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An Intersectional Reading of Contemporary Chinese Canadian Fiction

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1. German Summary/Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Diese Dissertation beschäftigt sich mit der Fragestellung, ob und wie Intersektionalität als analytische Perspektive für literarische Texte eine nützliche Ergänzung für ethnisch geordnete Literaturfelder darstellt. Diese Fragestellung wird anhand der Analyse dreier zeitgenössischer chinesisch-kanadischer Romane untersucht.

In der Einleitung wird die Relevanz der Themenbereiche Intersektionalität und asiatisch-kanadische Literatur erörtert. Es wird dargelegt, dass durch allgemeine globale Entwicklungen, wie beispielsweise erhöhte Migrationsbewegungen, das Erstarken politisch rechter Bewegungen und verstärkte soziale Ungleichheit im Kontext der Corona-Pandemie, die Notwendigkeit der Untersuchung von Machtverhältnissen in ihrer Komplexität resultiert, da Ungleichheitsverhältnisse sich nicht nur aus ethnischer oder phänotypischer Einordnung von Individuen speisen, was mit der Anwendung von Intersektionalität berücksichtigt werden kann. Kanada als Untersuchungsgegenstand erscheint dabei aufgrund seiner zugeschriebenen Vorbildrolle als Einwanderungsland besonders attraktiv. Innerhalb der kanadischen Einwanderung kommt dabei der asiatischen bzw. chinesischen Einwanderung eine besondere Rolle zu aufgrund der verhältnismäßig hohen Zahl von chinesischer Einwanderung nach Kanada vom 19. Jahrhundert bis in die Gegenwart sowie der sozialen und politischen Ausgrenzung dieser Einwanderungsgruppe trotz ihrer Notwendigkeit für die kanadische Wirtschaft. Die Stellung chinesischer Migrant:innen als **sichtbare** Minderheit verstärkt die vorab genannten Faktoren nochmals. Des Weiteren lässt sich für diese Gruppe eine hohe Produktivität von kulturellen Gütern mit erheblichem Bekanntheitsgrad feststellen - seien es z.B. literarische Texte, Filme oder Serien. All diese Aspekte tragen dazu bei, dass chinesisch-kanadische Literatur als Untersuchungsgegenstand besonders relevant erscheint.

Das darauffolgende Kapitel bietet daher einen historischen Überblick über die chinesisch-kanadische Einwanderung und geht detailliert auf die literarischen Produktionen ein. Es wird aufgezeigt, dass, obwohl kulturelle Güter auch zur Artikulation von Ungleichheitsverhältnissen aufgrund von zugeschriebener ethnischer Zugehörigkeit entstehen, ein Diversifizierungsbestreben innerhalb der literarischen Gemeinschaft von chinesisch-kanadischen Autor:innen identifiziert werden kann. Die vollständige Ablehnung einer ethnischen Einordnung in Werken, Sexualität und Geschlecht sind nur einige Beispiele dafür, wie chinesisch-kanadische Autor.innen und Forschende zu diesem Thema das thematische Spektrum dieses Literaturfeldes erweitern und die Heterogenität innerhalb dieses literarischen Feldes hervorheben. Des Weiteren werden in diesem Kapitel die Machtverhältnisse für die Produktion chinesisch-kanadischer Literatur angerissen: Die

Vormachtstellung der USA, nicht nur in wirtschaftlicher, sondern auch in kultureller Hinsicht, führten zu einer verspäteten Herausbildung einer asiatisch- bzw. chinesisch-**kanadischen** Literatur. Dies zeigt die Verbindung zu einem kanadischen „master narrative" (kulturelle Narrative, die historisch betrachtet eine Konstante bilden und als spezifisch kanadisch identifiziert werden können) in Kultur und Gesellschaft, nämlich der Suche nach einer dezidiert kanadischen Identität in Abgrenzung zu den USA. Des Weiteren können innerhalb des literarischen Feldes Strukturen sozialer Ungleichheit verortet werden, indem z.B. das Framing als Minderheitenliteratur zu der impliziten Annahme verleitet, dass dort verhandelte Aspekte von minderer Bedeutung seien. Das Verlagswesen ist ein weiterer Faktor, der nicht unerwähnt bleiben sollte, da auch dort Strukturen vorherrschen, die Privilegien forcieren und Ungleichheiten erzeugen. Insbesondere die Verschiebung von einer staatlichen (finanziellen) Unterstützung des Verlagswesens hin zu eines auf ökonomischem Wettbewerb basierten Literaturbetriebs erschweren den Zugang für chinesisch-kanadische Autor:innen, da „Nischenthemen" und text-immanente Ästhetiken außerhalb des Mainstreams ein finanzielles Risiko darstellen und so weniger publiziert werden. Ein weiteres Resultat dieser Verschiebung ist das Verständnis von Diversität als eindimensionale Verkaufsstrategie: Das „exotische Andere" wird durch ethnische Zuschreibungen reproduziert und das Hauptaugenmerk bei der Vermarktung von Literatur von chinesisch-kanadischen Autor:innen liegt aus diesem Grund auf der ethnischen Zugehörigkeit. Dies zeigt sich vor allem in der Gestaltung des Buchumschlags und des Klappentextes – Faktoren auf die im Rahmen der Literaturanalyse der jeweiligen Werke noch einmal eingegangen wird.

Das dritte Kapitel widmet sich dem Begriff „Intersektionalität" und stellt, nach einer historischen Einordnung des Konzeptes mit seinen Ursprüngen im Black Feminism, Intersektionalität als bindendes Element zwischen Postkolonialismus, Diversität und Empowerment dar – Konzepte, die für die Analyse (kanadischer) Literatur in dieser Dissertation von besonderer Relevanz sind. Anschließend wird die Rolle von Intersektionalität in der Literaturwissenschaft aufgegriffen. Als „travelling theory" wurde Intersektionalität bis dato vor allem in den Bereichen der Gender Studies und Cultural Studies angewendet mit einem Fokus auf die Analyse von (selbst gewählten oder von anderen zugeschriebenen) Identitäten. Im Unterkapitel zur methodologischen Reflexion wird argumentiert, dass der Schwerpunkt des Konzeptes in seinem Ursprung auf sozialen Hierarchien liegt, weswegen sich das Verständnis von Intersektionalität in dieser Dissertation von den bisherigen Ansätzen unterscheidet. Des Weiteren werden für die

vorliegende Arbeit relevante Begriffe definiert, wie z.B. Identität. Das Unterkapitel zeigt außerdem auf, dass Intersektionalität innerhalb der Analysen der untersuchten Romanen auf zwei Arten verhandelt wird, zum einen als Thema innerhalb der Romane in einem engen Sinne sehr nah am Ursprung des Begriffes, zum anderen weitet eine intersektionale Lesart den Blick über ethnische Belange der literarischen Texte hinaus, sowohl auf formaler als auch auf inhaltlicher Ebene. Dies spiegelt sich in der Struktur der individuellen Analysekapitel wider, indem zwischen inhaltlicher und formaler Analyse unterschieden wird. Intersektionalität wird in dieser Dissertation somit als Kaleidoskop verstanden, das die Analyse von Verhandlungen sozialer Hierarchien auf inhaltlicher und formaler Ebene erlaubt und dabei die Dekonstruktion einer ethnischen Einordnung von literarischen Texten unterstützt, um so der Komplexität und Vielschichtigkeit von Identitätsrepräsentationen in literarischen Werken Rechnung zu tragen.

Die darauffolgenden drei exemplarischen Analysen veranschaulichen die vorangegangen methodischen Überlegungen. Allen drei Romanen vorangestellt ist die Kontextualisierung des jeweiligen Werkes als chinesisch-kanadisch, aber auch bisher vorgenommene Überlegungen, die diese Einordnung infrage stellen. Nach einer Zusammenfassung des Inhalts folgt eine intersektionale Analyse auf der inhaltlichen Ebene, die in den familiären und weiteren sozialen Bereich unterteilt ist, da sich die Hierarchiemechanismen innerhalb dieser Bereiche unterscheiden oder gegenseitig verstärken, wie aus den Analysen hervorgeht. Anschließend wird die formale Analyse mit einem intersektionalen Schwerpunkt in einem separaten Unterkapitel näher beleuchtet. Ein drittes Unterkapitel widmet sich einem dem jeweiligen Roman spezifischen Aspekt, der im Zusammenhang mit einer intersektionalen Analyse von besonderer Relevanz ist. Diese Aspekte reichen von kultureller Aneignung über die Funktion von traditionellen Mythen als Instrument zum Empowerment bis hin zu den spezifischen Hierarchiemechanismen in einer von Katholizismus geprägten Immigrantengemeinschaft. Jedes Analysekapitel endet mit einem Zwischenfazit.

Die Arbeit schließt mit einem übergreifenden Fazit, welches die wichtigsten Ergebnisse aus der Analyse zusammenfasst. Hier wird dargelegt, dass Intersektionalität als literarische Perspektive bei der Dekonstruktion von literarischen Texten, die entlang ethnischer Zugehörigkeiten klassifiziert werden, durchaus nützlich ist und die literarische Repräsentation von Identitäten als vielschichtig berücksichtigen kann. Die Analysen haben außerdem gezeigt, dass die literarische Repräsentation sozialer Ungleichheiten nicht unabhängig von Empowerment betrachtet werden kann, da alle Romane nicht nur soziale

Hierarchien selbst, sondern auch Wege und Instrumente aus Ungleichheitsstrukturen aufzeigen. Diese Verbindung kann für die theoretische Konzeption von Intersektionalität in anderen Disziplinen von Nutzen sein kann. Das Fazit schließt mit weiteren Überlegungen zu den Implikationen dieser Dissertation, vor allem im Hinblick auf sogenannte kanadische „master narratives“, die eine weitreichende, kontextuelle Relevanz für das Arbeiten mit literarischen Texten aufweisen und durch eine intersektionalen literarischen Ansatz in Zukunft gegebenenfalls gewinnbringend ergänzt werden können.

2. Introduction

The space from which we speak is always
on the move, criss-crossed by the
conflicting and shifting discourses of things
like our social class, education, gender,
sexuality and ethnicity. (McLeod 213)

In the aftermath of the so-called "refugee crisis"[1] in 2015 and the flight of many Ukrainians as a result of Russia's invasion in 2022, debates about migration and integration have become virulent in modern Western societies. Phenomena such as Brexit, the election of Donald Trump as well as the rise of right-wing populist parties show that even with globalization, heterogeneous societies are being called into question. However, it is not exclusively the social category of race or ethnicity[2], which creates a sense of otherness. The emergence of academic fields such as gender studies, disability studies, or even unusual catchwords such as fat studies (Rothblum) seem to be symptomatic for a need to further examine diversity and how it affects power relations within societies, i.e. the position of various immigrant groups on hierarchies in society. The ongoing debate about social inequality and its complexities, especially after its aggravation on a global level in the course of the Covid-19 pandemic (Berkhout et al.), emphasize the importance of power relations and social hierarchies in contemporary discourses. On a theoretical level, the rather recent theory of intersectionality considers these complexities by combining multiple approaches of different academic fields in order to answer the question of how different social categories such as race, class, gender, age, sexuality, religion, or physical ability are interdependent in defining an individual's "self-identity", their "social identity"[3] and social hierarchies based

[1] This metaphor joins other expressions such as "flood of refugees", which linguistically create the impression of a catastrophe, the affect of fear (Shariatmadari). It underlines the following remarks on the general questioning of – in this case ethnically – heterogeneous societies.

[2] There is much discussion about the meaning of race and ethnicity in different contexts and disciplines. In this dissertation, the terms will not be – in contrast to many other works – used synonymously. Following McLeod, the terms differ as follows: race is socially constructed to serve the (political) purpose of a particular group based on **biological** distinctions (McLeod 131) whereas ethnicity is a broader concept comprising "a variety of social practices, rituals and traditions in identifying different collective groups" (McLeod 132). If not stated otherwise, the terms are used accordingly in this dissertation. Thus, McLeod defines racism as "the ideology that upholds discrimination against certain people on the grounds of perceived racial difference and claims these constructions of racial identity are true or natural" (McLeod 132). Race, in this context, is consequently used when talking about different social attributes of visible minorities identified as such due to their phenotypical appearance that differs from the ascribed societal norm.

[3] This differentiation is borrowed from Barker and Jane because it allows the consideration of the discrepancies between an identity that individuals ascribe to themselves and an identity that is ascribed to an individual by others, for example because of phenotypical traits. Barker and Jane define self-identity as "conceptions we hold about ourselves and our emotional identification with those self-descriptions" (260) whereas a social identity describes "the expectations and opinions that others have of us" (260). Section 4.4 picks up this aspect and provides more details on the understanding of identity in this dissertation.

on (the discrepancies of) these identities. The quote mentioned above by McLeod conveniently exemplifies these – sometimes fluid and even paradox – complexities and provides examples of factors that potentially shape an individual's position. Additionally, it rightly refuses to answer the question of who defines the space from which an individual speaks: is it the individual themself or another individual? This latter aspect refers to the area of conflict between self-definition and ascription by others that intersectional theory considers besides the fluidity of a self-identity in order to investigate power relations and social hierarchies between individuals and within groups. Due to its academic development in the social sciences and its characterization as a "travelling theory" into other disciplines (see chapter 4.3), intersectional theory offers a fruitful methodological basis to examine modes of social inequality as a (negative) result of diversity, also, if carefully adjusted, in literary studies.

In times of globalization and increased locomotion, migration presents an intriguing case in point for the exploration of social encounters between different groups and possible social hierarchies because of its underlying temporal permanence in contrast to, for instance, shorter sojourns in another country for vacation purposes. Since migration per se is not a new phenomenon, it is of interest to examine past encounters to gain insight into recent developments by comparison. In this context, Canada represents a highly appealing object of analysis: not only its postcolonial history, but also the implementation of a multiculturalist policy resulting in Canada's status as a role model in the handling of sociocultural encounters create an attractive combination for deeper research concerning migration and intersectionality. As a country of immigration, a great variety of different groups form the Canadian mosaic of which immigrants from Asia constitute the largest part as Statistics Canada illustrates in the census of 2016. Referring here to people born outside of Canada, the 2016 Census additionally shows that the Chinese rank first within this group (Statistics Canada "2016 Census"). Their consideration as members of a "visible minority", as "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in color" (Department of Justice 2), emphasizes their phenotypical difference which is often constructed as a basis for the establishment of social hierarchies. The Covid-19 pandemic, because of its origin's links to China, is again a telling context due to the increasing racism against visible minorities of Asian background on a global level (see Human Rights Watch for global remarks; Löwe for an example for Germany; Kate Ng for Great Britain; Tavernise and Oppel Jr.; Weiner for the U.S.), including Canada (Balintec; Hernandez). According to the 2016 Census, the Chinese in Canada (here referred to as born both outside of and in

Canada) rank second among the visible minority population, just behind people of South Asian background. However, people of Chinese background do not only constitute a large group in contemporary Canadian society, but they were the first to migrate from Asia to Canada (Kanaganayakam) and they were always among the largest immigrant groups despite governmental restrictions such as the Chinese Head Tax (1885) or the Chinese Immigration Act (1923) prohibiting Chinese immigrants from entering Canada. Statistics Canada, for example, shows that immigrants from East Asia, including China, represented the largest group of immigrants in Canada from 1951 to 2011 (Statistics Canada "150 years"). Hence, Chinese immigration to Canada is steeped in a long history dating back to the 19th century and it is characterized by resentment of the Caucasian Canadian majority against Chinese immigrants on both the social and the political level.

The strong presence of this population group is also reflected in cultural productions, including literature. TV series, such as *Kim's Convenience*, movies, such as *Crazy Rich Asians* or Marvel blockbuster *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings*, present (almost) exclusively Asian casts and/or themes and they are enormously successful. Moreover, Simu Liu's memoirs *We Were Dreamers* is longlisted for Canada Reads in 2023. Yet, despite their long immigration history and their contemporary presence, the considerable literary productivity by Chinese immigrants is linguistically limited as the few works in Chinese by earlier generations are either untranslated or inaccessible (Batts 769). Numerous introductions to (Anglophone) Canadian literature dedicate a considerable amount of space to descriptions of authors and texts classified as *Asian Canadian* in general and *Chinese Canadian* in particular, which makes it far more extensive than a simple niche field (see, for instance, Banita; Gross et al.; Ty "Asian Canadian Literature"). Consequently, in this dissertation, Chinese Canadian literature in English will be in the focus, also because of the interesting fact that no such label exists for francophone literature produced by Canadians with a Chinese background.[4] According to the introductions, general topics, themes and motifs include (but are not restricted to) marginalization, cultural belonging/dislocation and differences, identity-related cultural struggles, and ethnicity induced intergenerational disputes (Gross et al.; Heble; Kanaganayakam; Kortenaar; Ty "Asian Canadian Literature").[5] Besides inherently referring to ethnicity, these characterizations additionally do not go

[4] More general designations such as "littérature migrante" or references to concepts such as "transculturalisme" are used (see, for example, Gross et al. 401), which carry other (problematic) implications. This aspect unfortunately exceeds the scope of this project.

[5] Kanaganayakam merely refers to Asian Canadian writing in general but his remarks likewise apply to Chinese Canadian literature in particular.

beyond chapters entitled with catchwords such as *multiculturalism*, *minority*, or *migration* – all referring to an ethnic or racial component. Their classification as Chinese Canadian literature and the corresponding discourse in the context of ethnicity and race hence emphasizes merely one aspect negotiated in these works. However, in times of pervasive global discourses on gender differences, sexuality, migration, and inclusion, this dissertation offers exemplary analyses of texts considered as *Chinese Canadian literature* in order to illustrate the complex multiplicity of aspects that contribute to the establishment and maintenance of power relations which are indeed negotiated in these texts. Categorizations, in the context of literary studies or beyond, are certainly needed to make sense of the, sometimes maybe overwhelming, complexities that people are subject to. However, these categorizations are artificial constructions that serve the purpose of reducing complexities. Thus, as an attempt to add a notion of complexity, an intersectional reading of literary texts will be implemented as intersectionality considers the variety of factors contributing to identities, social hierarchies and their interdependence. As a consequence, an intersectional reading of literary texts can provide a useful addition for the analysis of ethnically labelled literary fields. So how do Chinese Canadians articulate the dimensions of power they experience in literary works? How do they make themselves heard in (canonical) Anglophone literary discourse? How do Chinese Canadian writers oppose reductive tendencies? To accommodate the complexity of identity and power relations, the terms *Asian Canadian* as well as *Chinese Canadian* (or any similar term) are used without a hyphen here in order to symbolize, corresponding to Ty and Goellnicht's suggestion, a transgression of the hyphenated identities, which are "not simply based on nation, religion, or ethnicity" (2). Going beyond the hyphen means to "contest easy notions of equating ethnic identity with originary culture" (Ty and Goellnicht 2), which is also illustrated by the implementation of an intersectional perspective for the literary texts in question.

This dissertation starts with a brief overview of the history of Chinese Canadian literature: despite calling into question the use of this classification, it is indispensable to recognize its purpose to create visibility for a minority group in a predominantly Caucasian society. Hence, the label *Chinese Canadian* is not only prescribed but it offers a means of articulating self-identification by Chinese Canadian authors. However, as this chapter shows, one can detect a variety of efforts within the community and in research on Chinese Canadian literature to consider the heterogeneity of works considered as Chinese Canadian. Additionally, this chapter offers some remarks on the power relations that Chinese Canadian literary productions are set in. The (cultural) hegemonic position of the U.S. and the

neoliberal turn in the publishing industry contribute to limiting the access of Chinese Canadian writers to the publishing industry.

In a second step, intersectionality is illustrated in detail. Before carefully exploring its use for the analysis of social hierarchies in the novels in the focus here, a brief genealogy precedes an overview of previous attempts to include an intersectional perspective in the field of literary studies. This part shows that all these attempts fulfil a function that neglects to consider the core of intersectionality, namely power relations and social hierarchies. The hitherto uses of intersectionality in literary studies are either situated in the field of gender studies (thereby disregarding the fact that intersectional theory, in its origin, aims to operate in an unbiased manner concerning the social categories) or they focus on the formation of identity, which degrades intersectionality to a mere synonym for terms such as *hybrid*, *fluid* or *multidimensional identity*. This dissertation, however, aims to use intersectionality as a lens to uncover the complexity of social hierarchies and power relations in a literary text. By illustrating that the power relations in the novels in question are as complex as the individual identities presented in these novels, the classification of these novels as *Chinese Canadian* is called into question. The novels show that it is not only race or ethnicity, which shapes individuals and communities, but that an interplay of various social dimensions form both the individual and the social hierarchies and power relations this individual is part of. If these novels offer a rich insight into these complexities, why, then, is there a persistent need to use the racial or ethnic background of authors and/or protagonists to allocate these texts into a literary field based on racial or ethnic markers? Intersectionality, in this dissertation, is hence understood as a literary perspective that allows one to analyze the negotiation of social hierarchies, thereby supporting the deconstruction of ethnically/racially labelled literary fields in order to consider the complexity of identity representations in literary works.

The three novels analyzed here present intriguing cases in point for the debatable use of racial or ethnic classification. The selection covers novels from the 1990s to the 2010s to allow for a diachronic perspective. Despite the long history of Chinese Canadian writing, the 1990s present a fascinating era for this type of literature: with the beginning of the publication of anthologies such as *Many-Mouthed Birds* (Lee and Wong-Chu), Gross et al., for example, identify a clear establishment of Chinese Canadian literature as such (319), which Lai justifies with her placement of this anthology within the literary discourse:

> The 1991 emergence of the anthology *Many-Mouthed Birds: Contemporary Writing by Chinese Canadians* did much to shape the expectations of what 'Chinese Canadian writing' ought to do, positing it both within the national container 'Canadian Literature' and outside it at the same time. (Lai *Slanting I* 58)

The emergence of these anthologies hence offers the opportunity of self-positioning by authors, who identify themselves as Chinese Canadian, but the area of conflict, the position of being inside and outside of Canadian literature at the same time, has not changed over time and has been adopted in a rather unquestioned manner within the literary discourse and by publishers in their marketing processes. Besides the absolutely necessary, identity politics related function of self-positioning, the field designation as *Chinese Canadian* still reduces this type of literature to a mere racial or ethnic reception. The examples in this dissertation, however, illustrate the richness and interdependency of factors contributing to social hierarchies and power relations, ranging from age, gender, sexuality, religion, and ethnicity. Despite the differences in the works analyzed in this dissertation, mostly due to the different periods they were written in, all of them share a considerable preoccupation with social hierarchies and power dynamics. Ty is correct in arguing that the works of different immigrant generations treat different issues (see the introduction of Ty *Asianfail*) but, as the implementation of an intersectional perspective will show, all of them are united by the fact that they deal with discriminatory practices, instances of social inequality and power dynamics – and their providing a means of overcoming these.

With Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony* from 1995, the corpus includes an award winning, canonical work composed shortly after the break in the development of Chinese Canadian literature mentioned above. Ty allocates Choy's work to a period called "Breaking the Silence" mainly dealing with giving the voiceless Chinese immigrants a voice by telling their stories in a written form ("Building" n.p.). Yet, *The Jade Peony* is not only about Chinese immigrants as a visible minority in Canada, it also adds to the discourse aspects such as gender, sexuality, and age and their interplay within power relations although it was published as early as the 1990s. The analysis of Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony* is an interesting example for the implementation of an intersectional perspective mainly for two reasons. First, it shows that intersectionality can work in two ways in literary texts as it can be used either as a theoretical frame to describe forms of multiple oppression characters are confronted with or it can be used as a perspective to depict the negotiation of power relations and social hierarchies. Second, Choy's novel uncovers ethnicity as a subject of negotiation and as not as consistent as one might expect in a novel classified as *Chinese Canadian*: different versions of Chineseness performed by different people in different social spaces are at play. Moreover, Choy's work illustrates the complex interplay of social dimensions such as age, gender, social class, and sexuality in the process of establishing and maintaining social hierarchies. Against the background of an assumed consistent (and hence considered

as authentic) Chinese setting, these interdependent negotiations of power relations can unfold their full weight.

Yan Li's *Lily in the Snow* from 2009 is lesser known although Li has received many awards. In Ty's periodization, Li's novel is part of the "Beyond Autoethnography"-phase dating from the end of the 20th to the beginning of the 21st century ("Building" n.p.). Texts published in this period refrain from depicting ethnicity as being the exclusive identity marker in Asian Canadian writing (Ty "Building" n.p.). On the level of form, this period is characterized by experimental writing regarding genre, time, and space (Ty "Building" n.p.). *Lily in the Snow* presents an exception to the experimental formal aspects as the novel seems to be rather comparable to works from the preceding period such as *The Jade Peony*. It shares the theme of intergenerational conflicts with Fu's and Choy's work. Besides the depiction of age, marital status and employment situation as decisive factors for social hierarchies within the family, religion plays a prominent role in this novel. Li illustrates how power relations are constructed in the parochial community under the cover of charity, independent from the hierarchies that rule outside of this space. Similar to Choy's representation, the importance of religion as a decisive factor in the creation of social hierarchies, culminating here in mental and physical abuse, is able to unfold its full weight against the ethnic background of the protagonists.

Kim Fu's *For Today I Am a Boy* from 2014 is the reference point in this dissertation as it is explicitly characterized as negotiating intersectional issues in secondary sources. According to Ty's categorization, this novel presents one example of "unfastened" literature of Asian Canadian writing in the second decade of the 21st century ("Building" n.p.). This period of Asian Canadian literature goes beyond the questions of autoethnography and intergenerational conflicts about integration as well as assimilation (Ty "Building" n.p.) and focuses instead on intersectional concerns. Ty's categorization of *For Today I Am A Boy* as intersectional in the sense that these works "demonstrate their [Asian Canadian writers'] awareness that systemic injustice and social inequality occur on multiple levels" ("Building" n.p.) raises questions. Besides avoiding the trap of creating "intersectional literature" as another (superfluous) field merely interpreting intersectionality as a literary topic, the analysis in this dissertation shows that looking through intersectional "glasses" at this text broadens one's horizon: best known for the negotiation of transgender issues, an intersectional perspective helps to determine that gender, ethnicity (here also as an "exotic other" in a postcolonial sense), and sexuality are depicted as interdependent in Fu's work.

In summary, the three novels of this dissertation illustrate, with the help of an intersectional reading for a literary analysis, that field classification along ethnic criteria can be regarded as a mere makeshift solution to satisfy a need for classification and to exploit, in a postcolonial manner, a field created as an "exotic other" for commercial reasons. By emphasizing these ethnic differences instead of the commonalities negotiated in these works, the possible benefit for non-migrant readers is lost. An intersectional perspective on literary texts helps to counteract this issue and it encourages uncovering the advantages of these texts for a broader readership than one might expect at first glance.

Finally, it is noteworthy to offer some remarks on my own position as a researcher in relation to the research topic. Originating in disciplines such as ethnology, this manner of self-positioning as a researcher has travelled to various disciplines and has rightly started to gain ground in the humanities, including literary studies. Especially research in the field of diversity, multiculturalism or inclusion (and the many other important catchwords and concepts that come to mind when thinking about sociocultural encounters) reasonably asks for culturally sensitive approaches. As a white, heterosexual, cis-gender, European middle-class woman, conducting research about Asian Canadian literature in general and Chinese Canadian literature in particular, with its multiplicity of topics far from my own position and experience, probably raises many legitimate questions. The questions of "Who am I in relation to my research?" and "What has shaped this 'I'?", consequently accompanies this research project. This does not imply that this research is free from blind spots though, as one cannot simply take off one's background like a piece of clothing. Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting need for social isolation has indeed not simplified sociocultural encounters, especially transatlantic ones, which has considerably complicated research in this field. Yet, the aim of this research project is not only to offer a further perspective on literature labelled along ethnic lines. In the style of what the International Research Training Group "Diversity. Mediating Difference in Transcultural Spaces" calls "herméneutique croisée", my aim is also to gain experience and deepen my own knowledge in other disciplines and types of literature without judgement but with the attempt to implicitly consider the underlying individual constructivism of my own position. Besides this personal benefit, my perspective as an outsider can also present an advantage for this research area as it allows the detection of, for example, patterns, values or norms that remain unnoticed within the community because they are regarded as a natural given. My research within this field hence aims at being culturally sensitive and useful for both sides by considering myself as an outsider – with all the flaws and benefits that this position entails.

3. Chinese Canadian Literature and its Context: Multiple Power Relations at Work

> *To write from an always already racialized subject position is to be rootless. It is to write without an originary being. It is to write always in relation to superiority one can never attain, precisely because the racialized subject is constructed and constructs herself in relation to it. (Lai Slanting I 12)*

In this chapter, the development of Chinese Canadian literature in connection to multiple power relations will be traced in order to contextualize this ethnic label as a field marker with its various uses and implications in the past and the present. Due to the genealogical connection of the label *Chinese Canadian literature* to the more general term *Asian Canadian literature*, this chapter refers both to the historical development of the latter term and the specific designation *Chinese Canadian literature*. To illustrate the complex nature of the term *Asian Canadian* and its numerous, sometimes highly individual, notions, it is necessary to have a brief[6] look at the history of Asian immigration to Canada, here with a focus on Chinese immigrants.

Asian Canadian immigration is characterized by a repetitive pattern of institutional and social racism and discrimination. Asian immigration to Canada has a long tradition dating back as early as the 19th century with the arrival of Asian (or, more precisely, Chinese and Japanese) laborers in the context of the Gold Rush and, more important, for the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway at the end of the 19th century (Goellnicht and Ty 225)[7]. Especially the latter project caused many deaths because of extremely inhumane working conditions: no safety devices, no medical attendance, no fresh food but Chinese Canadians were in charge of the most dangerous tasks of the railroad construction (Chao 6), for which they were even paid less than their Caucasian Canadian coworkers. In spite of their crucial role in the construction of one of Canada's key infrastructural facilities, Chinese Canadian

[6] For more details, also concerning information on differences regarding Asian immigration to the Canadian provinces, see Tan and Roy, who provide a concise history of Chinese immigration to Canada. Peter S. Li offers a more extensive overview with detailed information not only on the political situation but also on the living conditions of Chinese immigrants in Canada. Despite their excellent surveys, both works unfortunately only cover the beginnings of Chinese immigration until the 1970s and 1980s. The *Asian Canadian Studies Reader* (Coloma and Pon) provides recent data and information on immigration trends until the 2010s.

[7] Some sources, for example Hilf and Chao, date the beginning of Chinese immigration to Canada in the 18th century or even as early as the 5th century with the constraint of considering not an organized form of immigration but individual endeavors, though (Chao 1-4; Hilf 28-29).

immigrants[8] suffered from severe systematic exclusion by the Canadian government during the 19th and 20th centuries. The law back then required the Chinese to pay a gradually increasing head tax from $10 to $100 to $500 (1885, 1900, 1903), it prohibited particularly Chinese customs such as the exhumation of bodies for shipment back to China (Tan and Roy 8) or it entirely excluded Chinese immigration to Canada between 1923 and 1947 (Goellnicht and Ty 226). Moreover, Chinese were denied central citizenship rights such as the right to vote (Peter S. Li 30, 33). These practices seem incomprehensible considering the fact that the vast majority of Chinese workers was only temporarily employed in positions for which employers had difficulties finding Caucasian workers and that they intended to return to China for their retirement at the latest (Peter S. Li 16-17, 21, 25, 63). Moreover, Chinese immigrants only accounted for less than one percent of the overall Canadian population (Peter S. Li 38). Nevertheless, this hostile attitude is also reflected in racism against Asian immigrants in society, mainly based on the fear that Chinese workers would take away jobs from Caucasian Canadians because they were paid less (Peter S. Li 23-24, 26, 44). Derogatory terms such as "Chink" (Tan and Roy 10) or "(John) Chinaman" (Hilf 31) were only a precursor for violent outbreaks against the Chinese. The riots of Caucasian men in 1887 and 1907 destroyed many of the businesses and homes in Vancouver's Chinatown (Peter S. Li 31), not to mention other daily attacks, including violent encounters (Peter S. Li 59). In general, Chinatowns were largely perceived as "unsanitary, crowded places of iniquity" (Tan and Roy 12). As a consequence, Chinese immigrants found themselves in a fraught and contradictory position, constantly shifting between being needed as workers but unwanted as citizens and members of society because of their ethnic background. Life for Chinese immigrants, at this time, is hence lonely, harsh and poor (Tan and Roy 4, 20-21): the largely male immigrants were too poor to afford regular visits to their homeland and their families in China were prohibited from immigrating to Canada because of governmental restrictions. Starting a family in Canada was impossible due to the lack of Chinese women and social pressure impeded marriages with Caucasian Canadians. In addition to the

[8] As this dissertation focuses on Chinese immigrants in Canada, Chinese history will not be discussed in detail. To contextualize the migration movement, however, some remarks on reasons for emigration are indispensable. Tan and Roy identify internal and external forces for Chinese emigration in the 19th century: first, a dramatic population growth and a series of natural disasters resulted in a rural crisis in China: poverty and famine due to the lack of arable land determined Chinese life back then. Second, this crisis was additionally reinforced by Western imperialism (Tan and Roy 3) after the Opium War with Britain (1839-1842) and the following foreign invasions by France, Germany, Austria, Japan, the United States, Italy, and Russia (Peter S. Li 13), which additionally contributed to the weakening of the Chinese economy. Chinese emigrants thus fled from an ailing economic situation including severe, widespread poverty and famine, which provoked an unstable political situation because of peasant uproars such as the Taiping Rebellion from 1850 to 1864 (Peter S. Li 14).

emotional hardship of loneliness, most of the Asian immigrants suffered from economic hardships as well as they were caught in precarious jobs, first in coal mines, manufacturing industries or on farms, later as waiters, servants and cooks (Goellnicht and Ty 229). They were exploited as "cheap labor combined with concerted efforts to prevent Asian migrants from becoming part of an emerging Canadian national identity, which was being forcefully established as white" (Goellnicht and Ty 226). The establishment of businesses (still nowadays) considered as particularly Chinese and located in Chinatowns, for example restaurants, laundries or grocery stores, is thus both an adaptation and a segregation strategy in response to an extremely hostile labor market and a deeply racist society that provided Chinese immigrants with some agency in their own space, even if their economic situation did not improve at all (Peter S. Li 48-55, 79). These circumstances improved only slightly during the period of the Chinese Exclusion Act from 1923, mainly because of the suffering of China in World War II and the resulting sympathy for Chinese people in Canada at the price of a growing racist hostility against the Japanese (Peter S. Li 86-87; Tan and Roy 13-15). The removal of many governmental restrictions including the restriction on family reunification by the late fifties and the change in the immigration policy to a point system[9] in 1965 resulted in a significant increase in Asian immigration to Canada[10], especially in the urban areas, so that China ranked among the top three immigrant sending countries in the 2000s (Goellnicht and Ty 234; Peter S. Li 63, 86) and 2010s (Pon et al. 3). Additionally, Chinese Canadians rank second among the visible minority groups in Canada (Pon et al. 3) The implementation of a multiculturalist policy, with its celebration of ethnic diversity, certainly contributed to this development[11]. Chinatowns and their perception have since changed from "run-down ghettoes [with mainly male and single inhabitants to] lively commercial districts, attracting tourists and catering the trade of Chinese families […] whose

[9] This system does not define the country of origin as a selection criterion but points are given for aspects such as education, language abilities, age, employment situation etc. (Goellnicht and Ty 234). The more points a person can achieve, the higher are the chances of an immigration status for this person.

[10] In this period, push factors, i.e. factors motivating people to leave their home countries, only play a minor role. The attractiveness of Canada because of its perceived "political stability, high standard of living, relative lack of racial tension, and the openness of its educational system" (Tan and Roy 16) is identified as the main reason, the pull factor for immigration to Canada.

[11] Numerous authors convincingly criticize multiculturalism for being more of a gesture than providing a real opportunity to leave marginalized positions (see exemplarily Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis 26-27). Canada's multiculturalism is often criticized for being a mere illusion rather than a successful policy by, for example, promoting stereotypical images of particular groups as stable. For a legitimate criticism of this multiculturalist policy with its original focus on bilingualism and biculturalism, thereby fostering the marginalization of other groups, see Kamboureli (10-13). Banita concisely summarizes further points of criticism, for instance the concept's danger to predetermine immigrant identities (388), thereby promoting stereotypes. For selected examples in the context of Chinese Canadian immigration and/or multicultural literature, see Kamboureli (12), Peter S. Li (131-133).

breadwinners were as likely to be employed in business or the professions as in less skilled work" (Tan and Roy 3). Is post-war Canada now a country without barriers, where Chinese immigrants can fulfil their dreams of social mobility with equal opportunities? At first sight, statistics provided by Peter S. Li convey a favorable impression for the 1970s and 1980s: Chinese immigrants were able to enter the core labor market, perform above average with regard to university degrees and "are more likely than other Canadians to own expensive dwellings" (111-117). This improvement, however, cannot be attributed to progress in equality matters but rather to the general developments of the Canadian economy from an agricultural to a capitalist one (indicating here the increase of the manufacturing and service sector) resulting in more employment opportunities in the professional segment, which were filled with (Chinese) immigrants, who qualified for immigration because of the point system (Peter S. Li 117-119). Hence, Chinese immigrants to Canada, similar to the railroad workers in the 19th century, have served to fulfil labor market and economic needs. Moreover, statistics show that, despite their degrees, they are paid less than other Canadians including other migrant groups, which "can directly be attributed to the person's racial origin" (Peter S. Li 120). Social exclusionist tendencies also did not vanish, as surveys and media representations vividly illustrate, and numerous examples show that these developments continue in the 2000s: in 2010, for example, the magazine *Maclean's* published an article stating that some universities are not suited for Caucasian Canadian students anymore because they are not able to compete with overachieving Asian (Canadian) students (Findley and Köhler). However, the article simplifies issues related to immigration and education by fostering racial binaries, stereotypes and Anti-Asian resentments: Asian students are, according to this article, only interested in studying and achieving high grades because of familial pressure and Caucasian students are party people, who prioritize their social life, including alcohol, over education. Moreover, the article can be regarded as a mere repetition of a discursive media pattern of the 1970s (Coloma 371-372): in 1979, the Canadian TV broadcaster CTV aired the program "Campus Giveaway", in which the camera focused on Chinese Canadian students when it was stated that "foreign" Asian students take away university spots from Caucasian students (Pon et al. 11). Despite wide activist responses from Asian communities in both cases (Coloma 363-367; Pon et al. 11), this discourse continues in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, which provoked increasing racism against Asians worldwide (Human Rights Watch), including Canada (Balintec; Hernandez). These instances and their repetitive pattern illustrate a highly problematic understanding of an individual identity as one-dimensional and stable, which will be discussed further in chapter

4.4.: Asian Canadians have been perceived as "having a primary affinity and affiliation with Asia [and not as] Canadians who happen to have Asian ancestry" (Coloma 375).

Consequently, despite a considerable improvement of the living conditions of Chinese immigrants to Canada, a historical pattern can be identified – history, in this case, is repeated. Although Ty refers to Asian North Americans in general Canadians (see the introduction of Ty *Politics*), her pointed analysis illustrates that, considering Chinese Canadian history, the tense position between racialized visibility within society and systematic marginalization by the government and in society at the same time can be equally applied to the case of Chinese immigrants. Chinese Canadians have thus suffered from the paradoxical phenomenon of "visible invisibility": as racialized subjects, they have constantly been identified as an "Other" within Canadian society but history shows that they have been forced into social, economic and political invisibility by means of oppression and discrimination as Caucasian Canadian interests have been prioritized. Yet, how does this tension and the history of Chinese immigration to Canada relate to Canadian literature?

Asian Canadian cultural productions[12] in general and literary works in particular have served to overcome this "visible invisibility". Over time, Chinese Canadians, as other Asian immigrants, have indeed been able to use their invisibility: by hiding their frustrations, secrets and traumas, by appearing docile as expected, they indeed remained an anonymous alien, but a free one (Ty *Politics* 22). Asian cultural productions, however, have broken with this instrumentalized invisibility as they have responded to the historical hardships, uncovered long hidden secrets and they have served to come to terms with the obstacles of and racism against Asian Canadian immigrants in the 19th and early 20th century (Goellnicht and Ty 226), which illustrates the blurry nature of the boundaries between cultural production and social or political activism. These productions hence tell alternative histories that have been mostly untold in mainstream historical discourses. Many Chinese Canadians have decided to participate not only in social activist movements but to express their aims in

[12] The term *Asian Canadian literature* is generally used to refer exclusively to writing in English (or in French; see Ty and Goellnicht 7) and not in Chinese (Goellnicht 10), apparently by silent consensus, which also applies to Chinese Canadian literature. Explanations vary from practical to political ones. Regarding anthologies of Asian Canadian literature, Banita, for example, refers to two examples of Chinese Canadian literature without translations because the respective editors feared linguistic pitfalls or they did not even consider a bilingual edition at all (392). As a possible explanation, Yan Li, author of *Lily in the Snow*, provides the loss of language competences of second generation Chinese Canadians and the disinterest of the Caucasian Canadian society in literary works in Chinese (Jiang 339). Chao, in contrast, sees the adoption of English as the language of Chinese Canadian literature as a political task to raise one's voice and claim one's place in the discourse on historical racism and systemic discrimination in order to reach a wider public (23-24). Which explanation applies to a particular literary work is probably a highly individual matter and depends on various factors so that reasons for the choice of English as the literary lingua franca cannot be generalized for Chinese Canadian literature.

literary and cultural productions so that an overlap of people in the political and cultural sphere can be detected (Lai *Slanting I* 2). Novels such as Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Café*, for example, tell the story of four generations of female Chinese Canadian immigrants from the late 19th to the 20th century, thereby covering issues of racism with their tragic outcomes (Goellnicht and Ty 226). Paul Yee's poem "Last Words II" illustrates the cruel experiences of Chinese Canadian laborers in the 19th century whereas Winston Christopher Kam's play *Bachelor-Man* stages issues of the Chinese Canadian community during the exclusion era (see Chao 40-42, 66-87 for more details on the intepretation of Yee's poem and Kam's play). Anthologies, as a collection of many literary works of Chinese Canadians, provide insight into the (shared) experiences of past and present generations (Banita 392). They identify collective tropes and motifs by uniting otherwise individually perceived voices. Some of these motifs will be touched upon in the following analyses, for example questions of identity and cultural assimilation, the role of Chinatown, or intergenerational conflicts. The anthologies *Inalienable Rice* (1979) and *Many-Mouthed Birds* (1991) are considered milestones not only for the establishment of Chinese Canadian literature as a distinct field but also for political and social activism in this community. These two works have been followed by many others, but later anthologies seem to focus on particular genres instead of providing a general overview, for example *Swallowing Clouds. An Anthology of Chinese Canadian Poetry* from 1999 (Quan and Wong-Chu) or *Strike the Wok* (Chao and Wong-Chu) from 2003 about fiction, which illustrates an increasing complexity and number of works within the field (Chao and Wong-Chu x). Moreover, initiatives such as the Asian Canadian Writers' Workshop, which was founded in the late 1960s (n.p.), are set at the intersection of literary productions, academic research on these and political activism. In their online section on their history they explain that the initiative "was created out of a need to develop and nurture Pacific Rim Asian writers. Its primary purpose is to foster a community of writers and build literature" (Asian Canadian Writers' Workshop n.p.), so it unites the aim of collectivity and literary productions. Their initiative seems to focus on Chinese Canadian authors by predominantly naming writers such as Paul Yee, Sky Lee or Denise Chong, and by producing anthologies on Chinese Canadian Writing (Asian Canadian Writers' Workshop n.p.). From the year 2000 on, the society has focused on the promotion of emerging writers by providing assistance in publication processes and by offering an award with monetary benefits for newcomers in Asian Canadian literature (Asian Canadian Writers' Workshop n.p.), which can be regarded as a means to overcome the inequalities of the publication industry that will be discussed below. As a result, literary productions and

discourses are regarded as a means to "break through the wall of alienation and isolation" (Chao ix) by providing the voiceless with a voice and by creating visibility through a "minority discourse" (Chao 16). Literature has been used by Chinese Canadians to regain agency, to create subjectivity in a society marked by social inequality and discrimination, to eventually become a dialogue partner. As such, Chinese Canadian literature and discourses about it can be considered as a form of political activism, which serves the purpose to demonstrate past wrongs and to claim redress.

As it is usually the case, there is another side of the coin, though: some works, both literary and non-literary, illustrate that Chinese Canadian cultural productions, although subsumed under one label, are far from homogeneous and they attempt to deconstruct the above mentioned one-dimensional understanding of Chinese Canadians as being primarily Chinese.[13] Some artists, for example, explicitly intend not to join this articulation of ethnic interests. Evelyn Lau, although often mentioned in the context of Chinese Canadian literature (as, for example, in Banita; Chao; Bennett Yu-Hsiang Fu; Hilf; Ty "Asian Canadian Literature"), is one of these authors. Her poetry and her short stories focus on her past as a runaway and adolescent prostitute, thereby deviating from ethnicity as a topic in her writing (Banita 411; Chao 148-153, 173-184). The same applies to the focus of her autobiography *Runaway. Diary of a Street Kid*: her ethnic background is not explicitly mentioned at all with the exception of the prologue stating that she "was born in Vancouver to Chinese immigrants" (Lau 9). Readers can only assume that the manifold conflicts with her mother described in the prologue are a product of her mother's cultural baggage. The adaption of the novel into a CBC movie released in 1994 (Gunnarsson), "instead of portraying a young female artist's personal and career struggle […], simply documented the teenager's problems, especially those with her immigrant parents" (Chao 159, 163-165). Lau's parents are depicted as relentless first-generation immigrants, who are not only unable to assimilate to Canadian culture but who, additionally, emotionally abuse their daughter (Chao 163-165). Consequently, probably for marketing strategies, an ethnic level and a particular trope of Chinese Canadian literature, intergenerational conflict, has been added to the movie, approvingly accepting the reproduction of stereotypes that Chinese Canadians have suffered from for a long time. Both the movie and the numerous references in secondary sources on Chinese Canadian literature indicating her exceptional status thus put Lau back

[13] The same holds true for the term *Chinese Canadian*, which has become more and more deconstructed as a collective term that entails different understandings and interpretations of Chineseness, which is also discussed in the artistic community (see, for example, Koh). This aspect will be discussed in more detail in the analysis of Choy's novel.

into the community she has tried to explicitly distance herself from both physically and emotionally, also as a writer (Hilf 13). Lau is thus a telling example of a racialized author, unable to shake off her ethnic background in relation to her writing. Yet, it is not only explicitly that Chinese Canadian authors try to distance themselves from their ethnic identification as a part of a particular community but some works by various authors illustrate issues more broadly than merely related to race or ethnicity, sometimes even universal ones told through personal stories. Hilf, for instance, convincingly argues that Denise Chong's novel *The Concubine's Children* is not so much about a claim for redress of racial injustices but it focuses instead on the denigration of Chong's own grandmother, a concubine, by her family in China despite her success in earning money as a waitress or a prostitute that was sent to the kinship that disapproved of her (82-84; see also Ty "Asian Canadian Literature" 568). Chong's novel is, in the end, a novel about the intersection of gender, ethnicity and social class aspects. It does not aim at creating a collective voice but it tells a highly individual, a personal story. The same applies to writers such as Fred Wah or Rita Wong, whose poetry focuses, amongst aspects such as environmentalism, on the deconstruction of identity, encompassing many aspects such as gender, sexuality, and ethnicity, as stable, rigid or inflexible (Hilf 117-155; see also Ty "Asian Canadian Literature" 575-576). Literary works considered as *Chinese Canadian* thus show a broad range of aspects beyond racial or ethnic issues. Chinese Canadian literature is a rubric characterized by considerable heterogeneity. In this context, the formation of a "field within the field" is noteworthy as it shows the need for a view that considers individual concerns in order to acknowledge the heterogeneity of the Asian Canadian community in general and the Chinese Canadian community in particular. Works such as *Jin Guo. Voices of Chinese Canadian Women* (Go et al.), which collects life stories of Chinese Canadian women gathered through interviews, aim at providing Chinese Canadian women with a voice because Chinese Canadian immigration, historically, has always been considered a male endeavor. This is also reflected in literature and discourses about it. Some introductions to Canadian literature, for example, consider aspects such as Asian Canadian women writers in a section on feminist literature (see exemplarily Lane 141-142). In *Transgressive Transcript. Gender and Sexuality in Chinese Canadian Women's Writing*, Bennett Yu-Hsiang Fu recognizes the heterogeneity of female writers subsumed under the label *Chinese Canadian literature* and provides, in his work, convincing analytical examples relating Chinese Canadian literature to issues of gender and sexuality, which are negotiated as intricately linked, sometimes with

race and ethnicity, in some literary works.[14] In summary, one can detect a broad range of issues covered in Chinese Canadian literature, which are not necessarily related to or focus on Chineseness as such. Additionally, this heterogeneity is not only a matter of content but it is also detectable on the level of form. Ty invokes the use of magic realism, fantastic elements and the genre of science fiction in the works of Larissa Lai as telling and convincing examples (Ty "Asian Canadian Literature" 572), which clearly differ from the autobiographical nature of other Chinese Canadian works. Chong's *The Concubine Children* is characterized by a crossing of generic boundaries, ranging between fiction and history with autobiographical elements (Ty *Politics* 34). The inclusion of photographs and letters in this book adds to the blurry nature of genre limits by mixing different media representations of her story in one work. Taking this into account, both the terms *Asian Canadian* and *Chinese Canadian* can be regarded as "a useful umbrella term that has been adopted for the subjects who claim or have ancestors who claim originary affiliations with East, South, and Southeast Asia [or, more specifically, China]" (Ty "Asian Canadian Literature" 565). This relates the works, which are subsumed under these labels, immediately to the ethnic ancestry of authors or to that of their ancestors without referring to the individual content(s) and form(s) of the texts themselves. The usefulness of these terms is hence subject to reflection(s) and depends on the context(s) in which they are used in order to explore the text-immanent "hybrid sensibilities and knowledge"[15] (Ty "Asian Canadian Literature" 564) both on the level of content and on the level of form. So what are the implications, what is the baggage that these labels carry?

When talking about power relations and intersectionality in literature – be it as a reading perspective or as a topic in the text – the power relations that literature is situated in cannot be treated exhaustively here but they cannot remain unmentioned either. Chinese Canadian literature (and the academic research on it), as a field of its own, is, similar to Chinese Canadians, situated in multiple hegemonic levels, which are specific to the literary context: besides the negotiation of discrimination, oppression and instances of social inequality in literary works, the context of the field reveals more layers of power relations, in particular considering the constant comparison and equation with Asian American literature and obstacles or inequalities within the Canadian publishing industry. Chinese immigrants to the

[14] His starting point, however, is – and this is an issue for most analyses aiming at a (more) intersectional perspective (see chapter 4) – gender, which determines his gaze and results in a blind spot for other modes of social inequality articulated in this kind of literature.

[15] In this context, considering the diverse cultural backgrounds and richness of topics treated in the literary texts, the plural form – knowledges – would be more suitable.

U.S. have shared with their Canadian compatriots the destiny of severe racism, both in society and on an institutional level (Ty *Politics* 13-29), yet their literary history has started earlier with the publication of large numbers of Chinese American works in the 1940s and 1950s (Hilf 39-40).[16] Only with the beginning of the 1990s has the separate branch called "Asian Canadian literature" evolved despite several publications in this area of research since the 1970s (Beauregard 53; Goellnicht 1-2). Before, Asian Canadian literature was considered a part of the dominating field of Asian American literature with the U.S. as a focus including a more pronounced critical study. The relationship between Asian American and Asian Canadian literature is hence also related to the Canadian master narrative of the national identity search in relation to the U.S. as a hegemonic superpower. The emergence of Asian Canadian literature, and hence Chinese Canadian literature, as a distinct field can thus be considered as belated but also as a form of agency gaining, as liberating Asian Canadian cultural productions from the dominance of the U.S. ones and as producing Asian *Canadian* subjects. The range of academic research since the 1990s show the increasing importance and awareness regarding Asian Canadian writing. The journal *Canadian Literature*, for instance, published entire issues on Asian Canadian literature in 1994 and 1999 and an entire issue on Asian Canadian Studies in 2008. The universities of British Columbia and Toronto have included the field in their curriculum and in their university structures with whole degree programs, specialized centers or tenure-track positions in the 2000s (Bennett Yu-Hsiang Fu 15). The conference "Beyond Autoethnography: Writing Race and Ethnicity in Canada" in 2005 at Wilfrid Laurier University does not only illustrate the increasing importance of Asian Canadian Writing as a distinct field but also the growing interest in exploring the heterogeneity of this field (Bennett Yu-Hsiang Fu 15). Currently, however, the attempt to consider globalization, increasing locomotion and the resulting transnational character of many works and authors reverses the preceding undertakings of demarcation. Terms such as *Asian North American literature* appear to include both U.S. and Canadian productions alike but reality shows that Asian Canadian literary productions are still treated as the "little sibling". Ty and Goellnicht, for instance, explicitly refer to both Canada and the U.S. in their introduction with extensive remarks on the development of Asian Canadian literature and the meaning of the term but their collection contains only one

[16] Hilf offers two convincing explanations, which were probably both at work: the ideal of the U.S. as a melting pot, comprising the idea that all immigrants will become Americans, has been implemented from the beginning of U.S. independence in the 18th century whereas Canadian multiculturalism only started to gain ground in the 1970s so that U.S. society back then was much more likely to accept immigrant writing (Hilf 40-41). Moreover, funding for the arts and humanities in Canada only became popular in the 1960s (Hilf 41-42). See also McLaren for more information on the Canadian publishing history.

essay out of nine (Koh) with Canadian artists in the focus. In another work by Ty on Asian North American narratives, four of nine works deal with Canadian texts after all (*Politics*). Recent publications under the umbrella term *Asian American literature* show a similar tendency: Only two contributions of twelve refer to Asian Canadian works in Kardux and Einsiedel's edited volume, for instance. Both Adam's introduction to Asian American Literature and the volume edited by Okihiro et al. also present a clear focus on the U.S. (the latter with a remarkable consideration of intermeshed power relations based on a variety of identity dimensions, though with an intersectional approach). Both the U.S. and Canada are part of the Western world of neoliberal capitalism but a homogenization of these two literary fields with their different contexts would clearly stand in opposition to the impetus of heterogeneity in this work. As a result, despite their similarities, this dissertation differentiates between Asian Canadian and Asian American (cultural productions) because of the above-mentioned differences in marketal developments but also because of the different societies these cultural productions are set in, such as the American melting pot attitude in contrast to Canadian multiculturalism.

The attempt to differentiate between Asian Canadian and Asian American literature is not a panacea as power relations in the context of and especially within the field have still been at work: the heterogeneity of Chinese Canadian literature and the theoretical baggage that a racial or ethnic labelling carries – be it ascribed or self-imposed – has not remained unrecognized both within the academic and the literary community. Goellnicht, for instance, claims in his contribution that Asian Canadian literature as an academic discipline was mainly examined by white male scholars in its beginning stages, especially with regard to the special issue of *Canadian Literature* in 1999 (2).The attempts to launch an Asian Canadian studies program at the University of Toronto and the University of British Columbia in 2012 and 2013 respectively can be similarly criticized as "modest, top-down initiatives" (Goellnicht and Ty 224) because the foundation of these ethnic study programs, similar to the research, is not initiated by the groups to be studied but by scholars outside of the field of study. Additionally, from its beginnings, the emphasis has been on labelling Asian and Chinese Canadian literature as minority literature (Goellnicht 2), suggesting that it deals mostly with issues related to this particular group – including the implication that other topics treated in this kind of literature, if they exist at all, are considered as marginal. More essentially, however, the contexts of both minority and multicultural literature frame

Asian Canadian and Chinese Canadian literature in a structural understanding of identity[17] related to identity politics[18] in which racial or ethnic labelling might help to manage, by the reproduction of stereotypes, an "unruly Other" (Beauregard 67) in opposition to the Caucasian Canadian majority and Canadian literature. This view of a structural, stable social identity determined by an individual's racial or ethnic background and implicated with designations such as minority, multicultural, Asian Canadian or Chinese Canadian literature, however is challenged by many authors in the field. Larissa Lai, herself a well-known author from the field of Chinese Canadian literature, for instance, purposely rejects the idea of an essentialist communal identity but argues for an individual perspective that considers complexity (Banita 398). She calls for a more diverse reading not only regarding literary texts but also regarding authors as individuals. In a remark on her novel *Salt Fish Girl*, she states that "[…] it's a Chinese story, I'm a Chinese woman. At least in one version of my history. But in another version, I'm the inheritor of many more traditions than that" (Lai "Future Asians" 171). In her work, Lai desires to move "the conversation out from questions of national belonging to questions of globalized subjectivities, still raced, classed, and gendered, but in more fluid, mobile, and overlapping forms" (*Slanting I* 226). The quote mentioned at the beginning of this chapter tellingly summarizes these entanglements, the complexity of identity, by illustrating the possible reductions that might occur by a gaze limited to race and/or ethnicity. Moreover, it adds the need to differentiate between ascribed social identities and chosen personal self-identities because the construction of this limited viewpoint is an act of establishing power relations, of withdrawing agency from a writer[19].

Besides the hegemonic position of the U.S. regarding cultural productions and desires for a de-essentialized understanding of identity as a result of power relations in the literary field and the Chinese Canadian community, Lai's question of how a person can write from a

[17] "The law conceptualizes people through the structural identities of gender, race, sexual orientation, or national origin. These kinds of identities are different from personal identities of the sort that refer to personal taste, personality traits, gender performativity, or intimate and filial relationships" (Cooper 4). One has to differentiate, hence, between an ascribed structural identity, which presents an artificial construction for administrative purposes, and personal identities of individuals, which can be hybrid and multiply broken, i.e. inconsistent and contradictory. The term *visible minority* is a telling example of a structural identity as it has been used primarily for statistical purposes (Ty *Asianfail* 4).

[18] "[…] *Politics of identity* refers to political attitudes or positions that focus on the concerns of social groups identified mainly on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation […] In general, the politics of identity has developed around the idea of empowering the oppressed to articulate their oppression in terms of their own experience" (Balamir-Coskun 756). The underlying assumption of identity is that it presents "an outcome of a labeling process that reflects a conflict of interests at the political level" (Balamir-Coskun 757). In this frame, the remarks refer to Chinese Canadians constructed as a social group that is identified mainly based on their (highly generalized) ethnic background.

[19] The understanding of *identity* in this dissertation is picked up again in chapter 4.4 which provides remarks on the connection of the term to the concept of intersectionality.

(racialized) place constructed for her, pejoratively, by someone else (Lai "Political Animals" 146) can be interpreted as referring to one of these external factors, namely that of publishing industry, which contributes to the power relations within the field of Chinese Canadian literature in many ways. First, the Canadian publishing industry only started to develop in the second half of the 20th century with state sponsorships for the arts and increasing public investment in the publishing industry (McLaren 805), which indeed changed from a market-independent, state-sponsored policy to a competition-based policy with a focus on sales figures in the 1990s (Milz "Materialist Study"). It might not come as a surprise that, if the threshold for Caucasian Canadians to publish a work because of this "belatedness" of the Canadian publishing industry has been high, the threshold for Chinese Canadian writers to enter the Canadian market has even been higher: generally, mainstream publishing venues were largely closed to Asian Canadians until the 1990s (Lai *Slanting I* 21). The increasing interest in sales figures from the 1990s on has reduced the access for Chinese Canadian writers because non-established authors with niche topics writing against an assumed norm present a higher financial risk for the capitalized book industry.[20] Authors, as a consequence, are required to conform "to dominant representations [of white, male, European-based aesthetics], to socially determined 'tastes,' and to transparent literary expectations" (108), as Miki excellently summarizes the power dynamics in the literary industry. Additionally, in this context, the boundaries of diversity are uncovered. Cultural difference is often used as a one-dimensional commercial strategy in neoliberal capitalism to enhance the labor market force and economic competitiveness (see Abu-Laban and Gabriel for general remarks on selling diversity; Dobson; Huggan for specific remarks on the publishing industry; Santa Ana for the case of Asian American multiraciality), which artificially reduces the complexity of identity and social inequality patterns. For the case of the Canadian publishing industry, Milz convincingly argues that Canadian literature is reduced, because of the neoliberal orientation in the publishing industry, "to the literature of selected, internationally marketable stars who are predominantly published by multinational corporations and national presses that are linked to them" (Milz "Materialist Study"). For the case of Chinese Canadian literature, Li, author of *Lily in the Snow* describes that

> the Canadian publishing industry is very competitive. There is a small purely literary publishing house that publishes nine books a year while receiving nearly a thousand

[20] Dobson and Kamboureli provide an excellent collection of interviews with several authors, who offer detailed insights into their experiences with the Canadian grant system, small and large publishing houses, editors and agents. Although the authors interviewed differ sometimes in details, they all agree that the market regulates, to a considerable extent, what readers finally find in bookstores.

> submissions, relying on literary enthusiasts to screen them. So the difficulty of introducing Chinese literature to Canadians is evident. (Yan Li in Jiang: 339-340)

The opportunities to publish a literary work are thus rare and depend on accessibility, privileges and the sheer number and size of publishing houses, also concerning future perspectives for authors. The location of Toronto as Canada's most important publishing center with many multinational and domestic publishers (Milz "Spatial Perspective" 15) probably presents a geographical barrier for many aspiring writers not having contacts, or not even residing, in Canada's East. Small and mid-size publishing houses, often Canadian owned and situated outside of Toronto, do not have the (financial) marketing capacities to meet requirements for international campaigns and, in case of a huge international success, they do not have the capacities to provide the necessary number of book copies because of the monopolistic position of large foreign-owned companies in print and digital distribution (York 84-85). Additionally, small and mid-size Canadian publishing houses do not only compete with Toronto as the publishing center for literature in English but also with their dominating British and American counterparts (Milz "Spatial Perspective" 24), which refers again to the power imbalances between Canada, the U.S. and, additionally, Great Britain. This means, in the context of this dissertation, that one has to be aware of the fact that one reads literature by privileged authors, who had the opportunity to have their works published in a competitive publishing environment, which is in itself full of power imbalances.

Finally, Chinese Canadian immigration and Chinese Canadian literature is embedded in several contexts of power relations. Literature in particular has served as a means to bring (historical) racial discrimination to the surface, to articulate shared interests in Canada, and to provide alternative histories, especially in the literary period of the Canadian postcolonial postmodern during the 1980s and 1990s. Its (belated) denomination as a distinct field additionally illustrates the role of Canada in relation to the U.S. as a dominating global power, also regarding cultural productions. Despite the attempts to create a collective voice via literature, though, Chinese Canadian literature cannot be considered homogeneous or free from the power relations it is set in. Distancing oneself from one's ethnic background, demands for a more diverse reading, personal stories entangled in literary works in contrast to collective destinies or the growth of literature by and about Chinese Canadian women writers, for example, show that Chinese Canadian literature is constantly in a strained situation between political collectivity and individuality, which is related to different and entangled power relations. This literary field is strongly connected to the understanding of identity. The aim to deconstruct the understanding of a social identity as stable, rigid, or fixed in Chinese Canadian literature and its umbrella fields corresponds to the de-

essentialization of this type of literature, to acknowledge its heterogeneity, its richness in themes, motifs, and styles and, at the same time, to respect the collective aim behind it. As will be introduced in the following chapter, an intersectional reading of Chinese Canadian literature is suggested here as a means to consider both the political intention to illustrate the negotiation of racial discrimination but also to take into account individual aspects in a literary work. An intersectional reading of this type of literature, as defined in this dissertation, allows one to encompass more broadly its context(s), content(s) and text-immanent aesthetics supporting these content(s), including the aspect of race and ethnicity. It helps to shift from a reading informed by identity politics that sometimes may result in reductionist tendencies of the individual literary analyses to a reading that accommodates the globalized subjectivities with fragmented identities. Before providing a detailed methodological reflection, the term *intersectionality*, and its connections to concepts such as identity and empowerment, needs to be clarified.

4. Intersectionality and Literary Studies

4.1. The Beginnings of Intersectionality and its Development

In this section, a brief overview of the development of the term *intersectionality* as well as its implementation in different disciplines will be given. Due to the many ongoing controversies about its exact significance and practical use, this dissertation can only cover a small part of these discussions in order to provide insight into the main debates and some critical points. Hence, the information provided in this chapter is by far not complete but it presents a suitable amount of background information in line with the argument of this dissertation.

The concept of intersectionality or, more precisely, the aspects it problematizes, can be detected as early as the 19th century in the context of U.S. Black Feminist Movements with famous speeches such as "Ain't I a Woman" by Sojourner Truth. She asks central questions of intersectionality such as: who is part of an oppressed social group and due to what characteristics? Do various forms of oppression add to each other or do these oppressions have to be interpreted as forms of entangled power relations? (Winker and Degele 11-12.). The same applies to research in this area: many works call for an intersectional approach by demanding an ethnicized, racialized or classed view (or even all three) on gender, for instance, without naming it as such (see, for example, Hill Collins *Black Feminist Thought;* Mohanty et al.; Minh-ha. Further examples are provided by Cooper and in the introduction in Nash *Black Feminism*).

Eventually, the lawyer and Black Feminist activist Kimberle Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality in 1989 by problematizing the multiple means of marginalization of Black Women in antidiscrimination law ("Demarginalizing" 149). Single-axis frameworks of oppression, according to Crenshaw, are not able to capture the whole extent of discrimination ("Demarginalizing" 140).[21] Moreover, the privileging of some groups, such as males or Caucasian persons, is not at all recognized in the legal system, but discrimination is defined according to their experiences, e.g. sex discrimination is based on the experiences of

[21] Crenshaw differentiates between "double-discrimination", which describes "the combined effects of practices which discriminate on the basis of race, and on the basis of sex" ("Demarginalizing" 149) and, in the cases she illustrates, discrimination as Black women, which is not simply the sum of race and sex discrimination but which describes the interdependence of discriminatory catalysts ("Demarginalizing" 149). Double-discrimination is not a case of intersectionality as "Black women's experiences are much broader than the general categories that discrimination discourse provides" (Crenshaw "Demarginalizing" 149). Instead of the term *discrimination*, here, however, the term *social hierarchy* will be used because it comprises not only the negative effects for particular marginalized groups but, following Schnicke, it also refers to the privileges of some groups (4) and, consequently, tends to shed light on the whole spectrum of social hierarchies by contextualizing discriminatory practices more broadly (32).

Caucasian women (Crenshaw "Demarginalizing" 151). Transferring these ideas to a broader social context means that, in general, singly-burdened persons, who are privileged in other areas compared to multiply-burdened people, are able to metaphorically climb up the social ladder because they are able to compensate their inferior status within the social hierarchy (Crenshaw "Demarginalizing" 152). In contrast, multiply-burdened individuals are not able to overcome social hierarchies unless they deny discriminatory experiences in all but one area to "somehow pull themselves into groups permitted to squeeze through the hatch" (Crenshaw "Demarginalizing" 152) by claiming that they are discriminated against either due to their race or sex, for example. As a result of these observations, Crenshaw develops intersectionality as a metaphor for various types of discrimination Black women may face and which place them in an inferior position in the social hierarchy:

> Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination. (Crenshaw "Demarginalizing" 149)

The image of an intersection in a street is hence used to illustrate that the establishment of social hierarchies can be based on one single identity aspect of an individual but it is also able to capture the fact that numerous factors, which shape an identity, can serve as a basis for the formation of power relations. Crenshaw puts her remarks in the context of feminist theory while at the same time criticizing that the "value of feminist theory to Black women is diminished because it evolves from a white racial context that is seldom acknowledged" ("Demarginalizing" 154): white male subjectivity, and hence the authoritative white patriarch voice, is masqueraded as "non-racial, non-gendered objectivity" (Crenshaw "Demarginalizing" 154). According to Crenshaw, feminist theory ignores the role of race and remains white ("Demarginalizing" 154). Intersectionality, in turn, provides the possibility to broaden as well as deepen feminist theory analyses by focusing on non-privileged women (Crenshaw "Demarginalizing" 154). Intersectionality, as defined by Crenshaw, thus enables one to capture the multidimensionality of factors that social hierarchies can be based on and it supports the deconstruction of a Caucasian (female) gaze as an artificial reference point for the definition of discriminatory experiences.

Intersectionality can rightly be called a "travelling concept"[22] (Neumann and Nünning) as it has spread widely not only across the Atlantic but since then also from political activism

[22] The term "travelling concept" does not only imply the transnational and transcultural use of a concept as a dynamic intellectual tool in various disciplines and societies over time but it also refers to the (necessary)

into different academic disciplines, making its way into fields such as sociology, political science, and gender studies, both with regard to methodological considerations and practical implementations. Winker and Degele, for instance, present a theory on the use of intersectionality as a multi-level analysis in the social sciences, thereby resuming Crenshaw's exemplary multi-level analysis of violence against women of color ("Mapping the Margins"). Both the theoretical remarks by Winker and Degele and the practical implementation by Crenshaw look at the structural, the political, and the representational level, indeed with slight adjustments and further considerations in the case of Winker and Degele's work. Romero offers a variety of uses for intersectionality in her analyses of structural and political social inequality.

In Canada, intersectionality has received prudent attention in the context of the social sciences and policy assessment and development.[23] Siltanen and Doucet provide information on multiple initiatives in Canadian policy from the late 1990s to the early 2000s that demonstrate the consideration of an intersectional perspective in the context of gender-based analyses (GBA) (187-189). What is noteworthy, however, is that the given initiatives refer to *diversity* instead of *intersectionality* – an issue of confusion discussed in detail in chapter 4.2. All the examples are preoccupied with the term *women* as denoting a diverse, heterogeneous group with different experiences and backgrounds. The resulting hierarchies or inequalities are not in focus here. Hankivsky, in this context, rightfully argues that the modification of GBA to GBA+ as a reaction to the complaint of its limitation to hetero- and cisnormativity merely presents an empty signifier without producing considerable change; a preoccupation with systemic social inequality is still not included. Mason illustrates the inconsistent use of *intersectionality* in the context of the Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) from 2017, which again presents the challenge of grasping the key elements of the concept. Similar to the various examples from the field of literary studies discussed in chapter 4.3, all these cases, furthermore, use gender as a starting point, resulting in an

adaptations that are linked to a concept's multiple travels, especially in academic contexts (Neumann and Nünning 3, 11, 14). Travelling concepts are, moreover, regarded as driving forces for interdisciplinary approaches as they provoke a reflection about the use of particular concepts in specific disciplines, which enables a dialogue (Neumann and Nünning 4, 16). In that sense, this dissertation can be considered as an attempt to start an interdisciplinary dialogue between literary studies and the social sciences due to its use of intersectionality as a travelling concept. Furthermore, travelling concepts, as rightly remarked by Neumann and Nünning, are situated within (cultural) power relations (Neumann and Nünning 8-10), which perfectly connects them to the field of intersectionality on a meta level: who is in the position, who has the power to make a concept travel?

[23] For an example of a political analysis of the U.S. under Biden's presidency from an intersectional perspective, see Skrzypek and Thissen. Whether this presents a suitable example for the inclusion of intersectionality in politics unfortunately has to remain unanswered at this point due to the different focus of this dissertation.

additive approach with a predefined analytical reference point instead of deductively considering the intersections of multiple social categories that constitute an identity.

Especially the examples from Canadian policy initiatives and research reveal the unclear nature of intersectionality. Despite its wide range, what intersectionality actually is has still not been defined.[24] Blome problematizes, for instance, that it is unclear whether intersectionality involves a new research paradigm, a methodological approach, a form of criticism or social analysis (50). As a consequence of this ambiguity, Hill Collins and Bilge suggest a particularly general definition to accommodate the term's various understandings:

> Intersectionality is way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. Intersectionality as an analytic tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves. (Hill Collins and Bilge 2)

In this definition, the authors refer to two key elements, which can also be found in the remarks by Crenshaw: social hierarchies and identity. Identity is understood as complex, multisided, and constructed – be it on a structural, political or on an individual level. Intersectionality helps to consider these characteristics of identity when analyzing occurrences of social hierarchies. Furthermore, Hill Collins and Bilge implicitly differentiate between intersectionality as a methodological approach and as a tool of empowerment or activism, which the authors label as "critical inquiry" and "critical praxis" and which are not mutually exclusive (see also chapter 4.2 for more information on the connection between intersectionality and empowerment):

> [c]ritical praxis refers to the ways in which people, either as individuals or as part of groups, produce, draw upon, or use intersectional frameworks in their daily lives […] Intersectionality's critical praxis can occur anywhere, both inside and outside the academy. (Hill Collins and Bilge 32)

Both types, consequently, constitute the concept of intersectionality and both types themselves intersect: "We think that intersectionality is best served by sustaining a creative tension that joins inquiry and praxis as distinctive, yet interdependent, dimensions" (Hill Collins and Bilge 192; see also Hill Collins *Critical Social Theory*). Hill Collins and Bilge's research indeed comprises both types. For the purpose of this dissertation, however, these

[24] Whether this aspect presents a point of criticism depends on one's point of view: the vagueness and openness that accompanies intersectionality can indeed also be interpreted as an advantage, as Kathy Davis accurately points out in her article. Its openness, in this dissertation, provides space for the necessary adaptations in the field of literary studies and is, consequently, interpreted as a strength rather than a weakness.

types are considered as separate due to practical aspects and for reasons of clarity: in order to analyze the mechanisms of empowerment, of the ability to liberate oneself from inferior positions within a hierarchy as represented in the novels in the focus here, both concepts are regarded as analytically separate. Besides the lack of specification concerning its position as a research paradigm, heuristic device or social analysis, intersectionality suffers from another ambiguity: the term refers to both the research as well as to the instances of social inequality the research focuses on (Schnicke 5). Intersectionality can hence be interpreted as an analytical approach for the analysis of social inequality instances or the instances of social inequality themselves can be considered as intersectional. As a result, *intersectionality* needs to be specified in particular contexts in order to clarify its position and use, or, as Hill Collins and Bilge formulate it: "There is no one intersectional framework that can be applied to each field. Rather, varying academic fields of study take up different aspects of intersectionality in relation to their specific concerns" (99). Finally, the use of intersectionality depends on the context and the aim that one pursues with its implementation. In spite of all the vagueness this term carries, its openness presents a considerable potential for its interpretation and use as a travelling concept (Neumann and Nünning) The specific adjustments for the case of literary studies, also regarding its use in this dissertation, will be discussed in sections 4.3 and 4.4.

Intersectionality has experienced much contestation and criticism – not only regarding its vagueness – culminating in what Nash calls "intersectionality wars" in feminist debates (see Nash *Black Feminism* for more information). Nash conveniently summarizes that "nearly everything about intersectionality is disputed" ("Discontents" 117-118). Due to the focus of this dissertation, however, only the most prominent points of criticism will be considered in line with the argument and the methodology of this dissertation. Cooper, for instance, calls into question the use of intersectionality for the analysis of personal identities as it has proved insufficient for this purpose due to its roots in the analysis of structural identities.[25] For the case of literary studies, this criticism seems inapplicable due to the broad insights novels allow into a character's self-identity as will be resumed below. The debate about which social categories to include in an analysis presents another concern (see, for instance, Winker and Degele 12). Assuming a bottom-up approach, as Kimberle Crenshaw suggested

[25] Personal identities refer to personal tastes, personality traits, gender performativity and intimate relationships in contrast to structural identities, which describe the legal conceptualization of people according to race, class, gender, and further social categories (Cooper 6). This largely corresponds to the differentiation between self-identity and social identity used in this dissertation, without the restriction to a legal context, though (see footnote 3 and section 4.4).

("Demarginalizing" 167), and when following a deductive approach, this issue is inapplicable as well because the categories of analysis taken into consideration are dictated by the sources one works with, here by the novels in the focus of this dissertation. Another, more general observation and major concern in intersectionality debates is related to the understanding of the social categories themselves. The categories that form the basis for creating a collective identity within a particular group and that serve as a starting point for the analysis of social hierarchies are socially constructed (as is their binary quality as Blome (54) rightfully observes), or to put it differently, they are imagined and as such similar to what Benedict Anderson called "imagined community". While he refers to a nation as an imagined community, one can transfer these remarks to individual social groups that construct a feeling of collectivity and that are constructed as a social group on the basis of categories such as race, class, gender, or ability. Like nations, group identities "homogenise: they fashion unity and togetherness" (McLeod 82) by focusing on particular identity markers that create a collective identity. Hence, one has to keep in mind that the social categories of intersectionality are simply imagined, an ascribed, provisionally constructed tool for the analysis of social hierarchies. An intersectional research perspective, thus, always presents an active construction of social reality and the choice of categories reduces this social reality (Schnicke 13).[26] But why then use this strategy? First, because both intersectionality, with its use of social categories, and literary texts share this active construction of social realities: literary texts provide representations, thereby actively constructing, in this case, social hierarchies. Intersectionality as an approach thus allows one to consider the constructed nature of literary representations on a methodological level. Furthermore, by problematizing the constructed nature of social categories and their underlying essentialism, Lai contributes to one of the main points of criticism of intersectionality:

> The articulation of categories I recognized as constructed through language and yet also as historically, experimentally entrenched remains uncomfortable in the way it hails all players into a particular narrative, and yet I recognize the necessity of such articulation as a bulwark against a naïve universalism that works in the service of hegemonic power. (Lai *Slanting I* 211)

Lai, despite her awareness of the perils of this simplification, argues for the necessity to use these categories in order to deconstruct the underlying factors within power relations. This may cause problems and challenges, but – in the style of strategic essentialism (Spivak) –

[26] Accordingly, concerning literature, Nünning and Nünning describe a "performative power of narration" (56), which means that narratives are able to (re)produce and stabilize identities (56) and do not only call underlying categories of difference into question. Hence, one has to be aware of the fact that an intersectional analysis of literature may also (re)produce structures of difference.

"in trying to change things we sometimes have to use ideas or tools which we know are problematic" (McLeod 222). Additionally, Krass convincingly recommends the use of these categories as, despite their constructed character, they have a considerable impact on social relationships (21), or, in the terms used in this dissertation: social identity, in itself a construct by others, is used to establish and maintain social hierarchies, which impacts social relationships. In order to consider the problematic underlying meaning of the term *category* and its implications (see also Yuval-Davis), some German scholars advocate for the alternative *interdependence* (Walgenbach et al.) instead of *intersectionality* to express that categories themselves are already inherently dependent on each other, so they are not self-sufficient, closed entities (Schnicke 6). The aim of this alternative concept is to transfer the inequalities on a theoretical level into the categories themselves to clarify that these inequalities do not only occur when these categories intersect (Schnicke 6). Schnicke legitimately concludes that intersectionality should be interpreted as an umbrella term, a frame or a research perspective, which enables the analysis of particular forms of social inequality (28). This makes it, in an adapted version, fruitful for the implementation within literary studies to examine the negotiation of how the concurrence of social dimensions produces social hierarchies, especially considering the fact that literary texts are merely able to provide a snippet of a particular incident. As such, literary texts are not able to represent more than specific points, particular moments of intersections, which contradicts the aim of *interdependence* to describe social inequality as a constantly occurring phenomenon in societies (Schnicke 7). The use of intersectionality instead of interdependence, in this dissertation, thus underlines the fact that literary texts are only able to provide momentary representations of social hierarchies. The analytical categories used for an intersectional reading allows one to analyze these snapshots represented in literary texts.[27]Along these advantages and disadvantages of categories mentioned above, McCall developed a highly interesting systematization for methodology, which allows the adjustment of intersectionality to the specific needs of a research object and discipline: she differentiates between anticategorial, intercategorial and intracategorial complexity in the context of intersectionality (Helma Lutz "Assembling" provides a concise summary). The first one, anticategorial complexity, refers to a methodology that aims to deconstruct the analytical categories whereas the second one, intercategorial complexity, describes the strategic use of categories, which are understood as provisional, in order to explore possible commonalities,

[27] This approach is certainly linked to the understanding of identity in this dissertation, which will be elaborated on in section 4.4.

overlaps or amplifications (McCall 1773). The last one, intracategorial complexity, combines the other two approaches: its main aim is not to deconstruct the strategically used categories but the focus is on the deeper understanding of their inconsistencies and complexities while the constructed character is constantly kept in mind (McCall 1173-1174). Considering the above mentioned advantages and regarding the field of literary studies, this dissertation as well as the methodology used and explained below form part of the intracategorial complexity as provisional categories are used, yet their constructedness resonates, in particular regarding the aim to deconstruct the use of the label *Chinese Canadian literature*.

In summary, the genealogy of the term *intersectionality* illustrates its predominant preoccupation with social hierarchies and identity. Moreover, the term is characterized by a considerable vagueness that seems highly advantageous for its use as a travelling concept in various disciplines because it allows specific adjustments. In spite of many points of criticism, intersectionality can be regarded as an appealing approach for literary studies because especially novels allow insights into the self-identities of characters, a deduction of the identity markers at work from the source, both concepts share the active construction of realities and they provide momentary representations of social hierarchies, which corresponds to the use of provisional, constructed and momentary categories as an analytical tool. Before looking at the relevance of intersectionality in the field of literary studies and its concrete implementation in this dissertation in more detail, the semantic field of the term will be explored and presented in the next section.

4.2. Intersectionality in a Network: Postcolonialism, Diversity & Empowerment

After an exploration of its roots and major critical points, this section now focuses on the relationship between intersectionality and other concepts. The fact that the term *intersectionality* is often mentioned along with many other concepts results in the necessity for demarcations from the different catchwords in order to allow for a concise use of the terms. Three terms turned out to be of considerable relevance for the argument of this dissertation: postcolonialism, diversity, and empowerment. Their connection to both this dissertation and intersectionality will be explored in the following.

Canada's past as a former settler colony again strengthens the hegemonic context in which Chinese Canadians find themselves in as settler societies are characterized by a "settler's political domination over the indigenous populations as well as other racialized minorities" (Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis 1) with a "continued relevance for these societies" (Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis 8) with regard to political or legal institutions (e.g. the head tax) and prevailing

national myths, such as the Canadian master narrative of the two founding nations, which only refers to Francophone and Anglophone Canada. This facilitates its characterization as postcolonial. But how does intersectionality come into play?

On a theoretical level, postcolonialism and intersectionality share a certain degree of vagueness and lack of clarity which, in both cases, can be interpreted rather as a strength than a weakness (Kathy Davis; McLeod 4) because it leaves room to adapt the concepts in line with different disciplinary needs, for example. Moreover, both tend to focus on differences and their consequences (McLeod 18). Intersectionality, as mentioned previously, deals with power hierarchies resulting from ascribed and socially constructed differences between individuals and groups of people. This constructed dichotomy of Self and Other, that is processed in and forms the core of intersectionality, can also be found in colonial contexts: "That imaginative distinction that differentiates between 'man' (self) with 'black man' (other) is an important, devastating part of the armoury of colonial domination, one that imprisons the mind as securely as chains imprison the body" (McLeod 23-24). Consequently, postcolonialism and intersectionality share their aim to deconstruct ascribed differences and to analyze power relations and occurrences of social hierarchies. Current research tends to include an intersectional perspective on postcolonialism, for example by referring to postcolonialism and feminism (Ashcroft et al. *Empire* chapter 1, 5; McLeod chapter 6) or by looking at how the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, and class results in a politically systematic discrimination against visible minority (and First Nation) groups as a result of the Caucasian settler narrative with its ideal of British citizens (Stasiulis and Jhappan)[28]. An intersectional lens, consequently, can complement a postcolonial perspective by considering further dimensions of difference that go beyond the usual suspects in the center of postcolonial theory, namely race and ethnicity. An intersectional approach helps to understand the constructivist notion of a "self" versus "the other" as two homogenous counterparts and it uncovers social hierarchies as a spectrum, not as a binary opposition. The postcolonial nature of Canada and, consequently, of Canadian literature results in a paradigmatic field for an intersectional analysis because of the area of conflict between the integration of diverse groups and the established power relations on all levels – be it individual, societal or political, for example.

[28] However, despite their attempt to break with simplistic binary oppositions and essentialism, the editors of the collection clearly place the category of gender as one of the starting points for their analyses in the foreground and they are not able to exceed the classic trinity of class, race/ethnicity and gender (see the introduction of Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis) – an aspect that is problematized in the following section in detail. Moreover, the contribution provides a rather historical descriptive approach, with minority and female issues only appearing as addendum when suitable.

Concerning literary studies in particular, both postcolonialism and intersectionality generally share a reinterpretation of literature: in postcolonialism, 'classics'[29] are reinterpreted by adding individual historical and geographical components (McLeod 162). Intersectionality allows a reinterpretation of (not only but also) literary 'classics' by adding an individual perspective of social hierarchy discourses to the analyses of a work and by opening the focus of this discourse to more than one variable of power relations. Besides the reinterpretation – and in the case of the Chinese Canadian literature in the focus of this dissertation – both also share particular themes. Both are preoccupied with language, border-crossing and generational differences. Language plays an important role as an instrument to manifest power relations and hierarchies. Winker and Degele, for example, refer to intersectionality's preoccupation with a constructed binary gender system – an aspect that has been represented for a long time in linguistic terms when only differentiating between "he" and "she", for example. Colonialism also works with language as an instrument to maintain the binary system of Self and Other (Ashcroft et al. *Empire* chapter 2, 4; McLeod 21-22), which is reflected critically in postcolonial theory. Regarding literary studies, postcolonial strategies to deconstruct and refashion colonial values in literature ("new englishes")[30] (see McLeod 29-30 for a description of linguistic strategies in literary texts) can also be found in literary analyses dealing with intersectionality, regardless of how it is implemented (Radaelli, for example). Yet, further differences due to other social categories, such as class or gender, are neglected in the frame of language use in a postcolonial context (McLeod 31-32) – an intersectional perspective might counteract this negligence.

Border-crossing is another point of interest in both postcolonialism and intersectionality as crossing borders in a literal as well as a figurative meaning strongly relates to social hierarchy and power dynamics. McLeod summarizes the area of conflict:

> Although migrants may pass through the **political** borders of nations, crossing their frontiers and gaining entrance to new places, such 'norms and limits' can be used to exclude migrants from being accommodated inside the **imaginative** borders of the nation. The dominant discourse of 'race', ethnicity and gender may function to exclude them from being recognized as part of the nation's people. (McLeod 244; emphasis in original)

While he refers to race, ethnicity, and gender, McLeod indeed includes a feminist perspective on postcolonialism, yet he ignores further social categories and their possible intersections. The subsequent analyses demonstrate that border-crossing is manifold and

[29] Note McLeod's remarks on the definition of 'classic', which he characterizes as individual and socially constructed with value, hence as subject to debate and change (163).
[30] "[…] the lack of a capital 'E' is deliberate" (McLeod 29) to deconstruct the prominent role of English as a colonial force in writing.

complex as it can range from a domestic context to a communal one when crossing borders within an alleged homogenous ethnic group or from a rural setting to an urban one in a novel.

The depiction of generational differences presents another link to Chinese Canadian literature. In his remarks, McLeod refers to the case of Britain; however, this can be transferred to the example of Canada, as will be revealed in the literary analyses of this dissertation:

> Children born to migrant peoples in Britain may lay claim to British citizenship, but their sense of identity and subjectivity […] can be influenced by the 'past migration history' of their parents or grandparents that makes them forge emotional, cultural and imaginative bonds with more than one nation. The emotional and affective link these people might have to a distant location can be powerful and strong – perhaps more so than that of migrants, in some instances – even if they have never lived in or indeed visited the place in question. (McLeod 237-238)

Intersectionality comes into play when considering that "differences of gender, 'race', class, religion and language (as well as generational differences) [and many more]" (McLeod 238) result in fluid spaces. Thus, differences regarding social dimensions produce a heterogeneous community that is not "free from their own internal inequalities of power and divisive prejudices" (McLeod 240, also 259). In this context, McLeod also refers to identity and power discourses when stating that "discourses of power which seek to legitimate certain forms of identity and marginalise others by imposing a logic of binary oppositions remain operable and challenge new forms of identity from emerging" (260). In the novels, this becomes obvious, for example, by the portrayal of Chinatown or other communities that are marked in a peculiar way as insular on a spatial and plot level.

The distinction between diversity and intersectionality is not easy to grasp because many researchers either use both terms synonymously without providing the necessary demarcation and clarity or the discourse is shaped by strong disagreement. Especially in the context of policy initiatives and research, intersectionality is supposed to be a tool to illustrate, for instance, the diversity within a group of women, so it serves to uncover various differences within a group typically considered as homogenous, as has been illustrated in chapter 4.1: women are not equal and do not necessarily share the same experiences (Hankivsky; Siltanen and Doucet). In her remarks on the diversity discourse and intersectional analyses in North America and Germany, Knapp identifies intersectional discourse as a "programmatic-critical variety with reference to difference" (97, my translation). She hence implicitly equates diversity with difference but without a critical point of view, thereby converging the difference between intersectionality and diversity. The same applies to the field of literary studies: Luh, for example, regards intersectional research

as an opportunity to acknowledge and articulate diversity (265), unfortunately without differentiating between intersectionality and diversity. Whereas Blome argues for an overlap between diversity and intersectionality (48), Schnicke provides as an argument the criticism of power as a distinctive feature (13). The disregard of social hierarchy and power relations as key elements of intersectionality, thus, forms the core of this confusion: when focusing only on identity, both concepts can easily be used interchangeably. However, adding the notion of power relations differentiates diversity and intersectionality as diversity is basically defined as "[the quality or fact of including] a range of many people or things that are very different from each other" according to the Oxford Learner's Dictionary ("Diversity"). Diversity examines the aspects of heterogeneous social groups predominantly considered as positive such as enrichment (which can be understood as offering alternative ideas and strategies in different situations). Intersectionality, on the other hand, deals with the negative facets of plurality, namely resulting power relations and social hierarchies. As a result, both intersectionality and diversity share the concern with issues of difference but they differ in their focus: whereas the former deals with different power relations resulting from differences, the latter focuses on the differences themselves.

The intermingling of intersectionality and empowerment marks another point of confusion, which calls for the clarification of the similarities and differences of both terms. Helma Lutz, for example, introduces the phrase "doing intersectionality" in order "to explore how individuals creatively draw on various aspects of their multiple identities as a resource to gain control over their lives" ("Intersectionality as a Method" 41). Here intersectionality is not only restricted to the analysis of social hierarchies and power relations, but it refers to an individual's agency – an aspect actually characteristic of empowerment, which will be discussed below.

After having critically investigated the roots of empowerment, Hertel and Windberger, in the introduction to their volume, concisely summarize the key features of the concept and then elaborate on possible connections to literary studies (8-9). Considering these features, intersectionality and empowerment thus share some common ground at first glance: the roots of both concepts can be traced back to social inequality debates in the U.S. feminist and gender movements and both aim to reveal power relations based on racism and sexism. Upon closer inspection, however, one can detect nuances of difference. Generally, empowerment implies a liberation from inferior social statuses and largely depends on an individual's agency, whereas intersectionality carries negative connotations because it solely focuses on the diagnosis of these inequalities, aiming at bringing discrimination to the surface. The

relationship between intersectionality and empowerment thus can be characterized as interdependent to a certain extent: empowerment can be viewed as a mechanism to liberate oneself from the various forms of social inequality detected with the help of an intersectional analysis. But how does this relate to literary studies?

Regarding literary studies, intersectionality and empowerment share the inevitable link between the negotiation of social hierarchies and storytelling: discourses of power are negotiated in fiction by referring to different social categories such as race, class or gender. At the same time, moments of liberation within a story may occur, i.e. fiction can provide readers with the possibility to explore the various mechanisms of empowerment employed by protagonists, who are depicted as suppressed by a dominant ethnic, class or gender majority. The novels in the focus of this dissertation reveal various mechanisms of empowerment, such as clothing, references to popular culture, literature and, most prominently, the role of traditional Chinese myth as the subsequent analyses show. As a consequence, intersectionality and empowerment are closely linked indeed but, due to the above mentioned conceptual differences, intersectionality, in this dissertation, cannot be simply interpreted as a form of critical inquiry or praxis as some authors argue (see section 4.1). In order to be able to identify the agency providing tools at play, a conceptual differentiation of both intersectionality and empowerment is needed while, at the same time, considering their close connection also visible in the novels in the focus here.

In sum, intersectionality shares common features with the above mentioned partners from its semantic field. An intersectional perspective indeed contributes to their comprehension by providing a critical view on difference in the case of diversity and by extending the viewpoint of postcolonialism to power structures within a supposed homogenous group. Empowerment comprises a notion of agency, which in turn lacks intersectionality. These above mentioned remarks contribute to the clarification and demarcation of the understanding of intersectionality in this dissertation. The next section turns to a field that has been raised marginally here but not yet discussed in detail: what is the connection between intersectionality and literary studies?

4.3. Intersectionality Travelling to Literary Studies – An Overview

The preceding remarks illustrate that intersectionality as an analytical tool helps, in short, to explore social hierarchies based on the complex interplay of identity shaping factors such as nationality, gender, place, belonging, etc. An individual's identity, in this context, is understood as constructed, interwoven, multisided, fluid, and bound to social context(s).

Yet, how does this connect to literature in general and fiction in particular? Krass convincingly elaborates on the general opportunities that fiction offers:

> Literature [here used as a synonym for fiction] additionally is […] a testing of actions, the attempt to create a scope, in which the unthinkable becomes thinkable and the invisible is made visible. The confrontation of the real and the fictitious world […] results in a room for reflection and imagination, which encompasses the social world of its readers. (Krass 18, my translation)

Keeping this in mind, fiction offers both access and alternative insights concerning the negotiation of social hierarchies and concerning mechanisms to liberate oneself from inferior positions within such hierarchies. Krass adds the importance of identity for both intersectional theory and the genre of the novel as most novels deal with the construction of an imaginary character's identity (18). Linked to this, identities, social hierarchies and power relations appear in both the novel and intersectionality because, with social encounters, power relations are at play; hierarchies are negotiated, established, and maintained. The form of the novel promises a deeper understanding of and (alternative) insights into these processes due to broader descriptions of concepts, characters, and situations.

Furthermore, the novel seems to present a genre of high social relevance due to the broad public it attracts, so that the novel forms a valuable starting point for an intersectional reading. In this context, an intersectional approach helps one to consider several shifts in the understanding of a society in a globalized world, which, amongst others, is represented in the literary discourse. Remarks on a "postethnic America"[31] (Hollinger) or on a "postmigrant perspective"[32] (the latter in particular with regard to literary and cultural studies; Foroutan et al.; Rösch; Schramm) provide some examples of current advocacy to overcome the focus on ethnicity (or race, if talking simply about phenotypical features such as skin color) as the strongest shaping factor for both self-identity and social identiy as well as exclusionary practices in communities and/or societies. Transferring this idea to the literary text leads to a questioning of the classification of literature along racial or ethnic criteria.

[31] Historian David Hollinger defines a postethnic approach in the U.S. context as "a step beyond multiculturalism" (2) that "builds upon a cosmopolitan element" (3) which is "more wary of traditional enclosures and favors voluntary affiliations […] Cosmopolitanism promotes multiple identities, emphasizes the dynamic and changing character of many groups, and is responsive to creating new cultural combinations" (3-4). Hollinger suggests transcending the understanding of ethnicity as an indicator for a homogenous individual or community culture and accepting the cultural heterogeneity of one particular ethnicity (13).

[32] Schramm argues, in summary, that both migrant literature as well as postmigrant literature run the danger of othering because they are continuously contrasted to the literary canon assumed as traditional (83-84). A postmigrant perspective in literature allows one to free literary analyses from the ethnic background of a particular author or the topics discussed in a text: the negotiation of migration and its consequences can be transferred to the literary canon as a whole (Schramm 89-90). Thus, a postmigrant perspective can be adopted for any literary work regardless of ethnicity because the approach assumes migration not to be an exception but the rule (Schramm 89).

In literary studies, some recent attempts have been made to concretely implement intersectionality for the analysis of literature. Almost certainly due to its academic entrance via the field of gender studies, many practical applications of intersectionality in literary studies can indeed be subsumed under the formula gender + x. Despite the prominent naming of intersectionality in the title of these works, gender serves as a reference point and its intersections with other identity categories, such as age, class, sexuality, ethnicity, race or disability (Aldeeb; Armengol; Armengol et al.; Dell'abate Çelebi; Lew; Vyas) or even with ecocriticism (Armengol et al.; Vakoch and Mickey) are examined. The same applies to the theoretical considerations concerning the use of intersectionality in literary studies, mostly in the context of feminist narratology (Lanser "Intersectional Future"; Lanser *Fictions of Authority;* Lanser "Gender and Narrative"; Nünning and Nünning) or postcolonial feminism (Bartels et al.) . Other works touch upon literary texts from a cultural studies perspective, partly also with an intersectional approach interpreted as an extension of the research on gender related aspects (Blome; Nünning and Nünning).

Yet, the most striking aspect regarding the implementation of intersectionality in literary studies is not the depiction of gender as a starting point or the fact that the research is situated in cultural studies, but most of the works merely examine the (sometimes conflicting) area of self-identity and social identity in the context of identity formation and construction without considering the resulting social hierarchies. In addition to the preceding examples, an intersectional perspective is indeed less focused on gender here, but its use only consists of, for instance, the exploration of diversity within an individual's identity and within a novel (Bach "Spatial Belonging", in particular the chapter "Urban Belonging: Reading Antia Heiss's *Not Meeting Mr. Right* from an Intersectional Perspective"), inclusion and exclusion in particular settings (Bach "Intersektionalität als Analyseinstrument") or the characterization of individual identities as intersecting (Luh). Social hierarchies and power relations, which constitute key elements of intersectional theory, are neglected completely or only play a minor role in these analyses.

The volumes by Bedeković et al. and Klein and Schnicke can be regarded as highly innovative and remarkable approaches among all these works. Klein and Schnicke's work comprises a rich variety of concrete possibilities for the implementation of intersectionality in the field of literary studies, ranging from theoretical remarks (Nünning and Nünning) and text-oriented approaches (such as the contributions by Rennhak; Werner) to author-oriented approaches (Heinen) and reception research about readership experiences (Hrzán). The contributions referring to contemporary literary examples, however, can be classified in the

categories mentioned above: either gender serves as a starting point, the analysis is situated in cultural studies or intersectionality is understood as a particular concept for the analysis of identity. The whole volume by Bedeković et al. and two contributions in Klein and Schnicke (Michaelis; Schmid) constitute the most promising implementations of an intersectional perspective in literary studies as they include the negotiation of social hierarchies in literary texts. Unfortunately, all these analyses are based on a historical interpretation of intersectionality because they involve medieval texts. The necessary adaptations of an intersectional lens due to the different societal structures back then do not allow for a use of these analytical suggestions for contemporary literature; in these contributions, the authors' focus lies on the application of currently developed research perspectives for the analysis of medieval texts.

Coming back to chapter 3 and the constructed character of labels such as *Asian Canadian literature*, Goellnicht implicitly argues for an intersectionally informed reading by referring to the power relations in this label:

> The crucial question remains "Whom does the term Asian Canadian literature serve"? If the answer is that it serves publishers seeking a new "exotic property" to sell to a particular niche of the market in the voyeuristic display of ethnographic "knowledge," fetishizing "difference" into yet another commodity for capitalist consumption, then it is dangerous in its perpetuation of traditional power relations. If the answer is that it serves academics – including me – seeking to advance their careers, then its use is at best irrelevant and at worst mercenary. The term has validity only if it can be made to work for the benefit of Asian Canadians by performing as a sign under which forces fighting racism, classism, sexism, and colonialism can find some form of solidarity for the purpose of resistance to the dominant hegemony. (Goellnicht 29)

Taking this into account, an intersectional perspective, on Asian Canadian literature in general and Chinese Canadian literature in particular, allows for deconstructing traditional power relations; the value of the label requires this type of deconstruction that creates solidarity and can result in a form of empowerment. Readers and their expectations, which Goellnicht does not consider, might also benefit from this perspective as, similar to the publishers, they are confronted with the deconstruction of traditional power relations that go beyond the expected focus on race and ethnicity associated with the term *Chinese Canadian literature*. Examples of recent endeavors for the practical implementation of an intersectionally informed reading in the field of Asian Canadian and Asian American literature are provided either very implicitly when considering gender, sexuality, or class aspects negotiated in literary pieces in the context of racial discrimination (Chao 56-58, 72-86; Hilf 110-112) or explicitly by the works by Eng and Okihiro et al. Unfortunately, in their works, they follow the trend of (a racialized) gender analyzed from an intersectional point of view as described above.

In conclusion, some attempts have already been made to include an intersectional frame in literary studies. These attempts, however, only consider particular aspects of intersectional theory (such as gender and identity), they are situated in other research fields outside of literary studies (such as cultural studies) or they focus on medieval literature, which does not allow for a transfer to contemporary literature. In the field of Asian Canadian literature, the need for an intersectionally informed reading has already been expressed, even though only implicitly, to allow the deconstruction of the underlying power relations related to this label. An intersectional perspective on contemporary (Asian Canadian) literature, consequently, has not been established yet. How an intersectional lens on contemporary literature helps to examine the social hierarchies and power relations in the Chinese Canadian texts as a part of the Asian Canadian canon and in the focus of this dissertation will be explained in the following section.

4.4. Methodological Reflection

As has been demonstrated in the preceding section, many attempts have been made to include intersectionality as an approach in the analysis of literature, which certainly illustrates that the relevance of intersectionality for the field of literary studies has been recognized. The many different shapes of these implementations, however, ignore the core of the concept developed by Crenshaw: intersectionality as an approach centers, in its origin, on the exploration of social hierarchies, the resulting inequalities and power relations, thereby considering individual identities as multiple and fluid. In this dissertation, *intersectionality* is again understood as a "travelling concept"[33] (Neumann and Nünning; see also chapter 4.1) and refers to a methodological approach to include the negotiation of social hierarchies and power relations in literary discourses. Following Hill Collins and Bilge, it refers broadly to "an analytic tool [which] examines how power relations are intertwined and mutually constructing" (7). Concerning literature labelled by ethnicity, for example, an intersectional reading helps to reveal further mechanisms of power relations at play in works of fiction. These social hierarchies are not exclusively established and exerted on the basis of a character's ethnic background, but these power relations are depicted as a convoluted interplay of various dimensions, as complex as human identity.

Intersectionality as a tool for the analysis of literature therefore offers multiple perspectives on a theoretical level as it allows one to consider the interaction of the diverse social dimensions an identity consists of. In contrast to a gender studies or a postcolonial

[33] Although Neumann and Nünning refer to cultural studies, their characterization of travelling concepts (see footnote 22) is equally applicable to literary studies.

studies approach, for instance, intersectionality does not use gender aspects or ethnic issues as a starting point but it allows one to consider and to grasp the complexity of identity and the resulting social hierarchies. Instead of confining a literary work to one social dimension, an intersectional approach enables the consideration of further aspects of identity, and both the creation and perpetuation of power relations. Due to its openness, it allows for a deeper text-oriented approach with more possibilities as it does not precast the social categories taken into account for the analysis of a literary work. By aiming explicitly at **not** imposing a particular thematic focus on the analysis of social hierarchies, which other approaches tend to do in their core due to their theoretical thematic focus, intersectionality, as a perspective on literature, supports the text-oriented work with literature. In short, intersectionality claims to begin with the specificities of a text; its openness, sometimes negatively interpreted as vagueness (Kathy Davis), presents a fruitful advantage in the case of literary studies as it allows for adjustments considering the individual conditions of a particular text (Bach "Intersektionalität als Analyseinstrument" 13). As such, intersectionality hence allows the deconstruction of the ethnic ascription of fields to literary works generally subsumed under the umbrella term *migrant literature*.

For the case of the Chinese Canadian novels in the focus of the present dissertation project (and, almost certainly, for many literary works in general), one has to differentiate between two forms of intersectionality, which corresponds to the ambiguity of the term mentioned in chapter 4.1: first, readers are confronted with instances of multiple oppression in the narrow sense of intersectionality developed by Crenshaw and scholars in the social sciences. Figures in literary texts are illustrated as suffering from an inferior position within power relations due to multiple particular aspects of their identity (see, for instance, the characterization of Jook-Liang in Choy's *The Jade Peony* in section 6.2 or the description of Audrey's relationship with Margie in section 5.3). Here, readers experience intersectionality as a theme in the text and they find examples of the multiple oppressions that Crenshaw and others describe. Second, as has been described above, intersectionality as a tool in literary studies enables the extensive exploration of social hierarchies, their establishment, and their maintenance without imposing issues of inequality and discrimination on the texts by the choice of a particular theoretical approach. Both forms, as will be demonstrated with the subsequent analyses, are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but they can occur in one text and complement each other.

In the subsequent analyses, social hierarchies based on diverse social categories in literary texts are explored with the help of intersectionality as a reading perspective. By establishing

a dichotomy of a self, which is (sometimes voluntarily) segregated from a subjectively perceived other, the resulting different forms of power relations can be revealed with an intersectional approach for the texts in question. Since establishing and maintaining social hierarchies involves people, the following analyses regard the characters of the novels as a starting point for examining the negotiation of social hierarchies. To allow for a systematic analysis and to consider the differences of family internal and family external negotiations in the novels, the analyses differentiate between the domestic context and the social environment. The domestic context centers on power relations within a family, which demonstrates that social hierarchy is not only an issue between groups perceived as different, but that exclusion and discrimination also occur within a family and result in unequal power relations. In the domestic context in the present novels, the ethnic background of the family is not the only aspect negotiated regarding these social hierarchies, which demonstrates the constructedness of ethnicity as a criterion of literary classification as the family context clearly dominates the novels. The analyses of the social environment mirrors the social context the families in question are situated in. Contact with the Caucasian Canadian population as well as with other groups of different sexualities or ethnic backgrounds is in the focus in these sections. Both parts complement each other and provide an image of how social hierarchies are created and perpetuated in a family and in a social environment. The analyses of literary texts in this dissertation, in the style of Matsuda, aim at "asking the other question" (1189): what other factors contribute to the establishment and maintenance of social hierarchies within these novels? Ethnicity certainly plays a role in the mechanisms of power relations but an intersectional reading will help to demonstrate that many other components are at play and that social hierarchies are more complex than ethnic or gender centered approaches allow one to detect.

The openness of the term *intersectionality* does not only allow an intersectionally informed reading of literary texts but it also allows considerations in terms of methodology in literary studies. Within the discipline, it is common knowledge that texts cannot be reduced to the sequence of letters that result in a particular meaning; literary works are usually accompanied by many other factors that contribute to their positioning in a specific discourse, their reception and their interpretation. Besides form and content, various paratexts (such as cover image, genre allocation, and references), an author's background or the reception discourse itself shape the reception of a particular work as they are equally related to readers' expectations. All these aspects intersect in that they all interdependently add to the interpretation of a literary text, so – if these aspects are considered – literary

analyses are indeed intersectional. Similar to the practical approach regarding the use of categories mentioned above, however, not all of these aspects can (or have to) be considered in this dissertation. In line with the argument of this dissertation, the focus is on field allocation to deconstruct the use of ethnic labels for literary works. Besides this form of epitext, written peritexts will be considered in particular for the individual novels as they distinctively shape the reception of a work due to their spatial proximity to the literary text itself. All of these practical considerations enable the main aim of this dissertation to be pursued without neglecting the intersectional methodology of literary analyses.

The novels in the focus of this dissertation share the allocation to the field of Chinese Canadian literature because of aspects such as the author's background, the theme of intergenerational conflict that is considered as specific for this type of literature, their realist narrative mode, the negotiation of Chineseness in the novels, and their paratexts. The section comprising the analyses starts with Kim Fu's *For Today I Am a Boy* because it is also considered an "intersectional novel" (Ty "Building" n.p.). Hence, her work serves as a reference point in this dissertation. The remarks on Fu's novel reveal the dubiety of the novel's classification as intersectional and as Chinese Canadian but they will also illustrate the benefit of an intersectional perspective if intersectionality is differently defined and applied. With the subsequent analysis of Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony*, the focus shifts to a work considered as canonical for Chinese Canadian literature. This analysis consists of the concrete implementation of an intersectional perspective on literature labelled alongside ethnic or racial criteria in order to illustrate the constructedness of this type of field classification. The chapter on Choy's novel reveals the complexity of social hierarchies, which are not exclusively based on ethnicity and which can rise to the surface with an intersectional reading perspective. The analytical part closes with Yan Li's *Lily in the Snow*, a lesser known work considered as Chinese Canadian literature. This literary analysis underlines the usefulness of an intersectional reading for ethnically labelled literature as it also displays the complexity of power relations and social hierarchies but at the same time it illustrates the individuality of this issue as the novel differs considerably from the other two novels discussed. Each analytical chapter is divided into form and content sections in order to illustrate that intersectionality is indeed relevant for both levels and to consider the differentiation between intersectionality as a topic within the text and as a methodological approach. Notwithstanding, both levels are strongly connected, as will be illustrated in the course of the analyses, because they complement each other in the deconstruction of Chinese Canadian literature as a field designation: both levels allow the revelation of the complexity

of social hierarchies and identities when an intersectional reading is implemented. Moreover, each analysis is accompanied by a brief discussion of an additional aspect relevant in the spectrum of an intersectionally informed reading of these novels before drawing an interim conclusion that summarizes the main findings of the analysis.

Used here as an hermeneutical approach, intersectionality enables the deconstruction of the category of Chinese Canadian literature while still considering the importance of the racial/ethnic preoccupation of the works discussed here without ignoring further forms of oppression and identity. Following Barker and Jane, identity, in this dissertation, is understood as subject to change but temporarily stabilized by social practices (260, 296), here by literary texts. In order to consider the specific case of novels, which allow deeper insights into identities of particular characters, this dissertation uses the differentiation between self-identity and social identity. This differentiation is borrowed from Barker and Jane because it allows one to consider the discrepancies between an identity that an individual ascribes to itself and an identity that is ascribed to an individual by others, for example because of phenotypical traits. Barker and Jane define self-identity as "conceptions we hold about ourselves and our emotional identification with those self-descriptions" (260) whereas a social identity describes "the expectations and opinions that others have of us" (260). In conclusion, intersectionality, in this dissertation, is thus used as a kaleidoscope that enables the analysis of social hierarchy negotiations on the level of form and content, thereby supporting the deconstruction of literary texts classified along ethnic/racial lines in order to consider the complexity of identity representations in literature.

5. Kim Fu *For Today I am a Boy*

In this dissertation, Kim Fu's novel *For Today I am a Boy* from 2014 serves as a reference point for the implementation of an intersectional reading because it is situated at the crossroads of Chinese Canadian literature and of literary texts concerned with intersectional issues. The novel can be considered as Chinese Canadian literature because of its peritexts, i.e. the cover image, the blurb and the quotes provided on the front and back covers. The cover image depicts long, dark hair with dyed blond ends on a light gray background. On the left side of the front cover, from the top to the bottom and reaching across the spine to the back cover, one can detect two columns of identical symbols in a gray tone that is a little darker than the background color. The symbol, with its clear, geomtric shapes, evokes the notion of a mandala.[34] Both the dark hair and the mandala-like symbols provide a first hint at the Asian context of this novel. The designation as a "coming-of-age tale" on the front cover, in combination with the images, creates the impression of a story that is probably about an adolescent Asian character on their quest for their identity in a Caucasian environment. The first information for readers provided by the blurb fosters this impression with its immediate reference, printed in bold in contrast to the rest of the blurb, to the Chinese name that was given to the protagonist at birth. The allocation to the Chinese Canadian context continues for about two thirds of the blurb text with references to immigration, values explicitly regarded as "Western" and the description of a family organized strictly hierarchically. Readers only learn in the last third of the blurb about the transgender theme of Fu's novel. Consequently, the peritexts of the novel clearly raises the expectation that *For Today I Am a Boy* belongs to the field of Chinese Canadian literature.

In her contribution, Ty allocates Fu's novel to the period of "unfastened" Asian Canadian writing in the second half of the 21st century ("Building" n.p.). This type of literature is characterized by "notions of geographical mobility and displacement, in the positive and negative sense" (Ty "Building" n.p.).[35] In this context, she further explains the concept of intersectionality and links it to literature insofar as "many works by Asian Canadians demonstrate their awareness that systemic injustice and social inequality occur on multiple

[34] The origin of mandala art is situated in an Asian context because it derives from Buddhist and Hinduist traditions in India and Tibet to support religious meditation.

[35] Ty also elaborates on the level of form as "a way of becoming unfastened" ("Building" n.p.): "By breaking free from the mainly realist, documentary mode which dominated Asian North American literature and film of the 1980s and early 1990s, some authors reach a larger readership through the use of popular genres, like detective novels" (Ty "Building" n.p.). This change presents a thought-provoking basis for further research: it would be highly interesting to explore whether this shift of genres is motivated by an author's capitalist interest to increase the readership or if the shift itself has provoked this trend. Unfortunately, this aspect is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

levels" (Ty "Building" n.p.). According to Ty, the present novel fits this definition because "[r]ather than focusing only on the everyday negotiations with ethnic identity, *For Today I Am a Boy* depicts the failures of Peter and his siblings to conform to the kinds of gender, social, and professional roles expected of them" ("Building" n.p.) by looking "at the ways that ethnicity, social class, gender, and sexuality are mutually constitutive and become oppressive for the protagonist […]" ("Building" n.p.). On the other hand, the novel also "replays many of the intergenerational conflicts of the Chinese immigrant family, the first-generation parents' aspirations, subjugated children, and the failure to conform to the model minority, which were present in earlier writing by Chinese Canadians" (Ty "Building" n.p.). Nevertheless, it adds to this list of topics the negotiation of "how difficult it still is to disentangle our subjectivity from our physical bodies, and the complexities, the public and private institutions, the ideologies, and the emotions that are enmeshed in the discursive construction of the self" (Ty "Building" n.p.). Hence, the novel combines themes from previous periods of Chinese Canadian literature with negotiations of new issues, in particular with a broad understanding of intersectionality complemented by considering increasing mobility and the resulting migration movements in the 21st century. As a result, intersectionality, in the context of literary analyses, according to Ty, means a thematic preoccupation of texts with multiple oppressions. But how are these issues represented in the novel? What exactly makes this novel related to intersectionality? How is intersectionality negotiated in *For Today I Am a Boy*? The following analysis shows that an intersectionally informed reading can exceed the interpretation of intersectionality as a thematic preoccupation of texts by allowing insights into how social hierarchies are negotiated on both the level of form and content, thereby supporting the deconstruction of the allocation to the field of Chinese Canadian literature evoked by the peritexts described above.

5.1. Synopsis

For Today I Am A Boy presents the life of the Huang family, which is of Chinese background, in a small fictitious town in Ontario, Canada. The transgender protagonist Audrey, who was born as Peter, narrates the story retrospectively.[36] Audrey guides the reader through her childhood, adolescence and her thirties, leading the readers not only through various spatial settings but also through the transformation from her male identity to her female one. Within

[36] The name Peter indicates a point in the time of the story when the protagonist has not yet decided to become Audrey. When referring to Audrey in this dissertation, it may mean either the narrator or a point in time after the protagonist's decision to be Audrey. As the transformation to Audrey is near the end of the novel, most cases refer to the narrator, if not specified otherwise.

her story, Audrey meticulously describes her family's struggles, including those of her parents and her sisters Adele, Helen and Bonnie, and her encounters with various other persons, who shaped her identity search during her physical and psychological journey. The novel negotiates topics ranging from the family's ethnic visibility to social hierarchies within the family to gender issues and sexuality, thereby questioning expected roles both in an intergenerational context and in a societal one.

As has been explained in the methodological section, the following analysis differentiates between the domestic context, here referring to the protagonist's family environment, and the broader social context because both spheres are described as providing different experiences for Audrey in terms of the negotiation of social hierarchies. A section on the level of form complements the analysis of the content level, here focusing on the spatial setting and the narrative modes, which both serve as deconstructivist means here. After having provided some remarks on the importance of epitexts, meaning a self-positioning of author Kim Fu in the literary discourse, this analytical part closes with an interim conclusion summarizing the main findings of the analysis of *For Today I Am a Boy* from an intersectionally informed reading.

5.2. Intersectionality in a Domestic Context

Despite its focus on Audrey's journey as a transgender person feeling female but having been born male, Kim Fu's novel *For Today I am A Boy* depicts – especially with the minor characters – a multitude of social hierarchies that include negotiations of gender, ethnic background and social class and that considerably influence the protagonist. The thematic focus on the transgender aspect is already stressed even before the author dives into the plot: the title of the novel is an allusion to a song by the U.S. band *Antony and the Johnsons*. Before starting with a prologue, Fu presents three lines from the song "For Today I Am a Boy". This intertextual reference does not only foreground one particular theme of the novel (being transgender) but it also foreshadows the ending by stating that the lyrical I will become a woman but in the present time, he is a boy.[37] Interestingly, the singer of the band, Anohni, is a transgender person (Beaumont-Thomas). This background information shifts the focus again to the transgender theme. However, if this particular theme is underlined so heavily by intertextual references and other themes are not introduced at all at the beginning, what does an intersectional perspective add then for the level of content?

[37] The song consists of only 18 lines and is rather discreet, quiet, and calm. The piano is the dominant instrument. The focus in the highly repetitious song full of asyndetons and parallelisms is on the story, the message, rather than on the music. Consequently, its arrangement also emphasizes the transgender theme of the novel.

Whilst seeming like the archetype of a Chinese patriarch, the character of the father and his relationships to others illustrate what social dimensions intersect, ironically during attempts to assimilate fully to Canadian society following the so-called model minority myth. As will be demonstrated in the following, Father tries to shake off his ethnic background but is still strongly connected to it in many ways, amongst others by the model minority myth. The model minority image derives from the U.S. and refers to stereotypes that have been used to contrast Asian Americans from other migrant groups due to their "discipline, low crime rates, a willingness to work hard, and strong family values" (Ty *Asianfail* 2), so it appears to be a particular phenomenon among Asian immigrants and thus characterizes them as such. Hattori links the model minority discourse to capitalism in a racialized context, thus to an intersection of social class and race (229-230). As a stereotype, it "helps to maintain the dominant racial hierarchy by misrepresenting the success of some Asian Americans as representative of the racial group, which in turn obscures continuing economic and political inequalities" (Adams 198), on the one hand. On the other hand, the discourse is related to intersectionality as it presents the possibility of what Crenshaw described as squeezing through the hatch by denying matters of discrimination except for one: "The stereotype of the model minority as the ideal immigrant […] predicates social acceptance upon exceptional capitalist achievement" (Hattori 231). According to this myth, an Asian immigrant can be accepted by claiming their status as a part of this model minority but also by being outstandingly successful in the economic sphere. Furthermore, he adds the frame of multiculturalist institutions and hence transfers the idea of the myth to Canada (Hattori 229). In spite of the fact that the term is not explicitly a part of public discourse, Hattori's theoretical elaborations and the remarks provided by Ty show that the image of the model minority does indeed play a role one should not underestimate because it has a profound impact on the mental health of Asian immigrants due to the pressure related to these stereotypes (Ty *Asianfail* 107). Hence, the discourse is not only restricted to the U.S. context as will be shown in the analysis. Moreover, the discourse does not seem to be as prominent in the Canadian context in terms of broader society reproducing particular stereotypes, but it seems to be negotiated in Fu's novel within the Chinese family itself.

> With or without the explicit discourse of the model minority myth, Asian Canadians, like Asian Americans, feel a certain amount of pressure to excel and perform […] Even if the term model minority is not used overtly, the concept has become transnational, negatively influencing educational practices across North America" (Ty *Asianfail* 5),

This is illustrated in the child rearing practices by Father in Fu's text. As a result, *For Today I Am a Boy* does not depict institutional education practices but refers to the familial, private

sphere and thereby negotiates various forms of multiple oppression in a domestic context based on the model minority myth.

From the beginning on, Audrey's father is described as a cruel patriarch as there is "a brutal, magnetic beauty to his features" (xi).[38] With the help of opposites, Fu emphasizes the discrepancy between the father's height and the authority he manages to establish: he is "a short man who stands tall in people's minds" (xi). He imposes his decision to leave Chinese culture behind on his family, which is illustrated in the prologue which states that it was the father's decision to drop Chinese as the family's language when in Canada (xii).[39] This underlines his assimilation attempts because "to dismiss a language is to dismiss a whole culture" (McLeod 129). In the course of the novel, he does not only impose language uses but he has a profound influence on all members of the family and on a considerable variety of social dimensions. This aspect is illustrated again in the context of food and eating habits: the father disparages traditional food and values a dinner he considers Western (6-7).[40]

Corresponding to the model minority image, Audrey's father is also characterized by high ambitions regarding his career, which is strongly connected to his dominance on the one hand but also presents a paradox[41] on the other hand:

> He liked to be in charge of people. He liked the respect demanded by a *manager*; he would accept any pay but no other title. Father never stayed at one job for long. He always felt he wasn't climbing fast enough. Eventually he was hired by the Passport Canada office near us, part of a federal visible minorities program. Nothing could be more antithetical to the way my father saw himself. (45)

[38] All quotes of the primary source in this chapter refer to the following edition: Fu, Kim. *For Today I Am a Boy*. New York: Mariner Books, 2014.

[39] As one can see in the course of this chapter, this presents one of many ironic cases as Father manages to keep ties to his cultural background without the use of the Chinese language but by various cultural practices. On the surface, he drops his ethnic background yet his practices reveal his connection.

[40] This introduces the symbolism of food in the novel: it presents a "barometer of situations and relationships" (Link 650). For Father and Mother (see below), food presents a connection to their cultural background. Moreover, food is used in sexual contexts: Peter feels attracted to his boss, in particular on a physical level. Narrator Audrey describes how her former self Peter imagines Chef comparing some of his body parts to peaches (104). This corresponds to the kitchen depicted as a space of the erotic (Seid 154). Additionally, Link elaborates on the humoristic function of food for the novel because it reveals communication gaps as the discussion about dietary preferences with Peter's new friends in Montreal (see below) illustrates (215-216; Link 651-652).

[41] Another incident of Father's aforementioned inconsistencies and – sometimes ironic – paradoxes is presented in a humorous way when he "begins to think [his daughter] Helen sealed the spirit door behind her […] Then he remembers he's trying to shed his old superstitions […]" (xi). It is highly interesting that the narrator Audrey compares these behaviors of willful suppression to that of a child rejecting a toy (xi-xii), characterizing her father in that context thus as childish. Another paradox is the fact that Father wants to assimilate completely to Western culture but refers to the idea of shame related to ancestors and considered as part of Chinese culture when talking to his son before his death: "I'm careful, every day, not to shame him [Father's father]. Not to do anything that would make him ashamed. I know he's watching" (142). Interestingly, although Audrey "remembered […] how disgusted my father got when he saw me cry. *You cry more than your sisters*, he'd said, and it was true" (142-143), Father thanks his son for not shaming him (142) even though his son Peter fails to adhere to the gender norms the father represents.

Peter's father tries to deal with this paradox by forcing the Chinese people to talk to him in English despite a sign stating that he is able to communicate in Cantonese (45-46). Interestingly, his career ambitions are strongly connected to his aim of escaping his cultural background:

> Being a civil servant fit his white-collar idea of prosperity. Everyone dressed the way he always had – jackets, ties, shoes […] But their pale faces in the fluorescence reminded him how he'd gotten there, by being *visible*. He comforted himself with pictures of his two eldest daughters, away at university. Adele would be an invisible doctor and Helen would be an invisible lawyer. He'd laid it out for them, and they had expressed no resistance. Bonnie and I had much simpler orders. Be a little girl forever, be a boy. (46)[42]

This explanation by Audrey presents the first incident of intersectionality as a topic in the novel as it illustrates the interdependence of social class and ethnicity regarding the character of the father, who feels multiply burdened. By following a career and by adhering to the image of the model minority, he tries to overcome his status as a visible minority in an environment of a Caucasian Canadian majority. It seems that he fears social oppression because of his ethnic background and he tries, just as Crenshaw suggests, to squeeze through the hatch of social hierarchy by compensating one dimension of inequality with another one (see chapter 4.1.) – in this case, social class compensates ethnic background in the opinion of Audrey's father. In intersectional theory, this means that Audrey's father aims to become a singly-burdened person as he aims for economic success so that he is able to climb up the metaphorical social ladder in order to increase his agency in Canadian society.

Audrey's mother is also depicted as multiply-burdened but her character additionally illustrates the connection between intersectionality and empowerment as she is able to liberate herself from inferior positions by both adhering to Chinese cultural practices and rebelling against gender expectations imposed on her. The first impression the reader obtains of Audrey's mother[43] is from the prologue in which the birth of Audrey's sister Adele is described. Audrey's mother walks into the butcher shop and

> in her mind, Mother replaces the pig's body with her own: her legs hanging on the hooks at the back; her tiny feet encased in rounded, hoof-like leather boots; the shinbone ready to be held in a vise and shaved for charcuterie. Her torso is cut below the breast and lies

[42] Ruthven argues that this aspect presents a sharp contrast between Father, who tries to become invisible concerning his race and ethnicity, and Peter, who aims to be recognized as a female (3). This presents a matter for discussion as Peter does not try to be recognized but he wants to feel sought-after and desired on a sexual level (see, for example, 116).

[43] It is interesting to note that the names of Father and Mother are not revealed throughout the novel. This stresses their stereotypical roles and functions within the family and it refers to gender relations and hierarchies. The capitalization of the initial letter in *For Today I Am a Boy* shows that the terms replace their names. They serve as the form of address and highlight the person's definition through their role within the family instead of their individual personality. Using their first names would have provided a different notion to the reader: it would have presented both characters as individuals and would have freed them – at least to some degree – from their roles in the familial context.

> flat, showing a white cross-section of vertebrae. Her head is intact, eyes clouded yellow and rolled upward. The dried-out edges of her ears let light through. (ix)

This rather disturbing description seems to express the mother's feelings as a dead pig, which she is not able to escape from. From the beginning of the novel, it defines her status as inferior, helpless, even as a victim. Considering the course of the novel, this introduction of her character foreshadows the following struggles concerning gender hierarchy within the Huang family. It illustrates her feelings of being cannibalized emotionally in a symbolic way. On the other hand, this image offers a link to Chinese culture, which foreshadows Mother's other upcoming struggle related to her ethnic background: the Chinese character-ideogram for the term *family* consists of a pig under a roof (Seid 152). The negative impression is emphasized as Audrey's mother feels haunted by the house she lives in and tries to escape "its shabbiness" (xi) and the accusations [by her family] she links to it. The climax of this description is reached when it is revealed that "she fears him [Father] more than the house" (xi). This depiction extends the range of themes negotiated in the novel from transgender issues to the familial hierarchy based on gender roles imposed on Mother. Audrey's mother resigns after a "flash of violence passes through her mind […] and then is lost to her forever" (xi) immediately after the birth. Consequently, she seems to accept her fate, stays passive and conveys the impression that she is constantly in need of care because she "has always been in a hospital bed" (xi). The prologue is thus highly interesting as it introduces a shift of theme in comparison to the one presented in the title and the quote preceding the prologue: it is not exclusively about gender in the sense of transgender but also about hierarchies connected to gender within the Huang family. It opens up the image of women presented as the weak gender and men as the strong gender with the character of Audrey's mother in contrast to her father. This image is perpetuated in the course of the novel: generally, Mother is in charge of the housework and of the children, so the couple illustrates a highly stereotypical image about roles linked to gender. Sexist statements such as "That's how women are together" (73) or the fact that he leaves a mug to be picked up by his wife on the front porch (73) underline the father's role as a patriarch as well as his adherence to strict gender roles. He simply has to lift his hand to make mother understand that she should leave the room (140). Significantly, Mother sits in the backseat of the car whereas Peter sits in the front next to his father when driving to Montreal (106). This again puts the mother in an inferior role as she is situated symbolically behind the two men. Her place in the car does not change even after Peter has left (108), which indicates that her role in the familial hierarchy remains stable.

Several passages in the novel depict Mother's frustration and unhappiness about her situation. Her children, for example, seem to "eat her blood for dinner" (39) because her mother has to take care of them even after having cut her finger while cooking, which results in blood dripping into the children's meal. Metaphorically, her children hence suck the life out of her. She rubs little Peter's and Bonnie's skin "as though she could erase us both" (42) or she seems to forget that her children are around her (44). She is left alone with problems concerning the children as she is the one in charge of the rebellious daughter Bonnie (73). Peter realizes that his mother does not appreciate the situation; she seems frustrated and disappointed, also by her children:

> She stared at my ponytail, at another of her strange, disappointing children. She remembered holding newborn Adele, searching her blank heart for the joy she'd been promised. She imagined me offering her a male grandchild […] She didn't care. Mother, a pilgrim who walked a thousand miles only to find the sacred grove was just a clump of trees. (130-131)

A rather sad climax of the relationship with her undesired children is reached when Peter tells her after Father's death "I love you". Her response reads "Okay […] See you on Monday" (152) – a tragicomic manifestation of the shattered relationship with her own family. In the course of the novel, Mother and Father become more and more estranged as the mother withdraws from her husband: the couple does not communicate much (106, 111). Mother escapes this situation gradually and regains control over her life and self-identity. For example, it turns out that she gambles secretly on Thursdays instead of working (44, 54). It is particularly striking that she plays the traditional Chinese game mahjong but that she also does so in Cantonese (54) in the Chinese Association building (43). Through her behavior, she thus goes against the father's will to leave her ethnic background behind and she secretly reclaims her identity as Chinese. Moreover, she does not only reject the patriarch's attempts to escape their cultural background, but she also rejects traditional gender images by refusing to wear an apron, a symbol for the stereotypical housewife, that Father gave to her as a present (44). The mother tries to break these strict gender roles again when she explains that she wants to learn how to drive (107). The reaction of the father is telling and illustrates that Mother's attempt leads him almost to lose his countenance: "His hand slipped from the wheel but he regained his grip before the car could drift" (107). Eventually, she learns how to drive which Father comments with deep frowning (111). With this step, Mother regains her independence piece by piece as the ability to drive represents freedom.

The reclamation of Mother's independence and her journey back to her ethnic roots continue when she visits her son in Montreal. She drives there all by herself and Audrey describes that "she was wearing a blouse that once belonged to Bonnie and a skirt that had been Helen's" (129). Both eat in a restaurant in Chinatown[44] and Peter recognizes the pleasure his mother has when talking in Chinese (129). She also values multilingual contexts as she compares a mix of languages to an orchestra (181). When father is sick and hence bedridden, she secretly recaptures the house by immediately putting up traditional Eastern household gods in front of the house (140). After his death, she continues by moving the statues into the house and by assembling an altar with pictures of the family's ancestors (155).[45] She wants Helen and Peter to bow to their ancestors (155) – a Chinese tradition to show respect to deceased family members. Mother's regained traditional customs and her frustration about her marriage and children are so intense that she throws her children out when Helen refuses to follow her orders (156). Mother continues speaking Cantonese (172-173) and participating in activities of the Chinese Association (174). Peter recognizes the change in his mother after Father's death:

> Mother was like a different person. Silent except in rage all our lives, she'd blossomed at the mouth. She couldn't stop talking. Anecdotes about our childhood burst out of her, grown strange or impossible from too much time in the dark of her closed throat […] The *Ha!* threw me so completely, my mother laughing at her own joke. My mother laughing. (172-173)

The death of the father thus presents a moment of release for Mother and provides her with more agency. She is finally able to live her life the way she wants to, to express her self-identity, which includes her Chinese background and her image of gender related behavior. Both factors created a basis for a social hierarchy within the family and, consequently, present a case of intersectionality as a topic with Father occupying the oppressor's role. After Father's death, the trauma of the patriarchy her husband evoked in Mother is illustrated when she tries to visit her daughter Helen in the U.S. The agent at the border reminds her of her husband due to the authority he claims with his racist behavior[46] and she feels the need to rebel against her former, male oppressor with new views: "She wouldn't let another one tell her what to do. Another one of these men who make all the decisions, strip you of autonomy and disguise it as kindness" (184). At this point, she elaborates on how much she hated her

[44] This seems only possible because Father did not join Mother on her trip (129). It underlines again his efforts to escape his cultural background but also Mother's resistance.

[45] The shattered relationship between Mother and Father is once more demonstrated by the fact that Mother puts a picture of Father on the altar – in a cheaper frame (155). Thus, she adheres to her cultural traditions but degrades the family's father nevertheless.

[4646] See section 5.4 for more information on the presentation of the U.S. as a spatial setting in *For Today I Am a Boy*.

marriage and life in general and how much she has enjoyed the changes since his death (184-185).

In summary, the character of Mother, in relation to Father's assimilation attempts, illustrates that both gender roles and ethnicity constitute an individual's self-identity and social identity within the family. She is able to reclaim her self-identity by following her Chinese heritage and the related cultural practices as well as by liberating herself from the expectations based on her gender by refusing to correspond to stereotypical images. Both aspects present a matter of oppression by the family's patriarch and hence illustrate intersectionality as a topic in the novel. The family's mother is not able to live her self-identity openly and her gender, with the expectations expressed by Father, serves as a basis to create her inferior position. As a result, the hierarchy between Mother and Father represents multiple forms of oppression in *For Today I Am a Boy*. The character of Mother also illustrates the profound entanglement between intersectionality and empowerment: her liberation from social oppression within a familial context is possible and she regains agency, here living out her self-identity, by following her Chinese heritage and acting in opposition to gender expectations imposed on her. However, Mother still represents antiquated gender values as she criticizes her daughter for still being single at the age of 40 (186). She even claims all men are tyrants, at least men of her age (223). She also tries to assimilate when she attempts to become a member of the church community: "Mother dutifully filled out one of the cards for new parishioners […]" (161) or by cooking food considered as typically Western (161). She thus reproduces the norms and values she tried to escape from and transmits them onto their children to some degree. On the other hand, she still seems to care for her children to a certain extent: she plans to visit Helen, for instance, when Helen is sad and calls her (180).[47] Considering these partial contradictions illustrating that self-identity is not represented as consistent and stable, Mother is multidimensional with a considerable development despite being a minor character in the novel.

Audrey's elder sister Helen stands in marked contrast to Audrey's mother because the adherence to the father's idea of the model minority myth does not result in an agency regain for her but in depression and drug addiction. Helen embodies the so-called model minority myth because she fulfills the expectations of her career oriented father to study hard and

[47] This depicts the moment Helen recognizes a change in her mother because of her caring attitude: "She had expected a silent, furious auditor, an abstract *ma-ma* – the way our mother used to be […] *Who is this woman*, Helen thought" (181). Peter also states: "I felt like I knew her less and less" (222).

successfully: “The corkboard above her desk threatened to crush her, overloaded with medals and awards” (9). The second chapter of the novel illustrates her constant ambitions concerning school and depicts the great efforts she puts into her college application. She distances herself from her siblings, for instance, by not taking part in the collective outburst of joy on Adele’s 18th birthday but she “leaned on her elbows, resting an index finger in each ear” (21) to continue studying. Helen finally enters UCLA (38) and thereby fulfills not only the model minority image but she also manages – at least on the surface – to live the American Dream: “Helen went to California like a gold-rush miner, expecting to find a place where dreamers were ground underfoot by the hard-working, the wise. She would return wearing a suit of gold or she wouldn’t return at all” (38).[48]

In general, Helen represents a voice of responsibility and logic.[49] Audrey portrays her as fair and precise when describing how Helen divided a cupcake for the four siblings (194-195). On the other hand, this rationality leaves her cold-hearted in some cases, for example when telling an elderly confused woman that Peter is not her dead son (24-25) or when she was less worried about Adele’s safety than about possibly having to explain her death because Adele drove home with a stranger: “when you behave that stupidly, there are consequences” (32). She is depicted as being markedly different from Adele, who does not follow the narrative of the model minority as will be explained below. Helen is irritated, for instance, that Adele is not as interested in the responses to her university applications as she herself would be (22). This and her hard work illustrate Helen’s acceptance of the expectations she is confronted with and of the model minority role imposed on her.

Later in the novel, Helen still values the U.S. and views its possibilities positively (192). Notwithstanding, this is ironic as she does so when it turns out that she has severe problems. Helen indeed states that she can restart at any other place in the U.S. (which she believes she cannot in Canada) but her problems indicate that she actually cannot: her sense of guilt about a past case she was confronted with as a lawyer did not remain in LA but follows her to DC so that she becomes an alcoholic (192) – a fact that precludes a restart. Probably during an episode of alcohol abuse, she calls her mother and cries, which clearly contradicts her usual behavior (180). Peter visits his sister to find out “why the only good one, the only one of us

[48] Ironically, at the same time this refers to earlier Chinese immigrants in North America: the first immigrants from China arrived for the gold rush in the 19th century (Peter S. Li 11).

[49] Her responsible attitude might result in the youngest sister Bonnie seeing a mother figure in Helen (146). Peter feels similar about Helen: “I hadn’t seen Helen in a long time. She looked the way my mother did in my memories, the image I held of her when I was away. My mother looked like a stranger, leathery and wasted, face tightened around her mouth” (156) – his sister Helen looks more like a mother to him than his actual mother does.

with money and success, was so sad" (186).[50] Upon arrival, Peter asserts that his sister seems to be "the same as ever" (187) but it turns out that Helen, the lawyer, is a functional alcoholic[51] (188-194) as a result of a legal case involving a boy suffering from autism. The boy tried to commit suicide because his father wanted him to become normal, according to his understanding, with therapy and other measures (194-198). The fate of the boy affects Helen so strongly because she establishes striking parallels to her brother: "I just wanted him to be normal […] Like I wanted you to be normal" (194). She tells Peter that he should not change anything about his sex because "there is and there isn't. And look, there, there is" (197) referring here to Peter's penis. The legal case about the autistic boy changed her though: she realizes that purely rational and logical arguments do not always lead to the correct solution. In the course of the custody battle, several documents proved the boy's father to be the right choice for parenthood in contrast to the autistic boy's mother: "there is and there isn't" (198) is repeated. However, Helen expands her understanding and she learns that "there is and there isn't, and there could be" (198). As a consequence, she is no longer sure if Peter should continue to be normal according to the definition by others, including her own: "Helen looked at my feet, my legs, and the shapeless rectangle of thick white towel before she found my face. Possibility bloomed like a fireball. She shrugged. *I don't know*, it said" (198). In the end, she confesses to Peter that she would have loved to retire together with her sisters in one house, "a bunch of randy old ladies" (237), thereby including Peter as female and thus accepting Audrey's redefined self-identity.

Similar to her mother, Helen seems haunted by Father: she wonders if her father is proud of her (193). Immediately after her statement, "a blast of wind threw both of us [Helen and Peter] back a step; it was followed by a sound like an angry bellow" (193). The sound turns out to be a military helicopter, however it may also present the ghost of Father haunting his two children as Helen asked "can he see us?" and it is not clear to whom she refers: "The president, Father, God" (193). In any case, it depicts Helen's attitude towards authority: she is afraid of being observed, afraid that she is not able to conform to the model minority. The fact that the siblings are thrown back a step may indicate that the expectations of Father hinder the two, for example, from living out their identity. Despite the similarity to Mother's trauma, Helen does not rebel in this situation as her mother did at the airport towards the U.S. border agent (see above).

[50] It is interesting to note that "good" is defined in this context as earning a considerable amount of money and being successful at work. This is another hint at the importance of the model minority image.
[51] Narrator Audrey does not state openly that her sister is an alcoholic but the descriptions of her drinking behavior make this more than obvious.

Thus, Helen does not completely embody the role of the model minority, which is also underlined by the fact that she bought a house but lives there without a partner (111). This shows again that the model minority image depicted in *For Today I Am a Boy* does not only comprise a notion of social mobility, hence social class, but also particular gender images, at least for Father and thus for Helen. She tries to adhere to these norms on the surface, which is illustrated, for instance when hiding Peter's outburst about his gender because she fears Father's consequences (12).[52] As mentioned before, Helen is depressed about the path of her life and about the fact that she is childless, which is illustrated in a restaurant scene: instead of being aggressive and impatient as she has been before towards her brother, Helen apologizes to a mother for complaining about the mother's children and remains calm (190). She even admits that she would not be a good mother (191). Moreover, she follows her father's expectations as she has no interest in her cultural background. She refuses to bow, for example, when her mother asks her to do so after Father's death (155). As a result, the model minority image also includes ethnicity and refers to assimilation according to Helen and her father.

To summarize, only on the surface does Helen represent the model minority image expected by her father. In their interpretation, this image covers social class, gender, and ethnic issues. However, in contrast to her mother, who successfully disengages from Father's patriarchy at the end of the novel by adhering to her ethnic background and insisting on her own interpretation of gender roles, Helen's failure to fulfill Father's expectations (and thus her own adopted from him) in all three social dimensions leads to drug addiction and depression. This depicts a significantly different ending for a character multiply oppressed by Father's ideas. It shows, in comparison to other characters of the novel, that the attempts to assimilate to alleged norms – although they might seem perfectly rational and logical – are not always congruent with an individual's self-identity, similar to Helen's experience concerning her legal case involving the autistic boy. Moreover, it illustrates that the pursuit of one's self-identity instead of majoritarian norms may lead to happiness and satisfaction: Fu's novel thus shows that by adhering to one's ethnic background and by insisting on one's own interpretation of gender roles, characters are able to regain agency and harmonize with their self-identity. Following the model minority myth with attempts at total assimilation and

[52] Despite her rational attitude, she supports Peter within her realms of possibility. She neither hinders Peter from unpacking Adele's boxes before Adele moves out, which he "took as tacit blessing" (30) nor does she feel disturbed when Peter uses Adele's makeup as she only tells him not to mess it up "as though that were the worst of the things I'd done" (31). However, both cases depict Helen as supporting Peter at least passively by not hindering him actively. Moreover, she helps Peter remove waterproof makeup (33) but it remains debatable if this only happens because she fears trouble from Father.

a focus on economic success, in contrast, is represented as resulting in considerable failure and deep unhappiness.

Peter's relationship with his father shows that the establishment and maintenance of social hierarchies consists of an interplay of various identity aspects, here predominantly gender and social class. Peter, in contrast to the female family members, is confronted by his father with radically different ideas about his social identity in the domestic sphere and the model minority because he is the only male offspring of the family. The last paragraph of the prologue introduces the reader to the protagonist's birth. His Chinese name, Juan Chaun meaning "powerful king" (xiii), expresses Father's longing for a male descendant embodying stereotypical gender values and norms such as strength and authority.[53] Additionally, narrator Audrey explains that "all my father knows about me is the nub of penis that extends from my torso" (xiii) emphasizing the importance of the child's sex for Father.

In his childhood, a picture portraying Peter as a mother is destroyed and Father values the adherence to jobs typically considered as male and depicted exaggeratedly as such (3-4). Moreover, he honors the ability to endure physical pain (16). The abuse of girls by, for instance, pulling down their underwear in the playground (17), and hence the creation of a disparate interpersonal relationship on the basis of gender and sex is not only tolerated but even rewarded by Peter's father (19). As a result, Peter hides his passion for cooking – which, like the corresponding housework, is considered as "women's work" by his father (43) – from his family with Bonnie's help (43) despite no explicit prohibition. Housework in general inherits a special position in Peter's life as he strongly ritualizes it: on Thursdays, he cleans the house fully naked except for a long apron and he watches cooking shows (44). Peter thus behaves as he imagines a stereotypical housewife would by imitating the movements of a female cook on TV (50), his apron feeling "like a second skin – a better one" (50). A piece of clothing, in Fu's novel, is thus depicted as having an empowering function, as providing the possibility to express, at least when alone, a character's self-identity, similar to Jung Sum's coat in Choy's *Jade Peony* (see section 6.2) The burning of Peter's beloved apron by his father presents a climax regarding gender related behavior in the relationship between Peter and his father (50-55): Peter's father punishes him for his

[53] This passage again depicts the passive role of Audrey's mother as well as her relation to her cultural background: she wishes the Chinese name to officially be her son's middle name but it does not appear on the birth certificate at all (xiii). Additionally, it also illustrates the inner conflict of Audrey's father: first, the naming of his son presents the last time father spoke Cantonese (xiii). Second, despite his attempts to escape his Chinese background, he still refers to Chinese culture through the valorization of male offspring and names.

housework ritual and withdraws this possibility of self-expression from his son, thereby again forcefully establishing a hierarchical order in the Huang household with him at the top. Eventually, he forces his son to eat a burned piece of the apron (54-55), which means that Peter has to symbolically swallow his female gender and return to the corresponding male behavior expected of him.[54]

Concerning social class and mobility related to the model minority discourse, Father is satisfied when Peter starts working at a restaurant because he had a similar job when he came to Canada (79). As Father has managed to work his way up, he seems to transfer this possibility onto Peter. Peter's reflection on his career options connects to Father's expectations regarding the model minority: Peter tries to find a compromise between his passions and the familial expectations (85), so he tries to fulfill his father's expectations while being faithful to his self-identity at the same time. However, his father's gender stereotypes and social class notions merge explicitly when Peter is sick:

> […] my father said it was a sign of weakness, of a delicate constitution. Some people, he said, mostly women, got sick whenever they were needed, when there was work to be done – vague, mild illnesses that let them continue to do things they enjoyed, like lying under fresh, cool sheets and complaining. "Sick in their heads," he said. (95)

This passage presents multiple kinds of oppression from the oppressor's perspective: the father of the family discriminates against women and presumes that women try to dodge work. This links gender to social class as the model minority image hints at the aim to improve one's socioeconomic status. Father argues that women do not want to work for socioeconomic success. Moreover, it defines Peter once more as female because he shows – according to his father – signs of behavior Father considers female.[55]

Furthermore, not only behavior, but also a stereotypical male appearance is valued by Father whereas bodily aspects related to women are viewed negatively when implemented by men: "[Father's] approval at my torn, dirty fingernails and scars – a workingman's hands – and his displeasure that I still hadn't cut my hair" (110). In this context, Seid offers an interesting interpretation that highlights the intersection of gender and ethnicity at this point as she reads Father's adherence to heteronormative masculinity as a hypercorrection due to "persistent feminization of Asian men" (Seid 148). Unlike his father, Peter's refusal of his

[54] The consequences of this scene highlight Father's power within the family: "It was decided that my mother would quit her job in order to properly control her children. We listened to my father's calm voice from the hallway" (55). The passive construction used by the narrator Audrey demonstrates that a more powerful instance, a higher authority, arrived at this decision and that there is no alternative for the family. This social hierarchy within the family is again emphasized when Audrey states that "my father stole all our secrets and kept his own" (56).

[55] Interestingly, Peter withdraws his sick leave and goes to work (96), which indicates that he still tries to fulfill Father's expectations and the norms he represents.

sex accompanies the refusal of the ascribed gender norms. He feels as if his body is not a part of him, especially regarding his genitals:

> I never peed standing up. When I had to, I thought of my body as a machine, a robot that did my bidding. A combination of arms and legs and heart and lungs. It had nothing to do with me. My real body was somewhere else, waiting for me. It looked like my sisters' bodies. (8)

He views his current body as unreal and links the real body he is longing for with femininity by referring to his sisters' bodies. Moreover, this passage expresses first the security that there is a real body he can feel comfortable with, as well as his hope that there is a chance of reaching this real body. On the other hand, his body seems alien to him when it looks female which is illustrated when he describes a picture in which he is wearing a wig for the first time and which clarifies the instability of his self-identity:

> One of the last pictures on the roll was of two girls standing shoulder to shoulder, taken in a mirror. The flash whites out their faces. Their reflections are softened by grease and dents, and the tilted glass makes both of them look taller and leaner. They have solid, brightly colored hair. The one with the pink wig has her arm around the one in the blue, and their heads lean together. Their bodies are straight lines, feminine but fashionably athletic, petite. (149-150)

In this passage, Peter clearly identifies himself as a woman and he enjoys the image he sees in this picture. However, the pronoun "they" indicates that he does not refer to himself; he is not able to recognize that it is he himself who looks like a woman although it appears beautiful to him. The denial of his sex continues throughout the novel as Peter avoids the term *penis* or any synonym referring directly to his genitals. When describing a nightmare, he simply refers to "the thing" between his legs and uses the pronoun "it" (61). The context of the nightmare highlights his negative associations. His penis causes physical pain to him because of its mere existence (116) and he avoids the term even during sexual encounters (126, 136, 197). This denial is framed by Peter's longing for a female body: Audrey expresses Peter's being envious of Bonnie's body, referring explicitly to her female body parts (61). Moreover, he would take better care of such a body: "If I looked like [my colleague in the restaurant], I would stand with my back straight and my chest thrust out, smiling with my white teeth and puffy lips" (147). While exploring his sexuality, Peter also tries to avoid his penis and attempts to use a masturbation strategy he has seen in a strip club:

> I'd tried to masturbate the same way: the *thing* held between my two longest fingers, wagging it side to side, my head turned away, my other hand pressed so hard into the edge of my desk that it left a red, imprinted slice. It worked for a while. I had to end clutching the thing in a fist, feeling its whole, disgusting, senseless mass. (145)

In this scene, he does not only openly express the disgust he feels towards his own genitals openly but he also tries to live out his sexuality the way female sexuality is represented in public to him.

Despite his secret denials of alleged gender norms and of his sex, Peter tries to perform heteronormative masculinity from his childhood on, due to Father's positive valuation. He works, for example, with strong motivation on a masculine representation of a fireman (3) or he hides his fondness for makeup because he fears the consequences (33). As mentioned before, Father knows about Peter's failures but they arrive at unspoken arrangements: "[Father's] presence was an accusation, but a mild one: we'd both accepted certain limitations of mine at that point. I was not going to join the football team, and it was enough that I should admire them" (73). Both hence accept Peter's alleged shortcomings in conforming to an image of heteronormative masculinity. Xiang elaborates in a master's thesis on unspoken arrangements in the novel and refers to it as "reticence" denoting "a mode of speech in which the meaning of the message is actively obscured by the language through which it is conveyed" (2). Interestingly, reticence is interpreted as an instrument to exert power in the context of social hierarchies, even to marginalize specific groups in some cases (Xiang 32). Especially the first aspect corresponds to the interpretation of Father's character presented in this dissertation: he disciplines his children without words (Xiang 39-40) and hence manifests his status as the patriarch of the family. [56] The influence of Father's patriarchy has not only long-term effects on mother and Helen but also on Peter. Similar to the two women, Peter compares the guards at various security checkpoints in the U.S. with his father's regiment in the family due to the authority they claim (191). Peter still feels humiliated by authorities as well as ashamed and observed: "We are watching you from the other side" (191) is ambiguous in this context as it might refer to the guards, but also to his father and his ancestors Peter should not bring shame to (142-143).

With the relationship between Father and Peter, the novel displays the aspect of heteronormative masculinity as well as social mobility accompanying the model minority myth. Peter's constant attempts to reproduce and perform exaggerated heteronormative masculinity fail because they do not conform to his self-identity. Guarracino states that it is Peter's ethnic background, which "emerges as a major constituent of the heteronormative paradigm" (128). This is only partly correct: it holds true for the fact that Father, in his attempt to escape his ethnic background, constructs a heteronormative paradigm. After

[56] Besides, it presents another paradox in Father's concept of assimilation as reticence is identified as a particular Chinese ideal (Xiang 2).

Father's death, Peter is able to focus more on his identity search. However, he still tries to conform to an assumed social identity with alleged norms as will be shown in the following chapter.

5.3. Social Inequality In a Broader Context

As mentioned before, *For Today I Am a Boy* presents social hierarchies on the grounds of assimilation tendencies within a family context organized as a patriarchy – remarkably despite the fact that Father is only a marginal figure in the novel. His influence creates social hierarchies in terms of gender, ethnicity, sexuality as well as social class – all strongly related to the model minority myth Father aims to follow. The family members show various reactions with different results, from daughter Helen becoming a depressive alcoholic to Mother with her newly gained freedom. However, the novel also presents other moments of social inequality based on particular gender stereotypes and centering on the protagonist Peter/Audrey in their social environment.

The social environment is, similar to Father's norms, characterized by strong references to heteronormative masculinity, thereby mirroring what Audrey experiences at home during her childhood. The first chapter of the novel recalls Audrey's childhood memories. It introduces the reader to a world in which boys beat each other at school, in which physical strength, the ability to endure physical pain and violence are considered male: a tyrant, Roger, recommends to little Peter that he "should try [a fight]. It'll make a man out of you" (2). In contrast to this hyperbolic heteronormative masculinity that little children have already absorbed, narrator Audrey describes how she imagined herself being a woman (3).[57] Despite his longings back then, however, Peter tries to fit into this heteronormative social environment by mirroring behavior which he assumes to be desired by his childhood friends (4) or around his colleagues in the restaurant by repeating responses Peter assumes to be most common in a conversation (88). He also tries, regarding his biological sex, to simply adapt to the situation and to align with the majority: "The thing was hard between [me and Claire]. I tried not to move, tried to pack down my disgust into something smaller and denser, into something small enough to swallow, something I could make disappear" (170). Peter,

[57] It must be noted, however, that Peter – like his social environment – refers in this context to stereotypical images of the helpless, caring and nursing woman when referring to the idea of mothers "serving pancakes, wrapping presents, patting the heads of puppies, vacuuming sparkling-clean floors" represented in magazines (3) or when imagining "only being the woman, my arms around the thick neck of my savior, a high-heeled shoe dangling from my raised foot" (3). These stereotypical images occur throughout the novel when Peter wishes, for instance, for tan lines when wearing a bikini top (29) or when he imagines "wearing just breezy hollows and bare skin like the women were, all those smooth round stretches glowing in the sun" (189).

as a child and adolescent, hence uses the reproduction of the heteronormative behavior he perceives as mechanisms to fit in in both spheres, the domestic and the public.

Concerning race and ethnicity, Peter's idolization of white British icon Audrey Hepburn is remarkable as it shows the empowering function of popular culture, here indeed in the form of an actress and with reference to his family. In this context, Guarracino identifies the intersection of gender and ethnicity within Peter's identity search: "Hence, when Peter becomes Audrey he not only becomes the 'beautiful woman' evoked in Antony's song, but also grows into an 'Audrey Hepburn' persona, apparently morphing into a white, British woman" (128-129). Guarracino concludes that this aim results in his journey being utopian (129) but considering the fact that Peter strongly focuses on Hepburn's elegant and feminine clothing in her movie role as Sabrina in the movie of the same title (62), the identified intersection characterized as utopia remains debatable. Additionally, he idolizes his eldest sister Adele[58], so he finally arrives at being "the iconic Audrey, only with Adele's almond eyes, her sloping cheekbones. The face a little more drawn, a little harder, but undeniably her" (228). Both Peter's sister Adele and British icon Audrey Hepburn hence present role models for Peter that provide him with agency to search for his self-identity as the characteristics he aims for seem achievable: he can become an Asian Audrey Hepburn because of his sister Adele. The reference to an actress here provides a hint at the power of popular culture for individuals, which will also be explored in Choy's *The Jade Peony* with Jook-Liang's admiration for the actress Shirley Temple (see section 6.2). Despite several moments of insecurity (228, 230), he manages to enjoy the Halloween party for which he dresses as a female for the first time in public with the support of John and his friends: he acts "coquettishly" (229), for instance, and he knows how to stand to appear typically female (229). His high voice also fits his new personality as he speaks remarkably effortlessly (Guarracino 129), which presents the concept of falsetto (high male voice) usually not

[58] Peter seems to feel a deep emotional relationship with his sister Adele as he desperately tries to prevent her from moving out by throwing the responses to her college applications away (22) or by destroying her clothes (35-36). He compares her to Audrey Hepburn, admires her beauty (27, 34) and tries to imitate her with, for instance, the help of makeup (31). Adele is his role model and Peter defines her – compared to Helen – as superior: "Everyone could see that Adele was the superior creature: the ticket-seller at the Luther, the man who drove her home and left Helen standing smart and unwanted on the curb" (34). This quote shows the role of beauty and it contrasts physical attractiveness directly with intelligence. It also depicts a notion of sexuality that drives Peter as he only speaks about men's attitudes towards Adele and characterizes Helen as unwanted. Whereas Bonnie – like her sister Helen – starts to reflect Adele's behavior critically while growing up (61), Peter continues to glorify his eldest sister when she has left for Germany. He even feels their relationship becoming more intimate and characterized by equality because of the long letters the two exchange (62). He continues to compare her to Audrey Hepburn in *Sabrina* while watching some parts of this movie repeatedly (62). Adele is the one who sends him his first wig after father's death and when trying it on, Peter is "pleased that I had the same eyes as Adele" (158).

illustrated in transsexual narratives and which contradicts the deep voice socially constructed as particularly masculine (Guarracino 130-131).[59] As a result, Peter displays an intersection of ethnicity and gender in his search for identity. Peter individually constructs his Asian Audrey Hepburn he feels comfortable with, embodying what Halberstam calls *The Queer Art of Failure* by failing to be a heteronormative man or a "desirable transgender". The end of the novel again illustrates the satisfaction with this merging as it links spatial and cultural migration directly to gender transformation: in the very last paragraph, Audrey is in Berlin with her sisters and she is in fact introduced as Audrey (238).[60] The immediately preceding paragraph describes in a few sentences the migration of Audrey's father to Canada. It ends with the phrase "Go and be reborn" (238) and Audrey manages to be reborn as her personal interpretation of an Asian Audrey Hepburn including her individual voice.

Before her rebirth as Audrey, Peter's journey includes questionable acquaintances, in urban Montreal (see section 5.4. for more information on the spatial setting in Fu's novel), which illustrate the establishment of social hierarchies based on the intersection of age, gender, sexuality, and racial background. His relationship with Margie presents the first instance of intersectional oppression for Peter outside of his domestic circle and it illustrates his tendency to misinterpret social encounters. It shows how the perception of a social environment, or the social identity, constructs an individual's self-identity as it brings up race as a topic for Peter. He is drawn to Margie because he feels accepted and he has the possibility to act out his identity without being refused. He enjoys being called "pretty" (121), being cared for and feeling protected, comparable to his feelings for Chef (123).[61] Margie, however, is a racist character on the one hand. She sexualizes Peter because of his race and represents an orientalist attitude by eroticizing him. On the other hand, she sexualizes him because he is much younger than she is. Both aspects are illustrated in utterances such as "I've always wanted a little China boy" (124) or "Probably never seen a

[59] Anohni's way of singing likewise contradicts heteronormative gender discourses as she uses falsetto (Guarracino 133). Both Audrey's and Anohni's way of using their voice may be interpreted as a form of voice appropriation on the level of pitch as a tool of empowerment against heteronormative gender norms (see North for more information on voice appropriation in literature and the following chapter of this dissertation for details on appropriation in general).

[60] It remains unclear to the reader whether Audrey is located in Berlin at this moment or if it is only another dream and fantasy. However, the preceding passage gives hints for a change of the spatial setting as it alludes to migration from one country to another. Moreover, Audrey is invited to Berlin by Adele and Bonnie, who address her as "sister" in their invitation (235).

[61] Peter feels attracted to his boss in a restaurant in Fort Michel, notably on a physical level. Narrator Audrey describes at length in several passages how Peter wants to touch Chef's tattoos (77), how positive he feels when he is touched by his boss (78) or how he imagines Chef comparing some of his body parts with peaches (104), for example. Note in this context again the role of food. Moreover, the mention of peaches, which is often currently used in the context of digital communication as an emoji to denote a woman's buttocks on a sexual level, is utterly telling as Peter describes himself again as female with sexual connotations.

woman, right? Not supposed to look at women? Got beaten for it? Don't worry, little Peter Huang, little Huang, little wang, Margie will show you what to do" (125). Margie even makes Peter wear stereotypical Asian clothes and asks him to fake an Asian accent (127). Peter misinterprets the relationship and ignores her racist attitude because Margie presents a chance for him to explore the female body he is longing for (125-126). Retrospectively, Audrey realizes the racism she tolerated back then: "Peter should have protested, punched her on behalf of Asian men everywhere" (125).[62] Peter does not enjoy anything sexual related to his penis at all: he has to look away during oral sex with Margie (127) and basically endures anything, even violent sexual practices (128), because he wants a female body so badly and enjoys the contact to Margie's: "I wanted her to sit in my lap and let me reach under her clothes, to feel the body I coveted, envied, knew better than my own" (132). Peter describes how much he likes being forced to wear female clothes and put on make up (127), he seems to be happy in this unhealthy relationship (129) – another hint at the important function of clothing, here not as providing power but rather as providing the ability to endure even unhealthy relationships. Even after Bonnie and Margie's son try to convince Peter of Margie's oppressive motives and Peter's initial euphoria about Margie fades (133-134), he still sees the value of this relationship because he is able to live out what he wants to be: "The humiliation, the racial stereotypes so old or specific I had never encountered them before. Bonnie thought she was saving me. But Margie had saved me. This was the only way I could do it. This was the closest I could get" (133). Eventually, Peter's misinterpretations start to come to a climax when he realizes that the hierarchy in this relationship is different than he expected: "Admitting that I wasn't one of [these guys who fuck], what she wanted me to be. Her yellow man […] I watched her solid back and realized that I was doing this wrong. I wasn't offering her anything; I was begging for what I wanted" (135). Eventually, Audrey realizes her failure in interpreting these social circumstances as she "mistook the look in her [Margie's] eyes for tenderness" (135). The stormy weather in this passage also foreshadows the upcoming incident, namely Margie's rape of Peter (135-136).

The following relationship with Claire does not seem much healthier as she is actually homosexual and tries to escape her sexuality by ecclesiastical conversion therapy (166). With Peter, she can pretend to live a heterosexual relationship considered as the norm, so both use their relationship – as Peter had tried before with Margie – to hypercorrect their identity and to adapt it to other people's images. In this context, Claire also represents

[62] Note here the split between narrator Audrey and Peter indicated by Audrey's use of third person to refer to herself. For more information on the narrative situation, see the subsequent section.

prejudices of rather strict religious norms: "A man thrusting inside her had felt good, like voting or getting your teeth cleaned. That's how sex is supposed to feel for a woman, Claire explained. Like civic pride, like virtue, like doing one's duty" (169) or when she states that "Women can't have sex with each other. But it is…unclean" (177). Claire seems to understand Peter to a certain degree as both want to pretend to be someone else (167). For Peter, this relationship presents a similar chance and he tries to value this compromise positively: "It wasn't bad. All things are possible" (169).[63] Peter seems to instrumentalize religion in another attempt to fit in:

> God had never had a role in my life […] The Chinese Baptist church called to me. I imagined its congregants could replace my father. I imagined they'd understand guilt and silence. They'd use the same careful, euphemistic language that Father had – I was a man with *weaknesses* – and they'd guide me in the right direction without making me confess aloud. I assumed all kinds of things just because the people going in and out were Chinese. Because they looked like me. (163)

This passage reveals several aspects: firstly, it depicts Peter's escape to religion to become an individual considered as "normal". He also looks for comfort due to the loss of his father. These aspects correspond to the general functions of religion, namely that of support, care, comfort, and the hope for solutions and healing, which will also be of interest in the analysis of the Catholic Chinese community in Li's work (see section 7.4.). Moreover, Peter expresses his connection to the Chinese community because they all share being part of a visible minority, hence it refers to the fact that race becomes more important to him. By referring implicitly to the concept of reticence (Xiang) as he wants to keep silent but aims to be understood nevertheless, he establishes a link to his ethnic background. The comparison to Father's attitude illustrates Peter's aim to adhere to the images Father tried to model during his lifetime.

In summary, Peter's relationship with Margie helps to recognize that social hierarchies are not only based on gender, but they are a complex interplay of gender, age, sexuality and racial background. Nevertheless, it does not denote systemic social inequality but it refers to a profoundly intimate context. The same holds true for his attempt to embody alleged norms with the relationship with Claire: religion, or rather a religious community, does not present a means of fulfilling the model minority image his father believed in. The fact that Peter met Margie in his sister Bonnie's kitchen while she was preparing a salad (120-121) and the descriptions of Peter's and Claire's cake baking in Claire's house are probably no

[63] Strikingly, Claire illustrates that she and Peter were "amicable roommates" (169), which Peter confirms. This shows that both see their relationship as a compromise, a solution to the identity they are not supposed to live out. They want to live as a couple for others although they do not love each other.

coincidence: both aspects stress the sexual dimension of food and the kitchen as a space of sexual discovery and of the erotic (see subsequent section). However, Peter's relationships in urban Montreal present further instances of disillusionment countering the high hopes that accompanied him on his journey to Montreal. Margie's rape of Peter finally guides him back to his sister Bonnie in whom he seeks comfort, resulting in him experiencing a certain kind of sisterhood (137) as this trauma ties the siblings more closely together.[64]

Peter's encounter with John, his transgender colleague in a restaurant, and his friends, however, might be interpreted as exemplary for societal tendencies because they present more a type than individual characters: they do not have names in the novel but they are only referred to as "Pointy" or "Blue" because Peter is not able to remember their names (214). They embody the stereotypical supposedly open-minded urban hipster subculture claiming a natural sense of individualism with their eccentric dietary preferences (214-216), non-conformist clothing against gender stereotypes (208, 223) and intellectual as well as political engagement in diversity issues (226, 233-234). When being introduced to John's friends, Peter once again fails to integrate properly as he is not able to ponder dietary preferences and intolerances as John's friends do exhaustively (215-216) or because he does not own a computer (217). Consequently, Peter feels like an outsider, also because these people are rather fragile from his viewpoint (217) as one has to be very sensitive in conversations in order not to offend them. Eileen[65] explains to Peter that John started his transformation from childhood on with the support of his parents (217-218). To Peter, this privilege seems not fair and results in disillusionment and, above all, rage:

> I was so angry I could've driven the tiny blades into [Eileen's] side. I hadn't understood some of the terms she used but I had understood the tone. Who were these kids? What right had they to be born into a world where they were taught to look endlessly into themselves, to ask how the texture of a mushroom made them feel? To ask themselves, and not to be told, whether they are boys or girls? You eat what's there or you starve. (218)

This passage illustrates various points: Peter considers John and his friends as privileged and thus Peter assumes a teaching, smart-alecky attitude. Moreover, he envies this group because they have the possibility for self-reflection, which collides with himself growing up under a patriarch with a strong sense of authority. Despite having suffered from his father's regiment, Peter fails to see alternatives that enable individuals to express their identities and in this

[64] This feeling of sisterhood, with which Peter identifies as a female, might possibly result from the fact that Peter believes to have suffered from exclusively female experiences as rape is still considered a crime usually involving women as the victims and men as the offenders.
[65] She presents, with John, the only exceptions to the other group members without names.

scene, he reproduces the authoritarian attitude his father lived.[66] Peter continuously degrades the group by referring to them as "kids" and by criticizing their assumed privilege: "They never had to invent anything. Not who they were, not even how their bodies fit together in the dark. They probably made the same kinds of declarations in bed as at the dinner table. This is me, this is what I'm willing to do" (220). John represents to him a whiteness that "means that he need not negotiate the doubly ambivalent terrain of mapping a racial and cultural identity along with a gender one" (Ruthven 6-7). Besides embodying the "desirable transgender" due to a certain degree of conformity, John with his friends also represents notions of colonialism which creates a social hierarchy (Ruthven 7).[67] Peter feels that the group "beamed at me like proud parents. They'd made me into a project" (226) but it is also questionable in how far this evaluation holds true as Audrey seems to be a highly emotional narrator and race and ethnicity are not mentioned in this context (see footnote 66). As a consequence, the reader cannot judge if she is reliable at this point. What is true, however, is that Peter refuses to be politicized by the group: he defines their interest as their "political fight" (226) after having discovered their vast amount of literature on the topic. He does not defend himself when insulted because of him dressing as a female in public (230-231), he first denies taking part in a vigil for a murdered transgender person because he cannot identify with them as he has "worked his whole life so that it couldn't be me" (233). He also refuses to implement the image of a woman Eileen teaches him as her version of the correct female image (236) - a scene which, in turn, might present an argument for a colonial hierarchy in this group. Alluding again to Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure*, Peter is insofar progressive as he accepts that there are different images of how a woman can be despite his stereotypical female image he wants to embody. In the end, Peter concludes: "Let them fight their war. I appreciated it. But I'd fought long enough. I wanted to go home. I would send them a letter, apologizing for this last act of cowardice" (238). Although the

[66] According to Guarracino, "what separates them […] is Peter's experience as a Canadian of Chinese descent who lacks the cultural privilege of whiteness" (140). However, this is debatable as race and ethnicity are not mentioned in this context. It might rather present a case of generational differences and the development regarding the (political) importance of topics related to LGBTQIA+ issues, which might also explain Peter's later refusal to participate in this topic as a politicized one (see below).

[67] It has to be repeated, however, that in her novel Fu also works against stereotypes and proves "that boorish working men are as likely to be accepting as anyone else" (Link 650). Despite his occasional racism becoming manifested in multiple instances by referring to stereotypical Asian names (77, 79, 85) and his rough language (80), Chef proves to be supportive of Peter. He sees something in his employee: "I like you, Wong. I don't know why. I feel like I could whip you into shape. Like you're not anything yet" (78). This quote foreshadows to some degree Peter's struggle that follows to "become something" finally. Chef also seems tolerant regarding sexuality as he confesses that he once had sex with a man in Montréal without having known the sex of the person beforehand (93-94). Whereas some of the employees react in a disgusted and hostile manner (94), Chef is tolerant and even rebukes his other employees (94-95).

group seems to understand Peter's needs, he does not feel understood the way his sisters and other people did: "I missed […] the comfort of being partly understood. Eileen and John saw straight through me, past me, like a hole had been bored through my chest" (235). As a result, this depicts that despite a common misery or challenge, people deal with these differently. Moreover, it reveals that their presence cannot replace family (Link 652) as an anchor that provides power and agency although the group around John is more accepting and tolerant.

In summary, Peter's social environment outside his family confronts him selectively with issues of social hierarchies, leading to multiple forms of oppression and hence to intersectional experiences of the protagonist. Notwithstanding, the focus of domestic intersectionality remains as Father's images of the model minority haunt his children even after his death, as has been mentioned before. With Peter's reference to actress Audrey Hepburn and his family, here his eldest sister Adele, he is able to find a tool of empowerment that allows him to create his own self-identity. The resolution in Audrey's familial circle at the end of the novel stresses this point once more – the family serves as a starting and end point for Peter's journey to eventually become Audrey after having experienced multiple kinds of oppression due to his father's patriarchal regiment. Peter joins his sisters Adele and Bonnie in Germany looking for what the group around John in Montreal was not able to offer. It is his family that provides him with the power to eventually be Audrey. Despite his knowledge about the incidents in Berlin concerning his eldest sister Adele[68], Peter imagines Europe as a place of hope and freedom, of "no awkward lies and costumes" but as a space for expressing his identity openly in public (208). Interestingly, he is reborn as Audrey in a negatively depicted Germany, migrating – similar to his father's experiences when migrating from China to Canada – from male to female (238). The family represents, consequently, Peter's space of resolution, independent of the condition of the physical location.

5.4. The Role of Intersectionality on the Level of Form

The preceding two sections have illustrated that the establishment and maintenance of social hierarchies in Fu's work, on the level of content, are based on a complex interplay of factors such as gender, sexuality, racial background, and age and that an individual's self-identity is as complex and multidimensional as these hierarchies are. Pop cultural references, ties to one's family or ethnic background and clothing are illustrated as tools that support the liberation from these hierarchies and that provide the ability for an individual to search for

[68] Adele leaves Canada for Germany with a man she finally marries. Unemployed and illegally living in an occupied, messy house with many changing and chaotic roommates, Adele encounters meanness, infidelity and is finally presented with a baby from her husband's mistress. Eventually, Adele leaves her German husband to work as a nanny (69-70).

their self-identity. This deconstruction of one-dimensional social hierarchies and self-identities on the content level is supported on the level of form by the deconstruction of rural and urban spatial settings as absolute oppositions and the narrative perspective – with a split narrating I and multiple focalizers – and both prolepses and flashbacks disrupting the chronological order. On the level of form, the conception of the internal focalization and narrator Audrey's omniscience with its restriction to selected family members additionally illustrates the importance of family ties as agency providing for protagonist Audrey.

The depiction of the spatial settings in *For Today I Am a Boy* counters Russian literary scholar Lotman's theory of semantic opposites, such as good or bad, complementing topological opposites such as, for instance, center and periphery (see also Martínez and Scheffel 156-157). The U.S., for instance, is presented as a homogenous, racist and perilous space. Having just arrived at the border, Peter's mother notices a poster illustrating "three smiling young white people" (182) who present "the face of the United States of America" (182). After criticizing the mother in a racist manner, the border agent finally denies her entry to the U.S. and even humiliates her when she complains (183-184). The border agent's behavior is passive-aggressive as he remains calm and friendly on the surface but his orders cause many inconveniences for Peter's mother (185). Additionally, Peter notices "police cars were everywhere, sometimes four on one corner" (187) while visiting his sister Helen in Washington, DC. Helen's appalling condition, fleeing from Los Angeles to Washington and suffering from depression, anxiety disorder, and alcoholism (180-194), emphasizes the image of the U.S. as a space of decay. This depiction breaks with the "classic" transformation journey readers are familiar with from numerous other literary texts: instead of finding resolution in urban spaces after having escaped from provincial areas, Helen's journey is one of disillusionment, also on the level of the spatial setting.

The depiction of Berlin as a spatial setting is not identical to that of the U.S. but it evokes similar notions as it again deconstructs the dichotomy between metropolis and countryside. Hence, Berlin does not represent a space of diversity, liberty, and freedom but a place of shattered marriages, social inequality, and criminals. As a consequence, Adele's physical journey is also one of disillusionment, similar to that of her sister Helen and of her brother Peter. She is not able to escape her provincial hometown to find her fortune in urban Berlin. Adele is not interested in a career: eventually, she completely refuses the model minority role as a doctor, which her father had planned for her. Instead, she changes her studies to the

humanities[69] and leaves Canada for Germany with a man she finally marries. Unemployed and illegally living in an occupied, messy house with many changing and chaotic roommates, Adele encounters meanness, infidelity and is finally presented with a baby from her husband's mistress. Eventually, Adele leaves her German husband to work as a nanny (69-70). Adele thus refuses the model minority image regarding both social class and gender roles. As a result, she receives no more financial support from her parents but stays in touch with Peter and Bonnie (60). With Adele, Father gives an example of what happens when family members do not fulfill the model minority image he envisages. This may present a reason for Helen to follow the path her father has set out for her because she fears the consequences of refusing to personify his images. For readers, Adele's destiny shows, similar to that of Helen, that an escape does not provide agency – be it in Germany or the U.S.

The protagonist's hometown is described as a provincial fictitious town that, at first sight, raises the expectation of a topological opposition between disadvantageous rural setting and an urban space of liberation but breaks with this expectation because it indeed offers Peter some possibilities to search for his identity, in particular at home and in the kitchen of the restaurant he works in. Situated in rural Ontario, Canada, Fort Michel is negatively described as "awkward" (x) and of a "middling size" (x). From his childhood on, Peter realizes that he does not belong in this world: "Boys were ugly and foreign, like another species. I was not one of them. The evidence was right there, all the time, tucked into my tight underwear, but I still didn't believe it" (8). He deals with this feeling of not belonging by withdrawing into his home, first as a child into the companionship of his sisters, who know about and hide Peter's secret (10-13), later as an adolescent into the kitchen to express his identity. As mentioned before, stereotypical housewife accessories and tasks, such as secretly cooking and cleaning the house naked except for an apron (44-45, 50), complete Peter's safe space in Fort Michel[70]. Peter's father burning his beloved apron hence presents an intrusion into his son's private sphere (54-55).

However, the restaurant offers insights into a new world to Peter as it presents a space of violated taboos, sexuality and the erotic. The kitchen of the restaurant in Fort Michel with

[69] Interestingly, her father is not satisfied despite the fact that Adele produces high grades in her new degree program (59). This illustrates the strict ideas he has of a model minority.

[70] Conceptualized as an imaginary place, the name of the town is also a reference to the real Fort Mitchell, Ontario, which "expresses the negotiation between English (Mitchell) and French (Michel) in Canada" (Guarracino 143). The spatial setting and its descriptions hence do not only refer to the protagonist Peter but they also illustrate larger social issues negotiated in Fu's work. However, in how far this aspect refers to the protagonist's status as a Chinese immigrant and to the corresponding identity struggles, as Guarracino suggests, remains debatable.

its chef appearing as an unpleasant personality characterized by racist views (77) and vulgar language (80-81) at first sight replaces Peter's kitchen at home, his former safe space in his private sphere, which was destroyed by Father and his nearly ritualized burning of Peter's apron. Depicted as an enclosed entity differing considerably from the rustic outside world as it proves "that boorish working men are as likely to be accepting as anyone else" (Link 650), the kitchen allows Peter to begin the discovery of his identity and sexuality. It is portrayed as a space of the erotic (Seid 154) manifested in Peter's sexual attraction for his boss accompanied by numerous descriptions of food and the associated noises and smells (see, for example, 77, 80). With Chef telling stories about his accidental sexual encounter with another man (remarkably in urban Montreal) and successfully defending himself against colleagues characterized by strict heteronormative masculinity (93-95), the kitchen denotes a space of confessions and violated taboos in provincial Fort Michel. Unlike feeling uncomfortable when talking to his friend Ollie and hiding his sexual desires from him, Peter enjoys "the way the cooks at the restaurant talked about sex. Mapping out women's bodies for one another like explorers who've returned home" (83, see also 88-89). The kitchen also presents the space of identity discovery as Peter situationally embodies the stereotypical vulnerable woman rescued by the male hero Chef after having been locked in the freezer on purpose by a colleague (101). Peter clearly enjoys himself in this role, which is emphasized by him abusing his position as a victim for his own benefit as he reacts to the colleague's instant dismissal with satisfaction and malice (102-103). The kitchen, consequently, presents a space of identity discovery for Peter and it replaces to some degree his kitchen at home.

The move to urban Montreal is an escape from this provincial microcosmos, in which Peter sees hopes for his identity search. Montreal as a spatial setting indeed provides a transformative role for Audrey's mother. Before her husband's death, Montreal offers her the opportunity to rediscover her self-identity as both a Chinese and a self-reliant woman. However, for Peter, Montreal is a space of disillusionment as it turns out not to be a space of diversity, tolerance and freedom. With this strategy, Fu again disrupts the dichotomy of spatial settings of a classic literary transformation journey on the formal level. Leaving for university is unusual in Audrey's hometown Fort Michel (85), but the future of teenagers lies in the cities and is connected to their escape from this provincial life as Audrey explains: "Still believing that life was different in cities where the condos had been built, the pits had been filled, the buildings were tall – where you weren't assaulted on all sides by failure and empty sky" (104). The city is imagined as a place of tolerance and hope whereas rural life condemns the young to live a predetermined life exemplarily embodied in the miserable

destiny of Peter's friend Ollie: due to his girlfriend's unwanted pregnancy, he is forced to stay in Fort Michel and raise a family with the girl he actually wanted to leave (89-91, 111-112). Narrator Audrey's explanations for their leaving Ollie behind (105) are ambiguous because her former male personality Peter does not only step out of Ollie's truck but eventually leaves Fort Michel for Montreal. The mere imagination already empowers Peter in his identity search as he starts to button his chef's jacket the female way after having arrived at the decision to escape his hometown alone (105). It will hardly catch the reader by surprise that with this, Fu implicitly refers to the kitchen as a transformative space of development and discovery, this time related to Peter's outward appearance. Furthermore, the plan of going to Montreal motivates Peter to zealously work for bodily changes in the gym to highlight body parts usually considered as female (see, for instance, 97) and to shave his legs (103). Thus, high hopes accompany Peter during his journey to Montreal: "I wondered when we'd cross the line, when the signs would change language and beautiful things would start to grow" (106). In Peter's imagination, Montreal is a promising place of beauty and growth, full of possibilities. Tellingly, Peter's first encounter in Montreal however presents a moment of disillusion as he is confronted with racial stereotypes by his new landlord (108). Instead of the imagined apartment with "a big living-room window framing a cityscape" (91), Peter winds up in a coffin-like accommodation with a very small bathroom as a plumbing unit (108). Despite this disillusionment and the loneliness of a large city (110), the urbanity nevertheless empowers Peter as he is able, for instance, to withstand his father's views expressing disapproval of Peter growing his hair (110) – another marker of femininity not appreciated by a man captured in a world of heteronormative masculinity and gender-related stereotypes.

On the surface, race does not present a dominant issue in Peter's life in comparison to his father's but it becomes an important issue in Montreal. Montreal, as a spatial setting, thus helps Audrey to awaken to this notion of self-identity, which, however, does not present a resolution for the protagonist. When recapturing her past, narrator Audrey concludes "you would think that my father's rigorous scrubbing of heritage and the unavoidable fact of race in central Ontario would have made me more curious, but it hadn't" (141). She refers both to her status as a visible minority as well as to her father's attempts to assimilate but at the same time expresses her considerable disinterest and a lack of relevance for her. This is illustrated by the fact that Peter invented his family tree in school but did not ask his parents about it, for instance (142). It seems that he is more preoccupied with the negotiation of his gender and sexuality. Montreal, however, is the space where Peter is exposed to another

dimension of otherness, namely to his status as a visible minority. The relationship with Margie confronts Peter with his racial background so that he feels he experiences open racism for the first time in his life (133), apparently forgetting about the stereotypical model minority image uttered by his landlord upon his arrival in Montreal. After having been confronted with his mother's search for her cultural identity and his moribund father, Peter once more realizes the role of race when recognizing the oriental and exotic appeal of his sister as a stripper due to her Asian looks (144). The encounter with a stranger on the bus eventually provokes Peter's open interest in his racial and ethnic background. Asking where Peter is "really" from, the stranger is expected by some readers to represent another incident of everyday racism at first sight, but it turns out that he is a First Nation person advising Peter to investigate his roots because "you gotta know where you're from. It's important" (221). Back in his hometown Fort Michel, the presence of the Chinese community is almost non-existent as the poor condition of the Chinese Association building demonstrates – a fact Audrey only realizes retrospectively. Imagined as a vivid place and a contact point readers are familiar with from various other literary works or the media, the ruinous building is in fact ridiculed by a sign reading "Chinese Ass" due to letters having fallen off and the remaining <o> having been sprayed over as a joke (44).[71] Montreal, consequently, introduces Peter to another dimension of his identity, which has been suppressed by his father. The urban space is illustrated as one of ascription by others based on Peter's racial background, inciting him to critically reflect this dimension of his identity and personality.

With the loss of Chef and his kitchen as a safe space back in Fort Michel and his two new jobs unable to replace it – another instance of a disruption of the dream image of urban Montreal –, Peter retreats into his apartment, in which he is able to live out his identity as a female. He thus secludes himself again into the private sphere and escapes into fantasies about a love affair with his former boss (110) or about having a family with him as a mother (175, 205-206), realizing that Montreal is not as he expected. Nonetheless, Peter refuses to give up his hopes: "I had no real need for a bicycle […] but I imagined that my world would grow because I had one. That the person I had come to Montreal to be was just a little farther from the city center" (113). The hopes connected to increasing mobility are immediately destroyed with the anonymous destruction of his new bike: "A thought appeared in my mind, unbidden, as a fully formed sentence: *This is the most unhappy I have ever been*" (114).

[71] Seid interprets the precarious condition of the Chinese Association building representing Chinatown as placing Chinese immigrants symbolically at the bottom of the social hierarchy (Seid 150). The spatial setting serves, consequently, once more to underline larger social concerns discussed in the novel.

Despite these emotional obstacles, Peter still does not abandon his dreams and continues his secret identity search in Montreal: he buys his first own pair of women's shoes but in the shop, he pretends to purchase them for his non-existent girlfriend (114). Consequently, despite all its disillusioning instances, Montreal presents a place of hope, where Peter continues his identity search and both his psychological and outward appearance transformation.

With John, Montreal as a spatial setting is also depicted as space of diversity on the surface as it presents for Peter the place of encounter with other transgender persons. While feeling overwhelmed by a bar employee with obvious signs of gender transformation (171), Peter initially does not believe that his colleague John[72] used to be female due to his authentic male appearance (202-203, 204-205). Despite Peter's disbelief of John's transgender identity, the encounter with privileged John results in Peter feeling locked in his own small apartment stating that "everything was so fucking *white*" (205), thereby not only referring to his blanket but also metaphorically to his social surroundings and himself feeling multiply oppressed because of his gender and racial identity. Peter's apartment does not suffice to express his self-identity, which he painfully learns when confronted with the possibilities Montreal seems to offer. Learning about his error concerning John results in an outbreak of despair and rage culminating in Peter's life being reduced to one simple question nobody dared to ask in his rural hometown: "Are you a woman?" (213). John and his friends help Peter dress up as his idol Audrey Hepburn for a Halloween party, which he enjoys enormously (229-230) and which is the first instance of Peter himself breaking the boundaries between the private and the public sphere. The clash of "queer white liberalism" in this context with "Peter's own understanding of how racialized, gendered, and classed identity limits and guides how, where, and to which communities Peter belongs" (Seid 155) marks another moment of disillusion for Peter in urban Montreal. After having left the Halloween party, Peter's joyful moment as Audrey is disturbed immediately as he is confronted with insults on his way home (230-231) and the next morning, he learns about a transgender person, who was murdered during the night of the party (232-233). Consequently, Fu negates the image of Montreal as the urban space of liberation in her novel

[72] Remarkably, John also is connected to the kitchen due to his job as a chef in the restaurant Le Carré and much of the action that includes him is related to the restaurant, its kitchen or food. The restaurant itself is also – similar to Peter's preceding working space in Fort Michel – depicted as a closed entity differing from the outside world. It is characterized by breaking with gender stereotypical clothing as, for instance, "servers of both genders wore white-collared shirts and bow ties" (204).

as here, her protagonist is confronted with white privilege, colonial attitudes, racism, and sexism.

The narrative perspective of the novel is interesting as it also supports the deconstruction of binary oppositions and dichotomies: Guarracino identifies a "split between the narrating 'I' and 'Peter Huang' (Guarracino 138) when Audrey refers to her past self in the third person earlier in the novel (125), which shows the split of the narrator Audrey after her transformation and her former male self Peter. The explicit split between Audrey as a narrator distancing herself from her former male self Peter marks a point of disruption of the narrative perspective, hence on the formal level. Similar to the strategy used by Margaret Atwood in her novel *The Edible Woman* (Klarer 50), the change of the narrative perspective in these passages of Fu's work demonstrates the alienation of the protagonist Audrey from her former self Peter and it illustrates the identity struggle the protagonist is suffering from on a formal level.

Although the story is mainly told chronologically, resulting in a linear structure of the novel, the author generally includes several intrusions concerning both the narrative perspective and the focalization in order to disrupt the actual order of the narrative. This mirrors the complexity of identity searches negotiated in Fu's novel as the exploration of an individual's own identity and its development from childhood to adolescence to adulthood are characterized by inconsistencies and nonlinearities as well. Besides the split between the narrating I, several instances of prolepses break the linear structure of the narrative as they refer to incidents set after the temporal setting (see, for example, 56, 74). Especially the third chapter is full of references to Audrey's future and the knowledge she gained only years later, thus after the narrative's plot: she talks, for instance, about the decay of the Chinese Association building (44), symbolizing the loss of importance of the Chinese community in her rural hometown of Fort Michel. The tragic story of Mrs. Becker, Audrey's father's mistress who desperately wants to become pregnant and eventually commits suicide, is framed by Audrey's reference to a coincidental meeting with Mrs. Becker's widower in a bar in her hometown (47-48, 58). When describing her adolescent sister Helen's way of life (30), Audrey also recognizes "already the seed of the woman she would become" and thereby foreshadows her sister's grueling psychological journey which guides Helen into drug addiction, depression, and anxiety disorder. Additionally, the overt narrator Audrey does not even try to convey her own story without comment, sometimes providing ironic evaluations such as blaming the heat as forcing her ambitious sister Helen "to study by osmosis" (29, see also 30 for another example). These humorous comments as well as

instances of foreshadowing and prolepses remind the reader of the retrospective perspective and disrupt the image of the narrative being told from a child's or an adolescent's perspective, which is evoked at some points by long descriptions of Audrey's feelings as Peter, her former self in younger years.

Despite the autodiegetic narrative situation resulting in the expectation of a rather limited point of view in terms of action and introspection regarding other characters, narrator Audrey surprises the reader with her partial omniscience concerning her social environment, in particular her family. The novel begins, for instance, with meticulously detailed descriptions of the birth of Audrey's older sister Adele (ix-xi) and additionally includes chapters centering on Adele's miserable experiences in Germany (59-65) and Helen's grim fate in the U.S. (180-194). The enormous wealth of details and insights evoke a notion of omniscience although Audrey was not present at many of the events described in these passages. This introspection and omniscient knowledge confined to her family demonstrate not only Audrey's emotional proximity to her family on a narrative level, but it also breaks the otherwise autodiegetic narrative situation as it expands the expected limited viewpoint of the narrator of the novel.

Parallel to narrator Audrey's omniscient knowledge regarding incidents related to her family, the focalizers change multiple times in the course of the novel. As mentioned above, the beginning of the novel already introduces the reader to the narrator's ability of introspection concerning other characters but at the same time, the prologue introduces the reader to the variable internal focalization ranging from Audrey's mother as a focalizer (ix-x., 130-131., 181-194) to her sisters Helen (32, for instance) and Adele (see exemplarily 64-65), which complement Audrey's focalization. Interestingly, this variable internal focalization is again limited to Audrey's family members, which underlines Audrey's closeness to her family once more.[73] Moreover, it expands and hence breaks the expected limited viewpoint of an autodiegetic narration on the level of focalization. The variable internal focalization thus results in a certain inconsistency underlining Audrey's search for her identity and illustrating the strong bonds with her family. As a result, both narrative perspective and focalization support the theme of identity discovery on the formal level as both are characterized by inconsistency and nonlinearity.

[73] Peter's father marks an exception concerning introspection and focalization, which illustrates the shattered relationship between a father driven by heteronormative gender concepts and a transgender son: Audrey does not feel as close to her father as to other family members due to his lack of acceptance she experienced during her childhood and adolescence.

As a consequence, the oppositional dichotomy between rural and urban settings, often represented in coming-of-age texts, is deconstructed in *For Today I Am a Boy*. Metropolises such as Berlin, Los Angeles or Washington, D.C. do not present spaces of liberation but of decay and disillusionment for Adele and Helen. Montreal is illustrated as a multi-sided urban space that provides both agency and disillusionment for Audrey and his mother, similar to provincial Fort Michel. The spatial settings, similar to the identity markers that serve as the basis for the creation of social hierarchies, thus intersect in the search for an ethnic or gender self-identity. Narrative tools such as the use of a split narrating I, variable internal focalizers, and both prolepses and flashbacks disrupting the chronological order break linear structures and dichotomies on the level of form. Moreover, the restriction of the variable internal focalization and narrator Audrey's omniscience to selected family members illustrates the importance of family ties as an agency providing element for protagonist Audrey on the level of form.

The preceding sections have focused on the novel itself but an intersectional approach on the methodological level, as understood in this dissertation, argues for the necessity to consider epitexts in order to be able to discuss the social hierarchies in question. The following section, consequently, presents some brief remarks on author Fu's self-positioning in the literary field that shapes the reception of her work and results in benevolent critiques.

5.5. What Does Fiction Permit?, or: Some Remarks on Cultural Appropriation, Intersectionality and Literature

When reflecting on the depiction of social inequality in relation to an individual's self-identity, the challenge of writing a novel with a transgender protagonist as a cisgender author cannot remain unmentioned in an era of ongoing recent debates about cultural appropriation in general and in the context of Fu's novel in particular. Cultural appropriation is defined as "a term used to describe the taking over of creative or artistic forms, themes, or practices by one cultural group from another" according to *The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature*. Cultural appropriation may result in social inequality as privileged individuals can be blamed for (ab)using particular cultural practices for their purposes. It might reproduce not only intersectional oppression but also a colonial attitude and it works against the processes of decolonization in a postcolonial age.[74]

[74] The term is characterized by a considerable ambivalence. On the other hand, the appropriation of strategies of a dominant imperial power by an inferior one may stimulate processes of decolonization (Ashcroft et al. *Key-Concepts* 19-20) and can thus serve as a tool of empowerment. Besides, cultural appropriation can be interpreted positively as a result of hybridization processes in a globalized world, which is, admittedly, not always free from conflicts (Hahn 13). In summary, appropriation processes, their legitimacy, and their evaluation depend on the individual perspective (Hahn 19).

This issue is also intensively discussed regarding literature as numerous comments and articles about the recent novel *American Dirt* demonstrate (see exemplarily Altar and Schuessler; Boyagoda; Flood). Author Jeanine Cummins has been fiercely criticized for cultural appropriation because she, as a Caucasian American, relates to the experiences of a Mexican woman escaping a drug cartel to go to the U.S. with her son. Lively social media discussions and initiatives, for instance by artists of Hispanic background such as Myriam Gurba under the hashtag #DignidadLiteraria[75], have followed the publication of the novel. Cummins has been sharply accused, among other things, of illustrating and reproducing inauthentic stereotypes as well as racism in her novel – culminating in the expression "trauma porn" to characterize her work (see, for example, Groff; Gurba).[76] In the context of this particular novel, the debate has even crossed the Atlantic and found its way into European magazines and newspapers such as *Der Spiegel* (Rapp), *Die Zeit* (Pines) or *Neue Züricher Zeitung* (Neumann), which illustrates the global relevance of this issue. Critics do not only base their accusations on the content of the novel, but also on its frame by referring to Cummins' stance and marketing processes including, for example, her foreword in the novel, the choice of the cover image, or table decorations at events related to the novel (Pines). Moreover, the lack of authors of Hispanic background in publishing companies and hence their lack of representation on the literary market presents another matter of criticism centering on Cummins' work (Malik), which creates an interesting link to Chinese Canadian literature (see chapter 3). These remarks underline the usefulness of an intersectional approach (see chapter 4), here through the consideration of epitexts for a literary analysis.

Despite the fact that the *American Dirt* debate circulates around race, ethnicity, and immigrant experiences, the issue of cultural appropriation can also be transferred to the area of LGBTQIA+ matters as various controversies illustrate (see, for example, Caruso for a summary of this debate related to casts in movies). Interestingly, Fu has not been confronted with similar harsh criticism for her novel; her work has been widely praised and resulted in numerous enthusiastic reviews and favorable feedback.[77] Despite the partial reproduction of gender stereotypes, for example,

> Peter's *bildung* can be read as emphatically *not* a story of transitioning from one hegemonic model – masculinity, whiteness – to another – femininity, the 'Oriental' – which would eventually end up reinforcing the first. On the contrary, the novel supports a notion of fluidity of gender roles and personas and the truth of a voice that belongs to

[75] See, for instance, http://dignidadliteraria.com/ for more information on one initiative.

[77] The novel has also been critiqued but on a considerably different level than *American Dirt* because the points of criticism focus on the novel itself (see exemplarily the review by Whitlock).

> its own body, independently from its expected pitch or received gender assignations […] (Guarracino 142)

The positive comments also stretch across the transgender community (see, for instance, Link). Considering the diverging comments as well as both novels' superordinate genre of fiction, which does not claim any truth or complete ties to reality in contrast to nonfictional works, the question of cultural appropriation in a literary context develops into general discussions on what fiction permits, who judges in this matter, and why both novels differ fundamentally concerning their literary criticism – with only the latter one being touched upon briefly in the following.

Author Kim Fu explicitly locates herself in the context of ethnicity, gender and the model minority myth in public discourses, which results in her being perceived as reliable and authentic. In her novel, Fu depicts, as mentioned before, not only issues of transgender persons but she also manages to incorporate issues of ethnicity, thereby drawing from her experiences as a Chinese Canadian, who grew up in West Vancouver, where she "saw a lot of families where there was a strong schism between parents and children on a variety of issues, but the worst seemed to be gender and sexuality" (Fu qtd. in McEvoy). In another article, she describes how the identification was forced upon her by the perception by others (Kim Fu "Peril"). She gained considerable knowledge on an academic level about the issue of transgender by completing a master's degree in psychology and many acquaintances within this community (McEvoy) and while pursuing research in this area for her novel (McAllen). Moreover, she describes how she was confronted with her parents' expectations to become an engineer (McEvoy), thus referring implicitly to the model minority image she depicts in her work. In another interview, she describes how she learned about self-identity in terms of gender during the process of writing:

> I used to play up masculine aspects of my personality and dismiss a lot of feminine things as frivolous…as giving in to 'the man'. Even things I secretly liked or wanted to try […] A side effect of living so closely with Peter's voice was coming to peace with my own gender expression – that getting a pedicure does not negate my politics. (Fu in Brangien Davis)

Besides, Fu manages to problematize her narrative perspective in public and shows the respect this sensitive topic deserves: "Fu felt anxiety about creating a transgendered character, especially as a cisgendered writer. She now wants to avoid becoming a commentator on trans issues. 'The most important thing I can do now is shut up and step back', she says" (McAllen). In summary, the author draws on her own experiences and problematizes in public the most severe point of criticism related to appropriation. She locates herself regarding her ethnicity and her gender and does not shy away from discussing

this self-location in public, thereby providing transparency about her position, her self-identity. Fan summarizes in her review that despite the fact that Fu's "novel abounds in recognizable archetypes of the model minority […] the story itself contemplates something larger: how to define and defend one's identity against the clamoring voice of expectation, from both family and society" (n.p.). Fu, consequently, explicitly locates herself as an author in the literary discourse and, in her novel, she goes beyond mere stereotypes and manages to illustrate a universal human experience many individuals can relate to. This illustrates the importance of considering these debates in the context of literary texts and which is what may present the difference between her novel and works such as *American Dirt*.

5.6. Interim Conclusion

A kaleidoscopic use of intersectionality for the analysis of literary texts, with regard to Fu's novel, allows one to grasp the extent of the social hierarchies negotiated here, ranging from racial and ethnic background to social class, age, and gender. Thereby, the allocation of the novel to the field of Chinese Canadian literature, as evoked by its peritexts, is deconstructed because the analysis also enables the manifoldness of self-identity representations in literature and the discourses about it by, for example, the use of multidimensional characters or an author's self-location, here with a focus on gender. Additionally, an intersectional reading of this novel illustrates the strong connection between social hierarchies and the liberation from these, i.e. gaining agency and empowerment. For the case of Fu's work, pop culture references, family ties, an inner return to one's ethnic heritage and clothing are illustrated as tools that can provide agency for individual characters.

Considering the definition by Ty, Fu's novel can in fact be characterized as being concerned with intersectional issues because it negotiates social inequality on multiple levels, but not ostensibly in accordance with the definition according to Crenshaw, Hill Collins and Bilge (see chapter 4). The novel negotiates merging levels of oppression in interpersonal relationships concerning ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. However, these dimensions are negotiated mainly in one particular social sphere, namely the family: the patriarch suppresses his ethnic background and aims to impose this approach on his family. In his attempt to westernize himself and his family, Father includes specific gender roles he tries to impose on his family and which the other members fail to fulfil: mother is unsatisfied with her role as a mother and a housewife, Audrey is searching for her gender, which is not male and, consequently, does not correspond to his interpretation of norm, and Audrey's sisters fail to adhere to the model minority image. Moreover, it foregrounds other aspects of

identity besides ethnicity in the context of intergenerational conflicts related to the model minority discourse.

On a structural level, Fu deconstructs the classic transformation journey in coming-of-age novels: she refuses the semantic opposition, which accompanies the topological contrast between urban spaces and the countryside with the protagonist finding resolution in a metropolis. As a result, the spatial settings in *For Today I Am a Boy* support the deconstruction of one-dimensional identity markers that serve as the basis for the creation of social hierarchies because all spatial settings, be they rural or urban, provide spaces for Audrey to discover her self-identity and they provide instances of disillusionment at the same time. The narrative situation with its split narrator and varying internal focalization disrupt the expected limited point of view of the narrator Audrey and underline the nonlinearities and inconsistencies a search for identity is associated with. Due to its limits, the narrative situation also illustrates the protagonist's close ties to her family, in particular to her sisters. Hence, the novel vividly depicts the emotions related to the discursive construction of one's identity and conveys the broad differences concerning the construction of gender which individuals are confronted with in their social environment on both the level of content and the level of structure. Besides the family ties that provide the protagonist Audrey with the necessary strength for her identity search, female clothing, pop culture references to Audrey Hepburn and, in the case of Audrey's mother, a return to one's ethnic background illustrate possible tools that provide individuals with agency to liberate themselves from inferior positions within a social hierarchy.

Coming back to the original understanding of intersectionality, *For Today I Am a Boy* also presents some examples outside of this domestic circle: Peter is objectified on a sexual level as an exotic young boy by Margie or presents a (colonial) project for John's intellectual friends, who feel the need to fight on a political level for the rights of transgender people. However, these incidents remain a side note in a novel mainly about intergenerational conflicts in a migrant family, which are not only related to ethnicity. Fu manages to deconstruct and illustrate the different social dimensions that accompany the attempt of assimilation in the context of migration to Canada and which lead to different positions in familial social hierarchies and, as a result, to incidents of familial intersectionality. Interestingly, Fu succeeds in doing so primarily with the character of the Father, who seems to be of minor importance at first sight, but who proves to have a massive impact on many other characters of the novel. In the end, the family also presents the space of resolution

because it is Audrey's sisters who help her to find her identity despite many encounters with other, even transgender, people.

If the family of Chinese background as the space of resolution leads unmistakably to the conclusion that *For Today I Am a Boy* presents an example of Chinese Canadian literature remains highly debatable for two reasons: first, the aspects negotiated in terms of assimilation do not seem specific to Chinese immigrants but they present challenges and identity struggles for migrants in general. Moreover, the issue of ethnicity, as mentioned above, is only one issue in the course of the novel and it is linked to other, superordinate themes such as the model minority discourse and assimilation attempts. Kim Fu's novel *For Today I Am a Boy* might be described as migration literature as it elaborates on migration in more senses than moving from one nation state to another: "Immigration is perhaps the closest suitable metaphor for transsexual experience […]" (Link 649).

Notwithstanding, the highly individualized story of the protagonist offers more readings:

> If we read the book as a minority feminist novel, its third-wave message is that being a woman doesn't mean all women's experience is comparable. If we read it as a trans novel by a nontrans writer, it suggests some trans and other minority experiences can be comparable, and we shouldn't assume queer feminism can say more about trans experience than can the kid from the ethnic restaurant kitchen or the immigrant guy on the corner. (Link 653)

Besides the possible readings mentioned in the quote above, an intersectional perspective hence offers more insights into social hierarchies than one might expect at the beginning because it shows that experiences concerning social hierarchy might not be comparable despite similar starting points, which is what intersectionality aims to problematize. Eventually, the novel manages to center on the complex construction of identity with various different variables considered by oneself or by one's social environment – independent of which social category is included in detail. This presents the main linking point to intersectionality as this concept aims to recognize and value the variety of one's identity. Besides, it leads to reflection processes on conformity in a society. This is what eventually unites Peter and his father in Kim Fu's novel despite all their differences and it presents a rather universal human experience, which results in a certain attractiveness of the novel for various groups of readers.

6. Wayson Choy *The Jade Peony*

After the exploration of Kim Fu's novel *From Today I Am a Boy* from an intersectional literary perspective, this chapter deals with a work that can indeed be considered as canonical for Chinese Canadian literature. However, an intersectional approach helps, also for the case of Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony* from 1995, to uncover the complexity of social hierarchy negotiations and identity representations with factors such as age, gender and sexuality, thereby questioning the allocation to the field of Chinese Canadian literature, as the analysis in this chapter will demonstrate.

Choy's novel *The Jade Peony* is allocated to the field of Chinese Canadian literature through the research on it and through its blurb. The blurb introduces the reader immediately to the context of Chinese immigration to Canada by referring to Chinatown in Vancouver as a spatial setting at the very beginning. The following references to immigration, otherness and a status between two cultures foster this thematic focus and raise the expectation that this novel centers on ethnic encounters and negotiations. Despite its intriguing structure and the fresh insights beyond immigrant experience (Gambone), Choy's novel *The Jade Peony* is usually categorized into the field of Asian Canadian or, more specifically in terms of ethnic background, into Chinese Canadian writing in secondary sources because it "explores themes traditionally associated with novels about the immigrant experience" (Gambone). Considered as canonical for this field, the award-winning novel appears in numerous introductory monographs and articles, serving as an example of Chinese Canadian writing characteristic of the 1990s. In the *Oxford Handbook of Canadian Literature*, for instance,[78] various authors elaborate on Choy's works in four different contributions, placing his oeuvre in the context of postcolonialism (chapters 24 and 30) or in that of cultural clashes (chapter 38) and ethnic minority writing (chapter 43). Goldie and Frew reflect this classification in their contribution in the edited volume:

> Various authors explore the intersection of race and sexual diversity. Among those who have received the greatest praise is Wayson Choy, though while he is known to be gay, his works make few references to homosexuality […] He represents one of many authors who make no secret of an identity – sexual, ethnic, or otherwise – but choose not to make it central to their writing. Thus it is much easier to label Choy as "Chinese-Canadian" than as "gay". (Goldie and Frew 872)

[78] Further examples can be found in *Kanadische Literaturgeschichte*: Choy is mentioned in a section specifically on Chinese Canadian authors and *The Jade Peony* is described as illustrating issues connected to immigration (Hartmut Lutz 320). In the *History of Literature in Canada*, Banita classifies Choy as a minority writer and emphasizes the intergenerational conflict based on the characters' ethnic background in *The Jade Peony* (Banita 397). *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* offers another instance of classification along Choy's ethnic background (Heble).

In spite of their promising approach to deconstruct the classification of an author's work according to the author's racial or ethnic background, however, Goldie and Frew backpedal when placing Choy once again in the context of tensions resulting from racial background and immigration (872). Hence, they neglect to consider the social hierarchies and instances of multiple oppression, which illustrate the complexity of identity negotiated in *The Jade Peony*.[79]

Choy and his novel *The Jade Peony* do not only appear in general introductions to Canadian literature. Numerous publications on Asian Canadian in general and Chinese Canadian literature in particular engage with Choy's work. However, they also focus mostly on the ethnic background of the author and identify cultural issues based on ethnicity as the center of attention of their analyses. In multiple publications, Ty emphasizes Choy's role as a second generation writer of Asian North Americans (*Unfastened* 89) dealing with issues of "ethnic identity in North American society" (*Politics* 116) or the "complexities of racialized subjectivity" (*Politics* 116). In her work on interculturalism in Chinese Canadian literature, Hilf correctly observes that Choy's work does not exclusively negotiate these aspects. She notes that the cultural clash usually identified as the most prominent theme of the novel only plays a minor role for (at least) one of the characters. Hilf insightfully concludes that "Choy introduces [with the topic of homosexuality] an aspect which challenges a concept of identity solely in terms of ethnicity […]" (90). She further states that "*The Jade Peony* combines the poetic reconstruction of collective Chinese-Canadian history with the demonstration of three individual concepts of identity in which one's ethnicity is not necessarily the decisive factor" (Hilf 94). Consequently, Hilf recognizes the variety of aspects beyond those of migration in Choy's work but, unfortunately, she nevertheless interprets her chapter heading "Between Two Worlds" predominantly in an ethnic sense, mainly because of the explanation that Choy offers for many Chinese terms and concepts, which Hilf interprets as sign posting for non-Asian readers (96-97). Hilf thereby ignores the fact that Chinese Canadian children sometimes also need explanations in an intercultural context, which Choy vividly illustrates in his novel with his character Sekky. Similar to Hilf's remarks, Lai indeed identifies Choy as a well-established Chinese Canadian author

[79] Hepburn pursues – in comparison to the other introductions – a radically different approach by allocating the novel into a section entitled "novels centred on identity and family": by broadening the understanding of identity beyond ethnicity, he summarizes that "[…] the novel is a study of several identities that take their meaning from their relation – adopted, biological, loved, rejected – to other people" (Hepburn n.p.). Hepburn thus recognizes that an identity does not exclusively consist of a person's status as an immigrant from China to Canada or as the offspring of such immigrants. Moreover, he is one of the very few who transfer this idea to their literary classification of Choy's novel, so his remarks indeed present a rare exception to the rule.

(*Slanting I* 20), yet she also adheres to a purely ethnic understanding of what she calls "the strategy of breaking the silence as a mode of empowerment" (*Slanting I* 38).

At first sight, the categorization of *The Jade Peony* as Chinese Canadian literature hence seems suitable due to Choy's ethnic background, the spatial setting of the novel in Vancouver's Chinatown and its numerous historical allusions to Chinese Canadian immigration. However, multiple scholars have already recognized the richness that this novel offers. The shortsightedness of field allocation impedes the readership from grasping the full extent of the themes Choy's work negotiates. As will be demonstrated in the following, an intersectional reading enables readers to recognize the multidimensional characters with their complex identities and the social hierarchies within the immigrant family *The Jade Peony* centers on. Moreover, with his characters, Choy illustrates different mechanisms of empowerment that serve as a tool of liberation from the multiple instances of (multiple) oppression and which negotiate issues beyond that of ethnicity.

6.1. Synopsis

The Jade Peony narrates the life of a family of Chinese background in Vancouver's Chinatown in the 1930s and 1940s. As it is told from three different perspectives, readers learn first about Jook-Liang's position as the only daughter, who befriends Wong Suk, an old friend of the family, and thereby experiences a particular form of empowerment referred to as "intersectional" in the following analysis. Her older brother Jung-Sum describes his childhood as an adopted family member and the struggles with his homosexuality during puberty: he establishes a close relationship to his friend and role model Frank Yuen, who – like Jung-Sum – suffers from a past shaped by an abusive father. The youngest child, Sek-Lung, narrates the trouble with his self-identity as Chinese in a predominantly Caucasian Canadian context outside of Chinatown. The close and regular contact with his babysitter Meiying and her Japanese Canadian boyfriend Kazuo induce the little boy to reflect on his racist attitude towards Japanese Canadians. Their grandmother Poh-Poh accompanies the children on their journeys from childhood to adolescence and introduces them to their Chinese heritage. Both intergenerational conflicts between the protagonists and other family members and historical allusions to the Sino-Japanese War complete the story of the novel. Via retrospective narration, the three characters manage to convey a multifaceted image of Chinese immigration to Canada and its implications for individuals – far beyond issues of race and ethnicity.

In order to systematically analyze the power relations and the underlying intersecting identities negotiated in *The Jade Peony*, the following sections 6.2 and 6.3 focus on – as has

been explicated in chapter 4.4 – the domestic context referring to power relations within the family and the social hierarchies in the broader social context (i.e. Chinatown and Caucasian Canadian encounters). The subsequent section presents an exemplary analysis of empowermental means in Choy's novel: as mentioned above, characters experience an intersectional form of empowerment, which allows (some) liberation from the inferior social positions they find themselves in. Traditional Chinese myth proves to be a telling example due to its prominent use in the novel, which will be illustrated in section 6.5. The analysis closes with a conclusion regarding Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony* explored from an intersectional perspective.

6.2. Intersectionality in a Domestic Context

Besides the broader social context, the family itself presents a space of multiple power relations and social hierarchies in *The Jade Peony*. The present section, therefore, closely looks at the relationships between the family members and how power relations are established, maintained, and what effects they cause. Moreover, peritexts will be considered to illustrate how Choy places his novel in the context of Chinese Canadian literature. However, both the representation of social hierarchies in the family context and the peritexts contribute to the negotiation of social hierarchies in Choy's novel by deconstructing the label Chinese Canadian and illustrating its inherent heterogeneity.

The novel starts with a note by the author and a quote from a poem. The author's note is interesting as Choy refers to four works, which informed his novel: Paul Yee's *Saltwater City, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East* End by Daphne Marlatt and Carol Itter, Kay Anderson's *Vancouver's Chinatown. Racial Discourse in Canada* and *The Enemy That Never Was* by Ken Adachi. First, Yee's *Saltwater City* presents an introduction to the history of the Chinese in Vancouver. This richly illustrated book contains information echoed with careful attention to detail in Choy's novel: in *The Jade Peony*, readers do not only again find historical figures such as Nellie Yip but also broader issues are negotiated, for example the phenomenon of establishing "paper families" by the adulteration of documents to facilitate immigration to Canada or intergenerational conflicts between different immigrant generations. Second, Marlatt and Itter's work presents a collection of interviews with immigrant families in the working class district of East Vancouver. The meticulously detailed accounts of Vancouver's neighborhood Strathcona as a multiethnic setting are reflected in Choy's novel as is the "Oriental-Caucasian division" (Marlatt and Itter 5). Third, Anderson's historical recount of racial discrimination against Chinese in Vancouver complements the reference works with a political view. Fourth, Ken Adachi's work

remarkably does not deal with Chinese Canadian issues but it covers the history of Japanese Canadians. An informed reader (or one that is willing to invest some time in research while reading) might wonder about the relevance of Japanese Canadian history as the *The Jade Peony* is particularly allocated – as mentioned above – to the subfield of Chinese Canadian writing. As such, to a certain extent, the author's note creates suspense and arouses curiosity with its references. All these references illustrate Choy's careful research on the issues negotiated in *The Jade Peony* and underline the importance of Chinese Canadian history and the choice of Vancouver's Chinatown as the spatial setting (see below). His careful attention to detail probably sometimes causes readers to forget they are reading a novel instead of a non-fiction text. The author's note hence serves as a reminder by explicitly characterizing *The Jade Peony* as a work of fiction (vii).[80]

In an author's note, Choy includes remarks on language issues and a confession of free translation of Chinese kinship terms into English. In the following passages quoted from a poem, the aspects of language and translation are picked up again. The poem "Translations" forms part of a collection entitled *Expounding the Doubtful Points*, in which the U.S. poet Wing Tek Lum portrays his Chinese American heritage including issues of discrimination and stereotypes. Choy quotes the third part of the poem, which consists of one stanza. Here, the lyrical I describes the changes in the Chinese neighborhood as the result of their linguistic assimilation to the predominantly Caucasian surrounding: as a consequence of the renaming of "China-People-Street" into "China-Town", the people, probably the Chinese inhabitants, disappeared. This allows for two different interpretations: Caucasians may have taken over the quarter because it seemed more accessible after having been renamed according to Western standards or the Chinese may have started to lose their ethnic roots due to assimilation, which is illustrated by the renaming of their neighborhood. This stanza full of enjambments forecasts many themes of the novel. First, it depicts Chinatown as a spatial setting and its importance. Second, the othering of Caucasians, in the poem referred to with the term "Demon talk", is at play. Moreover, the multilingualism used in Choy's novel is also used in the poem. All the reference works preceding *The Jade Peony*, hence, serve to foreshadow (and to retrospectively strengthen) various themes, motifs and stylistic devices that can be found in Choy's work. Moreover, they also raise questions of social hierarchies that are likewise at play in *The Jade Peony*. In contrast to Fu, who, with her peritexts, breaks with the thematic expectations of Chinese Canadian issues raised by cover image and blurb

[80] All quotes from the primary source in this chapter refer to the following edition: Choy, Wayson. *The Jade Peony*. Madeira Park: Douglas and McIntyre, 1995.

and adds the transgender theme, Choy, by using these references, indeed himself puts the novel in the context of Chinese Canadian literature, which corresponds to the blurb.

The Jade Peony introduces the reader to three different perspectives, starting with that of Jook-Liang. The chapter heading "only sister" implicitly reveals her position within the family from the beginning, as do the chapter headings for the sections dealing with her brothers, which read "Second Brother" and "Third Brother" after their names. Jook-Liang does not only familiarize the reader with the family and provide a detailed description of Chinese traditions but, with this character, Choy presents a case of intersectional oppression as a topic in its narrow, original sense, illustrating the social hierarchies and power relations within the Chinese family and visualizing Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality in his work at the same time. Especially through the troubled relationship with her grandmother Poh-Poh, readers learn about the little girl's discriminatory experiences due to her age, gender, and mixed ethnic background but also about mechanisms to overcome these experiences.

The first instance of explicit oppression occurs when Poh-Poh explains to her nine year old granddaughter that "if you want a place in this world, […] do not be born a girl-child" (27), thereby referring to both her gender and her young age. Poh-Poh's judgement of Jook-Liang as "*mo young* – useless" (28), which she explicitly tells Jook-Liang multiple times (see, for example, 32, 33, 35), is a manifestation of this domestic oppression. To this ascribed uselessness due to Jook-Liang's age and gender, Poh-Poh adds another dimension of social inequality, which is based on the little girl's identification with figures of Western popular culture. According to her grandmother, Jook-Liang clearly does not belong to Western culture, so Poh-Poh openly disapproves of Western role models such as Shirley Temple (37).[81] For Jook-Liang, however, this reference and escape into the fantasy world of Shirley Temple allows her to imagine "a world where I belonged, dressed perfectly, behaved beyond reproach, and was loved, always loved, and was not, no, not at all, *mo young*" (38), illustrating the girl's despair because of her grandmother's rejection. Jook-Liang's allegiance to Western culture, similar to Audrey's choice of British icon Audrey Hepburn as a role model in Fu's novel, serves as a means of empowerment for little Jook-Liang.[82] This

[81] Some scholars interpret this disapproval as an act of reminding her granddaughter of her status as a visible minority in order to save her from disappointment (see, for example, Lorre 73). Poh-Poh's general attitude towards her granddaughter as well as her establishment and maintenance of a strictly segregated dichotomy between Eastern and Western society (see below) create a different image. Lorre's conclusion that Jook-Liang retrospectively reconciles with her grandmother (74) remains debatable also because the passages quoted only illustrate Jook-Liang's hybrid identity caught between Eastern and Western culture, also due to her looks.
[82] See section 6.5 for more detailed remarks on this issue.

allegiance and the creation of a dichotomy with Canada as modern and China as antiquated (27) results in Poh-Poh's frustration and her complaint to her friend and neighbor Mrs. Lim because Jook-Liang does not accept that Chinese norms are at play in Vancouver's Chinatown even though the family lives in Canada (220).

Her grandmother's lack of acceptance is not only expressed verbally, but the little girl experiences the assumed uselessness emotionally by Poh-Poh's aversion to spending time with her granddaughter (28). The grandmother's manner of communication underlines her rejection due to her aggravated tone: she "snapped at what she saw as my lack of humility" (30) whenever Jook-Liang was alone with her grandmother. Verbs, such as "command" (30), adverbs, such as "majestically" (34), or a "condescending look" (34) mirror the idea of Poh-Poh's superiority in the relationship with her granddaughter. The variety of verbs and adjectives depicting the manner of communication as well as Poh-Poh's "sharp voice" (46) all support the artificially reinforced hierarchy between grandmother and granddaughter. Poh-Poh's attempts to care for Jook-Liang are full of emotional rejection and harsh orders, even accompanied by rough touching:

> Grandmother pulled me away from the pillar and with her other hand presented a large white plate before my eyes […] "Sit down." "I'm not hungry," I protested. Poh-Poh spread out a clean diaper, pushed me down. I sat. She firmly tucked a tea towel under my neck […] Finally, she pressed the plate on my lap. "Eat." (46)

The grandmother's manner of communication is additionally characterized by the use of imperatives (see also 64) reinforcing the hierarchy between Poh-Poh and Jook-Liang. This complements the physical rejection of her granddaughter by the denial of physical closeness and attention (32-33) as well as rough physical contact.[83] She constantly exercises her "full authority" (47) towards Jook-Liang and "was always saying something discouraging" (39) in a dark manner; the acknowledgement the little girl is searching for is constantly denied her, both verbally and physically. Code-switching between different Chinese dialects is another means used to establish and maintain social hierarchies (Ty *Politics* 131-132). Poh-Poh "always chose her tone and style of words according to her judgement and mood" (29) and changes her dialect when talking to Jook-Liang: "[…] Poh-Poh used another but similar village dialect, in a more clipped fashion, as many adults do when they think you might be the village fool, too worthless or too young, or not from their district" (8, see also 34 for another example). The references to age, usefulness, and communal belonging hint at Jook-

[83] One could argue that Poh-Poh's use of non-Standard English is the reason for the multiple uses of imperatives but her utterances towards other characters within the novel suggest a deliberate use of this grammatical construction to exert her superiority. Jung-Sum additionally describes the conversations with her as neutral by using verbs such as "say" (see, for example, 78-79).

Liang's experiences with this issue as she elaborates extensively on these aspects in the subsequent passage of the novel.

The constant exertion of Poh-Poh's superior position provokes in Jook-Liang an unfulfilled longing for learning. Jook-Liang admires Poh-Poh's ability to tie ribbons into beautiful flowers, for instance, but due to the shattered relationship and bad experiences with Poh-Poh as a teacher,[84] Jook-Liang does not dare to ask her to teach her this (31). The power relations based on her gender and her age thus impede Jook-Liang from exploring her ethnic roots as this particular type of craft is considered traditional in her background culture. The grandmother's cruelty, her inability to recover from her own trauma from the past culminates in her own granddaughter stating that "I hated the Old One" (34). Poh-Poh's artificial exertion of power hence results in a shattered relationship with Jook-Liang – she is not only "only sister" but also "only granddaughter". The comparison between her grandmother's behavior towards herself and her younger brother Sek-Lung (32) fosters Jook-Liang's impression of being unwelcome. She feels like a "distraction, a nuisance" (40) that the old lady perceives as a strain.[85] Instead of bothering her grandmother, Jook-Liang, as a result, feels the need to grow up fast, which is revealed by her statement that "when I was six, Grandmother already had me folding diapers for Sekky, and when I cried, I cried on my own" (65). The girl is, consequently, not only included in the housework at a young age but she is forced to deal with emotional obstacles on her own.

Jook-Liang's position within the family is, however, not only reinforced by her grandmother. Father's lesson about proper behavior preceding the family's friend Wong Bak's first visit illustrates the importance of social hierarchies for him: "He was an elder, so every respect must be paid to him, and *especially* as he knew the Old One herself" (11). The little girl is expected to be more easily frightened by the old man's appearance because she is young and female in contrast to her older brothers (12). While playing with her older brothers, Jook-Liang is condemned to take on the role of Jane while her brothers play Tarzan

[84] The oppression of young girls has an ethno-historical dimension and is hence connected to the family's ethnic background: Poh-Poh tells Jook-Liang stories about her kitchen assistant, whom she treated "not knowing any better […] as unkindly as she herself had been treated […]" (7) back in China. Moreover, Poh-Poh herself was accused of being useless (38). She, consequently, reproduces the multiple oppressions she experienced during her own childhood. The above-mentioned scene does not only show the questionable child rearing practices of Poh-Poh but it illustrates Poh-Poh's insecurity resulting from her own childhood, which is described in the preceding and subsequent passages as ferocious and violent. However, it is questionable in how far Poh-Poh's cruel past in China can serve as a justification for her behavior towards her own granddaughter.

[85] One could argue that the higher amount of attention paid to Sek-Lung is a result of his precarious health condition as he suffers from a severe lung infection as a child (46). Nevertheless, this does not serve as an explanation for the above-mentioned other oppressive tendencies of Jook-Liang's grandmother.

and Cheetah (13). Jane as the typical damsel in distress, who is rescued by strong Tarzan, symbolizes female passiveness. Jook-Liang describing herself as "doing nothing" in this role emphasizes this image of the helpless and passive girl accepted by the little girl. Her brothers' teasing (13-14) intensifies this impression and shows that all male family members perform these hierarchies.[86]

Jook-Liang's position as the Canadian born offspring of Chinese immigrants is another dimension of exclusion within the family. When dealing with Wong Bak's immigration papers and how the family's father can help to manipulate bureaucratic procedures to support Wong Bank, Jook-Liang's father and Poh-Poh pay careful attention not to share information with Jook-Liang because of her socialization in Canada: "No one would say anything more: a child with a Big Mouth stood beside the oak table. Big Eyes. Big Ears. Big Careless Mouth. A mouth that went to English school and spoke English words. Too many English words. Poh-Poh looked at me cautiously" (51). In this scene, Wong Bak stands out as he constantly tries to include Jook-Liang into the ongoing discussion by urging her father to "tell her" (47, 48, 50)[87] but Jook-Liang's father continually ignores the old man's plea, thereby excluding his daughter from the family secrets.[88]

All the above-mentioned experiences result in Jook-Liang not feeling loved and also feeling like an intruder in her own family. From her early childhood on, she is systematically excluded – mostly by her own grandmother, but also by the rest of the family due to her age, gender, and her mixed ethnic background. She feels rejected and she cannot even imagine how the family cared for her when she was an infant, particularly in comparison to her younger brother Sek-Lung (65). Her food preferences (similar to her role as Tarzan's Jane in need of help) reveal her temporary acceptance of this status and her ambivalent ethnic and gender identity. Her choice of particular chicken parts during a traditional dinner (11) symbolizes her inferior position because "chicken parts are allotted according to the family hierarchy: the parts requiring the most work and offering the least meat for the effort – the

[86] This behavior between the siblings is, of course, not unusual. Notwithstanding, the sequence of descriptions of the teasing following the Tarzan and Jane game emphasizes the hierarchy that places Jook-Liang into an inferior position due to her age and gender. Her brothers could also have offered their support and they could have convinced Jook-Liang that she does not need to be afraid, for instance, as the female family members: Stepmother and Poh-Poh assume that Jook-Liang will behave correctly or encourage her to stare when meeting Wong Bak for the first time (14). The equal distribution of clothes among all three siblings described later in the novel might be interpreted as a moment of equality but can also be simply explained with the weak economic situation the novel is set in (99-100).

[87] See section 6.5 for more information on Wong Bak's role for Jook-Liang's multilevel empowerment.

[88] Poh-Poh also attempts to influence the friendship that develops between Wong Bak and Jook-Liang by judging the gifts he gives to the alleged useless girl as too expensive (29). Consequently, she tries to inhibit the empowerment of Jook-Liang by Wong Bak. See section 46.5 for more information on this aspect.

wings and the feet – are left for women after the choicer parts are handed out" (Hartley 67-68). On the other hand, her imaginary meeting with Hollywood icon Shirley Temple to share a banana split "represents her desire to melt into the ideal American middle-class existence […]" (Hartley 69) with the banana symbolizing her being "white on the inside, yellow on the outside" (Hartley 70).[89] Jook-Liang's choice of food, hence, displays her identity as ambivalent in terms of gender and ethnicity. Although she tries to escape her inferior position imposed upon her due to her age and gender (see section 6.5), she also symbolically "swallows" her status. Moreover, she feels like a hybrid identity caught between her Asian heritage and her Western environment, also symbolized with the help of particular dishes. Food, consequently, serves to symbolically negotiate intersectional aspects in *The Jade Peony* as it represents social positions and identity searches strongly connected to the establishment of hierarchies.

Besides this explicit case of multiple oppression, an intersectional reading reveals further social hierarchies and power relations between the characters of *The Jade Peony* exceeding the aspects of race and ethnicity. Poh-Poh, appropriately identified as the family's autocratic matriarch by van Luven (265), for instance, does not only create hierarchies between herself and others but she establishes power relations among her grandchildren by clearly favoring one over another. By taking Sek-Lung into her arms and by ignoring Jook-Liang, the Old One manifests the siblings' different statuses (148). Moreover, she clearly prefers Jung-Sum to Jook-Liang, for example, by identifying him as different and unusual (87). In contrast to his younger sister, Jung-Sum perceives that his grandmother "gently focussed on [him], her gaze full of mystery" (88), which implies a tenderness the old lady denies Jook-Liang.

Ty's legitimate assumption that Jung-Sum's being adopted results in "another layer of otherness" (*Politics* 128) and hence leads to his exclusion from the family however proves to be false. Poh-Poh already notices Jung's distinguished character during their first meeting at a train station, when the 4-year-old was introduced to his new family: at the beginning, the family's grandmother is skeptical about her potential grandson as she complains about his weight and his inability to respond when addressed directly (89-90). Jung-Sum's sudden outburst including his claim to be able to take care of himself (90), however, convinces Poh-Poh of his potential. She then decides to adopt little Jung-Sum and treats him differently to a certain extent as she allows him to look for his deceased parents in the house (92). By ensuring a considerable amount of attention by the family for Jung and by demonstrating

[89] For more information on the intriguing role of food in *The Jade Peony*, see, for example, Ty *Politics* and Thiesen "Transkulturalismus".

physical closeness in the family's presence (107)[90], the grandmother establishes and maintains Jung-Sum's special position. With these multiple hints at Jung-Sum's outstanding potential, Choy foreshadows the character's homosexuality and the search for his sexuality elaborated on in section 6.5.[91]

While telling the story of the oldest son Kiam's birth to his younger siblings, Poh-Poh does not hide her joy and happiness about the baby's gender and its perfect condition (108). In this context, the role of a male offspring in Chinese tradition and the cultural practices following a birth are explained, which serves as an explanation for Kiam's outstanding role in the family's hierarchy. The birth of a male offspring hence results in particular cultural practices manifesting the importance of the baby's gender and presenting a basis for future power relations. Kiam's perspective is not described by himself in *The Jade Peony* so that the reader only learns second-hand about the eldest brother.[92] The siblings' descriptions correspond to Kiam's particular position due to his being the first-born son. Jung-Sum describes Kiam's role within the familial hierarchy as one connected to responsibility and heteronormative masculinity, pushed by the family itself and the Chinese community: his status as the oldest of the four siblings leads to the conclusion that

> he had to behave more like a man than a boy. Father agreed and together, he and Third Uncle taught Kiam as much as possible how to behave responsibly. Of course, he was expected to stay away from the influence of the women. Kiam belonged more and more to Father, to Third Uncle, to the men of Chinatown who knew the worth of a well-trained and well-mannered First Son. Already, at only ten years, Kiam was doing odd jobs at Third Uncle's warehouse, and he had shown an interest in helping with the careful business of entering numbers onto long sheets of paper printed with columns. Kiam made Father proud. (107-108)

This passage does not only illustrate that one's position within the familial hierarchy depends on age but that the sequence of birth is also a criterion for the establishment of power relations within a family. Moreover, it underlines the separation of male and female persons, so it creates two different spheres – one female and one male – which are not to be mingled. As a result of these expectations, however, the oldest son alienates himself from some cultural practices, which is illustrated by Kiam's indifference about his birth story and his

[90] It should be noted that the grandmother might appear inconsistent in her attitude towards Jung-Sum as she, in turn, refuses physical closeness and uses a commanding tone when he tries to overcome the trauma of his murdered parents (98). Yet, this denial can be explained as a result of Jung-Sum pushing away his stepmother, who wants to comfort him (98), so the grandmother's behavior can be interpreted rather as a reaction to the little boy's needs than as her inability to tolerate physical closeness.

[91] This foreshadowing continues with Poh-Poh comparing her grandson to the *yin* principle usually considered as female in traditional Chinese mythology (88). See section 6.5 for more information on this aspect.

[92] However, Choy's novel *All That Matters* from 2004 focuses on the perspective of the oldest brother. While providing much background information to his novel *The Jade Peony*, Choy includes numerous motifs and themes from *The Jade Peony* and additionally provides insights into Kiam's inner conflicts, his status as first-born son and the consequences of this status.

generally negative attitude towards tales and the belief in supernatural beings (109, 187). Due to his position as first-born son, Kiam is expected to spend his time with responsibilities related to business.[93] Paradoxically, despite his refusal to perform the cultural practices he is confronted with by parts of his family, he adheres to the hierarchy that is established within his family and fulfills his position as he is a "part of a homogenous authority, a male world of work" (Hartley 62-63) separated from the female sphere.

Kiam's superior position within the siblings' hierarchy is not only fostered by his familial environment but he establishes and maintains his position himself. He aims, for instance, to educate his younger brother. By referring to the alleged male ability to endure pain and to have physical strength, seven-year-old Kiam puts himself in a superior position to his younger brother. Aiming to be his coach (93), Kiam creates an imbalanced power relation by reproducing gender stereotypes related to heteronormative masculinity – he is the teacher and his little brother is the student. The frequent use of the pejorative term "sissy" (93), which is associated with a male person who is rumored to stereotypically behave in a female manner, underlines the demarcation from the alleged female sphere. Moreover, the oldest brother adds a third level to this power relation by putting his absent sister in an inferior position in relation to the two male siblings: "His baby sister Liang did not count for much […]" (93).[94] His later adherence to responsibility (including the care for his younger brother), his refusal of Chinese traditions, and his superior position merge when Jung-Sum describes that "Kiam did not want me to grow up taking in too much of what he considered the Old One's superstitions about fate and jealous gods. 'Just Old China village nonsense,' he assured me, sounding more like Third Uncle than he realized" (122). Sek-Lung's description confirms Jung-Sum's impression: Kiam creates, similar to Poh-Poh and Jook-Liang, a dichotomy between China and Canada by characterizing Canada as a "scientific, logical world" (167) and as "modern" (184), which he contrasts with the "illogical stuff" (184) he associates with Chinese culture. Sek-Lung realizes the kind of natural superiority his brothers feel towards him because of their age: Kiam is 15 and Jung-Sum is twelve (148) when Sek-Lung is only six years old, which means that their interests differ considerably. The youngest brother's lung infection and the resulting, long absence from school additionally contributes to the hierarchies between him and his siblings (176). Kiam, in his

[93] Whether this denies Kiam the empowerment which his siblings experience due to the tales and stories they learn about (see section 6.5), is an interesting research question for the novel *All That Matters*.

[94] This utterance does not only illustrate the supposed superior position of the two male brothers towards their sister, but it also depicts again the multiple oppression Jook-Liang is confronted with in her own family as the two brothers do not regard her as equal due to her age and gender emphasized by the formulation "baby sister" in the above-mentioned quote.

role as the responsible oldest brother, tries to support his youngest brother in mastering the complex Chinese kinship terms but both agree that "these rankings […] they're more confusing than Confucius!" (149), hence leaving the unfamiliar reader with the complexity of Chinese kinship terms but with a good portion of wordplay and humor. With increasing age and the birth of his younger brother Sek-Lung, Jung-Sum rises within the siblings' hierarchy as he himself becomes a supervisor by coaching his younger brother in physical self-defense (194, 198). Sek-Lung, in turn, realizes these internal hierarchies and illustrates once more the inferior role of his sister in contrast to her brothers: "I had always been glad I was not a girl-child" (220).

Besides gender, age, and sequence of birth, the adherence to specific cultural traditions presents another axis of conflict contributing to the establishment of internal family hierarchies. Poh-Poh represents the embodiment of the so-called "old ways": she personifies cultural traditions related to China illustrated in the novel with the help of aspects such as language, medicine, religious beliefs, food, or stories. As a result of her strong identification with her Chinese background, she creates a dichotomy between China and Canada with China being culturally superior: "Grandmama was always telling me [Sek-Lung] that Old China had bigger and better things than anything in Canada" (155). The reiteration of the antonyms "old" and "new" by all the characters in the course of the novel "serves as a reminder of the binary assumptions that lay claim to the identities of [Choy's] characters" (Tara Lee 79), so it expresses their hybrid ethnic identities on a formal level. Instead of accepting the multiple differences, the family's grandmother thus creates a binary opposition between the two cultures of the nation states and puts China in a superior position.

In contrast to her identity strongly shaped by her Chinese background[95], the family's father attempts to adhere to what he identifies as Canadian standards: "Father knew these [traditional Chinese] sayings but wanted to be more modern" (117). Like his son Kiam, he

[95] Interestingly, Poh-Poh is not depicted as consistent as the reader might expect: after her death, Sek-Lung discovers a shelf full of his grandmother's herbs and other dried pieces. His meticulously detailed enumeration of each individual ingredient connected to his sensual memory ends with the deadpan note "And a small tin of Bayer Aspirin" (223). This sudden ironic and humorous crack between a sensual exploration of Chinese medicine so rich in detail in contrast to a short remark on the existence of Western medicine in Poh-Poh's room deconstructs the appearance of the grandmother's identity as monodimensional, as authentically Chinese (see below). In this context, Ty also interprets Poh-Poh's suggested simplification of terms for Chinese kinship relations in Canada (6) as an inconsistency in her ethnic identity (*Politics* 119). Considering the grandmother's establishment of the dichotomy of Self and Other (or, more accurately, of self and "white demon") in terms of the relationship to the Caucasian Canadian majority (see chapter 6.3), this interpretation indeed is debatable as the simplification can also be regarded as a means to avoid unearthing the truth concerning the falsification of papers and the forgery of kinship relations. Hence, this simplification can also be interpreted as a device to segregate from the Caucasian Canadian majority and to keep the Chinatown secrets within her community and family.

creates a dichotomy between modern Canada and antiquated China. Furthermore, Father's inability to remember and hence to retell the origin of one particular saying and disparaging it as "just old poetry" (117) depicts his estrangement from his cultural background (see 139, 140, 141 for further examples). Despite his explicit preference for Canadian culture, Father presents an example of sitting on the fence, of being caught between two cultures because "though he knew better, Father saw each of his three sons as Confucian scholars, as if his B.C.-Chinatown boys could reflect the Old China he himself remembered as a child" (214). He wants his sons to develop equal cultural bonds to their ethnic heritage and their Western home (167) but he both performs his ethnic heritage and denounces it at the same time.[96] In the course of the novel, more incidents depict Father's allegiance to his Chinese ethnic identity as he adheres to the social hierarchies established by Poh-Poh, which unmasks his inconsistent character related to his ethnic identity: "[…] because of her age, the wiry ancient lady was the one person Father never permit any of us to defy" (147). This again fosters the grandmother's role as head of the family (see also 67 for another example of Father accepting Poh-Poh's exertion of power within the family) but it also illustrates that *Chineseness* as a heterogeneous concept is subject to negotiation. Indeed in another context but not less applicable for the character of Father, Lee tellingly concludes that Choy "challenges essentialist, ahistorical notions of ethnicity, treating it instead as a term that is comprised, hybridized, and lacking in authenticity" (Christopher Lee 24).[97]

His wife, Stepmother, shows similar character traits. Her continuous glorification of her friend Suling, who "once won a prize for her English" (154, see also 158 for another example) reads as a tragicomic manifestiation of her bonds to her Chinese background: one passage does not only inform the reader about the tragic death of Stepmother's childhood friend but the readership also learns that Stepmother's stories of her friend's language abilities are far more exaggerated than expected as her friend's dedication in the Bible is full of mistakes (160). Stepmother similarly creates a hierarchy between Canadian and Chinese people (159): the postman's compliment on Sek-Lung's smartness is immediately rejected by her as she devalues English smartness in comparison to its Chinese counterpart, which corresponds to Poh-Poh's cultural hierarchy of the two cultures. Contrary to Stepmother's

[96] Hafner describes this trait of Father's character more positively: she interprets his ethnic indecisiveness as a purposeful recognition of himself and his sons as transcultural identities (Hafner 51). Father's inability to accept different images of Chineseness and to side with his wife (see below) evoke a different notion.

[97] Another example offered by Lee is Stepmother's friend Suling, who is repudiated by her family in China due to her Christian belief (Christopher Lee 24). Hafner, in this context, recognizes the different images of Chineseness of Stepmother and Poh-Poh during a discussion on how to raise Sek-Lung properly and even meaningfully identifies moments of Stepmother's resistance to the grandmother's interpretation of Chineseness (149-150; Hafner 50).

adherence to Chinese culture, she blames Sek-Lung for his grandmother's apparitions (185-186, see also below). Moreover, she empathetically hides the secret relationship between the Chinese neighbor Meiying and her Japanese Canadian boyfriend Kazuo in times of harsh discrimination against the Japanese community (256, 259-260, 264, 271-273, see also 6.3). Considering her adherence to Chinese culture, both examples show her inconsistency in terms of ethnic identity, her version of Chineseness, which probably also results from her inferior position within the familial hierarchy: the first name of the family's stepmother is never revealed in the novel and even Sekky, her biological child, uses the term "Stepmother" to refer to his mother.[98] Consequently, she is permanently considered as an outsider, as not being the biological mother of the family. Moreover, an individual identity is denied to her as she is only characterized through her function within the family network, which is underlined by the capitalization of the term "Stepmother" indicating that it replaces her individual name.[99] Stepmother's status as a second(-class) wife is strengthened by Poh-Poh, who uses means such as code-switching to establish and maintain the hierarchy regarding Stepmother (see, for instance, 8, 76, 147, 150, 153, 227-228). The conflicts with Father, every now and then, provide a hint at Stepmother's suppressed frustration about her inferior status within the family and the couple's estrangement from each other over differences concerning child rearing practices due to their ethnic background (see, for example, 156, 226). At the end of the novel, her outbreak demonstrates her emotional pain due to her husband's silence (272-273). Stepmother's escape into her past with her friend Suling and Sek-Lung's impression of his mother "as if she were stranded on an island" (153) underline her isolation in her own family (Ty *Politics* 127). Her double muteness hence consists of her position within the familial hierarchy but is also due to the conception of the novel as it does not offer her perspective on a narratological level (Ty *Politics* 127).[100] Her character being silenced, in this case, is not only a result of her ethnic background but also of her gender and her age, considering the fact that Poh-Poh is the head of the family.

[98] Lee misidentifies this as a form of subordination to the Canadian law against polygamy (Christopher Lee 20). As the first wife of the family's father is deceased, Father would probably not violate any law with a second marriage.

[99] The same applies to the name of Father, who is also defined by his position in the family without an individual name, similar to the family's father and mother in Fu's novel. Besides the use of this means to create hierarchies and to illustrate power relations, this strategy might enable readers to identify easily with the figures: due to the lack of individuality, Father, for example, can be regarded as a type character allowing for identification by some readers because he illustrates inner conflicts related to migration and child rearing practices. These experiences can probably be considered as global human issues in migration contexts.

[100] Ty's characterization of the family's household as patriarchal (*Politics* 127), in this context, does not seem adequate. As mentioned above, Poh-Poh is the initiator of these strict social hierarchies with Father complying (partly) with her matriarchal regime.

These fundamentally differing attitudes concerning Chinese traditions and Western standards, these different interpretations of Chineseness within the family provoke a discussion between the siblings about integration and assimilation, which reveals the differences between the siblings: whereas Jung-Sum, "still belonged with Poh-Poh, belonged to her stories and her ghosts, just as Liang and Sekky did" (141), his older brother Kiam thinks about renaming himself with an English name (140). The adverb "still", in this context, implies a continuity that will end at an unspecified point in the future. Its use indicates to the reader that the attitude of the younger siblings will most certainly change with increasing age, which establishes a link between ethnic identity and increasing age in *The Jade Peony*. This link, however, will be deconstructed by the character of Sek-Lung as he learns, at an early stage, about the constructed character of ethnicity and thus of ethnic boundaries and inequality.

Sek-Lung, or Sekky[101], is the youngest brother, whose perspective dominates the novel. The six-year-old boy suffers from familial exclusion because of his inability to correctly use Chinese kinship terms, indicating not only a "misidentification of [an] uncle, but, more importantly, of the self" (Christopher Lee 20) in social hierarchies. Especially Stepmother continuously loses her patience with his multiple failures to address a person properly and, similar to Poh-Poh's judgement of Jook-Liang, she characterizes him as "mo no" (145, see also 156) meaning "brainless". His linguistic agency within the family is thus clipped due to his scarce abilities in the Chinese language.

His inability to understand Chinese provokes a comparison of Chinese dialects to "hissing snakes and growling lions" (230). The comparison to wild animals might hint at Sek-Lung identifying strongly with Canadian culture and a corresponding colonial perspective as this symbolism might imply to a certain degree an uncivilized nature and a notion of othering. Sek-Lung's apparently innocent question about his ethnic belonging, however, results in the explanation of his living between two cultures:

> I knew just enough Chinese and English to speak to people, but not always to understand the finer points; worse, each language was mixed in with a half-dozen Chinatown dialects. I never possessed enough details, in either language, to understand how our family, how the countless cousins, in-laws, aunts and uncles, came to be related […] English words seemed more forthright to me, blunt, like road signs. Chinese words were awkward and messy, like quicksand. I preferred English but there were no English words

[101] This nickname derives from his teacher in elementary school because she considered it to be "more Canadian" (146). Ms. MacKinney's renaming suggests, in this context, a colonial attitude, creating hierarchies based on the assumption that a person is part of a superior culture with the "other" culture being in need of education and civilization (see the subsequent chapter for more information on this aspect). His siblings, however, adopt this nickname (see, for instance, 151) and Sek-Lung is the only one of the characters with an English version of his name (Rocio G. Davis "Novella Cycle" 206).

> to match the Chinese perplexities. I sometimes wished that my skin would turn white, my hair go brown, my eyes widen and turn blue, and Mr. and Mrs. O'Connor next door would adopt me and I would be Jack O'Connor's little brother [...] Everything was a puzzle to me. Everyone an enigma. (150-151)

This passage illustrates that his cultural belonging is linked to aspects such as language competence and cultural knowledge related to kinship terms and history. Due to his linguistic failures and his inability to master kinship terms, he is excluded from his own family, which is again demonstrated by his mother's reaction that he "will never get things right" (151). In his contribution, Christopher Lee wisely elaborates on Sekky's assumed lack of Chineseness, with *Chineseness* being defined by his family (and the Chinese community) as a "heavily ethnicized space" (Christopher Lee 20) resulting in the inferior position Sek-Lung perceives.

His non-belonging and his explicit exclusion provoke a rebellious outbreak in which Sek-Lung finally openly identifies as one of the so-called demons via a racist utterance: "My *huhng-moh gui*, my red-haired demon friend, says if you drop a plate in a restaurant, a dozen Chinks will answer" (158). Similar to his plan to whistleblow Suling's real identity (155), he paradoxically again "draws upon the racist conditions of his environment to empower himself" (Christopher Lee 24) by (ab)using Canadianness to resist Chineseness. His preference for English[102] and his wish to change his status as a member of a visible minority (see also 154, 158) seems a logical conclusion from this constant exclusion, not only from his own family but also from his alleged ethnic community (see also chapter 6.3).

Sek-Lung finally explains, in the last part of the novel, the family hierarchies themselves and their importance to the reader. He diagnoses that "every Chinese person […] had an enigmatic status, an order of power and respect, mysteriously attached to him or her" (147), thereby illustrating the role of hierarchies in his domestic environment. He also explains the dependence of a particular title on the age of the respective person (148-149), which again emphasizes the role of age for the establishment of social hierarchies. Sek-Lung hence explores with the reader the complexity of power relations within his own family and "his problem with misnaming his relatives [that] challenges the hierarchical nature of the family" (Rocio G. Davis "Novella Cycle" 208-209) as his inability and confusion leads to the assumption that he is not familiar with the domestic power dynamics at work.

Generally, Sek-Lung feels left alone by his family – be it because of their work (154) or due to the exclusionary tendencies mentioned above. The only exception within his family surprisingly is his grandmother. Despite her excluding the little boy from family secrets

[102] This is also illustrated in the fact that Sek-Lung, despite their close relationship, calls his grandmother "Grandmama" in contrast to the other family members, who refer to her as "the Old One" or "Poh-Poh" (see, for instance, 162).

(148) and his failures to internalize Chinese cultural practices, Sek-Lung is not considered *mo yung* as his sister but Poh-Poh takes care of him (154). They secretly communicate about family issues, meaning that Sek-Lung is warned of upcoming trouble (166). As a result, he establishes an extraordinarily close relationship to his grandmother, also because she has spent most of her time with him from his birth on (163). For instance, by teaching him to craft windchimes (167-168), Poh-Poh helps little Sek-Lung to gain access to his Chinese heritage. His detailed and long descriptions (168-170) depict his fascination for this type of handicraft work. Both the secret crafting and the preceding search for trash to recycle in the neighborhood, disapproved of by the other family members, bonds grandson and grandmother. Poh-Poh, having been characterized before as dismissive, embraces her youngest grandchild "and for a moment, the whole world seemed perfect" (166). Moreover, this relationship also depicts their agreement on their version of Chineseness. Due to his strong bonds with her, Poh-Poh's death presents a deep incision in the little boy's life. Regarded by Sek-Lung as a reward for his faith, the little boy interprets several occurrences as the presence of his deceased grandmother – his family, on the other hand, simply refers to them as "incidents" and provides rational explanations for a door swinging shut, for example (179) or derides Sek-Lung's interpretations (181). Father, with his eldest son, explains to his family "how we must all change, be modern, move forward, throw away the old" (185), thereby excluding once more his youngest son, who is afraid of being laughed at because of his grandmother's visitations (185). In this context, he again evokes the inner conflict that still splits the family: "No one wanted to believe me, though no one really wanted to doubt me either, for the world of Chinatown was the world of *what if*…" (180). Paradoxically, the parents try to cure their allegedly traumatized son with traditional Chinese medicine (182) but eventually, the family grew accustomed to Sek-Lung's obsession with his grandmother (183). Sek-Lung resigning himself to not telling his family anymore about his grandmother's appearances[103] (187) or his conversations with her (205) precedes a traditional farewell ceremony illustrating again the family's differences concerning identity: whereas his parents adhere to Chinese cultural traditions related to a death, his siblings are ashamed of their parents' behavior: "What would white people in Vancouver think of us? We were Canadians now, *Chinese-Canadians*, a hyphenated reality that our parents could

[103] See Jung for a reasonable analysis of ghosts in Choy's work: he explains, for example, the symbolism of ghosts as relating to the ambivalent identity of migrants and the fear of losing one's cultural background in diasporic contexts, which corresponds to the depiction of the characters in *The Jade Peony*. The ghost of Poh-Poh as representative of Chinese cultural practices, for example, can hence be regarded as Sek-Lung being haunted by his ethnic background (Jung 63).

never accept" (162, see also 164-165 for another example).[104] Thus, surprisingly, the family's youngest child, Canadian-born and conceptualized as an ethnic alien within his own family, adheres in this situation to traditional Chinese belief and teaches the family about the presence of death. Sek-Lung's strong belief in his grandmother's apparition minimizes "the division between the older and the younger generation, between the Old World and the New World […]" (Ty *Politics* 122). Therefore, this superstitious belief transgresses the hierarchies based on age as this aspect serves to blur generational, hence age differences. It also shows the interpretative character of Chineseness as a concept as Sek-Lung transforms from an ethnic alien to the preserver of Chinese cultural practices, which, in turn, provokes conflicts and exclusion as his interpretation once again does not correspond to that of the family.

In summary, Choy's novel *The Jade Peony* illustrates multiple instances of social hierarchies within a family. First, readers learn about intersecting modes of oppression in a narrow sense with the example of Jook-Liang, who is put into an inferior position within the family because of her age and her gender. An intersectionally informed reading reveals all power relations between the different family members as complex, interdependent networks based on social categories such as gender, age, birth sequence and different interpretations of Chineseness. The characters' multiple inner conflicts within the novel do not necessarily provoke a transcultural resolution, but *The Jade Peony* depicts the resulting social hierarchies within an ethnic community during the characters' different identity searches. Before discussing the implications of the formal level for these findings in section 6.4., the broader social context, i.e. the Chinese community and encounters with the Caucasian Canadian majority will be covered in the following section.

6.3. Social Inequality in a Broader Context

As mentioned above, social hierarchies in the literary works in focus are not only negotiated within a domestic circle restricted to the close family but the characters also interact with a social environment outside of this familial context. When considering these various encounters, an intersectional reading helps to grasp the understanding of social hierarchies that mirror the family context in terms of social dimensions at play or that might deconstruct these hierarchies and illustrate a different image. In Choy's work *The Jade Peony*, the

[104] In this context, the inner conflict of Father and Stepmother becomes apparent again: they understand their children's concern and agree that grandmother's behavior is not appropriate in their new home but they are not able to tell her as she is superior in hierarchy due to her age (165). Especially Father seems to be caught between his home culture and the one he immigrated to as he tries to adhere to Western practices but also respects his mother's wish by hanging her windchime in her window after her death (172) or the fact that he is not able to understand and talk in English (173).

broader social context can be further divided into the Chinese community and the (social) environment outside of this community.

The oppression of young female family members is not only negotiated regarding Poh-Poh and Jook-Liang in the domestic context. Several instances illustrate the superior position of male offspring within the enclosed Chinese community. Jook-Liang, for example, recognizes the richness of gifts for Sekky's birth and the lack of attention she herself suffers from in comparison to her grandmother and mother during the festivities after the baby's birth (27). It is the combination of her young age and her gender that results in less attention by the Chinese community. The interdependence of age and gender is accompanied by the separation of male and female spheres, which is demonstrated in Gee Sook's dry cleaner's store. While Jung-Sum tries on a reworked coat in a scene similar to an initiation ritual[105], Gee Sook "grandly announces [that all women should stay back as] this is a man's coat" (112). Jung-Sum describes that he feels "like a young warrior receiving the gift of his bright armour, a steely-grey coat born from fire and steam" (112) and the coat fits with "military precision" (112). It is not only the reincarnation of Jung-Sum's coat but it is also his own reincarnation as a man, which Jung-Sum experiences with joy, pride and, eventually, the feeling of being reborn (113-114).[106] Here, similar to Audrey's female clothing in Kim Fu's novel, the coat presents an agency providing tool that reincarnates Jung-Sum as a member of the male community. The comparison to aspects related to the army emphasizes the male sphere this scene is situated in. However, the reference to fire and steam is ambiguous as, on the one hand, it refers to military jargon but it also reminds the reader of the location, namely the dry cleaner's, which ironizes this initiation ritual to a certain extent.

The transmission of heteronormative masculinity in the Chinese community, which is linked to the separation of male and female spheres, is also illustrated with the destiny of Frank Yuen. Suffering from the early loss of his mother, Frank is taught by his abusive drunkard father "how to survive, how to fight, how to labour in the mills, how to avoid bad luck" (120). Frank is taught to value physical strength, hard work and Chinese traditions, implying heteronormative masculinity, identification with the working class and his ethnic background. This illustrates not only the complexity of an individual's self-identity, but it also depicts the interdependence of the various dimensions an identity consists of. This space

[105] Due to its origin in a shop on Caucasian Canadian territory in Vancouver (102) and its reworking with the label "Genuine British" (112), the coat also symbolizes an "act of defiance towards the British Vancouver establishment" (Lorre 76) and, therefore, presents a means of reversing the social hierarchies between Chinese Canadians and Caucasian Canadians in Vancouver.

[106] See also Ty *Politics* for further information on the role of clothing for the characters' transformations in *The Jade Peony*.

of heteronormative masculinity is also represented in Sek-Lung's social environment: having been taught how to fight by his elder brothers, Sek-Lung adopts the same heteronormative world as his brothers by valuing physical strength (198) and by playing war games related to weapons and death (216-218).

Jung-Sum also suffers from exclusion due to his age and resulting lack of experience: at the age of ten, he is considered spoiled and weak by older Chinese from the community because he did not have to work as a child which is indicated by his undamaged hands (76). Scars, bruises, and calloused skin as indicators of strength and hard work equal experience, which serves as a basis for social hierarchies in the Chinese community. Due to his lack of experience, older people do not take him seriously and comment "No work, no will" (76) to Jung-Sum's father. Ten-year-old Jung-Sum thus feels his inferior position in the social hierarchy within the Chinese community due to his age and his lack of work experience, i.e. his non-belonging to the social working class. The value of hard work and hence the role of the working class is stressed again in Jung-Sum's description "when Liang and I were younger, the Old One had often taken us with her to show us how hard [the dry cleaner's owner] Gee Sok had to work to earn a living" (104), indicating that the affiliation to this social class is also important for the protagonists' family.

Being Canadian-born additionally results in a problematic position for some of these children, which is illustrated with Jook-Liang and Sek-Lung: as mentioned in chapter 6.2., Jook-Liang is excluded from family secrets because her parents and her grandmother are afraid of her accidentally revealing the false identities of Chinese people. In their family, Sek-Lung is treated, similar to his sister, as a potential traitor by the Chinese community "for we were *mo no* children. Children with no Old China history in our brains" (152) because they were

> born "neither this nor that", neither Chinese nor Canadian, born without understanding the boundaries, born *mo no* – no brain. *Mo nos* went to English school and mixed with Demon-outsiders, and even liked *them*. Wanted to invite *them* home. Sometimes a *mo no* might say one careless word too many, and the Immigration Demon would pounce. One careless word – perhaps because a *mo no* girl or a *mo no* boy was showing off – and the Immigration Demons would come in the middle of the night, bang on the family door, demand a show of a pile of documents with red embossed stamps. Then the Immigration Demons would separate family members and ask trick questions. Then certain "family" members would disappear. Households would be broken up. Jobs would be lost. Jail and shame and suicides would follow. (152-153)[107]

[107] It is interesting to note that these worries are not unfounded as Sek-Lung plans to reveal his mother's girlhood friend Suling's false identity in order to take vengeance for his mother's stories about her perfect competences in all areas (155). Sek-Lung's inability to fully grasp the faked family relations indeed do not hinder him from instrumentalizing them.

This passage is striking as it depicts a constant othering on two levels: first, the Chinese community strictly segregates itself from Caucasian Canadians, who are explicitly demonized. As a result of this demonization, the Chinese community excludes Canadian-born children, who lack the necessary cultural knowledge to understand, and to participate in, the othering of the Caucasian Canadian majority. With Jook-Liang and Sek-Lung both experiencing this othering in different social contexts, one can conclude that these attitudes from the Chinese community are reproduced within the family and vice versa. The above mentioned inability of Sek-Lung to properly address his kin (see section 6.2.) is strongly connected to this aspect as he is regarded as a potential, even if unintended, traitor concerning the false family relationships. His family's continuous teaching shows that "ethnicity acts as a disciplinary tool that mediates the relationship between the [Chinese] individual and the power elite [of the Caucasian Canadian majority]" (21) as Christopher Lee accurately states. Cultural practices related to Sekky's ethnic background hence serve as a means in order to maintain the segregation from the white Canadian majority. Ethnicity is, consequently, not only a part of an individual identity but its performance additionally acts as a means of maintaining social hierarchies and the disjunctive tendencies related to them.

His grandmother's inclusion of Sekky in the ritual preparations of her death during her lifetime causes the young boy to believe in her visitations (177-182). His belief in her presence after her death, however, does not cause the final resolution in the form of including Sek-Lung into the community, but it provokes incessant chatter, specific recommendations and communal pity for his family (178, 181). Third Uncle's utterance and his accusing Father of forgetting his cultural heritage eventually provoke a final ceremony for grandmother Poh-Poh, with the neighborhood and a geomancer as spiritual assistance being present (189-190). However, Sek-Lung insists on a second ceremony as Poh-Poh still visits him and Mrs. Lim. The family's behavior also arouses accusations, for instance by the neighbor and friend of Poh-Poh, Mrs. Lim[108], who states "'If only your Father had asked [a geomancer] for advice about your Grandmother's burial,' Mrs. Lim shook her head, 'Poh-Poh wouldn't be bothering you now'" (189). In this context, the multiple versions of Chineseness of different individuals collide and cause discussion within the family and the community. Having been excluded due to his complete lack of Chineseness before, however,

[108] Mrs. Lim, in turn, presents another form of Chineseness. Similar to the family's grandmother, she is a preserver of the so-called "old ways" (218, 223, 232, 255) and participates in othering Caucasian Canadians (251). This superficially authentic image of Chineseness, however, is disturbed by her use of aspirin to complement Chinese medical treatment (109).

Sekky's final discovery and his interpretation of Chineseness does not release him from the social exclusion both within his family and the community.

With the historical reference to the second Sino-Japanese War, Choy illustrates another dimension of power relations and social hierarchy by negotiating the demonization and the corresponding ethnic discrimination of Japanese in Vancouver by the Chinese (see, for instance, 196, 226, 229, 254, 260, 264, 268).[109] The family's children have absorbed both rumors and hatred, and systematically exclude children of Japanese background at school (225-227, 252, 264).[110] Narrator Sekky's use of the term "tale" to describe the information circulating in Chinatown (225), however, indicates that the adult narrator is able to retrospectively reflect on these pieces of information and classify them as rumors. With the portrayal of Stepmother's multiple objections and her worries (196, 225, 260, 264) in this context, Choy indeed remains consistent in his depiction of the figures as multidimensional (and sometimes even paradoxical), referring again to the fluidity of ethnicity by Stepmother's refusal to show the expected solidarity with the Chinese community. The Romeo and Julia-like relationship between Mrs. Lim's foster daughter Meiying and the Japanese Canadian Kazuo, however, changes the level of this topic from a fact-oriented historical reference to an individual, more personal one. Having secluded himself from his family after Poh-Poh's death because "with Grandma gone, everyone was my enemy" (223), Sek-Lung establishes a friendship with the older Meiying. Being hostile to his family on purpose (224) and expecting odious Mrs. Lim to take care of him after school,[111] Sek-Lung surprisingly learns that he does not have to do housework he considers female[112] and that Mrs. Lim's daughter Meiying[113] is in charge of him. Despite his aversion to girls, Sek-Lung likes Meiying because she breaks the hierarchies he is used to: she calls him Sekky, as his friends do, brings him and his sister Liang sweets when she visits, does not interrogate him about school (238) or correct him when he tells her a story (250) and she accepts his using

[109] This is not depicted as a one sided discrimination in *The Jade Peony*, which Choy illustrates with the reaction of Kazuo's friends to Meiying's presence (245-246) – the Japanese likewise exclude Chinese people.
[110] Sek-Lung describes not only physical violence against Japanese children but also how he was sometimes thought to be Japanese due to his looks (227). This hints at the generalization of Asian people and the negation of Asia as a heterogeneous continent (see also Ty *Politics* 130).
[111] The hatred and unwillingness to be entrusted in Mrs. Lim's care is illustrated with the detailed description of Sek-Lung's arrival at her house for his first afternoon there: he compares his arrival with a war and he seems ready to fight (232-234).
[112] This presents another manifestation of the heteronormative atmosphere in the family: preparation of food and cooking are considered "all the womanly tasks [Mrs. Lim] and Grandmama, Stepmother and Liang used to do together in our kitchen: now I had inherited the labour. I was to spend eternity shelling, washing, sorting, chopping…never to see daylight again […] My mouth went dry; my teeth tasted of chalk" (236).
[113] Running down the assumed precarious stairs of Mrs. Lim's house behind Meiying presents another instance of hierarchy: "if a girl isn't afraid" (237) of these stairs, then Sek-Lung has to run as fast as she does. This places females in the stereotyped position of being tentative, less willing to take a risk and avoiding danger.

her English name "May" (238). Moreover, she does not behave like the typical girl Sekky is used to, but breaks the dichotomy between the male and female sphere in Sekky's universe because "she runs like Second Brother Jung […] I wished she were a boy" (239) and she impresses Sekky with her deep knowledge about weapons (240) and comics (250). Sekky "soon forgot she was really just a girl who was babysitting [him]" (250).[114] Regarded as the idealization of Chineseness by the community (Hafner 62-63) due to her superficial conformity and despite her status as an adopted child (238-239), Meiying therefore surprises Sek-Lung and the reader with her own interpretation of Chineseness with the deconstruction of gender and age borders. Her narratological muteness is similar to that of Stepmother and it underlines the inferior positions she attempts to liberate herself from.

Yet, the most striking boundary Meiying crosses is the one related to the exclusion of the Japanese by the Chinese: by crossing spatial borders from Chinatown to Little Tokyo and thus entering "enemy territory" (242), she introduces Sek-Lung to her Japanese Canadian boyfriend and causes the young boy to reflect his hatred and the alleged impermeability of spatial and social settings. Sekky uses military jargon by comparing himself to a soldier while analyzing the situation (243-245) at the beginning, but he quickly realizes that the Japanese are not as different as assumed: "I had to remind myself that they were the enemy" (243). With the young boy's constantly reminding himself of this while he compares Meiying's boyfriend Kazuo to a Chinese soldier (244) or admiring the Japanese baseball game in the park (245), Choy calls into question the social constructedness of racial and ethnic differences (Ty *Politics* 131) and hence of the resulting social hierarchies based on race and ethnicity. Sek-Lung's first meeting with the alleged enemy leaves him confused: "I was thrilled to have met the enemy, yet still so reluctantly dazzled by their baseball skills that I found myself tongue-tied and mostly silent" (247). Sek-Lung immediately realizes that Meiying is infringing the unspoken rule of staying within the Chinese community – in both a literal and figurative sense: "If Chinatown found out, Meiying would be cursed and shamed publicly as a traitor; she would surely be beaten up, perhaps branded with a red-hot iron until her flesh smoked and flamed" (255); but he does not betray her. The couple's meetings in the space between Chinatown and Little Tokyo at times mark "the arbitrariness of boundaries and the possibility of slippage" (Hartley 77) as it illustrates the proximity and shared space of the Chinese and Japanese communities. Instead of identifying Chinatown with its fixed,

[114] His fear of being seen with a girl by his friends (239) and his assumption of her being obtuse due to her gender (242), however, illustrates that little Sek-Lung is still caught in the heteronormative masculine sphere he has been socialized in.

ethnic-related cultural practices as a "liminal discursive space" as Davis argues (Rocio G. Davis "Backdaire" 94; Rocio G. Davis "Diaspora Space" 132), it is rather the space in-between that proves to be a threshold for Sekky's ethnic identity. The spatial setting thus underlines the constructed character of the hierarchies established between Chinese and Japanese in Vancouver and it symbolically depicts the closeness of the two communities. Sekky's continuous comparison to a war-like situation with Little Tokyo as a "war zone" (248) obviously mirrors the atmosphere of the time as he describes riots of white men in Little Tokyo (248).[115] Despite this atmosphere, Sekkys' trips evoke his thinking about Kazuo and the racism he has experienced in these encounters: Kazuo's Japanese friends, for example, chased them away (245-246) and Meiying has obviously been a victim of physical violence, probably because of her boyfriend (265), which illustrates the means of disciplining an unruly subject in the different communities. Sek-Lung learns more about the racism against the Japanese in his own environment when secretly visiting Kazuo in the park of the Japanese community with Meiying (253-254). Torn between the instilled racism, his mistrust of Kazuo and his sympathy for Meiying, the little boy observes the secret relationship between the Chinese girl and her Japanese boyfriend with curiosity and fascination but still views the Japanese as his enemies (262-263). Foreshadowing Meiying's pregnancy with her "queasy stomach" and "some kind of flu" (265, 271), Sek-Lung recognizes some kind of conspiracy between his Stepmother and his babysitter (267), which Hafner effectively summarizes as Stepmother challenging "the hierarchies of gender in the Chinese community and her husband's authority" (67). During the last meeting between Kazuo and Meiying, Sek-Lung falls back into his heteronormative attitude and his aggression against Japanese: crying Meiying "made me think how weak girls were, just like everyone said. I started to concentrate on the enemy boy across from me" (269) but this impression is deconstructed immediately by Kazuo, who also cries: "I was shocked: how could a grown man *cry* over a girl?" (270). Her death[116] with "two long knitting needles glinting between Meiying's legs" (275) marks the climax of the war between the Chinese and the Japanese with Meiying rather risking dying than to endure the shame of giving birth

[115] He wonders at the same time why the Chinese community did not join the white rioters and describes past riots in San Francisco's Chinatown (248), which illustrates racism against Chinese on the one hand but also the aim of the Chinese community to stay among themselves and to exclude other ethnicities.

[116] In this context, the reaction of the ambulance men is interesting as it illustrates in a side note the attitude towards Chinese Canadians in Vancouver: "One of the ambulance men seemed gruff, as if we were unclean, as if the task was crazy, climbing up those two rickety flights of stairs" (275). The constant subliminal racism does not remain unnoticed as Mrs. Lim states before their arrival "We are Chinese; they take their time" (276).

to an illegitimate child of a Japanese Canadian father.[117] The abortion of the unborn child as a symbol of ethnic connection represents the failure to completely deconstruct the boundaries between the Chinese and the Japanese (Christopher Lee 30). Stepmother's conspiracy with her youngest son and her preceding outbreak about her status within the family (see chapter 6.2.) seem to lead Sek-Lung to finally call her "Mother" (276) and to eventually put her in the social position that was denied to her for years. The jade peony (276), once given to him by his grandmother, the advocate of the old ways, and which serves as the title of the novel, symbolizes this shift in social hierarchy. This ornamental piece of jewelry presents the materialization of the past and the Chinese ethnic background as a "ghosted object" (Jung 66) because of the magic it contains (164, 169). The jade peony and its handing down to Sek-Lung's mother thus symbolizes the transgression of temporal borders, from the past to the present, strongly connected to the family's Chinese heritage as a "preserved cultural inheritance" (Jung 73), and the transgression of the preceding, firmly established hierarchies within the family.

Contact with the Caucasian Canadian population is scarce and limited to medical treatment and school affairs. The othering by the Vancouver Medical Officer who visits little Sek-Lung is demonstrated by his implicit questioning the use of tiger balm. The othering by the Chinese family is illustrated, on the other hand, by Father using his broken English "that he used with white authorities" (175). In this scene, the doctor sees the family in an inferior position due to their use of traditional Chinese medicine whereas the family regards him as an authority, hence as superior in the social hierarchy. Nevertheless, Sek-Lung describes his integration into Canadian society by referring to his migration status. He does not only feel as non-belonging in his own family and the community, but he experiences this emotion also in terms of Canadian society in general: despite his father's advice to keep things simple, Sek-Lung knows that "beneath the surface, of course, nothing was simple: I was the Canadian-born child of unwanted immigrants who were not allowed to become citizens. The words RESIDENT ALIEN were stamped on my birth certificate, as if I were a loitering stranger" (152). With this and multitudinous other references to the political situation for Chinese immigrants in Canada during the 1930s and 1940s, Choy illustrates the discriminatory tendencies that immigrants suffered from due to administrative and governmental policies back then. The historical coming-to-terms with the past – constantly

[117] Hartley concludes that the lack of explicit information about Meiying's pregnancy is a result of the limited perspective of a child narrator (80). Considering the preceding remarks on the narrative situation in this text, one can also argue that the pregnancy is not explicitly revealed because it presents a secret betrayal of the Chinese community that has to remain unspoken.

hanging like a Damocles sword above the plot – illustrates that the demonization of an ethnic group is not one-sided in the novel. The Chinese community segregates itself from the Caucasian Canadian majority, which likewise does not integrate the Chinese immigrants and denies them citizenship. The ghettoization in and of Chinatown therefore is not only a result of Chinese unwillingness but also a consequence of continuous separation and discrimination by the Canadian government (see the works Choy mentions at the beginning of his novel for more information on the history of Chinese immigration in Vancouver).

In the educational context, Sek-Lung describes his positive experiences with his teacher Miss MacKinney during his first two weeks of school: Sek-Lung feels equal to all the other immigrant children in his class due to her treating them all equally. Moreover, she seems to accept linguistic differences as she states "Nivver mind, Sek-Lung […] Ah've an accent as weel" (176). Her renaming Sek-Lung with the English version "Sekky", however, portrays her as inconsistent, especially with her comment that his new name sounds "more Canadian" (146). It foreshadows the underlying colonial attitude that can be found in Sek-Lung's second teacher. Miss E. Doyle is characterized by her military teaching style illustrated explicitly in the symbolism of her as the general and the students as her soldiers (198-199, 208-209) or troops (207). Besides, the use of the verb "march" and her extremely detailed requirements for behavior in the classroom (198, 200, 205-207) complement the image of military precision, which Sek-Lung tellingly describes with the oxymoron "compassionate terror" (200). Despite her military attitude, however, Sek-Lung's teacher surprises with a considerable interest in "'rescue' and 'courage' and 'kindness'" (201) when talking about the war and she encourages her students to be proud of their, for some people foreign sounding, names (201). Moreover, her use of military jargon is sharply contrasted with her empathy for a poor student, who is obviously not able to afford school supplies so that Miss Doyle provides her with some stationery (208-210). For Sek-Lung, Miss Doyle appears as a welcome relief from the general stereotyped discrimination he encounters:

> Most of us knew the humiliation and the mockery – "Me wan'nee fly lice! Lot-see lice!" – the tittering, brought on by our immigrant accents. On streetcars and in shops where only English was spoken, people ignored you or pretended they didn't hear you or, worse, shouted back, "WHAT? WHAT'S THAT YOU SAY? CAN'T YOU SPEAK ENGLISH!?!" Miss Doyle never ignored us, never tittered; she stood strictly at attention as if to compliment our valiant efforts when we spoke or read out loud, daring anyone to mock us. (203)

In her attempts at tolerating and performing multiculturalism, she indeed focuses exclusively on the children's ability to speak English, thereby negating the existence of other languages in their environment. Providing the King and Queen of England as a role model for perfect

pronunciation, she certainly causes the English competences of the children to improve considerably but the above-mentioned tolerance, which is debatably appraised, for instance, by Hafner (50), fades and only remains a well-meant but empty phrase without any substance. Consequently, considering the military jargon and her attitude, one can detect a colonial touch in the character of Miss Doyle as she creates a hierarchy between cultures by focusing on British[118] perspectives on World War II and language. Her attitude is significant because it illustrates the negative impact it conveys regarding the self-image of the children and it underlines the colonial notion:

> We were an unruly, untidy mixed bunch of immigrants and displaced persons, legal or otherwise, and it was her duty to take our varying fears and insecurities and mold us into some ideal collective functioning together as a military unit with one purpose: to conquer the King's English, to belong at last to a country that she envisioned including all of us. (207)

In this passage, Sek-Lung does not only describe the negative self-image resulting from his teacher's teaching style but it also depicts the fact that inclusion, in this context, equals assimilation – in both a linguistic and a normative sense. Thus, this description emphasizes the underlying colonialism represented with the character of Miss Doyle. Sek-Lung feels equal to his fellow students: "At recess, our dialects and accents conflicted, our clothes, heights and handicaps betrayed us, our skin colours and backgrounds clashed, but inside Miss E. Doyle's tightly disciplined kingdom we were all – lions or lambs – equal. We had glimpsed Paradise" (212). As Ty unfortunately only implies, and as has been demonstrated before, however, the equality and the paradisiac condition is only superficial as this interpretation of equality is based on the complete negation of (linguistic) difference (Ty *Politics* 133): "To dismiss a language is to dismiss a whole culture" (McLeod 149). In terms of intersectional theory in its narrow sense, one can argue that this understanding does not consider the different levels of many individuals within a social hierarchy, e.g. that a girl of Chinese background might possibly suffer from a higher degree of social inequality than a boy. However, the generalizations in her classroom result in egalitarianism without considering the specific situations of students. Her only aim consists in assimilating her students to British English standards in order to form a collective of soldiers that eventually conforms to Western Canadian society. This goal presents a colonialist approach and hence

[118] The numerous references to Great Britain, in this context, remind the reader of Canada's colonial past and its place in the Commonwealth – also an issue strongly linked to hierarchies and power relations in a political sense.

creates power relations between different cultures.[119] Tellingly, parents' reactions underline the unquestioned support for these educational practices (207, 213).

In summary, Chinatown presents the main spatial setting in Choy's *The Jade Peony*. Illustrated as a culturally and geographically enclosed entity, it reproduces, on the level of the social environment, the social hierarchies and power relations depicted in the domestic context and it illustrates the heterogeneity of Chineseness already depicted in the protagonists' family. The power relations are called into question, in particular through the character of Meiying, who counteracts the stereotypes that Sek-Lung is confronted with in his family and in the Chinese community. This implicit deconstruction of gender, age, and ethnic boundaries is underlined by the crossing of spatial borders and the narrative perspective, which will be explored in the next section.

6.4. The Role of Intersectionality on the Level of Form

The Jade Peony indeed illustrates, on the level of content, negotiations of intersectional oppression in a narrow sense with Jook-Liang being in an inferior position because of her age and gender but an intersectionally informed reading allows one to discover more factors, such as sexuality, social class and ethnicity, contributing to the establishment of social hierarchies that affect the protagonists. The use of intersectionality, as understood in this dissertation, thus allows the understanding of the extent of identity dimensions represented in the novel, thereby deconstructing the allocation of Choy's novel to the field of Chinese Canadian literature on the level of content. The level of form, in particular the use of language, the spatial setting and the narrative perspective, contribute to the representation of identity and social hierarchies as a complex interplay of a variety of factors, which underlines the deconstructivist notion that Choy's novel offers.

The use of language in the novel, mainly through the translation of particularly Chinese terms and concepts, reveals the hierarchical relationship between Caucasian Canadian society and Chinese Canadian immigrants but also the different interpretations of Chineseness within the Chinese Canadian community at the same time. The poem "Translations", that precedes the novel as a peritext, forms part of a collection entitled *Expounding the Doubtful Points* by U.S. poet Wing Tek Lum. The stanza starts with a Chinese immigrant perspective and the immigrants' new name for the space they are living in is described with a Chinese term. Dimic perceptively elaborates on the issue of language

[119] This segregation is emphasized when Miss Doyle explains the exclusive character of religious communities: by comparing them to families, Miss Doyle emphasizes that "all the people in the world belonged to families and had to stay with their families" (230).

in Choy's novel and recognizes the similarities between the poem's stanza and Choy's use of language in *The Jade Peony*. The deliberate use and translation of Chinese terms "in a kind of 'appositive' inter-lingual stylistic, similar to simultaneous translation in oral situations" (Dimic 95) can be found in both works. They do not only invite an unfamiliar (Caucasian) reader to access Chinese and the cultural aspects linked to it but it also illustrates, as Dimic correctly states, that the interpretation of Chineseness as part of an individual's identity is independent of language abilities (Dimic 102), which is also illustrated on the level of content in the novel with the example of Sek-Lung. On the other hand, however, when following the branch of postcolonial narratology, the use of translations shows the linguistic hierarchy in which this text works: English is the main language and even culturally specific concepts are translated into the language of the hegemonic authority. Postcolonial narratology explores the relationships "between narrative structures and those questions, themes, and categories which are of central importance to Postcolonial Studies. Postcolonial narratology, thus, shows how the concepts of identity and alterity or categories such as ethnicity, race, class, and gender are constructed, perpetuated or subverted in narrative texts" (Gymnich 62). As such, this narratological branch engages in the literary representation of relationships between power and authority, which, as rightly demonstrated by Gymnich, can be explored by analyzing the use of English (varieties) in literary texts. Related to Choy's novel, this approach indeed shows that the text is situated in a postcolonial hierarchy. An intersectionally informed reading, however, allows one to additionally detect that this mechanism of translation also works as a means to establish social hierarchies within the community in question.

The spatial setting Chinatown, as depicted in *The Jade Peony*, seems to be a homogenous entity but a closer look reveals that precisely this closed conception allows the foregrounding of border crossings. The role of Chinatown in *The Jade Peony* has attracted some previous attention resulting in analyses focusing on Chinatown as a space of ethnic performance (see, for example, the publications by Davis). Davis's interpretation of Chinatown in Asian Canadian literature as a spatial setting evolving into a character (Rocio G. Davis "Backdaire" 84) is indeed debatable, at least for Choy's work, as it ascribes a certain amount of agency to the location. The characters of the novel performing and negotiating (their ethnicity) within the context of a spatial setting seems more applicable for *The Jade Peony*. The Chinese community as a spatial and social setting is portrayed as an enclave, a closed entity within Canadian society, indicating that different cultural norms, values and practices are in

force here, as has already been mentioned in the previous section[120]. This largely corresponds to Maria N. Ng's claim that the binary opposition of East and West or Self and Other cannot be "achieved by novels or short stories localized in laundromats or restaurants in Chinatown" (172). Yet, her assumption seems rather shortsighted as it focuses exclusively on the spatial setting and ignores the various other facets of a novel, such as narrative perspective or the multiplicity of characters. Maria N. Ng's explicit reference to fictional works (171) additionally leads to the omnipresent question of how historically accurate or authentic fiction as a literary genre should be and/or has to be. This question unfortunately has to remain unanswered at this point because it would go beyond the scope of this research project. With reference to T*he Jade Peony*, however, Choy might indeed maintain these stereotypical images of Chinatown (Maria N. Ng 173) with the exception of Meiying and Kazuo, who cross spatial and social borders. But – as has been demonstrated in the preceding section on his work – he nevertheless manages to create "hybrid representations of ethnicity and cultural identities [which] can help to destabilize the oppositional mode of thinking" (Maria N. Ng 172), which Maria N. Ng does not consider possible. The stereotypically enclosed spatial setting in *The Jade Peony* enables a foregrounding of the numerous border crossings of the characters – in a literal and figurative sense – and the illustration of heterogeneous understandings of Chineseness at play within this enclave considered as authentic and ethnicized. Poh-Poh, for instance, explains that "We in Chinatown […] Things different here" (220), and Kiam's girlfriend suggests that "we should try not to be so different" (140) when outside of Chinatown. The secrets of its inhabitants present another social border separating Chinatown from other parts of the city (Rocio G. Davis "Backdaire" 90). The Chinese community is characterized by segregative tendencies regarding mixed relationships, verbalized by the saying "Mix blood, mix trouble!" often quoted by Chinese ladies (105).[121] In general, the unspoken law "*Never betray your own kind*" (247), referring to the ethnic community, rules. Dating a white girl is as disapproved of as is the contact to Japanese people (247). This social cohesion based on ethnic background is transferred to the

[120] This coincides with Peter S. Li's historical description of Chinatown in the 1930s and 1940s (103-104).

[121] One of the few accepted exceptions is the marriage of a Chinese man to white Nellie Yip. It is not only her language proficiency and her intercultural competence that pave the way for her status as a legend. It is foremost her knowledge of both Western and Chinese medicine that results in Poh-Poh's acceptance because Nellie Yip is considered to be "mainly Chinese in her heart, which was all that mattered" (106). The family's father and the neighbor Mrs. Lim agree with this honoring of Nellie's expertise: "If Madame Yip cannot save the baby […] then no one can" (106). The preceding description of Nellie Yip helping when Stepmother gives birth to a child she eventually loses puts this status of Mrs. Yip in another context as it ironizes Poh-Poh's utterance and illustrates Nellie Yip's instrumentalisation, at least to a certain degree: she only seems to be accepted because she helps when people are in need.

children: "'You remember: we Chinese,' all of the Old China men drilled[122] into my brothers and me […] 'Never forget, *we together Chinese*.'" (232). This results in Sek-Lung identifying as a Chinese fighter: "I was Chinese and would never surrender" (232), similar to the elder Chinese people having fought to earn a living in low-paid jobs (232). The conception of Chinatown as a segregated spatial entity, in consequence, deconstructs the homogeneity of Chinese Canadians and it helps to foreground aspects of border crossing both spatially and figuratively.

Whereas the use of the language in the novel and its spatial setting are rather related to its ethnic dimension, the structure of the novel and its narrative perspective allow one to detect the importance of age in *The Jade Peony* as it breaks age related hierarchies on a formal level. Considering the novel's structure, it is organized according to the birth order of the children: Jook-Liang's perspective, as the oldest of the three children, presents the first part, Jung-Sum and Sek-Lung's chapters follow. Sek-Lung's perspective, however, is of high relevance considering the familial hierarchies because it is this last part of the novel that provides the reader with explicit information about this aspect after Jook-Liang's and Jung-Sum's parts. The aspect of social hierarchy is an issue in both children's parts, as has been demonstrated in the preceding passages, but the background information is only revealed in the very last part of the novel, which breaks the age hierarchy among the three children based on their order of birth. The novel, which consists of three different parts, each by one of the siblings, who refer to each other but indeed tell different stories from the same family from different perspectives with different foci, follows a complementary approach regarding its structure. Despite the differences within these parts, this polyphony tells a particular, an individual side of the story that adds to the other two parts. As mentioned above, Sek-Lung, for instance, provides information in his part that explains retroactively the power relations his older sister Jook-Liang is confronted with.[123] Besides the complementary aspect related to information for the reader, all three parts share motifs such as the characters' transformations (Ty *Politics* 117), which in turn reinforces the image of interdependence between these different parts. Lorre adds another shared motif and tellingly summarizes that

[122] Note the use of military jargon in his quote, creating again a hierarchy between the children and the Chinese elders of the community.

[123] The interwoven character of the separate parts leads Rocio G. Davis ("Novella Cycle") to the conclusion that Choy's work presents an example of a novella cycle. By acknowledging that the "classification of a novella is determined primarily by length" (Rocio G. Davis "Novella Cycle" 199) and by focusing on the complementary parts of the sections instead of providing aspects of difference, his classification indeed seems debatable. The interesting criterion of thematic intensity established by a redevelopment of the situation in a novella cycle also does not contribute to his argumentation.

"the initial fragmentation of the narrative gradually finds cohesion in the multiple healing effects brought by words to personal and collective wounds" (80).[124]

The narrative perspective is even more striking as it illustrates an intermeshing of child and adult narration, thereby not breaking hierarchies among the three siblings but between the children and their adult environment. All parts are written in past tense, indicating that an adult Jook-Liang, Jung-Sum and Sek-Lung describe their childhood and adolescence in first-person-narratives. This contrasts markedly with many analyses in secondary sources interpreting the protagonists clearly as child narrators (see, for instance, Rocio G. Davis "Novella Cycle" 210-213; Hartley 66; Tara Lee 80).[125] Yet, the subsequent remarks illustrate that the narrative situation is more complex, so that a classification as a child narrative is highly debatable. Despite the grammatical tense, multiple naïve and fragmentary descriptions lead to the reasonable impression of a child narrating the story. Logical deductions from a child's perspective (188) complement scenes with different implications. Little Sek-Lung perceives his babysitter Meiying's meetings with her boyfriend Kaz, for instance, as follows: "They always disappeared inside the empty doorway of the Methodist Church building. Some days she came out rebuttoning her coat. Of course, it was very warm inside the church. I didn't mind" (258). For an adult reader, this description provides a first hint at a sexual relationship between Meiying and her boyfriend, which is not perceived by an innocent child. This passage, however, additionally illustrates the contrast between these child perceptions and those of adults – expressed by both the grammatical tense and numerous insertions. The insertions disrupt the child perspective and remind the reader of the narrator's adulthood: Sek-Lung retrospectively states that he did not mind about Meiying rebuttoning her coat in this situation, thereby foreshadowing that he indeed should have minded and that something related to this incident will happen in the course of the novel (see 189, 193, 206 for further examples of comments that disrupt the idea of child narration). With these partially paradoxical devices, Choy creates a narratological mélange, which leaves the reader continuously in doubt as to whether the narrators are children or adults. Both sides, similar to the three structural parts of the novel, complement each other, resulting

[124] Regarding the narrative situation, Ty adds that the polyphonic conception of the novel helps to counter the tendency of stereotyping in literature as the three voices depict the individual handling of different conflicts within the same family whereas the multiple references to Chinese Canadian immigration history in the novel "can be read allegorically and negatively as typical of the mysterious and sinister quality of the Chinese" (*Politics* 118).

[125] Lorre marks an exception as she dwells on the narrative situation in more detail and correctly identifies that the narrative voice in each section of the novel is characterized by "shifting back and forth from the viewpoint of the 'experiencing self' – the child – to that of the adult narrator" (Lorre 71-72). Hilf arrives at the same conclusion (Hilf 88) but – like Lorre – fails to transfer her findings to the novel in general.

in a vivid narration with comic elements but also with an appropriate amount of information so that the reader is able to follow the plot. Choy thus represents the issue of age not only as a theme in the novel but he also includes it in the structure of his work. By representing both sides, the adult and child perspective, Choy deconstructs the social hierarchies based on age on the level of content and he invites the readers to (re)experience the perspective of a child or that of an adult. Due to the Chinese Canadian context, which emphasizes the role of age because of its importance in Chinese culture, Choy constructs a subtle ethnic framing that intersects with the issue of age and which supposes a kind of "intersectional narratology" implemented in *The Jade Peony*. This aspect mirrors the form of empowerment characterized as "intersectional" in this dissertation. If breaking the hierarchies between child and adult on the narratological level is interpreted as a form of empowerment, then one can conclude that empowerment is represented both on the level of form and content (see section 6.5 for more information on this aspect). By providing a complementary structure and a narrative perspective which includes both adult and child perspectives, Choy manages to deconstruct hierarchies based on age, not only on the level of content but he invites readers to also change their perspective, which is emphasized by the intersecting ethnic frame of the novel.

In summary, an interesectionally informed reading reveals the multiplicity of factors shaping social identities also for the level of form. The use of language, the spatial setting and the narrative perspective present issues of ethnicity and age, deconstructing the accompanying hierarchies related to this field and displaying these categorizes as heterogeneous. As has been mentioned, the narrative perspective in particular can be interpreted as a means of empowerment on the level of form as it breaks age hierarchies and provides assumed child narrators with a voice, which corresponds to the outstanding role of empowermental mechanisms as illustrated by Choy in *The Jade Peony*. The following section, consequently, centers on this aspect and provides remarks on the use of myth as a tool of intersectional empowerment.

6.5. Intersectionality, Empowerment, and Intersectional Empowerment[126]

As indicated previously, *The Jade Peony* does not offer a perspective exclusively on oppression. Several instances in Choy's novel illustrate particular tools, which provide the possibility of empowerment for individual characters, so Choy's work does not only provide

[126] This section is partially based on the following contribution: Thiesen, Diana. "Of Monkey Kings and Fox Ladies. Intersectionality, Empowerment, and Myth in Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony*." *Empowering Contemporary Fiction in English. The Impact of Empowerment in Literary Studies*, edited by Ralf Hertel and Eva-Maria Windberger, Leiden: Brill, 2021, pp. 172 - 185.

insights into multiple forms of oppression but *The Jade Peony* also depicts opportunities and tools of liberation, of empowerment, of actively shaping one's status within a social hierarchy. Choy's novel thus illustrates tools of intersectional empowerment. Numerous references to traditional Chinese myth present one of the most prominent examples of this phenomenon in Choy's novel besides aspects such as sport, food, or pharmaceuticals. For reasons of space and focus in this dissertation and due to the prominent status of traditional Chinese myth, this section thus exemplarily centers on the use of myth as a tool of intersectional empowerment in Choy's *The Jade Peony*.

The definition of myth is subject to debate and change depending on the disciplinary and temporal background of discussion (Birrell 4). Literary studies indeed allows differentiating between the above mentioned terms *myth*, *legend* and *folk tale*. However, as the reader of *The Jade Peony* only learns second-hand information about the myths due to their, often fragmented, retelling by the characters, the basic understanding of myth in the sense of *account*, *tale*, *story* or *narrative* (Birrell 5) is used here. Moreover, the focus on the analysis of myths as an instrument, their function and not their content, enables this general understanding. Birrell and Cuddon both add, amongst others, elements such as the supernatural, the inexplicable, a notion of untruth and basic concerns such as eating to the definition (Birrell 3; Cuddon 526) – features, which can be detected easily in the myths in question in Choy's novel. Considering the functions of myth, storytelling in general contributes to the creation of intimate bonds between individuals and can hence be understood as a central instrument in the psychological process of identity formation and construction. Shared narrative moments between generations, as in *The Jade Peony*, open up the possibility to link and/or strengthen ties with one's ethnic heritage, or, in other words, to create a version of Chineseness in culturally different surroundings. Traditional myths, legends or folk tales of the culture left behind enable younger immigrant generations to form their identity. Additionally, the passing down of stories minimizes the division between older and younger generations (Ty *Politics* 122) in *The Jade Peony*. A cultural studies perspective on the term *myth* additionally ascribes these narratives a provisioning of meaning (Barker and Jane 642): they are able to guide an individual symbolically through the chaos of the cosmos and explain what is at first glance unexplainable. Myths as a form of storytelling and their (re)telling hence serve a social purpose by bringing people together and by possibly providing individuals with the power to find meaning when struggling with a chaotic reality. Their treatment in fictional works shows the psychological, social and cultural impact myths can have, not only on social interactions but also on questions of identity.

Besides aspects such as memories, food, language and kinship terms, traditional Chinese myth plays a prominent role in illustrating a polyphonic empowerment between and within immigrant generations in Choy's novel. However, as van Luven correctly states, "each child [protagonist] experiences differently the connection to, or distance from, the old [Chinese] ways, and thus each has a different story to tell about family life based upon his or her experience of what we might call family mythology" (118). This similarly applies to the depiction of myths in the novel. The prominent role of the traditional Chinese myths in *The Jade Peony* has been recognized by a variety of scholars (see, for example, Hafner; van Luven) but all of them unfortunately ignore the link to their empowering function for the novel's characters.

For the youngest brother, Sekky, myths only play a minor role. Sek-Lung does not describe his grandmother's storytelling extensively, but several hints indicate that he also has access to these myths, which are accompanied with positive associations and the establishment of a close relationship to his grandmother (171, 214). Poh-Poh's references to ghosts and spirits of deceased people are linked to her storytelling as they are described as "mischievous spirits and frightening demons" (178). Besides dealing with his grandmother's death (van Luven 267) similar to Jung-Sum (see below), her visitations, strongly connected to the mythical world she has introduced Sek-Lung to, serve as a health empowerment for the little boy as he recovers from his lung infection (192). Myths and stories, therefore, have an impact on the youngest of the children but the impact is more obvious for the characters of Jook-Liang and Jung-Sum.

Grandmother Poh-Poh introduces little Jook-Liang to the mythological figure of the Monkey King.[127] The first meeting of Wong Bak, an old friend of the family (see also section 6.3) presents a "transformative moment" (van Luven 266) for Jook-Liang as she starts to intertwine myth and reality, assuming him to be the Monkey King himself:

> *Is it a demon or a spirit?* I thought, and nervously darted back […] In the bluish light cast by the street lamp, a dark figure with an enormous hump shook off his cloak. My eyes opened wide. The large hump continued shaking, struggling, quaking. Something dark lifted into the air. The mysterious mass turned into a sagging knapsack with tangled straps […] The obscure figure gave one more shudder, as if to resettle its bones; now I could see, against the pale light, someone old and angular, someone bent over, his haggard weight bearing down on two sticks. (16)

Jook-Liang describes the first encounter with Wong Bak as emotionally loaded with mystery, suspicion and fear. Despite their deep emotional relationship established in the

[127] The Monkey King, as a part of a mythological world, is able to disguise himself and fights against supernatural beings such as River Dragons (15). For more information on the Monkey King and his role in traditional Chinese mythology, see Hayward Scott.

course of the novel, this description is dominated by adjectives creating a dark and negative mood with the alliteration ('mysterious mass') emphasizing the aspect of mystery. Wong Bak's facial ugliness finally leads Jook-Liang to identify him as the Monkey King, which she experiences again as deeply emotional (17-18). His use of a particular dialect with her grandmother further confirms her theory as she identifies it as "monkey Talk" (20). In another instance of intermingling fact and fiction, fantasy and reality, Wong Bak breaks the ice by embracing Jook-Liang (19, see 17-18 for another example of Jook-Liang mixing fact and fiction) and their close friendship starts to develop despite moments of doubt about Wong Bak's true identity provoked by her brothers (21, 23). The five-year-old reassures herself by again taking recourse to the myths provided by her grandmother (22). Myth, in this context, and its integration into the real world, serves as a tool of intersectional empowerment for little Jook-Liang as she overcomes her anxiety despite a fearful first encounter. By placing Wong Bak, the stranger, in the mythical world she is familiar with, she is able to regain control.

Eventually, Wong Bak's permission for Jook-Liang to touch his face (23) and his offer to call him "Wong Suk", a less formal name normally used for much younger men (van Luven 266) and which Jook-Liang interprets as "his secret magic name" and "a blessing" (24-25), free "her from the strictures of an elder-child relationship" (van Luven 266; see also Hafner 74) and empower the much younger Jook-Liang by breaking with the hierarchies created by the social category of age. Myth becomes reality through the presence of Wong Bak and his age-related border-crossing, which frees Jook-Liang from the mental boundaries imposed on her due to her age and gender, allowing her to "challenge the gendered hierarchies of the Chinese community" (Hafner 72) in general as well as those of her grandmother in particular. Her appropriation of the Monkey King myth enables her to question gender and age roles and to openly resist her grandmother's teasing (see section 6.2.). With the figure of Wong Bak, Choy creates in his novel *The Jade Peony* a remarkable counterexample of an elder-child relationship. In contrast to Jook-Liang's own grandmother Poh-Poh, Wong Bak manages to establish a relationship without the explicit exertion of power and by storytelling (28-30, 36, 60). By creating an imaginative third space in a Bhabhaian sense with their own version of Chinglish (Hartley 72), Wong Bak provides Jook-Liang with a place in her social environment, the feeling of belonging.[128] Without him, Jook-

[128] Wong Bak's status as an immigrant bachelor man in Chinatown leads Lorre to the valid conclusion that both he and Jook-Liang "experience a loneliness and a sense of rejection although their stories are separated by so many years" (72), which probably enables the establishment of their close relationship.

Liang, "barely tolerated by Poh-Poh, would merely be a useless girl-child" (36).[129] Jook-Liang finds her worth in this relationship and it strengthens the little girl's self-confidence (41). The relationship between these two characters in the novel calls into question the common proverb of blood being thicker than water: similar to the father in Fu's novel, Poh-Poh as a family member is not able to understand the needs of her granddaughter, but a person outside of this domestic circle is. By attempting to ascribe identity markers to her granddaughter, Poh-Poh establishes an artificial hierarchy that results in estrangement and a shattered relationship. The figure of Wong Bak, coming from the same district as Poh-Poh and with an equal social status (37), illustrates that cultural background does not necessarily aid the comprehension of identity and, consequently, of social hierarchies, but that these processes are more complex and heterogeneous in their interpretation and implementation. The relationship with Wong Bak as an imaginary embodiment of the mythical Monkey King presents a tool of empowerment for five-year-old Jook-Liang with respect to age and gender. So "what rescues her from the constant reminder of female worthlessness is Wong Suk […]" (Ty *Politics* 128) and her connecting the old man to the world of Chinese myth.

Besides the empowerment regarding gender and age hierarchies, Jook-Liang additionally crosses cultural boundaries. Similar to Audrey in *For Today I Am Boy*, who creates her own Asian Audrey Hepburn, Jook-Liang meshes traditional Chinese folklore and contemporary North American popular culture (Hafner 74). Instances of mixing the Monkey King with the popular figures of Tarzan (23) or Robin Hood (56-57) illustrate, as Ty rightly summarizes, "how competing ideologies from one's ethnic heritage and the surrounding American and Canadian culture intersect and continue to create sometimes constructive tensions in the gendered and racialized subject" (*Politics* 128).[130] Moreover, Ty tellingly describes a change in Jook-Liang's self-perception related to beauty ideals as she transforms from seeing "only the imperfections of her body, and the dominant culture's definition of beauty and loveliness […] [to] ignoring both Hollywood's gaze and Poh-Poh's belittling ideologies" (*Politics* 124), which is enabled by Wong Bak's encouragement and their friendship. Jook-Liang is

[129] This quote also illustrates that Jook-Liang consciously realizes Poh-Poh's rejection of her. The establishment of the close relationship with Wong Bak, however, also results in the little girl's withdrawal from her grandmother demonstrated by her imaginary defiance against Poh-Poh (25-26).

[130] Jook-Liang dressing up as Shirley Temple stresses the image of empowerment illustrated symbolically with the change of the weather from cloudy to sunny, which accompanies the young girl's self-assurance (39-41, see also Ty *Politics* 124). Poh-Poh's forecast of rain underlines her hostile attitude towards her granddaughter's play whereas Wong Bak's support (43) again functions as a form of confirmation for Jook-Liang. Hartley interprets this instance of cultural mixing as a "method of resisting the negative impacts of both traditional Chinese culture, with its limited opportunities for women, and North American society, with its expectations of white normative beauty" (Hartley 73), thus she analyzes cultural mixing as another form of empowerment, in this case however without reference to myth.

thus able to accept her looks which differ from the alleged beauty standards wihin a Caucasian Canadian society. As a consequence, the character of Jook-Liang is not only empowered in terms of gender and age but also in terms of ethnic background since the mixing of Eastern and Western myths and/or popular culture allows her to establish a hybrid self-identity through a process of transculturalization to deal with her status as a young female member of a visible minority. Jook-Liang's empowerment in *The Jade Peony* is driven by myths and their implementation into her reality, and it concerns the intersection of gender, age, and ethnicity. She overcomes, with the help of Wong Bak – also known as the Monkey King – social hierarchies imposed on her because of her age and gender, and she crosses cultural boundaries by combining Chinese and Western narratives. This intersectional empowerment induces Hafner to legitimately characterize her as a trickster figure similar to the Monkey King himself (76).

Like his sister, Jung-Sum also experiences the empowering function of traditional Chinese myth. His familiarization with myths is illustrated when he tells the reader the assumed ancestry of his pet turtle, which surely is "in Old China, [where the Great Turtle] held the Dragon, the Phoenix and the whole world on its back" (81). While Jook-Liang identifies Wong Bak with the Monkey King, Jung-Sum, at their first meeting, assumes Poh-Poh to be the mythical Fox Lady (89-90). [131] This first encounter shows clear parallels to that of Jook-Liang and Wong Bak, as the whole situation is perceived as gloomy and the strange grandmother is associated with a cruel mythical figure connoted negatively. In the course of their encounter, Jung-Sum takes recourse to a myth in order to make sense of his new reality:

> The Fox Lady at the train station took hold of my hand and held me in front of her. Her eyes narrowed. I imagined the back of her dress moving, side to side. "Who feeds you now?" the disguised Fox Lady said, her eyes twinkling, just as I was told they would, though her voice might have been more friendly. I said nothing. I stared back to hide my growing fear. Her furry tail would poke out from under her skirt and start wagging like crazy. Then everyone at the train station would see it was the Fox Demon […] I knew I had to say something. "I feed myself now", I repeated, loudly, for the Fox Lady always pretends she is very deaf, so you will bring your delicious young head within biting range of her row of razor-sharp teeth […] I darted behind the foxy old lady to look at the many folds of her skirt. Nothing moved. No furry tail appeared, no wagging motion whatsoever […] (90-91)

The imagination of his new grandmother being the Fox Lady, who likes to eat children, helps to overcome his fear of his new and unfamiliar environment. This is not a new mechanism for Jung-Sum, which is illustrated in the description of his past. The little boy is able to deal

[131] For more information on the characterization of the Fox Lady in traditional Chinese mythology, see Hayward Scott (35).

with the loss of his mother, who was murdered[132] and whom he connects to storytelling (which corresponds to the function of storytelling and myth transmission to establish intimate bonds mentioned above):

> […] and when the night fell, Mr. Chin sat beside me and told all his four children and myself a story of Old China. There were many words I did not understand, phrases whose meaning were riddles […] I remember the joy and excitement of his storytelling, and the quickening of my heart when he asked me what I would like. "Tell another story!" I said, and knew suddenly, another's voice, my mommy's voice with its *Hoiping* tones, would never say again "*Long time ago…in Old China…*" (97)[133]

This passage does not only portray the positive connotation of storytelling, but it demonstrates the connection between mother and son established in the process of transmitting myths from the parental to the child generation. Young Jung-Sum uses these memories of storytelling to maintain an imaginary relationship with his mother but also to come to terms with his loss, both when living at his neighbors' and when first meeting Poh-Poh. Thus, myth serves as a tool of empowerment in the context of a child's mourning. It provides Jung-Sum with the strength and flexibility to adapt to new situations while remaining in his imagination in the world he left behind with his mother's death.

In the course of the novel, Jung-Sum explicitly identifies with Poh-Poh's stories and ghosts (141)[134] and establishes his close relationship to his grandmother, largely due to her storytelling abilities. One of her stories is of particular importance as she tellingly associates the boy with the moon, traditionally connoted female (88).[135] Assuming that Jung-Sum's deep admiration for Frank Yuen (122) is based on the juvenile search for a role model, especially because of the military comparisons used to describe Frank (123) and referring again to a heteronormative sphere, only an attentive reader notices Jung-Sum's fascination for Frank's considerable interest in girls (122) or the surprisingly detailed description of his body (123). Jung-Sum's alleged rebellious interest in Frank as one of the community's outsiders that children are warned of (124-15) culminates in a violent boxing fight and the

[132] The passages describing this murder are highly interesting from a postcolonial perspective as they provoke a playful questioning of the reader's own position. The scenes do not provide any explicit hints at the spatial setting (95-97), which allows the reader to fill this blank space on their own. From a postcolonial perspective, this presents a challenge to the readership as they might assume this murder to have happened in China. Only a highly attentive reader might call this assumption into question due to some implicit hints. In the course of the novel, it is only later implicitly revealed that Jung-Sum's mother was indeed murdered in Canada as Jung-Sum was born in British Columbia (113). This aha-moment might result in a questioning of reasons for the initial assumption.

[133] In this context, myth and story are used synonymously. The reference to Old China as well as to the riddles, the introduction of the mother's storytelling similar to a fairy tale, and Jung-Sum's reaction supports the valid assumption that this scene is about myth with story used as a more general term.

[134] The reference to ghosts as supernatural beings provides the basis for the valid assumption that *story* and *myth* are again used synonymously in this context.

[135] See Hayward Scott (22) for more remarks on the concept of *Yin* and *Yang*.

resurgence of Jung-Sum's childhood trauma of his father's abuse (130-131). Frank's comfort, including a kiss on Jung-Sum's forehead (131) seems to be a sign of friendship, but for Jung, this incident results in an enormous change:

> After that time I fought Frank Yuen, I never felt the same about anything. *Frank Yuen is the sun*, I remembered thinking, and I remembered the Old One telling Mrs. Lim, "Jung-Sum is the moon." Yes, I said to myself [….] *I am the moon*. As I walked briskly to keep up with Frank on our way to the Blue Eagle, the Old One's words followed me, followed me all the way along the snow-dusted streets of Chinatown. (132-133)

Referring to the Chinese principle of *yin* and *yang*, corresponding to female and male, Jung-Sum learned about from his grandmother, this passage evokes the notion of a coming-out to himself. He eventually learns about his feelings for men and starts to recognize his sexuality at the age of thirteen. The impression of him being homosexual and on his quest for his sexuality is emphasized at Frank's goodbye party when he joins the army. Frank's physical closeness scares Jung-Sum because of his own feelings as he "felt the centre of my body go weak" (135). Fourteen-year-old Jung is not able to deal with his bodily longing for Frank (135, 136) and hence rejects him because he is afraid of the other people's reactions (136). Van Luven cleverly combines these two myths relevant for Jung-Sum when suggesting that "although Jung-Sum has to admit his new Poh-Poh does not have the telltale brush beneath her skirts, he comes to realize she is 'foxy' in another way – she is the only one in the family who recognizes his struggle with his emerging homosexuality […]" (269; see also Ty 128). Poh-Poh, ultimately, empowers the young boy with regard to his emerging sexuality as she recognizes it and, unlike he himself, does nothing to repress it. Hence, the use of myth contributes to Jung-Sum's negotiation of sexuality in the crucial phase of puberty, providing him, at least implicitly, with a voice as his sexuality is not explicitly treated as a subject in the course of the novel. The use of myth, in Jung-Sum's case, is thus able to provide otherwise structurally silenced characters with the possibility to articulate their individual issues.

In summary, Choy does not only depict identity formation as a multidimensional process but he also manages to demonstrate how myth and storytelling, as tools of empowerment, can help the adolescent children in his novel to negotiate the hierarchies of ethnicity, gender, age, and sexuality in an intergenerational context. Similar to the narrative perspective described in section 6.4, the ethnic frame of these empowermental moments in *The Jade Peony* helps to unfold the full vehemence of boundary crossing regarding gender, age, and sexuality. Choy has therefore created a literary example of intersectional empowerment,

which does not consist of an empowerment on various levels but which only works because of the connections between frame and levels of empowerment.

6.6. Interim Conclusion

Intersectionality can be applied to *The Jade Peony* by Wayson Choy in multiple ways as the novel represents instances of intersectional oppression on the level of content but the implementation of an intersectional approach for the literary analysis allows the detection of a multiplicity of factors contributes to the establishment and maintenance of social hierarchies and to identities alike. The kaleidoscopic use of intersectionality for the analysis of literature thus allows the questioning of the allocation to ethnic fields, here Chinese Canadian literature. Moreover, the novel, with its representation of myths with their outstanding function, reinforces the profound connection between intersectionality and empowerment.

Coming back to the definition of the term *intersectionality* by Crenshaw and multiple other scholars, it is clear that Choy indeed potrays, with the character of Jook-Liang, a form of intersectionality as multiple oppression in its narrow sense. Her family, with her grandmother Poh-Poh as a driving force, establishes and maintains the young girl's inferior position due to her age, her gender, and her mixed ethnic background. As has been demonstrated in the preceding analysis, an intersectional lens allows the exploration of Choy's novel from a different angle by revealing further social hierarchies and the resulting inequalities without a reduction to ethnicity. Jung-Sum's special position established by Poh-Poh due to his homosexuality and Kiam's prominent role as the first-born son related to separate gender spheres illustrate the complexity of power relations and their consequences for identity formation also, but not exclusively, related to an ethnic identity. Ethnicity itself, in this context more precisely Chineseness, in *The Jade Peony* is potrayed as subject to negotiation, which can be interpreted differently by individuals and often results in transcultural, hybrid identities. This heterogeneity of Chineseness, even in heavily ethnicized social spaces considered as authentic, results in conflicts and in the fostering of power relations due to intolerance regarding other interpretations and practices of one's ethnic background, which is in particular evident for Sekky: having been excluded at first because of his complete inability to create his version of Chineseness, he continues to be excluded from his family even after having established a link to his ethnic background. Choy hence manages to illustrate not only the complexity of social hierarchies but he also portrays that ethnicity is not a universal concept but one interpreted and performed individually by people. On the formal level, this deconstructionist tendency continues, yet with another

focus. In addition to unmasking Chineseness, and hence ethnicity, as a heterogeneous concept, the narrative situation with its playful switching between the child and the adult perspective does not only result in many instances of humor but it also helps to deconstruct the elder-child hierarchy thematized in the novel as it offers each a (re)experiencing of the other perspective.

The multidimensional conception of the three major characters and some minor characters, such as Stepmother or Meiying, illustrates the complexity of power relations and their dependence on social context, here indeed illustrated with the spatial setting. The enclave Chinatown, just as the domestic context, proves to be a space of heterogeneous Chineseness with social inequality and hierarchies based on age, gender, mixed ethnic background and social class at play. In the context of the Sino-Japanese War and the racism against Japanese Canadians, Sek-Lung, with his babysitter Meiying, crosses the borders of the Chinese community to Little Tokyo and learns that ethnic identity is not only constructed by oneself but also ascribed to an individual by others. The fact that the meetings of Meiying and her Japanese boyfriend are sometimes situated in the space between Chinatown and Little Tokyo and that both deliberately cross the forbidden borders of the other community is probably no coincidence as it contributes to the image of a permeable ethnic community, in both a literal and figurative sense, and the questioning of power relations based on the affiliation to such a community.

With his creation of a literary example of intersectional empowerment, Choy gives a voice not only to a visible ethnic minority but also to the young, the female, and the homosexual. Considering the impact fiction might have on its readers, the question arises in how far this portrayal of intersectional empowerment in *The Jade Peony* influences its readership. By addressing various other social categories besides ethnicity, the novel presumably also engages non-migrant and/or non-Asian readers and their struggles with the formation of self-identity with regard to gender, age or sexuality. The multiple thematic bridges for readers allow the ethnic frame of the novel to recede and invite readers to explore other important aspects related to individual identities. As a result, Choy does not only, as Ty states, illustrate "how factors such as gender, economic status, and position in a family affect the ethnic subject" (Ty *Politics* 177) but he also provides suggestions for escaping these oppressions. Fiction has the ability to empower individuals by providing such stories of empowerment, and readers who do not belong to ethnic minorities may nonetheless benefit from these readings, which ties in with questioning the classification as migrant

literature as such and according to an author's ethnic background from chapter 3 of this dissertation.

7. Yan Li *Lily in the Snow*

> *However, I believe that the value of a work is determined first and foremost by its own nature, and that the literary nature of the work, its humanity and its universal values are the most important. (Li in Jiang 341)*

Author Yan Li is exceptional in comparison to the other two authors of this dissertation mainly for two reasons: she is the only one of the three who emigrated from China to Canada, in her thirties in 1987 (Jiang 336), and she writes fiction in both Chinese and English (Luo). Additionally, in contrast to the other two works, *Lily in the Snow* has not attracted as much attention, demonstrated by the extremely low number of secondary sources, including reviews. This might come as a surprise considering the prizes and distinctions that have been awarded to Li.[136]

Yet, Li's work shares with the other two novels the allocation to the field of Chinese Canadian literature illustrated by the reviews and the presentation of the book. Luo states in her review that she acknowledges the fact that "literary writing by Chinese Canadian immigrants has become more diverse in terms of subject matter, genre, and style" and refers, in the case of *Lily in the Snow*, to the immigrant community depicted as diverse and going beyond Chinese Canadians but, in her review, she still centers on the Chinese Canadian background of the author by entitling her review *Writing Chinese Diaspora*. The peritexts of the book, here cover image and blurb, strongly raise the expectation of a Chinese Canadian novel. On the front cover, readers find Chinese letters prominently placed in the center in contrastive white under the black printed title of the novel. In the background of the front cover, readers find a blurry half of a female face with a phenotypical Asian eye. The back cover provides the reader with more information that strongly circulates around immigration topics. The blurb covers the (semantic) fields of immigration, intergenerational conflicts and China versus Canada. The information on the author given below the blurb underlines this thematic focus by focusing on Li's status as an immigrant born in China and her location as a professional in Chinese Canadian studies, both as an academic and an author. As a result, both discourse about the novel and the presentation of the novel strongly raise readers' expectation of being confronted with matters of Chinese Canadian immigration when reading this book.

[136] Among other distinctions, *Daughters of the Red Land*, Li's first English novel, was a finalist for the Books in Canada First Novel Award in 1996 and it is used as a reference book for the study of modern Chinese history in some North American universities (Jiang 337; Luo).

The Chinese ethnic background of the author however allows the exploration of many other issues. In the quote at the beginning of this section, Yan Li, in an interview, shifts the ethnic focus of her own novel to a more universal approach in accordance with the argument of this dissertation, i.e. calling into question the labelling of Chinese Canadian literature along ethnic lines. As a result, in the following sections, *Lily in the Snow* will be analyzed from an intersectional perspective in order to demonstrate how intersectionality, as a kaleidoscope, can help to understand the multifaceted image of Chinese Canadian literature, which goes beyond issues of race and/or ethnicity. A synopsis precedes the analytical sections and the chapter closes with an interim conclusion summarizing the findings of the literary analysis of this novel using an intersectional approach.

7.1. Synopsis

Lily in the Snow narrates the life of protagonist Lily and her mother Grace in Mapleton, a fictitious town located some hundred kilometers west of Toronto. Having been separated for the past eight years, Grace travels from China to Canada to visit her daughter Lily, who is now a mother herself. Li portrays the multiple differences between mother and daughter, which are not only related to their (inter)cultural background but also to their troubled past, their considerably different attitudes concerning child rearing and the different prioritization of various aspects of life. The multiple intergenerational conflicts between the two peak in a hierarchy established by Grace, which will be discussed in the first analytical section of this chapter. This section also includes a discussion of Lily's past relationships with two men, Prince and Majesty, which can equally be characterized by social hierarchies, with Lily again being the inferior person.

Besides the troubled relationship between mother and daughter, the novel extensively illustrates the troubles of a highly qualified single mother on the job market. Not being able to afford any childcare leaves Lily, a trained journalist, behind in a vicious circle as this constantly causes and reproduces enormous difficulties in finding a job: Lily is not able to successfully apply for a job because of her motherly duties but without a job, she is not able to afford any childcare. Despite having eventually found a babysitter in her mother Grace, Lily's status as a single mother presents almost insurmountable obstacles for any possible employment suitable to her qualifications. Consequently caught in unsteady and precarious occupations, Lily additionally experiences not only racism but also sexism. Readers can experience the issue of financial insecurity as a result of structural, gender-related inequalities, which will be in the focus of the second analytical section in this chapter. Lily's migrational background adds to these hardships and helps to reinforce the theme of structural

inequalities within Canadian society. Nevertheless, Li also provides insights into possibilities to gain agency, for example through literature, as will be demonstrated in the following. As Li elaborates extensively on the role of the church and religion in the Chinese community of Mapleton, a third section will focus on this aspect from an intersectional perspective. Members of the Chinese Christian community, as depicted in Li's work, abuse Christianity as a means to establish and maintain superior positions within a social fabric, which allows these characters to act for their own benefit while, at the same time, superficially adhering to Christian principles such as altruism.

7.2. Intersectionality in a Domestic Context

7.2.1. The Decay of a Mother-Daughter-Relationship

The family's internal hierarchies will be analyzed here, which illustrates that intersectionality, in Li's novel, is represented in its narrow sense as a topic, but that an intersectional approach for the literary analysis reveals the novel's preoccupation with, besides the characters' ethnic backgrounds, issues strongly related to social class and marital status. The relationship in the focus of the novel is the one between protagonist Lily and her mother Grace, which is characterized by a social hierarchy established and maintained by Grace through various means.

After their eight year separation, Grace travels from China to Canada to visit her daughter Lily. There, Grace learns that Lily leads a life that Grace disapproves of, which she verbalizes explicitly. The points of criticism range from daily aspects such as clothing (2-3, see also 54-55, 333)[137] or eating habits (40) to more fundamental issues such as her daughter's lifestyle and child rearing practices (35), for instance. From the beginning of the novel, Grace's utterances are persistently derogatory: the novel starts with her negative view of Canada as "dull" (1)[138] and even the rays of the sun are too strong so that her carefully chosen clothes clash with her tanned skin (154). She devalues the norms and values of the country her daughter lives in throughout the novel (154-155; 258), also by constantly othering Canadian culture and viewing several instances as "foreign" (154, 258), which destroys Lily's faint hope that her mother would start to appreciate Lily's new home (57, 158). As a result, Grace, similar to Poh-Poh with her continuous references to "good Old China" in *The Jade Peony* (see chapter 6), creates a notion of superiority with her Chinese

[137] All quotes refer to this edition: Li, Yan. Lily in the Snow. Toronto: Women's Press, 2009.

[138] Admittedly, the description of the snowy landscape as "suggesting not vitality but desolation" (1) truly allows for this negative opinion, at least for this moment and place, but Grace seems to be very fast and consistent in generalizing her view. Moreover, the description of the landscape and its conditions at the moment of Grace's arrival surely foreshadow the desolation of the relationship between mother and daughter on a symbolic level.

ethnic background. Canadian culture, with its norms and values, seems illogical and absurd (154). However, in contrast to Poh-Poh, Grace's criticism is more sophisticated as she refines her nostalgic memory by referring to early Communist China, which she misses because of the strict orders that were established back then and which are about to change in contemporary China (158). It is thus not only Chinese culture in general that is superior to Canadian culture in Grace's view, but within Chinese history, some decades are to be regarded as superior to others.

Apparent trivialities, such as the use of garlic when cooking (40, 174), serve as openers for outbreaks, sometimes even physical ones, that illustrate not only Grace's anger about the particular trivial matter but also her aim to belittle the shameful lifestyle of her daughter (174-176, see also 2, 120) and Lily's obviously unwise decisions in the past (327). Similar to Poh-Poh's continuous criticism of Jook-Liang as useless because she is young and female, Grace refers to her daughter as brainless (4), stupid and incompetent (174-175), and to her manners and lifestyle as indecent (5, 269, 327)[139] and full of moral decay (174-175). Not only Lily's status as an unemployed single mother provokes Grace's perpetual grumbling, as mothering does not require any talents according to Grace (35), but, due to Grace's negative opinion of Canada, also Lily's familiarization with values considered as Western: Grace realizes a change in her daughter (4) and disapproves of Western habits such as picking up a penny on the street because it is regarded as good luck in Canada (58).

In order to avoid a bourgeois lifestyle with its "bad influences" (329) and the double burden of professional work and child care (see Ferrant et al. for an excellent summary of this issue), Grace desires a lifestyle for her daughter that differs from the one she herself has experienced (329), thereby illustrating the intersectional oppression that her daughter Lily suffers from. Lily's mother, as a victim of a politically and socially imposed hierarchy related to her gender (121), turns into an oppressor herself: Grace reproduces the hierarchies she was confronted with back in China.[140] Lily regards Grace's experiences in the past in China as a basis for her mother's decision to desire a new lifestyle for her daughter in this context: "A career woman would often end up competing with other men at work while also

[139] Interestingly, Grace views the use of governmental social security measures as indecent, which might correspond to the general stigmatization of persons of lower income (or no income at all), who depend on public aid provided by a welfare state. Grace equates the receiving of financial support as shameless begging (5). Hence, even if governmental subsidies exist for unemployed single mothers with a migrant background, it might not be easy to rely on them because of a particular cultural background (see section 7.3 for more information on governmental institutions and immigration matters).

[140] The few examples that seem to present a glimpse of affection can also be interpreted differently: Grace's visit on Lily's campus to supply her daughter with yesterday's roasted chicken after an argument during dinner (52) might demonstrate Grace's affection for sustainability instead of her affection for caring for her daughter.

carrying on her back the wok, the children, and her man. Mother certainly has experienced this and that is why she wants a new lifestyle for me, Lily figured out" (329). This is an example of an intersectional double burden in a narrow sense as represented in Li's novel on the level of content, similar to Jook-Liang's oppression as a young female family member in *The Jade Peony*. This burden is a source of many current debates in the field of gender equality: women tend to withdraw from career options in order to be able to fulfil the care duties ascribed to them, which leads to hierarchies on the job market as it leaves women more often in lower (paid) and part time positions (Ferrant et al.). This issue clearly illustrates the interdependence of gender and economic success, i.e. social class. Lily's status crowns this double burden and superbly illustrates the multiple burdens that a woman can face within society: being a visible minority, a mother, unmarried and unemployed. Being aware of these burdens, Grace takes over the care work for her grandson so that Lily does not have to waste her time "on such worthless trivia" (33), which illustrates the low status of care work for Grace (329). In this context, Grace describes herself as "sacrificing" (33), which underlines the establishment and maintenance of her higher position in the relationship between her and her daughter. Grace's aversion to child rearing and care work is also shown in her handling of Lily's son, to whom she does not build any relationship and whom she regards as an inconvenience (see, for example, 33, 221). Grace does not want her daughter to be looked down at because she seems poor (2) and, more important to Grace, she herself does not want to be looked down at because of the supposedly shameful life of her daughter (175). As a result, Grace's highly specific expectations related to professional success (see, for example, 221), which differ considerably from Lily's conception, and an inappropriate canon of values due to Lily's adherence to Western culture present the roots of Grace's criticism. Moreover, it is not for Lily's personal happiness that Grace wants her to become more successful, but it is for her social reputation, which is illustrated by a discussion about Lily's clothing style: Lily does not need to dress "decently" (3) in public due to her unemployment but her mother would like her to need to dress up in order to correspond to her reputation based on professional success. Instead of dressing sloppily in jeans and sneakers, Lily should have to wear business outfits, according to Grace, because Lily pursues a successful career. Clothing, here, is thus not represented as a possibility to gain agency, as for Audrey's female clothing in *For Today I Am a Boy* or Jung-Sum's coat in *The Jade Peony*, but it is used as a means to establish an inferior social position by presenting a basis for constant criticism. Grace's order for Lily to marry a cruel man she is not in love with also illustrates the important role of Lily's professional success and social

mobility in comparison to her personal happiness (13, 120). The above-mentioned (daily) aspects, such as clothing or eating habits, all relate to these expectations to a certain extent. Grace wants her daughter Lily to correspond to a model image that might remind some readers of the model minority myth (mentioned in chapter 5) seen in Fu's *For Today I Am a Boy*. The difference between these two cases, however, is the fact that Grace does not want her daughter to adopt the Western values of the society she now lives in so that Lily might become part of a perfectly assimilated minority. Instead, Lily should adhere to her Chinese background that guides Grace's moral compass, exemplified by the fact that Grace views Lily explicitly as not being Canadian (4). Lily realizes the important role of decency and modesty in Chinese culture (13), which results in the depiction of Chinese culture, and its corresponding norms and values, as the core of the shattered relationship between mother and daughter. Intersectionality in a narrow sense, as a double burden to establish and maintain social hierarchies, is thus treated on the level of content in this novel. *Lily in the Snow* negotiates the balancing act of women in their role as employees in a professional context and their role in the domestic sphere, being additionally in charge of unpaid care work – in contrast to men. This balancing act, in turn, influences the relationship between Lily and her mother in a considerable way, resulting in a mother-daughter hierarchy as Grace wants to save her daughter from enduring the effects of this double-burden. This hierarchy is based on norms and values depicted as particularly Chinese in Li's novel: Lily establishes a perspective on Chineseness as the basis, the core of the character traits her mother has developed over the years. Lily understands her mother's shortcomings as a result of Chinese policies, as Grace's

> whole life and her many talents had been wasted in decades of soul-destroying revolutionary campaigns. Her feminine gentleness had been hardened by the ordeals repeatedly imposed on her. She must have been desperate, humiliated by her own colleagues and betrayed by friends she trusted. (50, see also 45, 216-217)

The characterization of Lily's expected gentleness as "feminine" illustrates that the attitude Lily expects from Grace in her role as a mother is also clearly driven by gender; Lily would probably not have looked for gentleness from a male person. Here, gender and cultural background are illustrated as interdependent for the formation of expectations in personal, familial relationships. The separate gender spheres implicitly illustrated in the phrase "female gentleness" is portrayed as a collocation to a certain extent. This aspect is again represented when Lily reflects on gender concerning the role of women: Lily "felt dismay and realized reluctantly that most women talked about confidence all the time, but when facing a man, they still couldn't forget they were women" (333). Here, the protagonist refers

to the efforts of women to raise their attractiveness and create attention by focusing on their outward appearance to please men. The descriptions of Lily's inner feelings, at this point, seem to suggest that she questions this attitude, yet she is not able to liberate herself from it as she describes her discontent about her fading youth when referring to her gray hair (327, 223) and as she expects "feminine gentleness" from her mother. The depiction of gender stereotypes, in the form of specific roles in family and society, underlines the double burden between professionalism and care work because especially the latter field is strongly linked to stereotypical female traits, such as gentleness (Ferrant et al.). These stereotypes are illustrated as a part of Chinese Canadian society. Grace's constant confrontation with these stereotypes during her past in China, i.e. her ethnic background, is thus depicted as the core of her behavior, which is surrounded by her hard shell. With this core created by Li, the social hierarchies based on Lily's status as an unemployed single mother depict her as even more heavily burdened due to her ethnic background as a visible minority not only by her social environment (see section 7.3) but also within her own family. Additionally, the ethnic core also helps to uncover gender related stereotypes leading to these double burdens.

Grace's continuous verbalization of criticism, even anonymously in public by writing newspaper articles (222), corresponds to the constant critical and accusing light in the eyes of her mother identified by Lily (1, see also 61, 95), which also serves as a means for Grace to establish and maintain her superior position within the familial fabric. Her manner of communication completes the critical mosaic on another level: she is described as speaking in a "disapproving tone" (55), she replies "cold and firm" (122) or "sarcastically" (4), she sneers (121, 174), hisses (174) and raises her voice (120), her voice sounds angry (120) and she uses imperatives (58) towards her daughter. Her utterances, her stare and her manner of communication hence create a vivid image of Grace as a nasty faultfinder, who steadily devalues her daughter on multiple levels. As a result, the exceedingly rare occasions of praise by Grace lead to Lily feeling surprised (276).

Interestingly, Li describes the relationship between mother and daughter explicitly as hierarchical, which results in open reflections about positions and means. Lily, in one scene, "knew that was Mother's way to make her feel low" (122). Here, she seems to disengage from Grace's constant degradation as she suddenly did not care anymore and continues to talk to her mother with the aim to better understand her (122). While starting to feel a stronger emotional bond to Grace with her presence in Canada, Lily, occasionally feeling self-doubts about her ability to fulfil her mother's expectations (34), "sometimes forgot her position and even made critical comments on Grace's past" (258). This form of Lily's

emotional closeness does not result in a mitigation of the hierarchy, though, but Grace insists on her power and tries to maintain her position, illustrated by her loss of temper because of her daughter's criticism (259). Paradoxically, Lily is not allowed to express criticism, something which her mother Grace constantly does, due to the unequal power relations within this mother-daughter relationship. On the other hand, compliments are not useful for the reduction of the hierarchical distance as, for example, after Lily praises Grace's looks (55), Grace reacts with the belittlement of her daughter's clothing style. The suffocation of Lily caused by Grace is symbolized with the dying asparagus plant, which Lily only found after another heated argument with her mother (178) and which revives the day that Grace leaves Lily for a trip with the church community (179): As soon as Grace leaves, the asparagus plant develops a fresh sprout (179) indicating that Lily is able to have respite and to revive herself. The plant's complete recovery mentioned towards the end of the novel (366) does not only foreshadow Grace's upcoming departure back to China (374) but also a revelation between mother and daughter with Grace explaining herself to her daughter in a monologue at the very end of the novel (347-376) and thus a final resolution of the conflict. Furthermore, the airport as a space of both arrival and departure seems a logical choice for a spatial setting for the beginning and the ending of the novel: at the beginning, Lily and her mother start their mission of achieving a viable relationship. After having grown as close as possible, symbolized, for instance, by the groundbreaking hug (377), Grace's departure implies the beginning of a new chapter for both. Grace has come to terms with her long lost lover from the past (see section 7.5.) whereas Lily is about to start a new career as a writer (see below).

The power relations between Lily and Grace have been established from Lily's childhood on and have affected her ever since (50). Lily, as a focalizer, describes how, as a little girl, she "would lower her head to avoid Mother's stare, but a strong sense of inferiority remained deep inside her for the rest of her life" (328). The past between herself and her mother Grace is characterized by emotional distance and a lack of (physical) contact: Lily and her siblings have been sent away to schools and nurseries for years (36), hugs, kisses and cuddling never occurred during Lily's childhood (35, 50, 377) and Grace continuously expressed her disappointment about her children (41, 328) while dismissing their emotions (112). The only instance of physical contact consists of a handshake when Lily was accepted as a Grade 1 student in a school approved of by Grace (50-51).[141] Grace's reaction, in this scene, only

[141] The handshake by Grace corresponds to Lily's repeated, valiant attempts at being successful back at school (328) because this ensures some positive attention by her mother.

seems logical as she regards her own hard work now as crowned with success, thereby completely ignoring Lily's contribution, which is underlined by Lily's impression that Grace does not devote her attention fully to her daughter in this moment (51). Moreover, Grace openly expresses to her little daughter that she did not miss her after three years of separation (121). Lily provides numerous further examples of Grace's, in Lily's view, questionable child rearing practices and the traumata she still suffers from and that result in Lily feeling uneasy in Grace's presence (1). These range from locking her 10-year-old daughter naked in the hallway of a shared apartment because of Lily's impertinent reaction (49) to the prohibition to leave her room because of an unsatisfactory performance at school (52). It is interesting to note that Grace justifies this measure with the fear of having to reveal her daughter's grades to other people (52). (Not) losing face due to the performance of her daughter is important to Grace during Lily's childhood, which corresponds to Grace's selfish motive for her daughter's professional success later in Canada. In contrast to hiding unsatisfactory school achievements, Grace likes to deliberately inform people if her daughter earns excellent grades (52). Any possible resolution or a reduction of emotional distance during Lily's childhood is quickly destroyed: During a time of famine back in China, Grace shoulders all obstacles to find eggs to feed her daughter but then denies Lily the long-awaited, delicious dinner because some peasant children, who also suffer from starvation, arrive and are given most of the food (342-344). Grace's expectations towards Lily during childhood and adulthood expressed by the constant criticism result in a shattered relationship: the unequal power relations and the continuous exertion of Grace's superior position within this hierarchy lead to Lily's feelings of insecurity and intimidation (34, 51) as well as inferiority (328) after having continuously tried to meet Grace's expectations during Lily's childhood (328). The fact that these power dynamics have been established by Grace from Lily's childhood on is particularly interesting because Lily's childhood is set in China. Grace's attempt to push Lily towards professional success because of her experiences with a women's double-burden consequently shows that women in China, as women in Canada, also suffer from the balancing act between care work and a professional career. In Li's novel, this specific female double-burden is hence depicted as universal, independent from a setting in China or Canada, thus transgressing alleged contrasts between East and West.

Lily's reaction to the constant degradation from her mother ranges from avoidance to defenselessness to confrontation and to empathy for her mother. In the beginning, Lily tries to hinder her mother from visiting her in Canada because she is afraid of her mother's

reaction concerning her status as an unemployed single mother (2). While separated, Lily even lied to her mother about her job to avoid a confrontation with Grace (2). She avoids looking in her mother's eyes (3, 58), remains silent (3, 5, 58), blushes (269) or she even praises her mother for whatever positive aspect she can find (222) when confronted with Grace's criticism. Regarding Grace's outbreaks, Lily generally remains controlled and tries to talk calmly in order to de-escalate the situation (174-176) or she defenselessly agrees with Grace's self-designation as a great mother (180). Moments of speaking Lily's mind are rejected by Grace, who turns the tables and continues to belittle her daughter in every respect (121-122). The only exception to Lily's defenselessness is the discussion about child rearing practices: whereas Grace regards Lily's son as a hindrance for her daughter that needs to be physically chastised (35) and has to be sent away in order to follow a proper career path (3), Lily insists that "No, Mother! In Canada, people don't send their children away at such an early age. It could damage their psychological development" (3) and that "if you ask Canadians here, they will tell you that such an arrangement is cruel" (4). Grace's reaction, in this situation, again reflects the constant belittlement and manipulation of her daughter as she clearly disapproves of Lily's child rearing practices (35), dismisses Lily's needs, replies in a sarcastic and angry manner (3, 35) and denies her a Canadian identity (4). To protect her son from the childhood traumata Lily herself suffered from (3), Lily refers to cultural differences related to child rearing practices. In this context, the question arises whether Lily's attitude would have changed in a similar way if she had not migrated to Canada. The severity of her traumata, which Lily expresses multiple times in the novel, indeed leads to the assumption that the reference to cultural differences serves as a mere excuse to avoid confronting her mother with her atrocious childhood in China. On the other hand, however, Lily's reply that "nobody knows who I am anyway" (55) to another instance of Grace's criticism regarding Lily's clothing style is tellingly ambiguous and might hint at Lily's insecurity about her own (cultural) identity.

In the course of the novel, Lily develops empathy for her mother after having learned about the hardships Grace had to endure during her life in China (258, 293). This does not lead to a resolution but Lily joins her mother in the continuous power play by allowing Grace to manipulate her: Lily feels that she needs to apologize multiple times in order to be able to go back to normal (37) or to talk in a "humble manner to ease the tension" (40). Lily constantly agrees on her guilt for the numerous arguments between her and her mother by cooperating in Grace's manipulation, thereby feeding the superior position Grace has established for herself. Despite these disparate power relations, Lily still feels an emotional

bond to her mother (50) and does not doubt her mother's affection for her but only her mother's lack of skills to express this affection (52). Grace's wish for a man inferior in position to her daughter "in every respect" (326) as, in Grace's view, this ensures Lily's happiness (326) is, according to Lily, a sign of Grace's affection for her daughter. Grace's caring is also shown in the fact that Grace "could never tolerate the least bit of unfair treatment of her daughter by other people" (327).

In summary, Grace constantly maintains the superiority she has established in the relationship with her daughter from Lily's childhood on through various means such as the explicit and constant uttering of criticism, a particular manner of speaking and facial expression. She bases her expectations related to her daughter's professional success, which provide the motive for this social hierarchy, on her ethnic background, thereby reflecting the multiple responsibilities women generally take over in family and society both in China and Canada and, additionally, the gender stereotypes related to this double burden of female members of a society. The hierarchy between Grace and her daughter Lily, as represented in Li's novel, thus illustrates that intersectionality is negotiated in its narrow sense as intersecting, multiple oppressions but that these experiences transgress national borders as they can be equally found in both Canadian and Chinese society.

7.2.2. Lily's Failed Romantic Relationships

This section provides an analysis of hierarchies within protagonist Lily's romantic relationships and offers insights into hierarchies based on gender. Similar to the relationship between Lily and her mother, Lily's love attachments to men also portrays social hierarchies in a familial, domestic context. The names of Lily's former partners, Majesty and Prince, with their strong connection to aristocracy, are telling names as they refer to a superior position within a social fabric. This superior position, provided to aristocrats by birthright, is indeed reflected in their relationships with Lily. Both men act with great suave and bathe themselves in their superficial magnificence that Lily is, eventually, able to escape from.

The novel starts with Lily's relationship with Prince, who acquired this nickname because of his outstanding looks (8). Lily, as a student, is dazzled by his appearance and charisma at first (8) but she quickly perceives his shallowness, self-indulgence and selfishness (9), which is also reflected in the chapter's title[142]: "Prince Charming's Tale" (8) foreshadows, with its

[142] Generally, the chapter titles serve to briefly summarize the content of the subsequent chapter in a very straightforward manner, for instance a chapter entitled "Unicorn with Jade" (82) tells the story of this couple, which is also the case for the chapter "Camellia's story" (162). Occasionally, however, the titles are rather enigmatic and arouse curiosity, leaving the reader puzzled. "The Remaining Soapy Bubbles" (96), for example, refers to Lily's earliest memories of Canada (96) or "Breast Says No" (154) to a bare breast demonstration by a Canadian women's organization (154).

reference to fairy tales, Lily's fantastical imaginations. Prince's outstanding looks cannot compensate for his volatile character as he emotionally abuses Lily by threatening to commit suicide if she leaves him (10, 16), by provoking guilt in her (108-110) and he grossly exaggerates in his utterances when apologizing to Lily (17). Nevertheless forced into a marriage with him by her mother (13), Lily realizes that Prince's superficiality (18-19), his dramatic performances and his exaggerated helpfulness with chores (18), which impede her from obtaining a divorce (17), are now accompanied by his hedonism and his attempts to provoke Lily's jealousy by talking about other women (14-15). His triviality cannot satisfy her intellectual thirst, which is repeatedly expressed to the reader but also to Prince himself (16, 19). In summary, Prince puts Lily into an inferior position by representing her as the perpetrator, as the person responsible for the failure of their marriage, which resembles Grace's strategy of expressing constant criticism to convince Lily that she herself is the one responsible for her miseries. Nowadays, the term "gaslighting" is used to describe this strategy of establishing social hierarchies and it is related to power. Merriam Webster explains the term as follows: Gaslighting is a

> psychological manipulation of a person usually over an extended period of time that causes the victim [here Lily] to question the validity of their own thoughts, perception of reality, or memories and typically leads to confusion, loss of confidence and self-esteem, uncertainty of one's emotional or mental stability, and a dependency on the perpetrator [Prince in *Lily in the Snow*].

Previously used to refer to a form of extreme manipulation inducing mental illnesses, the term is now colloquially used for any kind of manipulation evoking doubts in the gaslighted person (American Psychological Association). In the case of Lily and Prince, the significant effects described in the definition by Merriam Webster are not brought to their full extent[143] as Lily is able to eventually leave him. However, the typical communicative inversion of the victim and perpetrator roles, exerted by the perpetrator in order to achieve a superior position within a relationship, can be identified here.

Lily's second relationship is with Majesty, whom she met on the university campus in Canada while he corrected a Caucasian Canadian's kung fu moves (103). Lily perceives Majesty as a "real man", defined in her cosmos as a man being able to do charity work, organize meetings and give interviews when needed (103) or as smelling of a mixture of smoke and sweat (108). Similar to her relationship with Prince, the view through rose-colored glasses fades and Lily starts to recognize his undesirable character traits: she does not appreciate his stubbornness and pride or his overpractical manner (113, 205), for

[143] *Girl on the Train*, both the novel and the movie, provide an example of this worst case scenario (Yahr).

example, or the fact that it is unacceptable, in his view, that she sees other men, regardless of the innocuous purpose (183). His order not to talk "rubbish" (188) before her job interview shows his distrust in Lily's competences and presents an instance of belittlement. He is generally depicted as an impatient person without much empathy (see, for instance, 194-195, 198), also with Lily, as shown by his impatience with Lily's struggles with their boss' dog (194) or her view on their boss' alcoholism (195). Majesty himself, his name indicating a spot at the top of a social fabric, is illustrated as having difficulties with social hierarchies in a professional context because he does not fulfil, on purpose, the tasks given to him by his employer Mrs. Fortune (204-205), leading to "ill-fitting [employer-employee] roles" (205), which corresponds to the superiority he feels towards his boss (see, for instance, 193). Moreover, he does not seem to be able to take on other perspectives, which numerous instances of criticism about their Caucasian-Canadian boss' attitude illustrates (196, 198-199). His constant nagging reminds readers of Lily's mother Grace as does his manner of communication described with verbs such as "sneer" (195) or with "frown" (199). Lily, similar to her reactions to Grace, tries to conform to Majesty's preference of women being in charge of cooking rather than reading but it seems to provoke unhappiness in her as she starts to think back to her former partner Prince, who used to praise her for her academic achievements (197). Majesty has a wife and daughter in China[144] and he is not able to divorce due to his feelings of responsibility and of guilt because of his relationship with Lily in Canada (110-112, 114-115, 201, 208). Moreover, this presents a means for Majesty to establish a superior position to Lily based on her lack of experience related to child rearing, which he turns into a criticism of Lily (193). Furthermore, it causes many instances of outbreaks towards Lily, which become worse over time (201). In the end, this guilt seems to be the reason for their separation (208). Lily is well aware of Majesty's family situation but despite her – at least in her view – high moral standards (she considers working as a stripper as immoral, for instance; see section 7.2), she begins a relationship with Majesty, which depicts her character as ambiguous or even as a hypocrite because she feels jealous (110-112), and as complex because she also feels guilty and struggles with her moral standards (119). Interestingly, surely in another attempt at gaslighting manipulation, her former partner Prince accuses Lily in his farewell letter of being too critical, of having constantly looked down on him and of being caught in her Chinese cultural background (109-110) – all aspects

[144] Interestingly, he is also described as having been forced into this marriage for strategic reasons (115-117), so none of the marriages elaborated on in *Lily in the Snow* present love as a motivation for a marriage (see the following sections for more information).

that Lily accuses her mother of, so Lily might resemble her mother more than she thinks. This aspect as well as her inconsistent behavior related to gender stereotypes render Lily a multidimensional character full of contradictions in the sense of a complex identity that struggles with their own values in the course of the novel.

In summary, the relationships with Majesty and Prince show considerable similarities to the hierarchy established by Grace regarding the strategies used. Prince manipulates Lily in order to provoke in her feelings of guilt for every possible issue and Majesty's manner of communication is similar to that of Grace. These descriptions, and their multiple uses in different constellations, allow insights into the general establishment of social hierarchies in a domestic context. All three constellations involving Lily are characterized by a particular critical form of speech, a specific, derogatory manner of communication and distinct, condescending facial expressions – all used to put Lily into an inferior position. Lily, in turn, plays the role ascribed to her at the beginning but manages to liberate herself from these constellations: She obtains a divorce from Prince, she separates from Majesty and, eventually, she is able to reconcile with her mother, Grace, which changes the representation of Lily from a passive women in an inferior social status to a character with agency by means of resisting. Lily asks herself if she needs a man in her life anyway after Mrs. Rice unsuccessfully tried to match her with Lily's neighbor Master Iron (186). She does not want to conform to the separate gender spheres that, for instance, Majesty preferred, meaning that she does not prefer to cook and be in charge of housework but that she wants to pursue the activities she feels comfortable with, such as writing. After having called Prince in a moment of nostalgic memory, Lily realizes, through the information provided by his new wife, that he has not changed at all and that he still struggles with his life in Canada, which enables her to close this chapter of her life (236-237). When learning about a different view on the mythical figure of Norman Bethune (see chapter 7.2), readers learn that Lily's opinion about desirable character traits defining a "real man" have changed over the course of time: "To me, however, a man like Norman Bethune, with striking gifts, flaws, and a complicated personality, is a real man, and worth loving and remembering. That would also be true for a woman like that […]" (260). In this matter, Lily is again depicted as a multidimensional character, not only portraying inconsistencies and complexity but also changes in her view and developments in the course of the novel.

In the context of (domestic) social hierarchies, the remarkable role of literature is identified by Luo, who simplistically concludes that "what sustains Lily ultimately, and staves off her sense of loneliness and homelessness, is her writing" (Luo). Depicted by Li

not as highly outstanding but, nevertheless, constantly resonating in the novel, literature and authorship seem to provide a therapeutic function for Lily[145], not only in her failed relationship with Prince (15) and her past as a housemaid (189, 200-201) but also in the present time of the novel: "Literature was a holy[146] and magic world. She [Lily] could not find any other field where she could create and feel great" (53). Literature of a particular standard nourishes Lily – be it as an author or as a reader (201, 294). Its function is unique to Lily, which is illustrated by her old friend Jade's failed attempt to find distraction in literature during her time as a refugee in Russia (86). Lily's reflection on literature, additionally, is interesting as it presents a moment of liberation from her living conditions: Lily pursues her idea of a memoir with joy (see, for instance, 53, 257) despite the countless instances of criticism by her mother (see, for example, 54, 259, 330-331). To her, writing is a way to search for meaning in her life: "She had been writing mostly because she had so many whys in her life. She wrote down the whys she had figured out for others and also the whys she had failed to understand in her own life so that others might help her" (257). Here, literature serves as a means of empowerment, as a tool of liberation that Lily can use to escape the world she is currently living in, to follow her dream of becoming a writer and to come to terms with her past. The probable acceptance of her manuscript by a publisher at the end of the novel (378), despite previous rejections (363), leaves the reader with hope and the possible success of this tool. The prospective success in this matter revives Lily's confidence that she had lost during the previous application processes at publishing companies (378). Hence, on a metalevel, literature in *Lily in the Snow* is depicted as a means of escape, liberation, coping, and, possibly, of empowerment by providing confidence. The undescribed nature of the pieces of literature that Lily talks about extends this possible function of literature to all genres and topics.

Finally, the domestic hierarchies in *Lily in the Snow* are depicted as intertwined with more general social inequalities and as following a particular pattern in all character constellations that protagonist Lily experiences. The power relations between Lily and her mother, in particular, illustrates the representation of intersectionality in literary texts in its narrow sense, as a form of multiple oppression, here for the case of social class and gender by

[145] It is debatable in how far Lily has been urged to pursue an intense interest in literature, either by her mother Grace due to her fondness for excellent education or by her acquaintances, among whom she had a reputation "as a star always seeking out unusual orbits" (16; here referring to further education in general and literature in particular). Having been pushed or not, Lily's devotion to literary works cannot be denied.

[146] Please note here the reference to religion, which generally plays an important role in the novel. The ascription of religious characteristics to literature emphasizes religion's therapeutic function as it is represented, amongst others, as a space of refuge and comfort in this novel (see section 7.5. for more information on this aspect).

illustrating the struggle of an unemployed single mother. Literature, in Li's novel, is presented as a tool of liberation from these power relations in a domestic context.

7.3. Social Inequality in a Broader Context

In this section, the hierarchies in the non-familial context will be in the focus as these are intertwined with the social hierarchies in the domestic context. In the case of *Lily in the Snow*, one has to differentiate between the religious community and other social contexts. Due to its eminent role in Li's work, the religious community will be analyzed in detail in section 7.5. Additionally, Li's novel provides insights into social hierarchies established in China. This aspect will only be covered marginally as these social hierarchies can be attributed directly to the political climate (at least as represented in the novel) and not to communal or individual dynamics. The analysis of the politically established social hierarchies in China is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this dissertation due to the considerable differences between the political systems in China and Canada, the geographical settings, and the fundamental necessity to consider historical developments for a precise analysis, for instance. Yet, this aspect surely presents a highly interesting point of connection. Thus, the core of the present section consists of the protagonist's social environment outside of the family and the religious community, which provides an image of migrant lives in contemporary Canadian societies.

The spatial setting in *Lily in the Snow* might remind some readers of the secluded Chinese community in Vancouver described in Choy's novel. Located west of Toronto (2), Mapleton seems a rather rural area, though, if one considers the town near London as an inspiration for the novel's spatial setting.[147] Lily's living situation is downgraded because of Grace as they move from a two-bedroom to a one-room apartment to manage the family's financial resources (5). The building, in which both apartments are located, is characterized by its dreariness and deterioration: the so-called "refugee camp" is cockroach-ridden and inhabited by lower income immigrants (5)[148], which creates an atmosphere characterized by "exotic music, foreign languages from videotapes, vegetables sizzling in woks, and crying babies" (219). Lily, just as her mother Grace (219), feels foreign in this area (50). Among the few Chinese inhabitants of the apartment building that Lily lives in (48), some people's destinies are described in detail in the novel. They help to illustrate the connection between ethnic

[147] Mapleton in *Lily in the Snow* is said to be located around 300km west of Toronto whereas Google Maps research indicates only 190km for a Mapleton, Ontario near Toronto – a deviation that can, however, be ignored considering the different transport options.

[148] In this context, Grace does not only create a superior position between herself and her daughter, but she also looks down on the living area in general and its inhabitants in particular (5, 57) as she expresses the feeling of foreignness in this place (219).

background and social class and the heterogeneous nature of economic destinies that await immigrants, in particular with the descriptions of Master Iron, Mouse-colonel and Beaver-Teeth. Except for Master Iron, Lily nicknamed the inhabitants herself according to their looks (48). Master Iron is famous for his martial arts teaching and seems to enjoy basking in his reputation (34, 184). He pretends to be younger than he actually is and he is looking explicitly for a Chinese wife (182-184). Eventually, Lily learns that he died of a heart attack (323).[149] Mouse is the owner of a buffet restaurant with some employees he is in charge of (48). Rumors say that he hires workers illegally and pays them below minimum wage (250), which corresponds to Lily's first employer, who is also of Chinese background and treats his staff badly. Employers of Chinese background, hence, are not depicted as showing solidarity with their ethnic compatriots but they take advantage of the precarious job opportunities by exploiting their staff with regard to minimum wage or workers' rights. As a result, Mouse-colonel gives the reader the impression of having earned a considerable amount of money and having improved his social status, illustrated by his generous donation at church and the willingness to pay huge sums for the approval of his daughter's visa (263-265), while accepting other people's loss for his own benefit. On the other hand, the description of his life back in China (266-267) – his escape to Canada after having stolen money from the Chinese government, for which he has to hide in order not to be extradited (57) – creates empathy both in Lily and in readers, as "his back was already bent, like an old man's. [Lily] was struck with the odd impression, somehow, that the man was indeed, as his nickname 'Mouse-colonel' suggested, like a frightened mouse, ready to run away at any moment" (267). In the case of Mouse-colonel, his ethnic background and his past back in China as a poor soldier being forced into a marriage (266-267) serve as an explanation for his behavior in Canada, illustrating Chineseness as the core that forms Mouse-colonel's character, leading to social inequalities in Canada with him being the oppressor due to his inherent desire to improve his own social status. This use of his ethnic background results in him being depicted as a multidimensional character, similar to Lily's mother Grace. Lily becomes acquainted with Beaver-teeth in the context of her work for Mr. New's immigration service company. Leaving his status as a peasant in China behind, Beaver-teeth was brought to Canada by smugglers and pretended to claim refuge for prosecution because of his having three children (254-255). He describes the inhumane practices of the smugglers, forcing

[149] For more background information on the description of the circumstances of Master Iron's death see Bao, who, in his rather anecdotic contribution, briefly elaborates on Li's experience with signs of approaching death she includes in her novel with these descriptions (46-47).

women into prostitution or torturing men in order to recover their financial claims (252-253) and demanding immigrants to falsely claim asylum for religious prosecution (253-254). His fear of the authorities results in his illegal escape to the U.S. due to his fear of giving a false testimony to the immigration officer in charge of his case and, consequently, being deported (320-322). The depiction of these three unfortunate destinies with all of their unhappy endings leaves the reader with a vivid image of the sorrowful lives of immigrants in Canadian society, which is strongly connected to both their ethnic background and their economic success albeit with differing shares.

Lily's varying occupational contexts also provide insights into the precarious working conditions of many migrants, even highly qualified ones working under immigrant employers, and the cultural differences leading to difficulties on the job market.[150] Only after Grace has arrived in Canada and serves as a babysitter (23) is Lily eventually able to look for a job.[151] As a result, her status as a single mother adds to the aforementioned difficulties, which Lily, as a focalizer, verbalizes explicitly: "[…] the role of being a single mother constantly hindered her career and life" (336-337). Lily loses her first job as a warehouse manager because she refuses to have her purse checked, as all of her newly arrived immigrant coworkers must (24), before leaving her workplace controlled by a Chinese immigrant (24). Similar to Mouse-colonel as a boss, this employer is depicted as exploiting his staff for his own benefit without any sign of solidarity with other immigrants. The same applies to Lily's boss Mr. New, who runs an immigration service office. Offering legal advice on immigration matters to Asian clients, Mr. New – similar to other employers and members of the Chinese Christian community (see section 7.5. for more information) – is exposed as a mere capitalist, who seeks to take advantage of the dreadful circumstances of desperate illegal refugees in Canada. He charges large amounts of money (255, 265) and makes promises to his clients that he most probably is not able to fulfil (265), always looking for "fat cases" (255), i.e. the most profitable ones.[152] Although Lily's working conditions are described as

[150] The same applies to the minor character of Old Chia, who has a PhD from China which is not accepted on the Canadian job market (141) – a fact that intersects with his age of 50 when compared to his younger and more energetic competitors on the job market (141). Jade, Lily's friend from the Chinese Christian community, also talks about the difficulties in Canada: she and her husband are unable to afford child care so that they see no other option than leaving their nine-year-old son unattended at home (295).

[151] The struggles on the job market did not start with the birth of Baby. Lily had troubles finding a suitable job in the rural area of Mapleton immediately after her graduation, probably because she decided to stay in Mapleton with her former partner Majesty and declined the opportunity to enter a PhD program at the University of Toronto (188-189).

[152] Her position in this company additionally provides Lily with insights into the challenges of Asian immigrants in Canada, who, more often than not, try to migrate or to stay in Canada by strategic marriages (255-256).These strategic marriages indeed are not only restricted to Asians marrying Westerners but also vice versa as the novel shows (256). Moreover, this phenomenon seems to have a long history as a fellow student

comfortable (330) in contrast to her other jobs, Mr. New treats his clients in an abominable manner, being only interested in making money. In Li's novel, Chinese employers are hence depicted as treating their staff and/or their clients unfairly for their own enrichment, which adds to the picture of Chinese immigrants occupied in precarious jobs, such as Lily. The group of Chinese Canadian immigrants is thus depicted as heterogeneous regarding social class in Li's novel.

In her second job in a strip club, Lily realizes that she is not only hired to clean a kitchen but that she is also in charge of cleaning the strippers' rooms, which irritates her in two ways: first, she does not approve of the kind of immoral work these women carry out but she only eventually quits after having learned about the extraordinary high payment of the strippers in comparison to her earnings as a cleaning woman (26-27). Lily herself, additionally, looks down on her own position as a cleaning woman: "Becoming a financially independent person now seemed illogical, if it meant she had to contribute to society this way" (25). This corresponds to her intellectual ambitions she expresses in her relationship with Prince (see section 7.2) and it underlines the impression that Lily has a vocation for greatness. As a consequence, Lily, herself a victim of discrimination both in a domestic context and in society, places herself in a higher position based on her values and her education. With the descriptions of these occupations, readers learn about Lily's cultural difficulties not only in the family context, i.e. through the discussions with her mother, but also in the context of the broader society as her cultural values differ from one context to another. While rebelling against an autocratic work regime established by her boss and accepted by the coworkers, Lily refers to Canadian standards of human rights (24). However, while she does not refer to her Western code of ethics, she condemns both the kind of work and the working conditions from a Chinese perspective in her second position (29). These contradictions render her, as mentioned before, a multidimensional character. Her third position as a housekeeper in a hotel, on the other hand, illustrates the difficulties even highly qualified immigrants can face in Canada: when learning that all her Chinese colleagues are highly qualified with PhD degrees, their position as housekeepers in a hotel awakens Lily (and readers) to the systemic racism against visible minorities on the Canadian job market:

> Looking at the lack of expression on the faces around her, Lily saw her own image in the other people's eyes, particularly in that of job interviewers. She suddenly realized why she was rated as "overqualified" for clerical positions. That characteristic unemotional

from Shanghai recommends Lily to marry "a foreigner instead of a Chinese" (101) because this probably promises considerable financial security and, as a result, social mobility.

> look, with no trace of sunshine smiles, was suitable only for out-of-sight work, never at the front desk. (27)

In this passage, Lily describes how her qualifications and those of her colleagues are instrumentalized as an alibi to cover the actual racist reasons for rejections. Some of them, including Lily, even conceal their qualifications in order to find work (27). Moreover, Lily's rejection as a Chinese language newspaper reporter at the British Broadcasting Company illustrates that motherhood and a low income, with its resulting lack of participation in daily activities, present insurmountable obstacles for both the Canadian and British job market: she is not able to properly prepare for the interview because she does not own a TV and she is not able to afford child care (336), which disqualifies her as a suitable candidate. The fact that she is the only woman on the shortlist invited for an interview (336) evokes the assumption that she has been invited for quota reasons or that she is indeed highly qualified for the job but, in the end, not a suitable candidate after all due to the burdens mentioned above. So even if her background presents an advantage, it cannot compensate for the intersection with other burdens that Lily has to face in this case.

These hardships are not only restricted to workers of Asian background, but other visible minorities suffer from the same injustices, e.g. Lily's Jamaican colleague in the hotel has a degree in child psychology (28). She is thus also highly qualified but only gains a promotion in her housekeeping job after the Chinese coworkers have left for better jobs (238, 367) – she had witnessed this fluctuation, but had been denied the promotion for a long time due to her status as a Black (28) single mother of two toddlers (30) as Li indicates. However, the promotion and the job changes of the Chinese people provide not only a negative image of the Canadian job market for visible minorities but also a glimpse of hope that, if one patiently endures these hardships, employment opportunities will eventually improve. Climbing up the social ladder through the improvement of an individual's working position or squeezing through the hatch (as Crenshaw put it; see chapter 4.1) is depicted as possible in the novel, even if one is multiply burdened. However, it also illustrates the differences in social inequality as it shows the discrimination of Black persons on the job market to be more severe than the discrimination of Chinese.

Issues with governmental institutions and immigrants are also illustrated in the novel. Camellia, a friend of Lily's looking for advice for a divorce, finds herself stranded in a governmental organization in charge of providing shelter and legal advice to its clients (241). The organization, though, is completely unprepared to deal with immigrant women as they are neither able to meet different language needs by, for instance, providing interpretors, nor

to act in the interest of their clients by respecting individual challenges (241).[153] As a consequence, the demand for her signature on a piece of paper arouses strong suspicion in Camellia as her needs had not been met (283). Discrimination in governmental (related) agencies is hence another issue, also raised in the novel with Lily not being able to solve a visa problem for a client when working for Mr. New, whereas with Helen – her Caucasian Canadian former professor – accompanying her, "the problem was miraculously solved" (265). Lily's appointment with a member of parliament corresponds to the depiction of governmental institutions and staff as overstrained. His answers to Lily's query for help in her job search sound fully automated with a lack of emotional involvement because of his constant preoccupation with similar destinies (333-334). Canadian educational institutions are depicted in a similar manner as they show considerable difficulties in being flexible according to the needs of immigrants because of the Canadian law: due to the lack of a birth permit certificate[154] in China, the legal documents of a boy state that he is only seven years old while he was actually born two years earlier (288-290). First claiming to only act in accordance with Canadian law, the teacher eventually agrees to assign him to grade four instead of grade two after some discussions (288-290). Governmental institutions are, consequently, not depicted as practicing systemic racism, thereby enforcing social inequality, but as unable to cope with immigrant matters due to the multiplicity of individual challenges and needs.

Although descriptions of encounters with Caucasian Canadian characters are rare in Li's work, some passages provide insights into the colonial attitude of unnamed characters, which certainly allows one to regard them as types that show colonial tendencies at the intersection of race and gender. Their representation shows that racist incidents are indeed not only restricted to the occupational context. Having freshly arrived in Canada, Lily feels humiliated by a group of Caucasian people at the airport because they were laughing at her when she almost fell due to an unintended ankle kick by one of them (96), for example. Moreover, Lily is perceived as an eroticized exotic other by one of the hotel guests, who refers to her "lovely moon face" (32) and winks at his companion when offering Lily an unbelievably well paid job (32). This scene illustrates the interdependence of racism and

[153] Here, it is particularly ironic that Mrs. Rice, only driven by her self-interest (see section 7.5), advises Camellia to avoid this organization because of their exclusive self-interest in the acquisition of government funding by increasing the number of divorces (282).

[154] The Chinese government assigned an annual birth quota to keep the birth rate in China low, which means that couples had to apply for a permit officially allowing them to have children (289). In case of a pregnancy without such a permit, women usually had to have an abortion or, as Lily's friend Jade did, had to conceal their pregnancy and their baby until they were able to apply for a birth permit certificate (289), which results in discrepancies between a child's real age and its certified age provided in official documents.

sexism that Lily, as a woman of Chinese Canadian background, suffers from and it demonstrates the creation of social hierarchies with money: the man is of the opinion that he can buy a low paid Chinese Canadian woman for his pleasure. A similar situation happened earlier in Lily's life: during her first days in Canada, she was subjected to racist sexual harassment by a math professor, who offered accommodation to her (97-98, 100). Here, it is not only Lily's lack of money that creates the basis for a hierarchy, but it is his professional status as a professor, which leads to his superior position. Lily is able to free herself from this situation by explicitly abandoning her "Chinese-style politeness" (98) and by turning down his offer (100). In contrast to the other novels discussed in this dissertation, racism and sexism by Caucasian Americans is also described in China, where Lily's teacher from the U.S. is depicted as a colonial power, who wants to experience the eroticizied exotic other in China (11-12). The change in his attitude and his self-reflections about his behavior years later (340-341), however, presents a hopeful prospect similar to the hope to achieve an occupation corresponding to one's qualification. Generally, Lily perceives colonial attitudes towards the "uncivilized" Chinese on the basis of eating habits: "She [Lily] thought about the heated arguments over dog meat in the 'civilized' world' these days, and wondered why the same people would crave butchered piglets without feeling guilty" (179). Here, Li deconstructs, through the perspective of her protagonist Lily, the double standard that forms the basis of colonialism and its outcomes, which is portrayed in racist and sexist instances within the novel on multiple levels. This issue is again reflected in the scene of a discussion between two Canadians after a bare breast demonstration for women's rights: a woman declares that "Canadians aren't supposed to act like uncivilized tribal women in the African jungle" (157) by baring their breasts whereupon a young man educates her about the racial discrimination in her utterance (157). Hence, Caucasian Canadian society outside of the "refugee camp" which Lily calls her home and the occupational context is depicted as colonial, racist and discriminatory in various ways.

An exception to this, however, are Lily's Caucasian Canadian acquaintances, who are described in more detail in the novel thus being conceptualized as minor characters and not as types. They are depicted as open-minded towards Chinese culture as is demonstrated in the novel by the collective of Caucasian Canadians who meet and organize traditional Chinese festivals in order to educate their adopted children from China about their heritage (268-278). Lily's acquaintances at university, Kevin and Helen, are likewise open-minded and interested: Kevin is enthusiastic about Mandarin and kung fu (102), which eventually leads him to a Buddhist temple where he becomes a monk (185). Helen worries about Lily's

precarious job situation (239) and helps when needed (see above; 265). Helen, similar to Kevin, is depicted as a fully upright person, who, probably in sharp contrast to other characters from the Christian Chinese community (see section 7.5), is not driven by mere self-interest and her own benefit but she is upright even if it puts her at a disadvantage (261-262). Lily's former boss, Mrs. Fortune, despite being depicted as a lonely alcoholic (191, 194-196), turns out to be a pleasant employer to Lily (189-190). In contrast to the unnamed Caucasian Canadian characters, the individuals in Lily's social environment who are not a part of the Chinese Canadian community are depicted as loyal, honest and altruistic rather than egoistic.

Interestingly, and completely in accordance with her character being depicted as complex and multidimensional, Lily is illustrated multiple times as not being free from negative judgments herself and the establishment of hierarchies within her own social environment. As mentioned before, she condemns the work of strippers as immoral (26, 30) and she degrades her own position as a cleaning woman (25). Her code of conduct, based on her Chinese ethnic background, serves as a basis for the condemnation of behavior judged as immoral, which, in turn, leads to her feeling superior towards others from time to time. Furthermore, she cannot avoid the trap of othering when praising her Jamaican coworker's fluency in English (28) and when being confronted with "the exotic western dishes" at the hotel she works for (29). These negative judgments underline the multidimensional character of Lily's figure in Li's novel.

In summary, *Lily in the Snow* shows instances of social inequality as a topic, here in particular in the Canadian job market, where single mothers of a visible minority background suffer from precarious working conditions and systemic racism. Additionally, it provides insights into the heterogeneity of the Chinese Canadian community related to social class with bosses of a Chinese background treating their compatriots as their staff in a bad manner. Canadian governmental institutions are represented as unable to cope with immigrant matters because of the multiplicity of individual needs and requirements. Descriptions of Caucasian Canadian society do not allow detailed insights into strategies used to create social hierarchies but Li nevertheless manages to convey an ambiguous image with random type characters being depicted as racist and/or sexist in contrast to Lily's Caucasian Canadian acquaintances, who form part of her closer social environment and who are depicted as loyal, upright and trustworthy in many respects.

7.4. The Role of Intersectionality on the Level of Form

In contrast to Choy's and Fu's work, *Lily in the Snow* indeed puts the ethnic background as Chinese in the focus on the level of form, in particular through its length, the language and the temporal setting, which, at first sight, contrasts the range of topics negotiated in Li's novel and enforces an allocation to the field of Chinese Canadian literature. However, it is this ethnic framing that enables the foregrounding of further aspects of importance because the formal level also helps to illustrate the complex nature of identities and social hierarchies and it is connected to the Canadian context by using Standard English in a translated version and Mapleton, with its reference to Canada's national symbol, as a spatial setting.

The length of the novel is noteworthy because it reveals the link to the author's Chinese mother tongue. With regard to the novel itself, *Lily in the Snow* is by far the longest of the three novels discussed in this dissertation with a scope of nearly 400 pages, which might be explained with Li's Chinese background. She describes the linguistic and cultural differences regarding the length of descriptions between English and Chinese, arriving at the conclusion that descriptions in a novel in English are shorter than in Chinese (Jiang 338); she thus attempted to consider these differences but the length of her novel leaves the reader with the impression that she was indeed not highly successful in this matter.

In contrast to Fu and Choy, in whose works language switches are either non-existent or fully explicit, readers only learn implicitly or parenthetically that the characters of Li's novel always speak in Chinese, which is translated by the author into Standard English, providing little evidence that it is a translation. Lily's first encounter with her friend Camellia provides an excellent example of this mechanism:

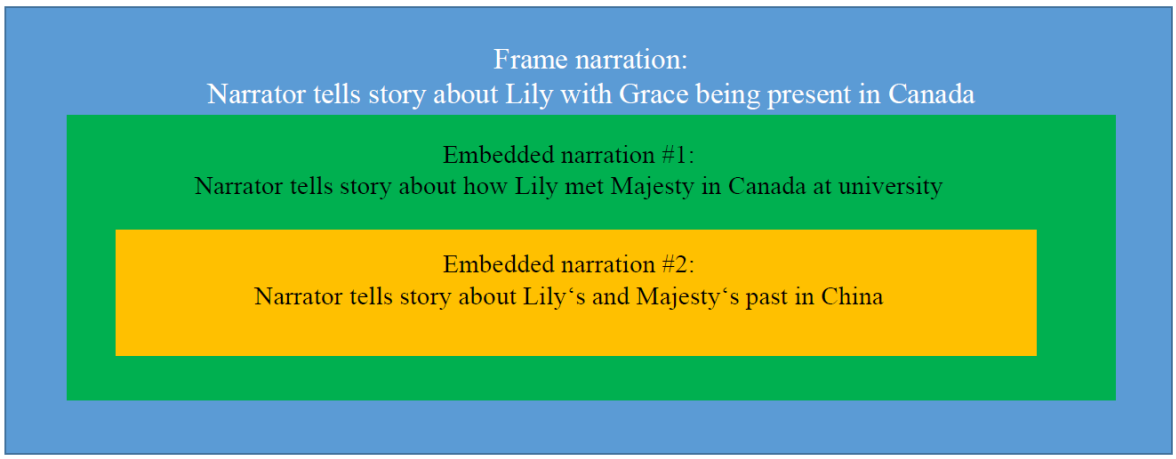
> Camellia showed great interest in [Lily's] reply. She raised her head, blinked her large eyes, and asked, "How long have you been in Canada?"-"Eight years."-"So long! Then you must be familiar with everything. I am sure you can help me. I have been here for only a year."-"What kind of help do you need?"-"I want to divorce my husband. But I don't know any English. Maybe you can help me find out how I can get divorced, since you have gone through the divorce issue in Canada" (59)

This dialogue illustrates the incidental manner with which readers learn that they are reading translations (see 33, 94, 188, 192-193, 224, 269-271 for further examples). This mechanism, because of the subtle ethnic framing it provides, allows the reader to perceive the issues negotiated in Li's novel as universal, as being relevant for readers independent of being Chinese or English speaking. Here, it does not matter whether Camellia speaks to Lily in Chinese but, as a woman, she is bound to her husband and has many difficulties in escaping her situation, as will be shown in more detail in the following section. The rare incidents of explicit use of Chinese (or English; 182) occurs in situations with unknown people (160,

236, 324), probably to clarify that they are nonetheless part of the Chinese community, or situations, in which language presents a barrier (240-241). Moreover, the explicit use of Chinese is used to foster the image of a secluded Chinese Christian community (297). A similar observation can be made for names: in contrast to Choy's novel, all names of the Chinese characters are in English, but the symbolic meaning of these names show they are probably related to Chinese imagery. Prince and Majesty, for example, present obvious cases of the symbolic meaning (see section 7.2 for more information) but even names such as Dwarf, Dragon, Grace, Jade, Camellia and Lily all carry meanings beyond a first name. Grace, for example, is linked with its antonym disgrace in several instances when critcizing her daughter Lily (120, 175, 259), which corresponds to her established social hierarchy with Grace being in the superior position due to her grace and Jade in the inferior position due to her disgraced character and lifestyle. The names of other characters in the apartment building Lily lives in and figures that cross her path in the course of the novel reveal Li's creativity in naming corresponding to the character's destiny, which Luo excellently summarizes: Especially the names of the Chinese people in the apartment building "not only capture vividly the characters' physical attributes but also convey their sorry stories of immigration" (Luo), here referring explicitly to the destinies of Mouse-colonel and Beaver-teeth: the former one has to hide "like a chased mouse for years" (Luo). In contrast to Li's English, characterized as "simple and direct, crystal and clear" (Luo), the nicknaming of the characters (see, for example, 48) and her expressive imagery, e.g. describing Prince's appearance like a red tomato in a pile of muddy potatoes (8, see also 19, 36, 53 for further examples), is clearly influenced by her Chinese background (Luo). Mrs. Fortune's name provides another excellent example as she is described as "certainly not a highly educated woman, she had married wealth and had eventually become a slave to wealth" (199). Both means, the disguised use of Chinese and the dual aspects of telling names with vivid imagery also related to the Chinese language, present Chinese as the frame on the formal level. Chinese language, in a translated version into English in the author's mind, is the frame for the novel to convey the story and characters' names that derive from Chinese with its rich imagery. On the level of form, i.e. here related to language, the ethnic background is again constituted as a starting point, as it helps to unfold the multiplicity of social hierarchies negotiated in *Lily in the Snow*.

The temporal setting of *Lily in the Snow* consists of multiple temporal jumps that create embedded temporal levels, thereby again putting aspects related to China in the focus. The

following image visually displays these layers of temporal setting with the example of a conversation between Majesty and Lily about their past:



Embedded temporal layers in Yan Li's Lily in the Snow *(own illustration)*

Another example can be found in chapters 16 and 17: the frame narration is again that of Lily and Grace in Canada with one flashback (embedded narration #1) to Lily and Majesty working together as housekeepers at Mrs. Fortune's house, which, in turn, contains an insertion (embedded narration #2) narrating Lily and Majesty's trip to the birthplace of Norman Bethune, a historical figure born in Canada and praised by the Chinese for his work in China (see section 7.5 for more information on this figure). After the insertion, the reader is taken back to Mrs. Fortune's house before returning to the present time of the novel with Lily and Grace in Canada (chapter 18). Here again, the temporal setting changes for each narrative thread, proceeding further into the past before incrementally returning to the novel's present time. Li's novel can thus be characterized as presenting an extradiegetic, intradiegetic and metadiegetic level of narration – to use Genette's terms – yet without focusing on the different narrators but rather on the different temporal settings, i.e. on the analepses. It is the same narrator but the temporal setting differs for each level of narration. The overt, omniscient non-character narrator provides multiple retrospective remarks foreshadowing the plot and, partially ironic, judgments: For readers, the end of the relationship between Lily and Majesty is foreshadowed when the narrator states that "It was at hidden away Deer Valley that [Lily and Majesty] have travelled the last part of their doomed-to-fail journey." (187; see, for further examples, 130, 147, 155, 307). In contrast to novels with a clear, chiastic narrative structure that changes in the middle of the novel in order to conversely mirror the structure of the first part, such as *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, Li's work is repetitious in its narratological structure as the multiple instances of

embedded narration mentioned above show (see chapter 19 for a further example). This means of using different temporal layers reaches its peak with a narrator change from a homodiegetic one to a heterodiegetic one and vice versa in chapters 13 to 15, in which Lily's friend Camellia tells the story of her past and the narrative voice changes from authorial to first person. Due to multiple internal focalizations (e.g. chapter 7, 126-130, chapter 18, 318), the reader also experiences Majesty's and Camellia's state of mind in addition to, for instance, Grace's and Lily's inner state. These narratological strategies contribute to an intersectional reading of this novel insofar as it adds complexity, which corresponds to the complexity illustrated on the level of content, and it mirrors the interwoven character of domestic hierarchies and social inequalities: Lily struggles with her identity and social status in Canada related to her being a single mother, a highly qualified employee and a (potential) member of the Christian Canadian community (see section 7.5). Especially her straddle between her professional career and her role as a mother provokes many conflicts with her mother Grace, resulting in a shattered relationship due to Grace's establishment and exertion of disparate power relations. Lily's and Grace's past in China forms the frame of these struggles as it presents the basis for Lily's socialization to norms and values differing from those she encounters in Canada in the present time of the novel as well as Grace's unpleasant experiences with gender related expectations and discriminations. Lily's self-identity, consequently, and the ongoing struggles and social hierarchies, are shaped by her past, which is represented in the temporal levels of the novel with its numerous analepses and its embedded temporal setting. For *Lily in the Snow*, the ethnic background of the protagonist, as represented on the formal level, forms the frame, as in Choy's and Fu's work, that leads to the establishment of different social hierarchies, here shown in the fields of gender and social class.

In summary, Lily's (and author Li's) Chinese ethnic background is represented in the novel on the level of form with its multiple reference to China through the length of the novel, the use of (translated) language and its temporal settings with many analepses. The complex incorporation of multiple temporal layers in the novel's structure additionally illustrates the complexity of hierarchy creations in Li's novel. References to Canada, by using translated Standard English as well as the spatial setting of Mapleton, with its highly symbolic reference to the maple leaf as Canada's main national symbol, links the Chinese framing to a Canadian context and allows the foregrounding of further aspects of high relevance to the characters in Canada, such as social class, gender, and religion. Especially

the latter aspect is of high importance regarding social hierarchies as represented in *Lily in the Snow*, which will be illustrated in the following section.

7.5. Catholicism and Chinese Immigration

Due to their prominent role in Li's novel, religion in general and the Christian Chinese community in Mapleton in particular will be analyzed here. Christianity in the context of Caucasian Canadian society is only touched upon in the novel when members of the Chinese Christian community are involved. Lily, for example, assumes that religion influences norms and values of people even if they explicitly disagree with church practices (270-271). Chinese Canadians with a Christian background, for example, differ from other Chinese immigrants regarding the definition of family as couples raised in Canadian Christian faith are able to adopt children because "family", in a Christian Canadian interpretation, is not necessarily tied to blood relations as in China but rather to altruism (269-270). Honesty is also interpreted as a Christian trait that is ascribed to Canadians (262) by Grace and Lily alike. Ironically, the myth of the honest Christian is constantly deconstructed in the Chinese Christian community as well as with the figure of Norman Bethune. The idealized, almost mythical figure of Norman Bethune, a Canadian doctor who worked in China and became a role model for his altruism there (21, 89, 273, 349), is exposed to be a mere illusion. Regarded as the incorporation of Communist ideals by Chinese people (89-90, 96, 312) and as the ideal man to Lily (202-204), Norman Bethune is not famous at all in his home country Canada (202-203) because of his fondness for alcohol and women (260). Similar to the altruist façade of the Chinese Canadian community in Li's novel, Norman Bethune is gradually unmasked as a "real" Christian in Lily's view (177) with many flaws. As will be demonstrated in the following, religion with its multi-faceted functions can unfold its full weight against the background of an ethnic framing. Moreover, the version of Chinese Christianity, as depicted in the novel, is deconstructed as superficially altruistic, only practiced to pursue an individual's own interest and benefit.

The religious community in *Lily in the Snow* is depicted as an enclosed entity, in which the ethnic background of its members intersects with a religious dimension that serves the rather practical needs of Chinese Canadian immigrants. In general, the church and its community is described in *Lily in the Snow* as "almost the only place that provided some social activities for non-English visitors" (54) by, for example, providing books in Chinese beyond the stereotypical offer of the local public library (294). With an extremely small Chinese community in Mapleton, "the church functioned naturally as a community centre, attracting the attention of many newcomers" (58, see also 84). Members show their deep

affiliation, for instance, by renaming their children or themselves with Biblical names (288, 291). Consequently, the church and the related Chinese Christian community present a monopolistic meeting point for many immigrants. It is depicted as a space of ethnicized communal belonging, providing security and refuge in a predominantly Caucasian Canadian society. Similar to the Chinese community in Choy's novel, the Christian Chinese community is illustrated as an enclave with particular norms, values, and traditions. However, Li describes the pressure of conversion in order to be fully accepted as a member of this community (62), in contrast to Choy's community. Hence, Li adds a religious dimension to an already ethnicized space. This religious dimension is indeed illustrated from a critical point of view in the novel. Besides several characters that help to deconstruct the spiritual, well-intentioned function of this religious community (see below), the general description of the church as a fast-growing (58) "matchmaking centre" (66) with a problematic over-representation of newly recruited female members and an impractical separation of gender spheres (62-63) provides a first insight into the (ab)use of the Chinese Christian community and its church for the rather secularized challenges of Chinese immigrants in Canada. So-called "rice Christians" (133) visit rather for practical help, for instance with marital problems[155] (87), than for religious faith. The comparison of the recruiting process to a rehearsed theater play hints at publicity effects the church aims to produce, thereby revealing its artificial character: Lily describes that "seeing Mrs. Rice also on stage, Lily realized her cooperation must have been prearranged to help with the show" (62).

Religion plays a highly important role for all the main and for many of the supporting characters. Lily, for instance, refers to religion and Christian tradition multiple times during her search for the core of Christian faith (see, for example, 83-84). When expressing her feeling of foreignness in Canada, she also refers to various religious spaces:

> In her years in Canada, Lily had often had dreams in which she was looking for her home. The homes in her dreams had always been different, some familiar, some exotic, some with her family members, some with strangers. Her search brought her to a windowless Muslim mosque, to the bank of the Ganges River, to an incense-burning Chinese temple, and the crowded stone monuments of a Catholic graveyard. She wandered about in those dream places but found no sense of security there either. Waking up, she would often sink into her fears of homelessness and feel at a loss. But she stayed. She felt something glittering, waiting for her in some unknown, obscure place. She couldn't tell what it was, or exactly where. All she knew was that she stayed because of that blurry feeling of promise. (177-178)

[155] However, the church is not only a source of help but also the source of marital problems as the couple Jade and Unicorn illustrate (see below for more information on these characters): Jade blames her husband for spending too much time with missionary activities (311-312).

It is interesting to note that, in this passage, Lily does not only connect religion and a notion of home to religious spaces but she also refers to security. The fact that she does not feel at home or safe in either a Muslim mosque or a Chinese temple or a Catholic graveyard symbolizes that no religion is able to fulfill her needs. Her conclusion to her nevertheless stay in Canada can be interpreted as a search for a home and security outside of a religious community (and independent of people), however yet unknown to her at this point in time. What she is looking for now, instead of the material riches that she came for, is the spiritual wealth that seems to have been lost in China (349). Her final decision to be baptized is justified with a hopeful perspective on life after death for herself and her son (359-360), which corresponds to the instrumentalization practiced by the community members mentioned above: it is not spiritual wealth and the closeness to God that she aims for, but she wants a source of comfort for herself and her son by adapting Christianity to her needs, i.e. to provide hope with regard to death. Religion, to Lily, provides a source of comfort, belonging and hope. With the example of Lily's search for a home and her final interpretation of Christianity, religion, often portrayed as a highly ethnicized space of refuge, security, and comfort on the surface in the Chinese community of the novel, is illustrated as a matter of individual interpretation that can provide characters with the necessary mental strength to deal with emotional obstacles. Li demonstrates the heterogeneous nature of belief similar to the various versions of Chineseness in Choy's novel and gender in Fu's novel, which all lead to the establishment of social hierarchies within families and social environments alike.

Interestingly, the church, as an institution, is interpreted by Lily as a form of useful hierarchy, which people of Chinese background might need due to their socialization in a system organized strictly hierarchically. Lily struggles with the myriad options that Canada offers, be it regarding the choice of university courses (97) or concerning the huge variety of religious communities (91). Independence and isolation are regarded as a (psychological) burden (91), which is accompanied by the loss of formerly honored values (111), whereas strict hierarchies and their related dependence provide stability. The structures of the church community, as depicted in the novel, are the only ones that resemble the guidance and instructions immigrants from China are used to:

> Just like me, Lily thought, Jade was brought up in the collective-styled communist society. Though we all had a hard life and wanted, at least theoretically, to get rid of the dictatorial system, we had actually become accustomed to its style: a life of unity, collectives, instructions, orders, control, and mass mobilization. Psychologically, we were still afraid of being isolated and independent […] In Canada […] there was no place except the church where [Jade] could find the familiar atmosphere she was used to. (91, see also 282-283)

Thus, religious communities are popular among Chinese immigrants because they offer a form of stability, or, as Luo interprets it, "a strong sense of fellowship" (Luo), which puts the focus on the social opportunities that this community offers to its members. Multiple comparisons between the Christian community and the Chinese Communist Party underline this aspect: Lily recognizes not only parallels regarding her friend Jade's wording to describe both institutions, but she also realizes similar hierarchical mechanisms, e.g. that everything has to be reported to authorities by members (90-91) or that women are depicted as "the evil" in both Christian and Chinese storytelling (275). Jade's husband Unicorn seconds her hypothesis as he also compares Christianity with Communism and identifies sufficient similarities that leads to him feeling attracted to Christianity (94, 149-150). The image of human nature presents an aspect of difference, though: whereas Communist ideology expects the unconditional sacrifice of one's own interests for the benefit of others (149-150), Christian ideology seems closer to human nature as faith is only accepted when rewarded with benefits, at least with a life in Paradise after death (150-151).[156] Setting aside the question of whether this interpretation of Communist ideology is reasonable, the latter aspect is highly interesting as it uncovers precisely, on a theoretical level, the questionable Christian attitudes of the members of the Christian Chinese community in Mapleton, which will now be explored.

Grace, for example, uses the Chinese Christian community as a starting point to search for her long lost love from the past (123-130), who has devoted his life fully to God, including to be celibate (214) and leaving China first for England (211, 213), then for North America (217). This last piece of information has induced her to visit her daughter Lily in Canada in order to begin her search for him in the (religious) Chinese communities around Mapleton (218). Even her trips organized by the Chinese church only serve the purpose to find the love of her life (218).[157] With this information, readers are able to understand the enthusiasm that Grace has shown in preceding and upcoming passages of the novel with regard to the religious community (4, 39, 64, 268, 294, 347). In Grace's case, it is thus not a devotion to Christian faith that serves as an explanation for her motivation in the Chinese Christian community, but it is her own mission. As a result, she (ab)uses the Chinese Christian community in Canada for her own benefit. In the end, however, Grace learns that

[156] The commonality of sacrifice is also detected by Grace during her younger years in China, when she leads her family to yield all their property to the Chinese government in order to have it redistributed among the poor in the context of a Land Reform Movement (215).

[157] Grace's decision to eventually not meet her long-lost love because of her "lost youth" (319) again underlines the importance of age for the characters in Li's novel, which is also demonstrated by Camellia and Old Chia (see chapters 7.2 and below for more information).

the priest has been married (even for a second time) and he is not able to remember Grace (371-372), indicating that he lied to her about his future plans before (214), shedding a rather hypocritical light on Christians, which corresponds to the account of other Chinese Christian community members.

Mrs. Rice presents another form of interpretation and an instance of the deconstruction of Christian faith, albeit on a different level than Grace. While Lily hesitates to become a full member and prefers to keep her position as a semi-outsider, being only connected by her ethnic background, Mrs. Rice – whose name might be a reference to her ethnic background but indeed aligns with the telling names explained in section 7.4. - is one of the main characters that promotes Catholicism in the Chinese community. Having migrated from Taiwan, she is now an activist in the local church and in charge of recruiting potential members, especially among newly arrived immigrants (38). Superficially adhering to religious altruism (68-69), it indeed turns out that Mrs. Rice interprets Christian belief as a form of self-love and self-interest. Instead of showing a considerable amount of Christian modesty appropriate to her leading position in the community, she lives in the wealthy neighborhood in a spacious house (132, 140) but she does not want to work in order to afford this lifestyle because she does not want her husband in Taiwan to "become spoilt" (220) with her additional income. Lily and Grace present one of her many targets (147) but her character traits are uncovered in the story of Camellia.

Camellia's story is an interesting one as it illustrates the variety of social hierarchies in different contexts and on multiple levels. Lily's very first meeting with Camellia at church already foreshadows Camellia's character, which might be considered unusual both from a Chinese and a Christian perspective, as openly talking about a potential lover of Camellia's in China is disapproved of by Grace but Camellia "didn't seem to mind [Lily's] directness" (61). Lily's misgivings concerning the relationship between Mrs. Rice and Camellia (64) and their contrasting appearances (58-59) indeed foreshadow the tensions between the two women and depicts Camellia's difficulties with Christianity despite her constant presence in the religious community, which underlines the range of functions this community has. First depicted as the poor wife of Old Chia, the abusive husband (60-61, 170-171), she was urged to marry by her mother (164-167), also because of her pregnancy (171), it turns out that Camellia has more in common with Mrs. Rice than one might expect at first sight. Her fondness for material goods and male attention towards her (see, for instance, 76, 164, 172,

229), her carefully kempt appearance with the aim to look younger (66, 229)[158], the importance of her social status (65-67, 229) and fun (160), her willing abuse of "female tricks" to manipulate people for her own benefit (137, 307-309) and her past weakness for participating in social occasions back in China (70, 226-227) reveal her superficial character and exemplify her arrogance (see also 66). Her ambiguous confession that she looks "for other things in a man" (81) than his sexual abilities only misleads naïve readers as she is obviously not looking for a man's moral integrity but for his (enormously fat) wallet. Material generosity, in her view, qualifies a man to be called a "real man" (229). Furthermore, she strategically takes advantage of Jade and Unicorn, a couple from the Christian Canadian community, who offer shelter to her in order for her to live separately from her husband: she does not speak her mind openly but she feels superior because of her clear view about love that both do not share because of their religious involvement (247-248). Her superficiality carries into her family life as she tries to uphold a particular image not only for her family but also for herself. In the course of the novel, Camellia faces multiple obstacles while attempting to become divorced from her husband. Officially filing for divorce because of domestic abuse by her husband (59-60), Camellia's accusation evokes readers' doubts due to Camellia's ongoing love affair with a man in China called Dwarf (74-76, 230) and to Lily's (and Mrs. Rice's; 315) perception of Old Chia as defenseless and shy (233, 281, 296). Moreover, Camellia confesses to being tired of being caught in traditional gender roles as she has always been the one in charge of housework for Old Chia, their son Dragon and her father-in-law, who all proved to be heavily dependent on her female household skills (227, 231). The descriptions of their son Dragon as highly aggressive towards his mother (60, 223-225) lead to the reasonable assumption that he is the true physical and psychological perpetrator, who emotionally blackmails and threatens Camellia (see also 60, 285-286). The necessity of a false testimony, the emotional bonds to her family making her feel responsible for them (60, 283-284), the extortion by Old Chia if they become divorced (232-233) and the pressure of the community, here exerted by Mrs. Rice (59, 281), who cherishes family, hence hinder Camellia from firmly insisting on a divorce. Moreover, after her love affair Dwarf is arrested for pornography in China (351-352), Camellia, left with no other marriage option, develops misgivings about her potential divorce from Old Chia and returns to her family (352). The possibility of staying unmarried after a divorce did not occur to her, which underlines the importance of marriage for women and, therefore, the

[158] The importance of age, indicated by the attempt to look younger to keep one's position in a social hierarchy, is, in this context, noteworthy.

belonging to a family, to a home, to a community.[159] Camellia cannot stay alone because, as a woman, she needs a family to take care of in order to maintain her social status. Thus, instead of pursuing a divorce and staying alone, Camellia changes her previous plans and explains that she will start looking for a man to marry in China after having acquired Canadian citizenship (353). Lily's general remark that "most women talked about confidence all the time, but when facing a man, they still couldn't forget they were women" (333) reads as a retrospective criticism of Camellia's adherence to her gender roles although Lily herself regrets that "she had no man worth devoting her life to" (337) – a remark that, again, depicts Lily's character as multidimensional and full of paradoxes.

While pretending to provide a refuge for poor Camellia, Mrs. Rice exploits Camellia's superb cooking skills to manipulate people for her own advantage (69-70, 76). Praying for trivial matters related to her own benefit (71, 242), her selfish efforts continue with the attempt to isolate member to-be Camellia in order to be able to influence her and to completely engross her: Mrs. Rice tries to take advantage of Camellia by systematically sealing her off from any contact outside of the Chinese Christian community (145). For example, she wants to control Camellia's coming and going while she lives in Mrs. Rice's house (72, 135) and she wants to hinder Camellia from learning English outside of the church community but she herself, probably due to her own inability, avoids teaching her (76-78). Moreover, Mrs. Rice clearly intrudes upon Camellia's private sphere when talking about her sex life (80-81), her financial situation (138) and her family life in public (143-144) and she does not want Camellia to work (84) because of potential contacts with other people outside of the Christian Chinese community. Mrs. Rice's intrusive control reaches a peak when Camellia runs into trouble with her boss because of Mrs. Rice's interest in her own enrichment – be it with (free) food, Camellia's money or Christmas gifts (64, 68-69, 135-139, 181, 351). Interestingly, Camellia explains Mrs. Rice's self-interest with her assimilation to Canadian culture but doubts it again soon (136, 139), so the Chinese ethnic background presents the basis for the shattered relationship between the two women as it is not the failure of intercultural communication but simply miscommunication due to both women's Chinese background, as the narrator explains (140). Moreover, she dupes Mrs. Rice by calling into question Mrs. Rice's version of Christian faith in a "suspicious tone" (73) Even after Camellia's escape back to her abusive family, Mrs. Rice does not cease from her attempts to metaphorically suck her dry by plaguing her with continuous, supposedly

[159] This attitude is also illustrated with Jade, who admits that she married her husband, Unicorn, not for love but out of fear of staying alone (312).

worried calls (140-141), abusing Camellia's housework skills while pretending to plan to teach her English (145), inviting herself and even others over to Camellia's home (146-147, 142-153) or to influence her testimony at a trial against her husband, who arouses suspicion of abuse and is finally found guilty (281). The love affair of her husband in Taiwan and the cessation of his financial support (351, 369) underlines the crumbly character of Mrs. Rice's front of (religious) wisdom despite her claimed comprehensive and exclusive knowledge about the male gender (78-81) and Christian traditions (see 282, for example), which puts her, at least in her opinion, in a superior rank within a social hierarchy. The knowledge about a potential doomsday, which Mrs. Rice uses in her attempt to convince Camellia to be baptized, presents another source of her superiority – at least perceived by Mrs. Rice herself: reactions reveal that her argumentation is indeed perceived as amateurish and poor (73, see also 134 for another example in a different context), though Mrs. Rice is deeply convinced of her cleverness, which she accidentally expresses towards Camellia (80), thereby downgrading Camellia once more within their social fabric. Thus, Mrs. Rice, as a full member of the community, does not shrink from instrumentalizing Christian values for her own benefit, i.e. to keep her superior social position through an alleged knowledge advantage. Hence, it is not a spiritual home that she is looking for but financial security and material stability that she expects from her membership and the (ab)use of this membership to establish and maintain her superior position within a social hierarchy. With a claimed focus on spiritual support, this materialist aim contradicts the implicit claim of a religious community. Her victim Camellia indeed recognizes the ridiculousness of Mrs. Rice's attitude (71) and the unequal power relations but her ethnic background and her lack of intercultural knowledge impede her from any attempt at liberation:

> Despite the bitter thoughts brewing in her mind, Camellia was still a brand new immigrant from China. She had not been in Canada long enough to learn the frankness of the new continent. As a Chinese woman, all she could do was conceal her disappointment and continue to put a smile on her face. (70)

Here, Li illustrates the failure of empowerment and liberation from social hierarchies with reference to ethnicity. Conversely, intercultural competencies are depicted to enable liberation; they can serve as a tool of empowerment to overcome inferior positions within a social hierarchy.

Minister Wong is the formal leading figure of the Chinese Christian community. His attitude, similar to that of Mrs. Rice, underlines the superficial, contradictory and secular interpretation of Catholicism within the religious community. Descriptions of him wearing an expensive suit (92) as well as being talented in drama and rhetoric competitions illustrate

once more the sometimes artificial staging of religion (63). His façade of being talented is destroyed immediately as he is said to have applied for Bible College only because of his failure to pass university entrance exams (63). His inability to constructively deal with feedback or criticism (93-94, 297, 299) and a competing church (346, 358, 362, 368), revealed by his threats (300) and his childish responses such as playing pranks via telephone calls and spreading derogatory rumors (314-315), and his seemingly arbitrary decisions about what criteria qualify for a baptism (356, 358, 362) result in his being perceived as arrogant and pushy by several characters (354, 356): For example, Minister Wong tries to convince Camellia to become baptized despite her adultery but Lily he denies Lily a baptism because of her divorce from Prince (355, 358-362). His interrogation of Lily, because he wants to ensure that she is a "true Christian" (358), leaves the reader with the impression of an artificial limitation to create the image of membership in this community as particularly distinguished and only for qualified believers, not as the "careless" (358) acceptance of members as practiced by other ministers. Hence, Minister Wong aims to place his community in superior positions in comparison to other communities by artificially creating a sense of uniqueness. Minister Wong's pushy aim to collect financial means ends in members feeling uncomfortable (93, 297-299) and unmasks him as a mere capitalist (93, 300) rather than as a spiritual support for the members of his religious community. Minister Wong, readers learn, is also more interested in looking for potential members to admire him and accept him as superior instead of properly educating them about their Christian faith (283). His interest in financial means for himself is also seen with his inability to understand Unicorn's decision to go to China and live a poor life instead of making a fortune as a Mandarin speaking clergyman in North America (355). With Minister Wong's character, Li once more illustrates the broad scope of interpretation a belief can produce. Moreover, Li emphasizes the secular, materialist and instrumentalized use of religion by leading actors in this church community, thereby deconstructing the superficially ascribed spiritual role of religion for Chinese Canadian immigrants, which cannot be fulfilled.

The couple Jade and Unicorn presents an example of members whose needs for spiritual support cannot be met, neither by Mrs. Rice nor by Minister Wong due to their secularized approach. Having escaped from political persecution in China, Jade and Unicorn were rescued by Chinese Canadian Christians in Russia, who finally helped the desperate lost sheep to migrate to Canada (84-86) and, eventually, find their way back to their Christian flock. The Christian faith helped Jade to overcome her traumatic childhood in China (86-87). Coincidentally meeting Jade and her husband Unicorn during a clerical get together (84-

85), Lily notices, as the novel progresses, a change in her old friend Jade, who is about to become "another Mrs. Rice, but on a higher level" (295) because of Jade's constant preoccupation with Christianity. The same applies to her husband Unicorn, who intensively studies the Bible and Church communities because he interpreted several incidents as warnings from God (87-88, 287-288) to do so. He wants to grasp the core of Christian religion (91-92, 150-151) and aims to feel closer to God by, for instance, fasting (246) but no community seems to offer decently educated and qualified Christians (357). His constantly growing proficiency to stubbornly (ab)use arguments in a theological debate to cement his viewpoint whenever needed in whatever earthly matter (308) corresponds to Lily's first impression of Unicorn as stubborn (85) and reminds the reader of Mrs. Rice and Minister Wong, who both also instrumentalize religious arguments for their own benefit, but in a much more obvious way and on a lower level. After having left the Chinese Christian community led by Minister Wong in order to participate in a competing community, the couple eventually leaves with money from their new community to go to a theological institute in California so that Unicorn is able to pursue Bible study (346-347).

The couple's faithfulness also proves to be subject to debate when Camellia's presence uncovers Jade's shortcomings as a housewife because of her preoccupation with her church activities (306). The clear ascription of household tasks to women and, thus, the strict separation of gender spheres cause marital problems between Jade and Unicorn (306, 310, 329), which have been foreshadowed before with several remarks (297, 304). Camellia provokes these marital tensions by pretending to be open-minded to Unicorn's religious education, by spending a conspicuous amount of time with Jade's husband (307). Jade's trust in her husband's commitment to Christian regulations, which forbid adultery, hence proves to be fragile due to her jealousy (307), which, in turn, presents a lapse in her own Christian faith (307). Eventually, their argument peaks in the discussion about the option of a divorce, which also contradicts Christian values as has been explained before (310). Financial arguments add to the gender aspect because Jade does not consider her husband's donations to the church as generosity but as shortcomings as he cuts off her own financial freedom in order to be able to afford these donations (311-312). As a result, the couple's faith also deconstructs the Christian Chinese community as one driven by self-interest and self-love, which is in line with the characters of Mrs. Rice and Minister Wong.

In conclusion, in her novel, Li deconstructs religion as a space of support, refuge, comfort and a home for immigrants. Unmasking the leading community members as predominantly selfish, *Lily in the Snow* shows that religion does not always provide a home in the new

place. With the religious community being conceptualized as an ethnicized space, the deconstruction of the social hierarchies established through this community by the leading figures can unfold its full weight against this Chinese background – similar to the strategy used by Choy in his novel *The Jade Peony*. Lily's conclusion towards the end of the novel that

> many people left China originally for the material riches in North America. But eventually, we find that what keeps us here is more the spiritual wealth, something China took great pride in for thousands of years but which has been totally destroyed by the materialist bombshell (349)

reads as an ironic reminder that the Chinese Christian community only pretends to be held in North America by spiritual wealth but actually is completely driven by the mere interest in their own individual benefits. This implicit, harsh form of Christian religion might be enabled only because of its ethnic dimension: by ethnicizing the religious community, Li is able to express fierce criticism of Christianity with the Chinese background of its members acting as a disguise. Here, the ethnic background thus allows Li to voice general social concerns by pretending to be restricted to a particular community and to deconstruct the often ascribed function of religion as providing agency and mental strength in times of need.

7.6. Interim Conclusion

Yan Li's novel *Lily in the Snow*, as Choy's *The Jade Peony*, presents an example of the double-sense of intersectionality for literary analyses. Intersectionality, on the one hand, is represented as a topic by illustrating double-burdens and the social inequality of particular characters: protagonist Lily's mother Grace tries to prevent her daughter from being caught in the balancing act between a professional career and care duties by insisting on and supporting her daughter's pursuit of promising employment opportunities. In this context, it is of particular interest that this specific female double-burden is depicted as problematic for both the Chinese and Canadian society. Moreover, this double burden, as depicted in Li's work, is accompanied by a particular set of female gender stereotypes that characters reflect on in the course of the novel. The similarities of inequality in China and Canada are likewise mirrored in the job market descriptions as both companies run by Chinese and those run by Canadians are depicted negatively, offering only precarious working conditions for highly qualified employees, with systemic discrimination against Asian and Black people being shown as a particular Canadian issue. Governmental institutions are not depicted as practitioners of systemic racism but as overstrained because of the huge variety of immigrants' individual challenges and their different needs. Caucasian Canadian society mirrors these unequal tendencies as protagonist Lily describes how she is discriminated

against in the intersection of colonialism, racism and sexism by, for example, being perceived and approached as the "erotic exotic". The spatial setting, described as a shabby environment inhabited by immigrants with a refugee history in a rural area, adds to the poor conditions described in Li's novel. In the context of both areas, occupational and societal, Li still provides a few positive examples, especially in Lily's closer social environment, that occasionally leave readers with a glimpse of hope of improving one's situation.

On the other hand, an intersectional reading of this novel allows the detection of how these double-burdens shape characters' personal relationships, i.e. how inequalities on a social level are intertwined with power relations within families. The above-mentioned double-burden of women's roles as employees and unpaid care workers leads to a strict social hierarchy explicitly pondered in the novel. It is established, maintained and continuously exerted by Grace since Lily's childhood through the means of extensive and harsh criticism, choice of words and facial expressions in order to teach her daughter about, in her view, a decent lifestyle. Grace's definition of this lifestyle is recklessly driven by her Chinese background, not considering her daughter's preferences at all. Grace's fear of her daughter becoming a victim of intersectional oppression hence results in a rigid hierarchy and a shattered relationship between mother and daughter. The character of Lily, represented as a multidimensional character full of contradictions, provides an example of a complex identity that struggles with their own values not only influenced by an ethnic background but also by gender and social class.

The formal level of Li's novel supports the allocation to the field of Chinese Canadian literature at first sight, but a detailed look reveals the complex character of the novel in terms of length, language, temporal setting and spatial setting. A first glance tempts the reader to understand the formal level as a contrast to the range of topics negotiated in Li's novel because it creates an ethnic framing that is, however, not only restricted to a Chinese background. By using Standard English in a translated version and Mapleton, with its reference to Canada's national symbol, as a spatial setting, Li indeed creates a connection to the Canadian context on the level of form. This intermeshing is again processed on the level of form as Li provides a complex temporal structure with multiple time layers, which are embedded and which present China as a spatial setting at its center. The ethnic dimension, consequently, is not only depicted as a frame within the characters' relationships but also on the formal level of the novel. The repeated illustrations of these particular strategies, such as gaslighting, used to create a disparate power relationship by Lily's partners Prince and Majesty, allow for generalizing and hence provide insights into the generic patterns of social

hierarchies in a domestic context from which Lily is fortunately able to liberate herself in the course of the novel. Literature, in this case, is illustrated as a tool of liberation for Lily and presents a possibility of comfort and refuge. Lily's memoirs being accepted by a publisher in the end serve as a hopeful prospect that is illustrated as empowering in the sense that Lily overcomes her situation with a foreshadowing of a happy ending despite the lack of this structural support.

In contrast to this agency providing function of literature, the frequent understanding of religion as a source of comfort, as offering agency by providing spiritual strength is deconstructed by representing the exclusively secular, materialist and instrumentalized use of religion by leading actors in the church community. Depicted as an enclosed entity similar to Choy's Chinese community (see chapter 6), the heavily ethnicized Chinese community in *Lily in the Snow* is enhanced by a religious dimension. Within this space, both present and potential members of the Chinese Christian community are uncovered as only superficially adhering to religious altruism. Instead, they interpret Christian faith as a form of self-interest and act for their own benefit, be it materialistic or personal. Especially materialistic motives provide, according to Li's description, a source for the establishment of social hierarchies within the community. The characters of Mrs. Rice and Minister Wong superbly illustrate the purely secular objectives, which the members of this community pursue. Here, the ethnic dimension might provide Li with the opportunity to express severe criticism about Christian religion in general, while using the ethnic background of the church community as a disguise to soften the voicing of more general concerns.

Just as with Choy's novel with its broad thematic range, readers can relate to many of the thematic bridges built in Li's novel independent of their ethnic background. Ranging from the systematic discrimination of highly qualified single mothers to sexism to questioning the interpretation of Christian belief as performed in its very own organization, the topics of *Lily in the Snow* certainly provide many linking points, not only for readers with a migrant background. As the preceding analysis has shown, both intersectionality as a topic and an intersectional reading of literary works does not only help to uncover the interwoven nature of social hierarchies on the societal and on the familial level, but it also supports the exploration of issues beyond those of race and ethnicity in migrant literature.

8. Conclusion

> *We read to experience alternate realities and perceptions and to be entertained. If the writing is true, it strikes a common chord in all of us, and we gain deeper satisfaction because it stimulates our imagination and challenges our moral judgement. (Lee and Wong-Chu 7)*

This dissertation has dealt with the question of whether intersectionality, as an analytical perspective for literary texts, can help to deconstruct ethnically labelled literary fields. This has been exemplarily investigated with the analysis of three contemporary Chinese Canadian novels. As a kaleidoscope for the analysis of social hierarchy negotiations in literary texts, thereby considering the complexity of identity representations, an intersectionally informed reading indeed illustrates that the designation as Chinese Canadian literature of the novels *For Today I Am a Boy* by Kim Fu, *The Jade Peony* by Wayson Choy and *Lily in the Snow* by Yan Li disguises the multiplicity represented in these works.

Chinese Canadian literature proves to be an intriguing example for analyzing the negotiation of social hierarchies with an intersectional approach because, on the one hand, this immigrant group and their cultural productions are situated in inferior positions within power relations in many ways and, on the other hand, Asian cultural productions generally inherit a prominent position in contemporary Canadian popular culture by portraying Asian topics and/or staging an (almost complete) Asian cast. TV series such as *Kim's Convenience*, movies such as *Crazy Rich Asians* or the memoir *We Were Dreamers. An Immigrant Superhero Story* by Canadian actor Simu Liu all share remarkable success and demonstrate the ongoing presence of Asian Canadians in general and Chinese Canadians in particular in Canadian popular culture. Despite these stories of success, Chinese Canadian immigrants have been confronted with repeated patterns of social inequality since their arrival in Canada in the 19th century in both the social and the political sphere. Cultural productions in general and literary works in particular have been used by the community to voice these inequalities but, at the same time, the necessity for a more nuanced view, for example regarding gender issues, has been articulated by some of its members in order to deconstruct the notion of homogeneity that accompanies the classification as Chinese Canadian with its strong emphasis on the ethnic background. Moreover, the publishing industry, with its many barriers for immigrant writers covering "niche topics" and its neoliberal use of ethnic backgrounds to create an "exotic other" in marketing processes, present further power

relations that this literary field is situated in. These, in turn, are situated in discourses about the demarcation of particularly Canadian cultural productions from those of the U.S. with its hegemonic position, or (for the case of Anglophone literature) from Great Britain due to Canada's settler colonial past.

Intersectionality has its origins in U.S. Black Feminist Movements aiming at illustrating the multiple forms of burdens individuals can face within a society. Kimberle Crenshaw used the metaphor of the intersection to demonstrate that the discrimination against Black women works differently than the discrimination of Black people **or** women in general. Coming thus from a legal context, the term has traveled into various disciplines with different interpretations and uses. In Canada, the use of the term is predominantly restricted to political and sociological research, with a strong focus on gender and the heterogeneity of women groups though, thereby neglecting the preoccupation with social hierarchies at the core of intersectionality. Moreover, this approach illustrates the vagueness that intersectionality as a term carries – it is unclear whether it is a theory or a methodological approach, which – for the case of this dissertation – is a blessing because it allows all necessary adjustments when implemented in literary studies. Intersectionality has indeed been used in the past for the analysis of literary texts but, similar to the use in the Canadian context, these attempts have been restricted to gender and identity issues, and they are situated in the field of cultural studies or they focus on medieval literature with its totally different structure regarding society. The negotiation of social hierarchies, a key element of intersectionality, has thus been neglected in these attempts. The term's conceptual connection to postcolonialism makes it interesting for the Canadian context in particular. Furthermore and what the preceding analyses have revealed, intersectionality is profoundly linked to empowerment, hence to the liberation of individuals from instances of social inequality, as will be summarized, amongst other research results, in the following.

As has been demonstrated in the preceding analyses, intersectionality is of relevance in three different ways for the literary texts in the focus here: First, intersectionality is represented in a narrow sense, close to its origins as developed by researchers such as Crenshaw or Hill Collins. Major characters in the novels are depicted as suffering from intersecting forms of oppression because of their gender, their ethnic background, their age or their social class. What presents an intriguing difference to the understanding of intersectionality in its originary sense, though, is the fact that the representation of these multiple forms is predominantly situated in a domestic, a family context in contrast to the context of society. Father in *For Today I Am a Boy*, for instance, imposes his version of the

model minority idea related to ethnic background, heteronormative masculinity and socioeconomic success on his son Peter, who is transgender and who is, before having moved to Montreal, not preoccupied with his ethnic background at all. Jook-Liang in Choy's *The Jade Peony* suffers from the family's oppression because she is young, female and Canadian-born whereas Lily, in *Lily in the Snow*, has to deal with her mother Grace's expectations of her pursuing a career despite her status as female, unemployed and a single mother. The only instances offering insights into systemic inequalities on a societal level are provided by Li with the description of the (few) career possibilities of highly qualified immigrants and the overburdening of governmental institutions with the heterogeneity of immigrant matters. As a result, intergenerational differences, often considered as a principal motif and motive for the allocation to the field of Chinese Canadian literature, indeed play a major role but the conception of these differences varies considerably in the novels, clearly exceeding issues of race and ethnicity.

The second relevance of intersectionality for this dissertation is its use as a kaleidoscopic reading strategy. ntersectionality allows the reader to grasp a broader extent of factors that shape social hierarchies because, in contrast to gender, postcolonial or queer studies, it refrains from imposing the shaping factors negotiated in literary works. Adjusted for literary studies, an intersectional approach hence adds a necessary amount of complexity, thereby supporting the deconstruction of literary fields organized along racial and/or ethnic lines and considering the multiplicity of identity representations in literary texts. The identity representations and social hierarchies, as seen in the novels in the focus of this dissertation, range, amongst other factors, from gender to social class and age, including also, but not focusing exclusively on, the ethnic background of the characters. For the case of Jung-Sum in Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony*, for example, an intersectional perspective reveals his privileged position within his family established by his grandmother that allows him to deal with his homosexuality. The illustration of his brother Kiam's position additionally uncovers the relevance of birth order for the establishment of social hierarchies as depicted in Choy's novel. Lily's mother in Li's novel indeed bases her expectations on her Chinese background but an intersectional reading reveals the equal importance of gender and social class, here in the sense of a professional career for a woman. An intersectional perspective on the novels in the focus of this dissertation additionally unravels categories for the establishment of social hierarchies as heterogeneous. Gender, in *For Today I Am a Boy*, is illustrated as subject to Audrey's interpretation as is Chineseness to Poh-Poh, the family's father, Stepmother, and, most vividly, to the youngest child Sek-Lung in Choy's novel. The

multimensional conception of these characters underlines the individual interpretations by displaying not only the individual interpretations but also paradoxes within an individual character. A view on the broader social context, for instance, as depicted in these novels, rarely allows insights into intersecting forms of oppression as systemic injustice but it is likewise restricted to interpersonal relationships and individual experiences. Audrey's intimate relationships with Margie and Claire, as described by Fu, for instance, uncover the interdependence of gender, sexuality, age and religion in the creation of social hierarchies and relationships. Choy's illustration of the social environment is similar in that it does not provide profound insights into systemic issues: as his novel focuses on the Chinese community in Vancouver, Choy illustrates negotiations of social hierarchies within migrant groups, here for the case of Asian immigrants, also on a personal level with the tragic love story between Chinese Meiying and her Japanese boyfriend Kazuo. Lily's environment, as depicted by Li, focuses on the different interpretation of Chinese immigrants in their roles as bosses in a working context as perceived by her protagonist Lily. References to sociocultural encounters between Chinese immigrants and Caucasian Canadians are only treated marginally, for example in the context of medical treatment and school affairs (Choy) or related to acquaintances with a particular fondness for Chinese culture (Li). When providing more elaborated examples, Fu and Li use type characters: Fu illustrates the use of type characters to imply a colonial and political view on transgender issues with John and his unspecified friends whereas Li uses type characters in the context of racialized sexual harassment. An intersectionally informed reading has shown that the ethnic framing indeed has a particular function because by receding, further issues of social inequality can unfold their full weight.

Third, intersectionality, as understood in this dissertation, helps to consider the context of a work that particularly shapes its reception. Paratexts, such as cover image, blurb, quotes both on the cover and preceding the novel text, secondary sources and self-location of authors in public discussions about their works often raise reader expectations and thus shape the reception of a literary text considerably. For the works in question here, it is particularly remarkable that the peritexts related to the very first (visual) impression of a book, i.e. cover images, blurb, and quotes provided on the book cover, substantially contribute to the classification of a work as Chinese Canadian, leaving the reader with the expectation that these novels provide a certain exotic notion and problematize ethnic difference and identity. Regarding the peritexts immediately preceding the beginning of the novel, authors deal with the expectations raised by the book's appearance differently: whereas Kim Fu playfully

deconstructs these expectations by shifting the focus from the evoked ethnic theme to a gender one with the title of the novel and a song quote, Wayson Choy stresses the ethnic focus with his intertextual references preceding the novel. Both mechanisms, however, contribute to the foregrounding of issues beyond race and ethnicity as expected by the readers, for the case of Choy's work however with stronger vehemence because at first sight, he pretends to fulfil readers' expectations.

Besides the different shapes of intersectionality for literature, this dissertation has moreover shown that intersectionality, as a way to analyze the negotiation of social hierarchies of literary texts, is inextricably linked to empowerment. The novels in the focus here, in addition to the negotiation of social hierarchies, provide ways to gain agency, to liberate oneself from inferior positions within power relations. Being only vaguely differentiated in its originary sense as "critical praxis" in contrast to intersectionality as "critical inquiry", the differentiation between intersectionality and empowerment allows the consideration of the different mechanisms as represented in the novels: the recourse to popular culture with Audrey's interpretation of her Asian Audrey Hepburn (Fu), the outstanding role of traditional Chinese myth for Jook-Liang and Jung-Sum (partially also connected to references to popular culture by intermeshing North American cultural figures with traditional Chinese myth) (Choy) and the releasing function of literature, both as a reader and a writer (Li), are only the most prominent examples of the novels in the focus that illustrate the profound connection between intersectionality and empowerment. It is especially noteworthy that, in Fu's novel, ties to one's family are represented as empowering despite the social hierarchies at play, which is illustrated by Audrey's reference to her eldest sister Adele for the creation of her Asian Audrey Hepburn. Further examples of the connection between intersectionality and empowerment are also provided by minor characters, for example by Audrey's mother in Fu's novel, who illustrates that adherence to cultural practices related to one's ethnic background enables characters to regain agency in a previously established familial social hierarchy. The shattered destiny of her drug addicted and depressive daughter Helen, who follows her father's ideal in terms of cultural assimilation and aims for economic success, emphasizes the strategy of Audrey's mother by providing a vivid counter example full of failure and unhappiness. Li also presents a case of failure related to agency providing tools with the deconstruction of religion, which, in her novel, indeed does not serve as a source of comfort and refuge but is represented as secularized, instrumentalized and materialist.

The formal level of the novels proves to be of equal interest for the implementation of an intersectionally informed reading as it is also related to the negotiation of social hierarchies and heterogeneity of factors such as ethnicity, however differently for each novel. Fu, for instance, breaks with the binary opposition of rural and urban spatial settings by offering a sophisticated depiction of moments of liberation as well as disillusionment in both provincial towns and metropolises and breaks the linear narratological structure with a split narrating I, variable internal focalization, as well as prolepses and flashbacks, which mirrors the intermeshing factors contributing to the creation of social hierarchies. Choy's conception of the Chinese Canadian community as an enclosed spatial and social enclave allows for a foregrounding of literal and figurative border crossings as well as for a deconstruction of this community as homogenous. Li seems to put the Chinese ethnic background in the focus on the level of form through the close connection of the novel to Chinese because of its length and the highly symbolic names full of imagery, such as Dragon, Prince or Grace but establishes a connection to Canada by using the symbolically loaded town "Mapleton" as a spatial setting and Standard English as the novel's language, only revealing marginally that characters actually speak to each other in Chinese. The temporal setting with its multiple layers of embedded narrations illustrates an ethnic frame, switching back and forth between a past situated in China to a present in Canada. The link between intersectionality and empowerment is likewise illustrated on the level of form with the internal focalization being restricted to Audrey's family members, who provide her with the necessary strength for her identity search (Fu), for example. Choy also displays an empowering function of the formal level by breaking with age related hierarchies through intermeshing child and adult narrative perspectives in his novel, providing children with a voice here in a very literary sense.

As a consequence, an intersectionally informed reading of literary texts allows readers to discover the multiple thematic bridges that literature can provide, here in particular for non-migrant or non-Chinese readers, by revealing the multifaceted representation of social hierarchies and identities. If "true" in the quote at the beginning of this chapter is interpreted as representing complexity in order to build bridges, Lee and Wong-Chu provide an excellent summary of the use of fiction: fiction engages and involves because it offers insights into inner worlds and alternative representations of hierarchical systems. The realist narrative mode of all three novels, often considered as characteristic for Chinese Canadian literature of earlier periods, implies the existence, the possibility of these alternatives, including their strategies of empowerment. In addition to the individual strategies represented in the literary works in question, the creation of female, young, unemployed,

single mothers and/or transgender persons as protagonists presents another form of empowerment for multiply marginalized groups by providing an elaborated voice to otherwise voiceless people, here restricted to literary texts.

As has been shown, intersectionality, as a reading strategy in the sense of a kaleidoscope, can support the unraveling of the otherwise one-dimensional categorization of Chinese Canadian literature. This unravelling can be of help in many more areas in the Canadian context, in particular to those related to power relations and identity discourses that are known as Canadian master narratives because of their constant relevance over time in a variety of disciplines. The dichotomy of Anglophone and Francophone Canada, multiculturalism, the discussion about a particular Canadian identity demarcating Canada from the U.S., Britain or France, and Canada's past as a settler society all share a preoccupation with power relations and identity discourses. In order to consider the complexities that contribute to the formation of these power relations and to consider the heterogeneous nature of the groups involved, an intersectional perspective could possibly present a benefit. Labels can, as a matter of fact, be helpful for providing structure(s) and for grappling with complexity but, as this dissertation has shown, they have limits in that they can disguise aspects that serve as uniting, as building bridges between people considered as markedly different at a first glance. An intersectional approach has the potential to uncover these bridges – and maybe to uncover the fact that the questioning of heterogeneous societies, mainly related to a racial and/or ethnic understanding, mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation, is based on a premature assumption of difference, neglecting the many things people can have in common.

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