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# **Patriarchal Authority and the Southeast Asian Chinese Diaspora in Shirley Geok-lin Lim's *Passports and Other Lives***

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Based on the archetypal experience of the Jewish exile in Babylon during the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar (605–562 BCE), the concept of diaspora deals with the idea of expulsion from one's national homeland and its related themes of displacement, remembering, and homecoming. The idea of diaspora prompts us to imagine vast movements of people forced by political upheaval. It deals with the political and social negotiations that transpire between originary homelands and host nations resulting from the forced scattering and dispersal of a people into foreign lands. Remembering the native homeland is one of the defining features of historical diaspora. This act of remembering from the realities of geographical distance often assumes the form of nostalgia, but nostalgia can over time be affected by the development of an accommodative relationship with the foreign land (or host country) in which one finds oneself.<sup>1</sup>

In the story of the Chinese diaspora, social, economic, and political problems in Qing China had resulted in much suffering so that fleeing the land in search of a better life elsewhere was considered by many. Wanting to live close to their ancestral homeland, many Chinese who sought a better life overseas looked to the lands south of China. These lands belonged to Nanyang or the "South Seas," otherwise known as Southeast Asia. The Chinese who left China generally hoped to settle down somewhere in Nanyang rather than in faraway lands, including the United States.<sup>2</sup>

When Southeast Asian countries became inhospitable to the Chinese living in their midst, there was pressure for some of them to consider emigrating to another country. Malaysian-born Shirley Geok-lin Lim writes about such a search for a new homeland in her memoir, *Among the White Moon Faces* (1996).<sup>3</sup> This memoir offers an

intimate narration of the author's upbringing, covering topics such as family life with a violent father, the experience of a British-based education, and her journey to the United States for doctoral studies. Lim's *Bildungsroman* centers on what it means to be a woman of Chinese descent living in Malaysia and concludes with an account of her decision to become a naturalized American citizen.<sup>4</sup>

Evoking academic discourses of diaspora, Lim describes her immigrant position in the United States as a form of exile, aimed at capturing the experience of separation from one's birth country, culture, and family left behind in Malaysia.<sup>5</sup> However, Lim's writing of exile lacks the kind of resonance associated with Edward Said's "crippling sorrow of estrangement" described in his *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*.<sup>6</sup> Because Lim possesses the agentic capacity to choose between national homelands through her possession of cultural and symbolic capital, she more readily fits the profile of a transnational subject who can be on the move to optimize the social conditions needed for self-actualization. Her journey from Southeast Asia to the United States signifies resilience, the ability to "respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions" both within and without the nation state.<sup>7</sup>

In diasporic literature, geographical separation from one's birth country generates dreams of returning home one day in the future. However, the passage of time interferes with these dreams, and the diasporic subject finds himself/herself slowly but surely assimilating into the social and cultural life of the host country, a process that can be made a little easier if support is available from the immediate family. But what if this family is itself struggling with anxieties of diasporic dislocation such that it cannot function as a pillar of support? Or what if this family has remained in the old country, and the diasporic subject is alone in a foreign land?

In Lim's *Among the White Moon Faces*, family relationships, especially those between child and parents, constitute an important narrative feature that represents the author's journey from Malaysia to the United States as both a diasporic and transnational experience. Narrating the stories of parents and other family members who remained in the old country confers significance on their lives as well as preserves memories of the world into which one was born. However, remembering the family can prove an unwelcome burden especially if a narrator's relationship with different members of the family is marked by tension and conflict. Memory is not a straightforward faculty as it can be desired or unwanted by the diasporic subject.

Shirley Lim's work portrays the family in Malaysia with ambivalence. When memories of the past persist in the diasporic subject's present life through the intrusion of dreams, they are not always welcomed. For Lim, the diasporic instinct to remember is entwined with a desire to forget. *Among the White Moon Faces* informs the reader that Lim's mother left the family when Lim was only eight years old, forcing her to rely on her father as the sole parent and caregiver. Lim refers to her mother's abandonment as "[m]aternal malice," a transgressive act "unthinkable in human culture."<sup>8</sup> In *Passports and Other Lives* (2011), the theme of maternal abandonment finds visceral expression in the poem, "My Mother Wasn't," in which Lim avers that after

her mother left the family, “I never found her again. / I never found the unbroken / vessel of childhood.”<sup>9</sup> Forgiveness is difficult when a parent abandons her child:

In my dream my mother comes to me,  
saying, I have forgiven you.  
I am angry—who gives you  
the right to forgive me? I don’t want  
forgiveness. Take back your love  
you give without asking,  
without a price to it. Take back  
your forgiveness. No one who gives  
away her daughter has a right  
to love her. I will not forgive you  
till I have made you pay the full  
debt of your abandonment. (302-03)

Lim’s experience of family life in Malaysia includes an absent mother among the set of challenges encountered when living in a country transitioning from British colonial rule to Independence.

Left with her father, Lim finds herself relating to him with a mixture of love and hate. A man susceptible to women and gambling, this father is also capable of severe rages and physical violence, having beaten his young daughter on several occasions. In the poem “Watching,” Lim’s poetic persona intently watches an unfolding scene of violence between a mother and a father who “have nothing to give each other” anymore.<sup>10</sup> Culminating this poem is a man, “angry, blazing, a mean fire,” who hits his wife until she bleeds. *Among the White Moon Faces* similarly presents this motif of father–mother estrangement and its effect on the daughter. In her memoir, Lim narrates her problematic relationship with her father after her mother’s departure from the family, a relationship that will haunt her journey to the United States. Travelling to America on her own without the accompanying presence of her father, Lim’s immigrant experience is realized through the abjection of paternal authority.

In portraying her father to the reader, Lim deploys a familiar thematic feature often found in diasporic Chinese literature, which is that father figures represent forms of authority that both daughters and sons need to grapple with to find answers to questions of identity. In this literature, the representation of fathers often serves an ideological function. Paternal figures may be marginalized in feminist works that seek to thematize mother–daughter relations and identify mothers as an important source of cultural transmission and empowerment. Or, as seen in Maxine Hong Kingston’s *China Men* (1980), they may be foregrounded to contextualize the ancestral status of the Chinese men who first came to America and planted the seeds of a new diasporic community in the new world. Fathers could also be demanding and authoritarian, their position as the head of the family finding its national analogy in patriarchal and

masculinist state authority. In her anti-war novel, *The Fifth Book of Peace* (2003), we see Kingston (rather unexpectedly) portraying her late father as an angry spirit who is associated with American military violence. This association gives Kingston the necessary literary symbols for representing a feminist and Buddhist vision of peace over and against a world defined by male-centered violence and war.

If Kingston represents patriarchal authority from the perspective of a daughter, Indonesian-born Chinese American poet Li-Young Lee portrays it from the perspective of the son.<sup>11</sup> Recognized for the trials and tribulations he undergoes to bring his family to the United States, Lee's father is described as a hard man without demonstrable love and warmth. A stern and authoritarian patriarch when alive, this father makes his presence felt even after death, so that much of Lee's writing involves attempting to exorcise the specter of this authority while aspiring to recuperate its significance. Lee's father is an ambiguous but necessary alternative to a mother who cannot be relied on for any viable inspiration and support, a motif that we also find present in Lim's memoir and poetry.

The poems in *Passports and Other Lives* offer snapshots of the father in different sociocultural contexts, central to which is his position of authority within the Chinese family unit. In the poem "My Father," the speaker begins by recording her father's imperative command: "Please finish your studies. / This is what I want you to do."<sup>12</sup> Encountering this injunction from paternal authority, this daughter describes herself as "[n]ervous" and "cowed again with misery" (231). We recall Lim's accounts of her father's violent beatings, which fill her with misery in *Among the White Moon Faces*.<sup>13</sup> This Confucian patriarch who rules supreme in the family places a premium on education. If the father here appears to have the right instincts in wanting his daughter to have a good education, his motives are nevertheless questioned. The educational imperative is not so much for the daughter's future and well-being as it is for a father's ability to show his daughter off to his neighbors as a kind of trophy, with the aim of stoking envy. In "My Father," an educated daughter also helps "to keep [the father's] years well," suggesting that one of the daughter's expected roles in life is as a caregiver for the patriarch in old age.<sup>14</sup>

If "My Father" introduces the reader to a father whose character and quirks are well known to his daughter, another poem, "Father from Asia," expands the father's significance beyond his racial and ethnic identity as a Chinese man.<sup>15</sup> Lim here invokes the idea of Asia, a broader conceptual designator than China, to highlight attributes and qualities possessed by fathers who come from the world's largest and most diverse continent. So, what is a father who comes from Asia like? First and foremost, the Asian father typifies the condition of want, his hands, figured as "Large cracked bowls," signifying the "empty / stigmata of poverty" (313). The father's poverty implies that Asia is an area of the world associated with lack. Central to memories of the speaker's childhood, the father is also associated with "sacrifice," suggesting he had done some selfless things for his family in the past (313). However, despite recognizing him as a "father of sacrifice," the poet renounces him as a "Ghost / who eats his own

children,” destroying them (313). Oceanic distance is not vast enough to remove the daughter convincingly from this “dangerous” father, especially when even remembering Malaysia in America becomes “a wheel that crushes” her (313). In addition to signifying “nothing,” the father finally functions as a synecdoche for the “dust” that metaphorizes the social, cultural, and existential condition of the Asian world (313).

The father who is treated with ambivalence is significant for his relationship with his daughter more than as a reference point for thinking about China, the ancestral homeland of the Chinese diaspora. When China is invoked, it is as a country visited by the father when he was dying of cancer. “Father in China” is a retrospective poem that focuses on a sick father’s visit to China for medical treatment while the daughter was “unhoused / in ... another country.”<sup>16</sup> Separated by oceans, the daughter admits: “I do not know how to write / to him. I do not have his motherland / address. I do not pick up / the black coffin telephone” (309). Lim’s anaphoric “I do” functions as a refrain that registers a lack of relational closeness between father and daughter. Not only does the poet lack the ability to converse spontaneously with her father, but she is also excluded from details of his private life. She finds herself barred from knowledge of her father’s death: “No one tells me he’s dead / till he’s been buried” (310).

Staying behind in the birth country, a parent can support the functioning of memory on the part of the diasporic subject by serving as a familiar point of reference. However, geographical distance between the birth country and one’s host/adopted country as well as time’s passing could make efforts to remember one’s native homeland increasingly difficult. When memories waver, there may be a need to preserve as much of this memory as possible. Sometimes, however, there may also be a need to distance oneself from memories of the birth country because of the desire to find a new life in a new land.

Dreams and cameras can bring the past into the present and facilitate the preservation of memory. In Chinese culture, photographs are significant not only for remembering the past but also for the support they give to the practice of ancestor worship, at whose heart is also the project of remembering. In *Among the White Moon Faces*, Lim analyzes the few photographs she has of her father as a young man. Noting that he is always smiling in these photographs, she comments that this happy image is “un-Chinese.”<sup>17</sup> Why? Because for the Chinese family, “[t]he convention of individual portraits, a seriously considered expenditure when it wasn’t an extravagance, taken perhaps only once in a lifetime, was that of the gaze across the centuries. One was looking at masses of one’s great-grandchildren and expecting their worship. It was as human deities that Chinese parents looked into the camera, lofty, and as always under the eye of eternity, with a tragic cast” (36).

In *Passports and Other Lives*, images of the father in both dreams and photographs allow the poet to consider the radical changes that have taken place between past and present. Where photographs of the past show the father smiling in

emulation of Hollywood stars, later photographs of this father sick in China present a very different image.<sup>18</sup> Robustness and strength have made way for intimations of mortality. In “Black and White,” Lim shares with the reader a “middle-aged dream” she once had, in which she conversed with her “younger father / openly, affectionately.”<sup>19</sup> The daughter, who is now “middle-aged” and dreaming of her father as a “younger” man, disrupts the actual age difference between parent and child, making space for interpreting the significance of the father’s life from the vantage point of the daughter’s contemporary present. The dream allows the poet to view a younger version of herself and imagine how this version must have appeared to her father: “the girl doing the twist, / the cha-cha. All night in tight blue jeans / and give-away lipstick, moving / to the drums of the conga” (311). The view of the father here stands in stark contrast with a photograph that presents him as “a specimen of cancer / taken at the zoo in Guangdong” (311). Another poem, “Father in China,” describes “a frugal picture, / black and white, two inches by / two inches” taken of her father under a lychee tree in China.<sup>20</sup>

Lim’s father’s visit to China when he was ill evokes the familiar symbolic structures of diasporic narratives by enacting the return of a diasporic Chinese subject to his ancestral homeland. Why does the father return to China? Is it because the diasporic subject inherits a homing instinct that never fully disappears? Is it because this father is making a last-ditch effort to find a cure for his cancer in Chinese medicine? Lim’s poetry does not explain the father’s precise reasons for going to China. However, it tells us that the father was not buried in China, but in Bukit China (or Bukit Cina) in Malacca (the town in Malaysia in which Lim was born), when he died.<sup>21</sup>

Bukit China functions as an important symbolic marker in Lim’s writing of the diasporic experience. A Malay name that translates in English as “Chinese Hill,” Bukit China, which refers to the ancestral burial ground of the Chinese community in Malacca, is the oldest and largest burial ground of the Chinese outside of China.<sup>22</sup> A physical reminder of the coming of the *huáqiáo* (overseas Chinese) to the Malay Peninsula, Bukit China inscribes an important part of the history of the Chinese diaspora in Nanyang, a history that includes the experience of cultural intermingling with the local population as well as of discrimination. In fact, this monumental cemetery has seen its share of controversy when in 1984, “the Melaka state government made public a development plan that would transform Bukit China into a mixed land use site of housing, commercial properties, and public amenities, such as a library and theatre.”<sup>23</sup> This ignited a firestorm involving preservationists and pro-development forces both wanting their positions to prevail. Predictably, the firestorm was exacerbated by the evocation of historical memories of racial conflicts between Chinese and Malays in postcolonial Malaysia.<sup>24</sup>

For the Chinese community in Malacca, Bukit China is an intrinsic part of ancestral and diasporic history. As Carolyn Cartier informs us, “Bukit China represents the fundamental historic tie to the land of origin in its grave sites, where character inscriptions on each and every monument mark the person’s place of origin in Fujian

or Guangdong, and often down to the county level.”<sup>25</sup> Not only are there graves that stand as monuments to local Chinese associations, there are others that belong to prominent Chinese community leaders as well as to the leaders of ethnic groups (163). More than a plot of land in which the great ancestors of the Chinese community in Malacca are interred, Bukit China is filled with symbolism, some of it evocative enough to transform a specific site in the cemetery into a place that belongs to a province in China (163). A summit in Bukit China can become coextensive with a place in Fujian, a conjoining of significance that reinforces memories of the ancestral country.

The reference to Bukit China as the ground of Lim’s father’s interment resonates with the history of the diasporic Chinese community in Malaysia, a history that goes all the way back to the Ming admiral and sea explorer Zheng He’s visits to Malacca in the early fifteenth century.<sup>26</sup> Sent by the Yongle Emperor on voyages to faraway lands such as India, Hormuz, Malindi, and Mogadishu, Zheng He’s itinerary included sailing down the South China Sea, rounding the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula, passing through the Straits of Malacca, and crossing the eastern Indian Ocean.<sup>27</sup> While tracing its beginnings in the Malay Peninsula to the visits of Zheng He to Malacca, the Chinese community in Malaysia also claims cultural kinship with another figure, the princess Hang Li Po, who is reputed to have married a ruler of the Malacca Sultanate in the fifteenth century.<sup>28</sup> Whether history or legend, the story of Hang Li Po helps give shape to narratives of the arrival of the huáqiáo in the Malay Peninsula.

The subsequent presence of the diasporic Chinese community in the land was reinforced by the influx of migrant workers from China to work in the tin mines, an industry which developed because of the discovery of rich tin deposits in Perak and Selangor. The Malay Peninsula attracted laborers, traders, and merchants, as well as “intellectuals, students, teachers, journalists, writers, political reformers, and dissidents.”<sup>29</sup> Coming to the Malay Peninsula brought the Chinese into contact with local Malays, an encounter that resulted in cultural intermingling as well as tensions between ethnic communities. For many Chinese, venturing out of China to explore the possibilities of Nanyang involved the experience of alienation and acculturation as they found themselves defined by their position as ethnic and cultural Others in a foreign land.

Cultural intermingling and miscegenation between the early huáqiáo and Malays gave rise to the development of a third culture: the *Peranakan*, a nomenclature which generally refers to peoples of mixed Chinese and Malay/Indonesian heritage.<sup>30</sup> When Lim sets out to confer recognition on her mother as an important source of cultural authority in *Among the White Moon Faces*, she identifies her mother as a “nonya” who wields “peranakan female power.”<sup>31</sup> This identification points the reader to the history of the early Chinese in the Malay Archipelago, a history inscribed in the existence of Bukit China in Malacca.

The diasporic subject’s relationship with both the ancestral and host countries often finds expression in the land in which she chooses to be buried. In “Learning to



Love America,” one of the reasons Shirley Lim gives for having to learn to love the country she had journeyed from Malaysia to call home is her love for her son:

because I have nursed my son at my breast  
 because he is a strong American boy  
 because I have seen his eyes redden when he is asked who he is  
 because he answers I don't know

because to have a son is to have a country  
 because my son will bury me here  
 because countries are in our blood and we bleed them.<sup>32</sup>

In *Among the White Moon Faces*, Lim tells the reader that her American-born son Gershom is the reason for her decision to become a naturalized American citizen. Affected by the instabilities of diasporic subjectivity, Lim the immigrant mother does not want Gershom to be unmoored by pressures of “nostalgia and regret” brought about by the inability to exorcise the haunting “consciousness of another country.”<sup>33</sup> The most important thing is for her son to “possess the privileges of a territorial self” grounded in “the infant primacy of an American homeland” (287). In wanting her son to know “who he is” in terms of cultural roots and the stability enabled by a national homeland, Lim embraces the foregone conclusion that she will be buried in America as an American citizen. As a diasporic subject who had left Asia for the promises of the new world, Lim’s anticipation of the location of her final resting place in America appears straightforward enough.

However, being buried in America can have complex cultural implications for the diasporic Chinese subject. We find this in the work of Li-Young Lee, whose family’s experience of sojourning in different countries and settings such as China, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Macao, Japan, and the United States makes him feel he is “going to be disconnected forever” and that there is no place he can convincingly call home.<sup>34</sup> Etched in Lee’s memory are his father’s sufferings as he toiled to find a better life for his family in America, bringing them all the way from Asia, crossing countries and continents. Meditating on his father’s burial in America, Lee tells us: “I find it strange that when I go to visit my father’s grave I look down and there on his stone is the Chinese character for his name and, when I look up, there are all these American flags on the other graves” (258). Lee’s father is the Other even in death. A poet in exile, Lee cannot find grounding and legitimacy in any material sign that links language and race to the idea of the nation.

In the history of the Chinese diaspora, the location of the burial of the dead is not always within one’s capacity to choose. Chinese American literature tells us that the early Chinese who came to America to work and look for wealth had planned to return to China after their sojourning abroad because that is where the family is. Chinese workers of the Transcontinental Railroad were anxious that their bodily

remains might not be returned to China in the event they should die in America. To be buried in America is akin to being buried nowhere as the Chinese desired to be interred close to their loved ones back in China. Burial in China was important as the spirit of the departed could then be properly cared for by his/her loved ones in the world of the living.

In American history, arrangements had to be made for the Chinese who died in America during the period of the Gold Rush to be repatriated to the ancestral homeland. The result is the practice of “secondary burial,”<sup>35</sup> which refers to the exhumation of remains (two to ten years after death) for shipment back to China. However, as the twentieth century progressed, and as more Chinese made California their permanent home, this practice of exhuming and repatriating the dead dramatically decreased, so that it has almost completely disappeared in California today. What has emerged instead is the occasional reverse transportation of human remains from China for burial in America.<sup>36</sup> The dead are not immune to transnational and diasporic movements.

The return of the diasporic subject to a parent’s gravesite in the ancestral country is a familiar motif in diasporic Chinese literature. In Maxine Hong Kingston’s *China Men* (1980), we read about the story of Mad Sao, one of the narrator’s Americanized relatives, who finds himself plagued by letters from his mother in China complaining she is dying of starvation and demanding that he send her money and profits from the sale of his possessions.<sup>37</sup> A prodigal son, Mad Sao finds himself burdened by the tenacious hold exercised by the old country over his life in the new world. When Mad Sao’s mother dies, her ghost appears to her son in California as a hungry ghost. Desperate to exorcise the ghost of his mother, Mad Sao undertakes a sea journey to China accompanied by his mother’s ghost. In this return to the ancestral country, the son lavishes food and other offerings on the mother’s grave, following which he leaves for America never again to be haunted by the spirit of maternal authority. Feeding hungry ghosts is needed for the cessation of China’s harassment of the overseas Chinese with its various obligatory demands. The story of Mad Sao suggests that the Confucian demand for a son to respect his parent in all things might in fact prove to be a burden for a descendant who has chosen to forge a new life of his own in a foreign land.

Lim’s “Bukit China” focuses on the poet’s return to a historic burial place in Malacca to offer prayers and burn offerings to her late father, not unlike Mad Sao’s journey to his mother’s final resting place in China.<sup>38</sup> The poem registers the speaker’s familiarity with the rituals of veneration required of the living in the wake of a parent’s death. Traditionally these rituals include the kowtow, lighting joss sticks and incense, offering food, and burning “spirit money” as well as replicas of other objects to facilitate a comfortable existence for the deceased in the afterlife. Observing these rites showcases one’s filial piety (or *Xiao* in Confucian thought) and ensures that the spirit of the departed is well taken care of. In Confucianism, filiality, which is a moral obligation, must be readily given as a substantive expression of an offspring’s

gratitude to his/her parents and grandparents for the fact of his/her being and existence in the world. Furthermore, the departed should not be aggrieved; otherwise, it might become an errant spirit or hungry ghost bringing harm to the world of the living.

In representing her relationship with the dead in “Bukit China,” Lim tells us that geographical distance in the diasporic experience can make it difficult to fulfill one’s duties in the event of a death. Lim points out that she did not don traditional Chinese mourning attire upon learning about her father’s death:

I did not put on straw, black,  
Gunnysack, have not fastened  
Grief on shoulder, walked mourning  
Behind, pouring grief before him,  
Not submitted to his heart. (283)

This revelation could refer to the poet’s absence from her father’s funeral which prevented her from participating fully in the traditional Chinese mourning rituals. Or it could suggest a daughter’s relational distance from her father, making mourning not something that comes easily. Standing before the grave of her father, Lim tells us:

... I pour  
No brandy before memory,  
But labour, constantly labour,  
Bearing sunwards grave bitter smoke. (283)

The fractured relationship between father and daughter continues even after the father’s death, implied by the way in which prayer and offerings for the dead do not come readily but require “labour” and effort. When she was finally at her father’s gravesite in Malacca, she found she had difficulty performing well the funerary rites she returned from the United States to carry out.

In *Passports and Other Lives*, Lim includes poems that capture the experience of visiting the country of her birth after becoming an American citizen. These poems offer opportunities for representing nostalgia, the act of remembering under the conditions of geographical and cultural dislocation. In diasporic writing, remembering occurs in tandem with forgetting because it is affected by time’s passing and by the subject’s absorption into the social and cultural environment of the host country.

In Lim’s poetry, the past haunts the poet’s American present, manifested in dreams and through the death of loved ones, both powerful reminders of the passage of time. This past centers on Malacca, the place in which she was born. When Lim remembers her birth country through recollections of family history, she identifies her hometown both as a setting that importantly shaped her development as a young girl and young adult and as a way of life that must finally be left behind for the promises

of America. In Lim's diasporic experience, leaving Malaysia for the United States also means leaving behind, both literally and symbolically, her parents, whose role in her life has not always been positive. Nevertheless, very much like ghosts, Lim's parents continue to haunt her consciousness, insisting on the continuity of psychological and emotional links between the diasporic subject in America and her birth country despite the existence of deep tensions and fractures.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For a reflection on the relationship between diasporic displacement and recuperation in both writing and lived experience, see Rajeev S. Patke, "Diaspora as Translation: Literary Refractions from Asia," in *Asian Migrations: Sojourning, Displacement, Homecoming and Other Travels*, ed. Beatriz P. Lorente, Nicola Piper, Shen Hsiu-Hua, and Brenda S. A. Yeoh (Singapore: ARI Research Institute, 2005), 111–27. For an analysis of the meanings and resonances of diaspora as both concept and idea, see the important chapter "Diasporas" in James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 244–77.

<sup>2</sup> Brian Bernards, *Writing the South Seas: Imagining the Nanyang in Chinese and Southeast Asian Postcolonial Literature* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2015), vii–viii.

<sup>3</sup> Shirley Geok-lin Lim, *Among the White Moon Faces: Memoirs of a Nyonya Feminist* (Singapore: Times Editions–Marshall Cavendish, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> In this article, "Malaya" refers to the federated and unfederated Malay states together with the Straits Settlements controlled by the British, while "Malaysia" refers to Malaya after Independence in 1957.

<sup>5</sup> Lim, *Among the White Moon Faces*, 248.

<sup>6</sup> Edward W. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 173.

<sup>7</sup> Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 3.

<sup>8</sup> Lim, *Among the White Moon Faces*, 51.

<sup>9</sup> Shirley Geok-lin Lim, *The Shirley Lim Collection: Passports and Other Lives* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 2011). Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "My Mother Wasn't," in *Passports*, 302–03.

<sup>10</sup> Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "Watching," in *Passports*, 314.

<sup>11</sup> See especially Li-Young Lee, *The Winged Seed: A Remembrance* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

<sup>12</sup> Shirley Geok-lin Lim, “My Father,” in *Passports*, 231.

<sup>13</sup> Lim, *Among the White Moon Faces*, 53–56.

<sup>14</sup> Lim, “My Father,” 231.

<sup>15</sup> Shirley Geok-lin Lim, “Father from Asia,” in *Passports*, 313.

<sup>16</sup> Shirley Geok-lin Lim, “Father in China,” in *Passports*, 309–10.

<sup>17</sup> Lim, *Among the White Moon Faces*, 36.

<sup>18</sup> Lim, *Among the White Moon Faces*, 36.

<sup>19</sup> Shirley Geok-lin Lim, “Black and White,” in *Passports*, 311–12.

<sup>20</sup> Shirley Geok-lin Lim, “Father in China,” in *Passports*, 309.

<sup>21</sup> The Malay spelling for this historic Chinese cemetery is “Bukit Cina.” However, in this article, I use the older spelling “Bukit China” because that is Shirley Lim’s usage.

<sup>22</sup> M. Veera Pandiyan, “Bukit China: A Hill Steeped in Legend and History,” *The Star Online*, Aug. 16, 2013, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/community/2013/08/16/a-hill-steeped-in-legend-and-history-its-proposed-development-29-years-ago-sparked-outrage-and-anger/>.

<sup>23</sup> Carolyn Cartier, *Globalizing South China* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 159.

<sup>24</sup> Referred to as the 13 May incident, the sectarian violence that broke out between Malays and Chinese in the aftermath of Malaysia’s 1969 General Election has cast a long shadow over Malay-Chinese relations in the country. In fact, the 13 May race riots, which Shirley Lim evokes in her novel *Joss and Gold* (2001), led to the formation of a political, economic, and social order in Malaysia in which one’s racial identity defines one’s rights and privileges within the nation state.

<sup>25</sup> Cartier, *Globalizing*, 163.

<sup>26</sup> Edward Wong, “Celebrating the Legacy of a Chinese Explorer,” *The New York Times*, December 18, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/19/world/asia/celebrating-the-legacy-of-a-chinese-explorer.html>.

<sup>27</sup> See Corona Brezina, *Zheng He: China’s Greatest Explorer, Mariner, and Navigator* (New York: Rosen Publishing Group, 2017); Michael Yamashita, *Zheng He: Tracing the Epic Voyages of China’s Greatest Explorer* (Vercelli, Italy: White Star, 2006); Leo Suryadinata, *Admiral Zheng He and Southeast Asia* (Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, 2005); and Louise Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas: The Treasure Fleet of the Dragon Throne, 1405–1433* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>28</sup> Alexander Wain, “The Search for Hang Li Po,” *New Straits Times*, April 7, 2017, <https://www.nst.com.my/news/2017/04/228020/search-hang-li-po>.

<sup>29</sup> Bernards, *Writing the South Seas*, ix.

<sup>30</sup> Pue Giok Hun, “‘Our Chinese’: The Mixedness of Peranakan Chinese Identities in Kelantan, Malaysia,” *Mixed Race in Asia: Past, Present and Future*, ed. Zarine L. Rocha and Farida Fozdar (New York: Routledge, 2017), 147–61. Pue explains that “[t]he term ‘Peranakan’ is a Malay/Indonesian term derived from the root word ‘anak’ which means child (offspring). When circumfixed with ‘per-...-an,’ Peranakan originally referred to the womb, but eventually evolved into a metaphor that refers to local-born of non-indigenous descent” (149).

<sup>31</sup> Lim, *Among the White Moon Faces*, 24, 25.

<sup>32</sup> Shirley Geok-lin Lim, “Learning to Love America,” in *Passports*, 324.

<sup>33</sup> Lim, *Among the White Moon Faces*, 287.

<sup>34</sup> Bill Moyers, *The Language of Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 258.

<sup>35</sup> Wendy L. Rouse, “‘What We Didn’t Understand’: A History of Chinese Death Ritual in China and California,” in *Chinese American Death Rituals: Respecting the Ancestors*, ed. Sue Fawn Chung and Priscilla Wegars (Lanham, MD: Alta Mira Press, 2005), 37.

<sup>36</sup> Roberta S. Greenwood, “Old Rituals in New Lands: Bringing the Ancestors to America,” in *Chinese American Death Rituals: Respecting the Ancestors*, ed. Sue Fawn Chung and Priscilla Wegars (Lanham, MD: Alta Mira Press, 2005), 248.

<sup>37</sup> Maxine Hong Kingston, *China Men* (London: Picador, 1980), 168–76.

<sup>38</sup> Shirley Geok-lin Lim, “Bukit China,” in *Passports*, 283.

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