WHAT DO WE HAVE IN CANON?
CHINESE CANADIAN ANTHOLOGIES AND
THE POSIT(ION)ING OF AN ETHNO-NATIONAL LITERARY CANON
AND ITS CONTEXTS

by
JANEY LEW
B.A., The University of British Columbia, 2001

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Abstract

Chinese Canadian anthologies are sites for negotiating community boundaries, positing coalitions, deconstructing social and literary institutions, and asserting legitimacy. They pose the question, What do we have in canon?, by interrogating the representation of Chinese Canadian writers in the existing canon and by offering an alternative canon for consideration. I propose the term “ethno-national literature” to account for the ethno-racial and national distinctiveness of the literary category “Chinese Canadian.” While recent scholarly work has been directed toward conceptualizing “Asian Canadian” and “Asian North American” as disciplinary areas of study within English, it does not address the issue that specific ethno-racial groups continue to identify themselves in categories such as “Chinese Canadian” or “Japanese Canadian.” This thesis considers the theoretical potential of Chinese Canadian anthologies as texts which articulate rhetorical community. I examine five anthologies of Chinese Canadian literature, Inalienable Rice (a collaboration between Chinese and Japanese Canadian artist-activists, 1979), Many-Mouthed Birds (1991), Jin Guo (1992), Swallowing Clouds (1999) and Strike the Wok (2003), in comparison with three Oxford anthologies of Canadian literature to consider how Chinese Canadian anthologies act as culturally-resistant, canon-forming texts.
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For the most part, writing is a lonely business. No matter how much help and input a writer receives from the outside, the bulk of the work is spent in solitary confinement, your only company coming from the tools of writing (desk, paper, writing instruments, computer keyboards). Perhaps this seclusion is necessary to coax your research to life. The voices of the critics and authors I have read during the day haunt me all night when I am writing—snapping at one another, jostling for my attention, having murmured conversations in the corners of my mind.

I found inspiration for this project while re-reading Andy Quan’s Introduction to Swallowing Clouds, when he observes that writers, particularly poets, are outcasts. Indeed part of my motivation for tackling this thesis was to figure out the prickly relationship between the necessarily isolated life of the writer, and the need to develop writerly communities to combat further alienation, for instance, on the basis of race. My acknowledgements must begin here, with a humble nod at the social activists, artists and community workers who have inspired me. I am grateful for having grown up in a community which nurtured my cultural difference and brought it to awareness. In particular, I acknowledge Glen Nagano at Strathcona Elementary School for teaching me, and I am sure countless numbers of his students, community and social responsibility. To all my teachers who encouraged me to write, who gave this girl poetry, I thank you.

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... lyric is
not rule but desire. signpost the revolution.
your body's alphabet encrypts the message.
rising on the silent letter that chances the sound around it . . .

Rita Wong, “Open the Brutal”
INTRODUCTION

What do we have in canon?

Lien Chao proposes in her groundbreaking 1997 study of Chinese Canadian literature, *Beyond Silence: Chinese Canadian Literature in English*, that the anthology is Chinese Canadian literature’s “founding form” (18). In one of the book’s chapters, she examines two publications produced by Asian Canadian writers and artists, *Inalienable Rice: A Chinese and Japanese Canadian Anthology* (1979) and *Yellow Peril: Reconsidered* (1990), and the first dedicated anthology of Chinese Canadian writing, *Many-mouthed Birds: Contemporary Chinese Canadian Writing* (1991). Since the appearance of Chao’s important bibliographic work, two additional anthologies of Chinese Canadian literature have been produced, the most recent, *Strike the Wok: An Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Canadian Fiction* (2003), co-edited by Chao herself. While some critical attention has been paid to individual anthologies in reviews (both academic and non-scholarly) and in scholarly essays, little additional work has been done which looks at the group of Chinese Canadian anthologies together and their theoretical potential as a corpus of culturally resistant, canon-forming texts.
With this in mind, my thesis expands upon and reconsiders Chao’s work on Chinese Canadian anthologies to explore how the anthologies act as sites for negotiating community boundaries, positing coalitions, deconstructing social and literary institutions, and asserting legitimacy. Chinese Canadian anthologies pose the question, *What do we have in canon?* The question is addressed in two directions, each signaled by a different stress in its enunciation. First, with emphasis on the word “canon,” the question points at the Canadian canon and the representation (or lack) of Chinese Canadian writing therein; second, with emphasis on the words “we have,” the question draws attention towards the works represented in Chinese Canadian anthologies, thus positing an alternative canon. The central question of my thesis intentionally echoes the words of Andy Quan in the Introduction to *Swallowing Clouds: An Anthology of Chinese Canadian Poetry* (1999), where he asks, “What do we have in common?” (8). The two questions combined outline the major issues at stake in my analysis: the first interrogates how Chinese Canadian anthologies respond to, resist, and assimilate notions of literary authority and value with respect to Canadian canonical discourse, while the second explores themes of commonality and community which seem to motivate the construction of an ethno-national literature through the process of anthology-production.

Chinese Canadian anthologies participate in several overlapping institutional discourses. They lie at the intersection of several “literatures”—Canadian, multicultural, “minority,” Asian Canadian, Asian North American, Asian diaspora, to name a few. At the same time, they stake a claim for “Chinese Canadian” as a valid literary category. Chinese Canadian anthologies articulate the development of, what I call, an “ethno-national literature.” While recent scholarly work has been directed toward
conceptualizing “Asian Canadian” and “Asian North American” as disciplinary areas of study within English, the emphases in this work on pan-ethnicity and transnationalism do tend to elide some of the particular issues of difference raised by, for instance, the community of Chinese Canadian writers who continue to identify themselves by their specific ethno-national designation. Articles by Donald Goellnicht (2000) and Guy Beauregard (1999), as well as a forthcoming essay by Chris Lee (2006), all trace the “emergence” of Asian Canadian literature and discuss its institutional place in relation to Canadian literary studies; in the Introduction to a special issue of Essays on Canadian Writing (Winter 2002), Goellnicht and co-editor Daniel Coleman advocate for “the institutionalization of racialized Canadian literatures” through the development of “recognizable disciplinary apparatuses . . . attached to racialized designations such as ‘African Canadian,’ ‘Native Canadian,’ and ‘Asian Canadian’” (14-15); and two books released in 2004, a critical study by Eleanor Ty of narrative fiction and literary non-fiction, and a collection of essays edited by Ty and Goellnicht, suggest critical paradigms for reading and conceptualizing Asian North American literature. Each of these works suggests that there is an institutional value to these categories, and they all imply that the strategic development of national and transnational racial coalitions have some potential impact on canon-formation, historical revision and institutional activism.

As Coleman and Goellnicht argue, and I agree, there is a strategic value in theorizing racialized literary categories. Moreover, the work by various scholars to posit reading strategies that apply comparatively and cross-culturally to Asian Canadian and Asian American texts opens up an exciting critical field for further development and theorization. While both these efforts constitute plausible institutional strategies for
raising the profile of Asian Canadian literature, they only address from one perspective (that is, a critical or academic perspective) how strategic coalitions and communities form and operate. Writing about the Asian American context, King-Kok Cheung makes the point that “adverting to race alone also obscures the variety of generational and ethnic constituencies within Asian American communities” (3). Additionally, while transnational investigations into diasporic literatures illuminate significant patterns and affinities in the experiences of displaced and marginalized subjects, it is important not to overlook the impact of national policies and ideologies on the development of minority communities. Goellnicht himself contends that Asian Canadian literary and social movements emerged out of local and “single-ethnic” community activism (“A Long Labour” 9). If this is the case, would it not make sense to further investigate the events, actions, and products that raised community consciousness within these specific groups?

While individual ethno-cultural groups may, for strategic reasons at different times, form coalitions and alliances based on racial identification and common histories of exclusion, they continue to identify themselves with, and advocate the distinctiveness of, their own individual ethnic communities.

With this in mind, I propose the term “ethno-national literature” to account for the ethno-racial and national distinctiveness of the literary category called Chinese Canadian. I argue that the category arose out of various coalescences and separations among several overlapping artist-activist communities in the late-1960s and it regenerates itself through the production of anthologies. Anthologies are sites for showcasing multiple voices. The anthology is a genre which is based upon consolidation of, and interaction with, different texts. As collections of written works which, taken together, articulate a common
cultural purpose, anthologies not only articulate the bounds of rhetorical community, but they also instantiate canons and provide a structure for canons and canonical values to reproduce themselves. Therefore, an analysis of Chinese Canadian anthologies in relation to the texts and contexts which surround them, provides one way of looking at how an ethno-national community represents its history and cultural politics.

Tackling a Literary Pink Elephant: Whither and Why Canon?

For critics of Asian Canadian literature, the consolidation of an alternative canon has been a paramount task even as we might express reservations about the process of canonization as such [. . . ] In the context of the canon and culture wars, texts themselves come to stand in for previously marginalized subjects. In other words, the presence of these texts (in libraries, bookstores, reading lists, syllabi, and so on) signifies a negation of silence. (Lee “Enacting” 9-10)

When I began my research, I responded to the word “canon” with a skepticism and fear that bordered on loathing. In my mind, The Canon (capital-T, capital-C) represented everything ancient, oppressive, and “precious” about English literature. As a graduate student interested in minority literatures, I felt that The Canon was not only irrelevant, but in fact antagonistic to my field of study. What could be more antagonizing than a faceless, nameless, formless power that rules by exclusion? What could be more frustrating than confronting an entrenched, amorphous foe who enacts its greatest violence by ignoring you? Yet it also seemed to me that the question of canon was inescapable when talking about how nations and institutions use language to exercise power. The fact is, questions of canon necessarily arise when we raise the issue of
cultural value. And, if what Paul Lauter asserts is true, that “culture [...] is a significant way of constructing and mobilizing power” (viii), then questions of canon can never be far off when we discuss how power works in society.

Lauter defines canon as “the set of literary works, the grouping of significant philosophical, political and religious texts, the particular accounts of history generally accorded cultural weight within a society” (ix). The contents of a canon are difficult, if not impossible, to pin down. Even when a group of critics agree on a majority of the values that should inform canonization, their particular ideas of what “works, “texts,” and “accounts” best represent those values are bound to vary in some degree. The apparent passivity of canonization is problematic. The sources of a canon are as hard to pin down as its contents, and it is difficult to imagine how something with so little agency can exert so much power. As Lauter remarks, “[o]bviously, no conclave of cultural cardinals establishes a literary canon, but for all that it exercises substantial influence” (23). Moreover, despite the fact that canons are multiple, fluid, and subject to constant debate, they also rely upon, define, and signify endurance.

Canons entrench particular standards, structures, and processes for debating values, whether they be literary, political, cultural, and social. These are, as Robert Lecker argues, “crucial interrogations” (“A Country Without a Canon?” 2) which need to, and do, occur whether or not we use the word “canon” to signify them. To avoid the issue of canon is to sidestep any important interjections we can make in debates over value. Indeed, if we are to agree with Steven Scobie or Lorraine Weir, who, respectively, argue that canons are “intrinsically conservative” (Scobie 57) and consist of “what can be
absorbed with least resistance or noise in the institution” (Weir 194), then more effort is necessary to engage and intervene in canonical discourse.

Theorists resistant to a conformist canon must, however, grapple with what Lecker calls the “double bind of canonical inquiry” (Canadian Canons 16). Lecker acknowledges that by identifying the power of canonization (even in an attempt to destabilize this power), critics “paradoxically [augment] the value of whatever canons are undone” (Canadian Canons 16). One of the broader issues I take up in this thesis is whether Chinese Canadian anthologies, by responding to the ideologies of a national canon, are not indeed reinforcing them? Canons are bound up in paradoxes, assumptions, and vested interests which make them all the more difficult to unravel.

Both Lauter and Lecker identify material concerns which, in part, motivate canon-makers. The fixed, impressionistic nature of canonical authority is unsurprising, argues Lecker, given that “the interests of academics, pedagogical concerns, government intervention, and marketing strategies all conspire to create an impression of a stable canon and to promote a set of critical assumptions that congregate around this impression” (Canadian Canons 7). Lauter puts the point more simply when he writes, “the issue of canon involves not only taste and values . . . but jobs and power” (8). As Lauter’s statement shows, material conditions (particularly in capitalist societies) are closely tied with the deployment of power. Conversely, one way of limiting power and influence in the literary professions is to limit the material resources available to those who write. Thus, the inclusion of minority literature in the canon not only “validates [the] social power” (Lauter 23) of minority groups, but it also, in a practical way, validates their existence and material rights in history.
Some of those who view canonical discourses optimistically see the possibility for "democratic" process and participation. Virgil Nemoianu defines canon as "the outcome of democratic pressures," with "communitarian orientations" which arise out of popular debate (qtd. in Lecker "A Country Without a Canon" 5). Lauter advocates for a shift in institutional approach to canon-formation in the United States, calling for "democratic and inclusive processes for reconstructing academic programs" (xii). But, given the unequal access of participants to such a privileged discourse (a discourse which, I have shown, consciously renders itself impenetrable), is such a "democratic" ideal possible, or even desirable? The invocation of democracy, in some ways, detracts from the debate over canonical power by suggesting that "power" (in general) is equally available to all people in society, that all we have to do is exercise our democratic right to power in order to participate in the debate. In this way, references to democracy dangerously oversimplify the power relationships which underlie the problematics of canon formation and which inform the fierce struggles over inclusion and exclusion which result from canonization.

Lauter explains that "debating the canon turns out to be a symbolic way of arguing a variety of other social and political issues—basically who has power and how it is exercised" (x). Double-binds and democratic ideals aside, canons can and must incite action and agency. Canonical discourse does have the potential to illuminate how literature affects ideology and can bring about social change. Both Lecker and Lauter offer useful suggestions for how canons can empower marginalized subjects. Lecker advises that we reconstitute canons as objects which "facilitate" debate, encourage change, and force those addressing literary and social issues to take responsibility for their
positions, no matter how subversive or self-serving" (emphasis original, "A Country Without a Canon” 12). By emphasizing responsibility, Lecker reminds us that, at the core of institutional and disciplinary decisions lie personal and social responsibility. Lauter argues for greater inclusion through the introduction of “alternative categories [which] provide useful perspectives on the limitations of the traditional formulations by suggesting how different a canon posed in their terms would be” (37). Alternative canons, he argues, need “both . . . separation and integration” in order to carve out a space for recognition (165). I contend that Chinese Canadian literary anthologies model that exact point—representation on the community’s own terms, and inclusive representation in the national canon.

“Imagined Canon?”: National Literature and Imagined Communities

[T]here may be no canon, but there might be an imagined canon—an imagined community?—that we share. (Lecker “A Country Without a Canon” 12)

This anthology of poetry comes from a place that is both real and mythical—a place that exists concretely, and one that is created as we speak its name: Chinese-Canada. (Quan 7)

What links “canon” to “nation”? As Lecker maintains, the central issues of canonicity, “politics . . . ideology . . . gender . . . subjectivity [,] know no national bounds” (“A Country Without a Canon” 2). A canon is, however, a way of conceptualizing and representing national identity, common values and a shared history.
Nationalism arises out of the collision between culture and power; since these forces likewise drive canonization, nations and canons meet at their intersection.

Perhaps the most influential work on nationalism in the last twenty-five years is Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983). In brief, Anderson argues that since World War II, nationalism has emerged as “the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time” (3). In other words, since 1945, the political right to rule has been inextricably bound with ideas and feelings of kinship and communion which form the basis for shared cultural identification. Anderson argues that the need for new ways of constituting political legitimacy arose out of religious and ideological revolutions which saw the weakening of power structures based upon sacred texts and the divine right (36). He continues to assert that nationalism answered the call when groups of people needed new ways of making meaning together (36).

Shared meaning provides a powerful basis and rationale for political right (and might). As Anderson suggests, we give consent to rule to those who can best justify why, and for what, we live and die. Anderson draws a direct link between literacy and nationalism when he writes, “[n]othing perhaps more precipitated this search [for meaning], nor made it more fruitful, than print-capitalism, which made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways” (36). The spread of culture through print technologies enables a nation, which Anderson defines as “an imagined political community” (6), to imagine (and, importantly, reproduce imaginings of) itself. Anthologies of national
literature are, therefore, instantiations of canon which embody nationalist values and represent national histories.

As several of the critics in Lecker’s *Canadian Canons: Essays in Literary Value* suggest, canon formation in Canada is closely tied to anxieties over national identity (see Surette, Gerson, McCarthy), while elsewhere, Lauter suggests that the establishment of a canon signals cultural and institutional “legitimacy” (27). Pointing to the lack of American literature courses and anthologies prior to the twentieth century, and the concomitant view that American literature was “a branch—a shaky one at that—of the British stock,” Lauter notes that increased anthology production after World War I legitimated American literature as an academic course of study (27). The desire for legitimacy—whether cultural, social or institutional—represents a desire to claim the powers of right and affirmation. In particular, legitimacy relates to the validation of truth- and power-systems which govern and motivate communities.

Ethno-national communities within nations conceive of themselves in similar terms of value, legitimacy, and community, as nation-states do. Quan defines “Chinese-Canada” in terms of “place” and “name.” While the assumption of a “place” by no means signifies a nation, the assertion of right over place often attends the exertion of national power. Additionally, the enunciation of a name suggests the adoption of a sign that stands for (or “imagines”) the “community.” Anderson introduces the concept of “sub-nationalism” (3), or a group within a nation which comes to conceive of itself as a separate “imagined community.” These groups project their political and identitarian desires in nationalist terms and, taken to its furthest point, aim these desires toward the ideal achieving of sovereign rule\(^1\). While I do not argue that the ethno-national
community posited by Chinese Canadian anthologists goes so far as to demand the right of sovereignty, I do suggest that it imagines itself as a discrete community (within a larger community) which desires legitimate recognition of its history, cultural contributions, and political rights. While Chinese Canadian anthologies do not argue for sovereign power per se, they do demand redress for past political exclusions and opportunities for more equal participation in political processes. Ethno-national communities are, thus, not so much “sub”-nationalisms as they are *meta-nationalisms*, which refer to the concept of national identity and operate within the structures of national power, while at the same time, they conceive of themselves as a separate community with attendant rights and culture which are distinct from (and not well-represented within) the nation at large.

Re-evaluating the Canon: Positioning Chinese Canadian Literature

More than ever, textual production becomes a survival tactic in the construction of the imaginary that enacts the actual in our lives.
(Miki 151)

Anthologies of Chinese Canadian literature emphasize the need to re-evaluate the canon. Chinese Canadian literature represents an alternative to the Canadian canon, at the same time as it claims its legitimate “place” within that canon. Representation in an anthology signals the power of claiming a place from which to speak; conversely, lack of representation means erasure from a nation’s cultural imaginary. Thus, I begin my thesis by examining the representations of ethno-national difference in three anthologies of
Canadian literature: Donna Bennett and Russell Brown’s *Anthology of Canadian Literature in English* (1982/3), a comprehensive survey of Canadian literature; Linda Hutcheon and Marion Richmond’s *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions* (1990), the first major anthology of Canadian multicultural literature; and Smaro Kamboureli’s *Making a Difference: Canadian Multicultural Literature* (1996), which positions multicultural literature in Canada against a backdrop of theoretical considerations such as institutionality, representation, and difference. The limited number of Chinese Canadian selections in these anthologies reveals the still-marginal position of Chinese Canadian literature with respect to the canon, even while multiculturalism is being introduced in significantly radical ways.

In my second chapter, I look at the way Chao, and others, have positioned *Inalienable Rice* and *Many-mouthed Birds* as “founding” texts of Chinese Canadian literature. I re-contextualize the two anthologies in light of this discourse of “foundings” and “births,” and question why the critical works surrounding Chinese Canadian and Asian Canadian literatures are preoccupied with these issues. Why is the establishment of firm beginnings important to the constitution of an ethno-national canon? What does the claiming of “first-ness” do for a text? How important is it to get your “firsts” in order? I see all these as questions of legitimacy and historical construction. Finally, I relate the preoccupation with births and beginnings to the issue of legitimacy.²

In my final chapter, I consider the two anthologies of Chinese Canadian literature published since Chao’s *Beyond Silence, Swallowing Clouds* and *Strike the Wok*, and compare them to a collection of oral history narratives published by the Chinese Canadian National Council, *Jin Guo: Voices of Chinese Canadian Women*. In particular,
I examine the centripetal forces which produce a sense of collective identity or collective imagination in these texts, and I analyse how the anthology is a rhetorical genre which reproduces community, while still allowing for difference.

My project suggests that ethno-national literary communities, such as the Chinese Canadian community, identify and position themselves in various configurations based upon strategic need. These configurations are fluid and they respond to community conflict and debate. While it may be tempting to suggest, as Goellnicht does, that the development of a mass, panethnic social movement would put Asian Canadian literature in a better institutional position, such a suggestion does little to credit the work done within and between different local and ethnic Asian Canadian groups to shape and drive the politics of their own communities. Roy Miki reminds us that “The deprivileging of university-sanctioned discourses brings into play knowledge formed in the daily lives of those engaged in social struggles. Here involvement needs to be participatory rather than the mere application of academic models of abstraction to serve the ends of institutional validation and individual proprietorship” (178). Chinese Canadian anthologies represent community-driven initiatives to articulate ethno-national identity and activate social change. More importantly, by studying the form and content of Chinese Canadian anthologies, we can see how a community theoretically constitutes itself and, in some ways, levels the division between academic and grassroots cultural discourses.
Notes

1 Anderson argues that a nation imagines itself as a "limited ... sovereign ... community" (7). The issue of sovereignty has to do with the recognition and exercise of rights. Nations, Anderson argues, are communities that want the power to define and rule themselves. State structure is a formalized mode of exercising this power, and it is seen as, if not the most legitimate, generally the most authoritative. "[N]ations," Anderson writes, "dream of being free [and the] gage and emblem of this freedom is the sovereign state.

2 An analysis of some selections from Many-mouthed Birds reveals several texts which illustrate anxieties over birth legitimacy in families. This issue represents but one of the avenues for further research which are worth considering, but which I have not had the opportunity to explore fully in this project.
CHAPTER I

Oxford Anthologizing: Disciplining the Canadian (Multicultural) Canon

Students like myself who did not belong to the dominant groups in society found our subjectivity either rendered irrelevant, thus nonexistent in the canonical texts, or stereotyped into caricatures which offended us collectively. Unless we adopted white values and tried to sound white, we would find ourselves constantly being denied a legitimate voice either in the texts or in analyzing them as readers. It was my experience with the mainstream canon that prompted me to challenge its composition by introducing Chinese Canadian literature. (Lien Chao xii)

In the title of a 1993 article, Robert Lecker poses the question: Is Canada “A Country without a Canon?” Lecker’s essay proceeds not so much to answer the question as to argue for increased scholarly engagement with discourses of canonical theory by critics of Canadian literature. By shifting the emphasis of his inquiry from the substantive existence of a canon, to the existence and, importantly, the function of canonical discourses, Lecker proves that while a unitary Canadian canon may not exist, literary discourses which examine the ideas and ideals of canonization exist in many forms; moreover, interrogations into both the purposes and content of the Canadian canon have a significant impact on canon-formation practices.
The question "What do we have in canon?" points directly at the canonical selections in survey anthologies like Donna Bennett and Russell Brown's *An Anthology of Canadian Literature in English* (Vols. 1 and 2, 1982 and 1983) and in multicultural anthologies such as Linda Hutcheon and Marion Richmond's *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions* (1990), and Smaro Kamboureli's *Making a Difference: Canadian Multicultural Literature* (1996). While some critics argue about the existence of a Canadian canon, Lien Chao's description of her personal experience as a student of Canadian literature presupposes an understanding of a "mainstream canon" (xii). As an anthologist and a theorist of Chinese Canadian literature, Chao positions herself and her work as reacting against a corpus of Canadian literature which excludes and misrepresents her subject position, consequently delegitimizing her experience as a non-"white" Canadian (xii). Chinese Canadian anthologies function, as Lucia Re argues about anthologies in general, to "reflect, expand, or modify (in more or less radical ways) the existing canon" (585-6). Chinese Canadian literary anthologies resist and respond to assumptions about canonization in a specifically national context, and thus assimilate ideas about the purpose, arrangement, and authority of canonical discourse. Because Chinese Canadian anthologies configure themselves within a context of nationalist literature—and a nationalist canon—it is important to consider the implications involved in defining canonical inclusion in nationalist terms, and to examine the ways in which anthologies of Canadian literature represent multicultural difference.

In this chapter, I provide an overview of a selection of Oxford anthologies of Canadian literature. Specifically, I compare Bennett and Brown’s editorial approach in *Anthology of Canadian Literature in English* with the approaches of multicultural
anthologists Hutcheon and Richmond in *Other Solitudes*, and Kamboureli in *Making a Difference*. What is the position and visibility of multiculturalism within conceptions of what defines the national in these anthologies? *Anthology of Canadian Literature in English* is a comprehensive survey of Canadian literature. Bennett and Brown’s editorial position is broadly national, but their specific selections of multicultural literature and the ways in which they frame multiculturalism within their editorial argument, provide clues as to how multiculturalism fits (or does not fit) into their definition of what represents Canadian literature. The editors of *An Anthology of Canadian Literature in English* use a strategy of elision to discipline and delegate considerations of multicultural difference to the margins of canonical discourse in Canada. In contrast, the editorial strategies employed in Kamboureli’s *Making a Difference*, and Linda Hutcheon and Marion Richmond’s *Other Solitudes*, intentionally and self-consciously position multiculturalism as a central consideration for canonical inclusion. However, while both the Kamboureli anthology and the one edited by Hutcheon and Richmond make multicultural literature in Canada visible, the anthologies offer two different approaches to representing multiculturalism in Canada; the first politicizes the question of multiculturalism, while the latter reinforces the values of official multiculturalism. By looking at two specifically multicultural anthologies alongside a widely-used survey anthology of Canadian literature, I argue that Canadian literary anthologies discipline multiculturalism within narratives of literary value, nationalism, history, and institutional practice. The relative presence or absence of multiculturalism in anthologies of national literature reflect arguments about the location of multiculturalism in Canada’s literary history and the critical components that define
canonical inclusion. These arguments discursively frame representations of a national
canon, which Chinese Canadian anthologists and theorists such as Lien Chao seek to resist.

I. Oxford anthologizing: disciplinary power and imperial form

*Anthology of Canadian Literature in English, Other Solitudes* and *Making a Difference* are all published by Oxford University Press. As the world’s foremost academic press and major publisher of Canadian survey anthologies, Oxford thus influences the production and consumption of Canadian literature. Oxford maintains its disciplinary power\(^2\) through a process which Roy Miki calls “imperial form” (42). Numerous overlapping institutions influence and regulate language, literature and knowledge, which in turn, affect the constitution of power in societies. Disciplinary structures such as the state, universities, publishers, community groups, and professional organizations govern the politics of visibility and invisibility in canon-forming discourses, influencing how texts (and tastes) are produced, positioned, and perceived. Imperial form regulates power by absorbing, neutralizing, and containing difference; it operates by covering everything and using everything within its perimeter to raise the power of the centre. By providing institutional support to multiple anthologies of Canadian literature, Oxford applies imperial form and consequently asserts hegemonic influence over nation-building and canon-forming practices in Canada. Moreover, since the 1990s, Oxford’s increased production of multicultural and ethnic Canadian
anthologies both recognizes cultural and critical changes in Canadian literary discourses, and reflects an institutional effort to manage and contain ethnic difference in the Canadian canon.

Miki explains that "[i]mperial form works from the stability of a centre outward to the colonies" (42). As a department of Oxford University, the Press acts as one of the University’s mechanisms for the exercise of power and hegemonic control over academic education and scholarship. Oxford’s compass of influence aims to be universal. The University, through the Press, endeavours to support “excellence in research, scholarship and education by publishing worldwide” (emphasis mine, About). By operating “the world’s largest university press” (About), Oxford University attains a measure of control over knowledge production on an international scale. The Press’s role as a global producer and disseminator of textual material is summarized on its website:

[Oxford UP] publishes more than 4,500 books a year, has a presence in over fifty countries, and employs some 3,700 people worldwide. It has become familiar to millions through a diverse publishing programme that includes scholarly material in all academic disciplines, bibles, music, school and college textbooks, children’s books, materials for teaching English as a second language, business books, dictionaries and reference books and journals. (About)

The emphasis on absolutes in the above paragraph—words such as “world,” “worldwide,” “millions,” “all,” and “includes”—illustrates imperial form at work. The Oxford institution both asserts and receives power through a system of mutual reinforcement: the more institutional support Oxford provides (for example, through its publishing programme) for scholarly projects in different parts of the world, the broader the impact of its ideological influence on the academy, and consequently, the greater the extent of its institutional power. Not only do the products of the Press benefit from its
resources in areas such as production, distribution and marketing, they also benefit from the academic prestige and cultural capital of being associated with the Oxford vision of "excellence in research, scholarship and education." But the power relationship is reciprocal. Every product of Oxford UP's "diverse publishing programme" assumes compliance with Oxford University's standards of academic excellence. To be associated with the Oxford institution is to benefit from assumptions of its established institutional power; at the same time, it is to add to the centre of that power by deferring to its support.

Oxford University Press's institutional hegemony grounds itself in the notions of academic tradition and prestige associated with Oxford University. Terry Eagleton summarizes Antonio Gramsci's definition of hegemony as "the ways in which a governing power wins consent to rule from those it subjugates" (112). The crucial point in Gramsci's definition of hegemony is "consent." Hegemonic power is neither unidimensional nor wholly coercive; rather, it relies upon the spread of ideologies and practices which garner compliance and acceptance for centralized power. Oxford UP's authority as an academic publisher rests upon establishing assumptions of leading experience and expertise. For example, Oxford UP traces its organizational history to the first book published in England, "printed in Oxford in 1478, only two years after Caxton set up the first printing press in England" (About). The origin story connects Oxford UP's organizational history, which "began to develop in a recognizable form" not until the seventeenth century (About), with much earlier events in the revolutionizing of print technologies. The proposed version of history sets up Oxford UP as a pioneering institution—a leader in experience. Additionally, the Press's leading position amongst
academic publishers is secured through its system of Delegates who oversee the “peer group review” editorial process (Quality). A committee of Delegates, consisting of “appointed” (About) Oxford University faculty, controls the operations of the University Press. Delegates are “actively involved” (About) in the editorial process, from reviewing and approving book proposals, to working with editors to comment on individual manuscripts and oversee the peer review process. Peer review processes are widely applied and accepted in most academic disciplines as appropriate means to determine and regulate quality in scholarship. Peer review fosters trust from the academic community for the quality of Oxford UP products because such a practice reflects collegial values: experts judging experts. Its reliance upon academic specialists “either from Oxford or from other universities” (Quality) suggests a best-among-peers philosophy which, collegial as it may be, nonetheless obscures the control Delegates (not to mention the nameless few who appoint Delegates) and editors hold in deciding who the specialists are and what constitutes expertise.

The language of tradition and excellence which legitimizes Oxford UP’s institutional power also influences canon-forming discourses in Canadian literature. Alan R. Knight argues that even the earliest Canadian anthologies aimed to “represent the Canadian tradition” (147). Knight reviews a group of six “representative” (147) anthologies, beginning with Edward Hartley Dewart’s pre-Confederation Selections from Canadian Poets (1864). The six anthologies are “representative” in the sense that they all focus on defining Canada’s national literary identity by tracing its literary history. Knight argues that Dewart’s anthology signifies the beginning of a lineage of Canadian poetry anthologies, one per generation, which have each attempted to define and shape
the development of poetic traditions in Canada (147). Three of the six anthologies which Knight designates as “the hegemonic anthologies of English Canadian poetry” (1947) are products of Oxford UP; included in Knight’s “genealogy” (148) are successive editions of the Oxford Book of Canadian Verse edited by Wilfred Campbell (1913), A.J.M. Smith (1960, rev. 1967) and Margaret Atwood (1982).

Atwood’s version of the Oxford Book of Canadian Verse in English assumes the values of tradition and excellence espoused by Oxford UP to such a degree that, in her anthology, the two terms are conflated: tradition is excellence. “Old chestnuts are old chestnuts,” Atwood writes, “because they have survived the other chestnuts, and there’s usually good reason for that” (xxviii). Atwood alludes to “good reasons” but does not define what they are. Elsewhere, Atwood refers explicitly to the prestige of Oxford UP and the result of its influence on her selections. She writes that, “[b]eing in the Oxford anthology is like getting your baby boots bronzed: the aim is durability” (xxviii). “[T]his collection does not claim to represent the cutting edge,” she writes (xxviii). Interestingly, Atwood attributes the conservatism of her selections to an implied conservatism associated with being “the Oxford anthology.” She does little to cite her own power and position as an editor in defining (and reinscribing) the traditions of Canadian literature. Instead, Atwood acknowledges, in the Preface to the New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse, her position as an inheritor of specific anthological traditions. She writes:

I undertook the editing of the editing of The New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse in English both with the sense of making a personal memorial tribute to someone who had contributed greatly to my education as a poet, and, I hope, with the same sense of cultural mission that [A.J.M.] Smith himself pursued through his tireless collecting and elucidating . . . Consider what follows, then, as the propitiation of both a collective ancestral ghost, and of the individual spirit of a sage and generous man. (xxvii)
She describes her work as a “propitiation,” summoning notions of a sacred offering back to her literary ancestors. Thus, Atwood situates her editorial responsibility to tradition in two ways: first, by deferring to the need for “durability” demanded by Oxford anthologies, and second, by referring to her spiritual obligations to literary predecessors.

The existence of multiple editions, or series, to some degree indicates the influence of a particular anthology over canon-forming practices. Since anthologies are primarily used as textbooks for courses, they must be marketable. Gary Geddes’ *Canadian Poets* franchise is another widely cited series of canonical anthologies, principally because of the anthologies’ extensive use as textbooks for introductory English courses in Canadian poetry (Miki 35-6; Kamboureli, *Scandalous Bodies* 133-4). Bennett and Brown’s *Anthology of Canadian Literature in English* appears in multiple editions, beginning with the first in 1982/3, a revised edition released in 1991 and a reissue in one volume with major revisions and additions in 2002. The production of multiple editions of an anthology allows editors not only to add contemporary writers to the canon, but also to update their selections according to critical responses and current literary theories. Anthologies which appear in multiple editions also, significantly, reflect a degree of institutional support or acceptance for the premises of canon-formation which inform the original text. Oxford UP’s institutional support of comprehensive Canadian anthologies extends beyond the production of multiple anthologies, to the production of multiple editions of several anthologies.

A review of the 2002 volume of *A New Anthology of Canadian Literature in English* states that “[a]lthough the word ‘canon’ doesn’t appear in the title, it’s implicitly representative of canonical writing” (New Anthology, Book Information). Bennett and
Brown's anthology is comprehensive both in historico-national scope and in its coverage of literary movements and genres. It begins with early writings by English-language settlers and explorers and ending with a tentative list of "Poets for Further Consideration." Bennett and Brown "write" a narrative of Canadian literature through their canonical selections, the organization of the anthology and their editorial framing of the literary works. The two-volume anthology traces English-Canadian literature in four discrete movements: the first two movements pivot on the historical moment of Confederation, and thus set up the context of national history and its effect on the development of a national literary consciousness; with a national consciousness thus awakened, Canadian literature moves into its maturing phases of early- and late(r)-modernism. Bennett and Brown emphasize their editorial intent to provide a "representative" survey of the Canadian writers (1: xi), but they do not articulate their politics of representation, nor do they situate their critical investment in the tradition they represent. It is precisely this erasure of editorial subjectivity which reveals the disciplining practices at work in Anthology of Canadian Literature in English. With their focus on presenting a comprehensive anthology thematically centered on the development of Canadian literary consciousness and aesthetics, Bennett and Brown elide multicultural representation in the formation of a national literature. "The most commonly used" (Lutz 54) anthology of Canadian literature for survey courses at the university level in the 1990s, Anthology of Canadian Literature in English illustrates a canon which leaves multicultural voices and identities out of its ideological constitution of the national.
II. "Canada First": Editing Literary History in An Anthology of Canadian Literature in English

An Anthology of Canadian Literature in English comprises over 1,300 pages and contains works by eighty-six authors. The writing is arranged by author, in order of year of birth. The works of each author are presented chronologically, in turn, by year of first book publication. The chronological organization of both authors and works supports the historical framing of the anthology. A prefatory introduction for each author, ranging from a few paragraphs to several pages, appears before the author’s selections. The author introductions include biographical information and contextual commentary which, Bennett and Brown explain, place the “selections in relation to their larger body of work, their personal development, and their place in the Canadian literary community, [as well as provide suggestions for] relevant contexts of study” (1: xi). Bennett and Brown’s general-to-specific arrangement of works and contexts operates like a set of stacking dolls: an individual work nested within a body of work; nested within the story of an author’s life; nested within social, cultural and literary communities; nested within a context of literary movements and innovations; nested within Canada’s politico-national history; nested within the influences of international literary movements and socio-political history. Re notes that texts in anthologies serve a “synecdochic function” (578); she writes, “[t]he act of anthologizing . . . implies the notion of an organic relation between part and whole, as well as a topological conception of the text itself” (587). Bennett and Brown’s anthology employs a structure which makes use of multiple layers of synecdoche. Each layer relates to a master narrative of the importance of Canadian
literature as a component of the socio-cultural fabric of Canadian life and as a reflection and designator of national identity.

Re characterizes the anthology as a distinct literary genre because it involves a process of “creative writing, or rewriting, of the literary tradition” (586). Anthologies bring together a variety of works—writing by various authors, in various forms, from various places and times—into one overarching structure, for consideration against one another. Anthology-making carries, in its selection process, the trace narrative of decision-making, an implied narrative of inclusion and exclusion. Anthologists also (more literally) “write” their versions of literary tradition, and their arguments for a nationalist canon, into the editorial introductions, prefaces and explanatory notes that accompany their presentation of literary works. As Bennett and Brown explain:

The study of literature must, of course, begin with the individual work; however, survey anthologies . . . provide a glimpse of a whole body of literature. The works at hand can therefore be read both for their intrinsic interest and for the way they collectively reveal the cultural and historical contexts that inform them. (1: xi-xii)

In the “glimpse of the whole,” and the ideas and assumptions that inform that glimpse, anthologies reveal the breadth of issues involved in the process of canon formation. As Bennett and Brown argue, survey anthologies such as theirs “reveal cultural and historical contexts” of interest in defining the national whole (1:xii). The narratives of literary history told by these anthologies allegorically trace conjunctive national and cultural histories.

The aims of this conflation of literature, nationalism, and history are ideological and disciplinary coherence. Robert Lecker observes in the Introduction to Canadian Canons: Essays in Literary Value that several Canadian theorists, among them, Leon
Surette, Carole Gerson and Dermot McCarthy, have argued that “the evolution of canonical value [in Canada] projects a displaced expression of nationalist ideology” (9). Such an understanding of canon results in literary choices which are “always-already” constrained by an assumed discourse of national identity. Survey anthologies offer different representations of the ways in which literary history engages with national and institutional histories. Consequently, their representations of Canadian literature reveal ideological assumptions which discipline not only the study of literature in Canada, but also the construction of national cultural values and normative Canadian identities.

The strength of Bennett and Brown’s master narrative lies in a set of critical and theoretical assumptions underlying their editorial argument. Bennett and Brown identify the challenge of selecting works for inclusion as being one of balancing representation with space. They write:

From among the many writers who have contributed to the development of English-Canadian literature, we have chosen a representative group and have elected to give them sufficient space for readers to gain an accurate sense of their work. This policy has allowed us to include in their entirety long works . . . It has also enabled us to keep from abridging poetry and fiction. (1: xi)

Acknowledging (albeit in very general terms) the considerable job of having to choose from amongst the vast number of English-language writers and writings in Canada, Bennett and Brown state their objective as one of selecting “a representative group,” and, correspondingly, of offering a representative selection from each chosen author’s body of work. The editors fail, however, to explain what they mean by representative or to specify what the selections are representative of. They use the word “accurate” to describe their rationalization, a word which tacitly reveals their critical stance. Their approach is positivist, employing a tone which emphasizes their objectivity and distance
from the text. The use of the word “accurate” distances them from their editorial decisions, instead subsuming their critical interests in the name of an ostensibly higher good—accuracy. Accuracy implies scientific, quantitative or logical correctness, a correctness which, assumably, has some kind of empirical basis. But if anthology production is, as Re argues, an act of critical re-writing, then editing an anthology cannot escape also being a political act. Even in situations where editors claim critical disinterestedness, the activities of collecting, arranging, framing and justifying a selection of work scatter the anthologists’ ideological fingerprints all over the text.

Re argues that anthology production has wide-ranging ideological implications. Taking an Althusserian approach to ideology, she describes anthologies as apparatuses that construct a sense of the “imaginary” that structure people’s understandings of their real lives and conditions (585). She writes:

In constructing a more or less hierarchical order for literature, the anthology constitutes and reproduces a system of values within literary studies, while simultaneously contributing to the hegemonic orientation of cultural codes in the wider field of discursive practices. The anthology can never be a disinterested or non-ideological instrument for the dissemination of literary discourse. Indeed, the anthology is one of the textual places where the ideological appropriation of literature becomes most readily available. (585)

Bennett and Brown accomplish, by omission, several rhetorical goals in their Introduction. By leaving out their particular definitions of words such as “accurate” and “representative,” Bennett and Brown defer to the reader of the anthology, asking for the acceptance of several premises. First, that there is a mutual understanding between the reader and the editors of the anthology as to what the terms “accurate” and “representative” mean; and second, that the terms used are indeed reasonable, attainable, and desirable. Bennett and Brown’s second act of omission is to make their own roles as
editors as invisible as possible. They build the anthology’s pyramid-like, synecdochic organizational structure to operate as an apparatus which will discipline’s the reader’s encounter with the text (and contexts). They also recommend and employ an editorial principle of avoiding, where possible, excerpting longer works.

Favouring an editorial policy which avoids excerption supports the idea of writers and their works “speaking for themselves,” but it nonetheless obfuscates the role of the editor-as-writer. The editors provide just one line of explanation for the exceptions to their editorial policy. They note that the included excerpts “are from works that are not often read today and are of interest to the student of Canadian literature” (1: xi). The passive construction of the sentence places the reader (“the student of Canadian literature”) in a position of accepting what the editors have determined are works “of interest.” Thus, Bennett and Brown rely, paradoxically, on the reader to accept their position as the arbiters of accuracy, representation (and “interest”) in literature while also accepting that accuracy and representation are best achieved through minimal editorial intrusion. In other words, the structure of the anthology produces an argument based on assumptions about cultural and literary values which support the invisible authority of the editors.

The theme that surfaces in Bennett and Brown’s narrative of Canadian literature is development. Their portrayal of early Canadian literary history correlates closely with narratives of exploration, colonial settlement, and Confederation in Canada. Selections from the first volume of the anthology include excerpts from Frances Brooke’s *The History of Emily Montague* and the exploration narratives of Samuel Hearne and David Thompson; the voices of early settler women are represented in *An Anthology of*
Canadian Literature in English in the literature of Catharine Parr Traill and Susanna Moodie; and early impulses to centralize and elucidate Canadian literary and cultural identity show up in the excerpted Introduction to Dewart's Selections from Canadian Poets. In Selections, Dewart argues that “[a] national literature is an essential element in the formation of national character” (136). He also notes that one of the hindrances preventing recognition and growth of Canadian literature is Canada's “colonial position” (138). Dewart's goal in producing his anthology is national unity articulated in a shared collective imagination: “It may be fairly questioned,” he writes, “whether the whole range of history presents the spectacle of a people firmly united politically, without the subtle but powerful cement of a patriotic literature” (136-7). Bennett and Brown point out that Dewart's Selections is “Canada's first anthology” and that it is particularly notable because it preserves writing from nineteenth century Canada which may otherwise not have survived. Bennett and Brown also praise Dewart's “critical principles,” arguing specifically that “through his detached and perceptive introduction he affirmed the existence of a coherent body of literature in Canada and created self-awareness in his fellow writers and readers” (1: 136). Importantly, Bennett and Brown laud Dewart for introducing a literary form (the anthology), approach (critical detachment) and ideology (coherent national identity formed through literary coherence) which they themselves support and inscribe in their Anthology of Canadian Literature in English. Dewart's Selections, therefore, marks a solid, convenient beginning to a literary tradition from which Bennett and Brown may naturally follow.

As Dermot McCarthy observes in “Early Canadian Literary Histories and the Function of a Canon,” Dewart himself argues the crucial role of the anthology in
producing a national canon because the anthology furnishes a “permanent form” (qtd. in McCarthy 33). McCarthy argues that the Canadian canon depends upon the idea of having a stable structure. The idea of a national literature with firm foundations works for both those who support and those who contest the canon; as McCarthy explains, “stability legitimizes the former by providing them with the authority of tradition, and the latter by providing them with a tradition they can proceed to ‘delegitimize’ by revealing its authority to be bogus” (30). McCarthy furthermore raises an important point in asserting that the foundational structures of canonicity—its assumptions, its historical truths, its insinuations into political and institutional power structures—are fundamentally conservative and resist destabilization (30).

The organization of the works in *Anthology of Canadian Literature in English* into “movements” indicates the importance of historical context in the development of canonical works; it also emphasizes shifts in thinking and how significant shifts affect the production of literary work. Bennett and Brown identify Dewart and the writers of his generation in a movement they call “*The first stirrings of a literary culture before Canada became a nation*” (1: xii). Bennett and Brown’s second movement, “*The emergence of a national literature*,” (1: xii) centres primarily on the development of “Confederation poets” such as Charles G.D. Roberts, Bliss Carman and Archibald Lampman (1: xii). The Confederation poets characteristically engage with Canadian setting, particularly in poems such as Roberts’ “The Skater” which depict individuals confronted by “the white, inviolate solitude” of Canadian landscape (28). Immense, endless and stoic natural landscapes, such as the winter vista in Roberts’ poem, dwarf human experiences. Selections such as Carman’s “*Low Tide at Grand Pré*” and
Lampman's "At the Long Sault: May 1660" allude to historical events and human struggles which make little dent in nature's ceaselessly ebbing rhythms.

Bennett and Brown follow other critics in conventionally portraying the Confederation group as inheritors of the lyrical traditions of British and American poetry (xii). At the same time, the editors of the *Anthology of Canadian Literature in English* also suggest that the Confederation group's engagement with themes of the individual's struggle to find identity within the context of a vast and overwhelming natural landscape represents uniquely "Canadian" concerns which are apparent in literary works in Canada both before and after the late-nineteenth century. Thus, Bennett and Brown locate the Confederation Poets at the center of their second major movement in Canadian literature, a movement whose particular significance lies in its correlation in historical time with the "founding" of Canada as a nation during Confederation. Concrete events (such as Confederation) or objects (such as documents like the British North America Act of 1867) which *signify a nation's coming into being*, play essential roles in the construction of national identity. As Benedict Anderson argues, the political and "emotional" legitimacy (3-4) of nations depends upon people to envision the "image of their communion" (6). In Canada, (capital-C) "Confederation" represents a historical event imbued with signification, which helps to organize the image of Canadian communion into one tidy moment. While in a strictly legal or political sense, Canada does not claim its "existence" as a nation prior to the BNA Act of 1867, processes of national identity-formation must already have been in place prior to (indeed, would have led to) the signing of the Act which formally acknowledges the existence of Canada.
Notwithstanding the circular logic of correlation and causation that results from the editors’ argument ("the emergence of a national literature" results from the establishment and consequent legitimation of national government), and notwithstanding the problematic narrative construction of a national history which marks its “beginning” at Confederation (thereby leaving the histories of colonial exploration, exploitation and European settlement, not to mention the extensive histories of First Nations communities, hanging in a unformed, “pre-beginning” no man’s land), Bennett and Brown’s representation of the Confederation poets does reveal underlying hegemonic forces which emerge around the time of Confederation, and which have continued, to some extent, to shape the boundaries of Canadian literary institutions and national identity.

In the header notes which precede each poet’s work in Anthology of Canadian Literature in English, Bennett and Brown describe cross-poetic influences, the existence of literary friendships and the poet’s work in the historical literary scene. The Confederation poets, for instance, were related by friendship, kinship (Roberts and Carmen were cousins) and mentoring relationships; they came from similar cultural, class and religious backgrounds (English and/or Loyalist; Roberts, Lampman and D.C. Scott were sons of Anglican and Methodist ministers); they were all university-educated; and, in addition to writing poetry and participating in literary and cultural organizations, they were active in education, politics and government. Lampman, D.C. Scott and Wilfred Campbell were all employed as civil servants and became members of the same cultural organization, the Ottawa Literary and Scientific Society. Roberts supported the Canada First Movement, an association which Bennett and Brown describe as, “a loose union of people who were intent on developing national pride by celebrating Anglo-Canadian
history, encouraging Canadian arts, and strengthening Canada politically” (1: 156). The Canada First Movement integrated history, arts and politics in its strategy for promoting nationalism. Hegemonic controls over national identity in the nineteenth century primarily served Anglo-European interests. As W.H. New writes, “the normative values of the Canada First Movement designed a Canada in which ethnic differences would be absorbed into an anglo-Protestant norm” (85). The shared literary interests and mutual association in political and cultural organizations amongst the Confederation poets may have produced engaged conversations about the direction a national literature should take, but their shared backgrounds also produced unquestioned assumptions which inscribed and circulated privileged, masculine, anglo-Protestant norms. Moreover, the contributions and observations about Canadian literature by members of the Confederation group continue to reverberate in twentieth century Canadian literary criticism. Bennett and Brown’s own remark that the “revolutionary character of European and American modernism . . . is less evident in the work of Canada’s first modernists” (1: xii), indeed, echoes Charles G.D. Roberts’ observation fifty years earlier that “[m]odernism has come softly into the poetry of Canada, by peaceful penetration rather than by rude assault” (qtd. in Bennett and Brown 1: 170).

New identifies the Confederation group as “[t]he most important poetic movement of the nineteenth century” (118), and Atwood notes that “this group of poets wielded considerable influence over their successors” (xxxiii). Outside of their thematic and formal contributions to Canadian literature, the Confederation group leaves the significant legacy of a privileged literate elite in Canada—a class within which the values of Canadian literature, the boundaries of Canadian identity and the criteria for a Canadian
canon continue to be developed, defined, and disputed. F.R. Scott satirizes the self-conscious literariness of the Confederation Poets’ early-twentieth century successors in his “The Canadian Authors Meet” (1927). In the poem, Scott describes a meeting of the Canadian Authors’ Association, where:

The air is heavy with Canadian topics,  
And Carman, Lampman, Roberts, Campbell and Scott,  
Are measured for their faith and philanthropies,  
Their zeal for God and King, their earnest thought. (8-12)

Scott depicts his the members of the CAA as a “chattering group” (5) of “[e]xpansive puppets” (1). He mocks the people at the meeting for being old and old-fashioned, calling them “[v]irgins of sixty,” and scoffing at their “cakes,” “tea” and archaic vocabulary (8, 13, 20, 24). Scott sarcastically remarks upon the gathering of authors who seem more interested in status than with writing—“but sweeter is the feeling/That one is mixing with the literati . . . Really, it is a most delightful party” (13-16). The poem unravels with repetition and enjambment in the final two stanzas, in which Scott conveys his impatience with empty banter about vague and irrelevant “Canadian topics” such as who the next Poet Laureate will be (19). Scott’s frustration results from the disjunction between the circular discussions he witnesses at the meeting of the CAA and his own serious preoccupation with changing Canadian poetry and society. In contrast to the “selfsame . . . ringing” (24) of Canada’s nineteenth-century poetic canon, Scott’s vision of Canadian poetry is a modernist vision; Scott’s expresses his hopes for modern Canadian poetry in “Laurentien Shield,” where he describes a tactile and organic national literature, “[a] language of flesh and roses” (12).

Scott’s caricature of the CAA in “The Canadian Authors Meet” reveals his dissatisfaction with the Canada’s the literary establishment of the day. Scott’s rejection
of literary convention and status proves to be doubly ironic: not only is he the son of a “lesser-known” Confederation poet (Bennett and Brown 1: 346), he will also turn out to be an important figure in the canonization of a new literary elite. Bennett and Brown point to Scott as a leader amongst a group of emerging poets in the early twentieth century who would introduce literary modernism to Canada (1: xii). In their chronology of literary movements, Bennett and Brown connect the early modernists of the 1920s in coherent succession with the two preceding movements of Canadian poetry. The editors of *Anthology of Canadian Literature in English* not only cite a link to Confederation Poet Roberts (whose literary career survives well into the twentieth century; Bennett and Brown reproduce his 1931 “Notes on Modernism” in the first volume of *Anthology of Canadian Literature in English*), but also suggest also that “some of the chief concerns of modernism—the alienation of the individual and the loss of teleological vision—were part of the Canadian intellectual tradition almost from the beginning” (1: xii). However, the canonical legacy of the Confederation Poets is one that Scott and his fellow modernists, in many ways, resisted. Canadian modernists such as Scott rejected literary convention and encouraged formal innovations and experimentation. “The Canadian Authors Meet” satirizes those amongst the early-twentieth century *literati* who failed to recognize and react to changes in modern poetic tastes and sensibilities.

In the story of Canada’s early literary modernists lie multiple paradoxes of continuity and rupture: while the early modernists favoured innovation and social change, many of them shared socio-economic backgrounds and cultural status similar to their canonical predecessors; and while Scott and the early modernists reacted against Canada’s literary establishment, their version of the *avant-garde* would set the
foundations for the next movement of national literary establishment. Like the
Confederation poets, who shared similar class, cultural and religious backgrounds, there
are socio-economic overlaps in the backgrounds of several of Canada’s early modernists.
The most influential of the early modernists, like the Confederation poets, tended to have
had professional associations with one another. Scott collaborated with A.J.M. Smith on
Scott, with Leo Kennedy and A.M. Klein, also published the literary magazine *Canadian
Mercury* (1928-29), to which Smith contributed. Scott’s father was a clergyman, as was
E.J. Pratt’s father (Pratt’s was a Methodist minister, while Scott’s an Anglican cleric). In
general, those falling into Bennett and Brown’s group of early modernists were male,
university-educated and born and/or raised in eastern Canada. There are exceptions.
Dorothy Livesay, a notable female poet and social activist, lived in Winnipeg and
Vancouver. Earle Birney, another western Canadian writer, grew up on a farm in
Alberta. Changes in the ethno-social makeup of cities such as Montreal in 1920s had
their effect on access to literary culture and status; the success and influence of A.M.
Klein and Irving Layton, both important Montreal poets of Jewish-European background
(Klein’s parents were Russian and Layton was born in Romania), reflect these changes.
Montreal’s McGill University, the institution from which (among others) Klein, Layton,
Scott and Smith received degrees, was an important hub for modernist literary activity in
the early twentieth century.

Developments in literary modernism comprise the final two movements
represented in Bennett and Brown’s anthology. "The initial stage of literary modernism
in Canada," is the third and final movement covered in Volume One, while Volume Two
features writers born after 1914 and particularly reflects writing produced during the well-documented “explosion” of Canadian literature post-1960. Bennett and Brown explain that the second volume of *Anthology of Canadian Literature in English* records the progress of Canadian writers in consolidating the modernism of their predecessors; in exploring and developing the range of possibilities that had been opened up to them; and, in some cases, in reacting against or seeking to go beyond this inheritance” (2: xiv)

In all, the final two modernist periods of Bennett and Brown’s literary chronology take up three-quarters of the anthology’s 1,300 pages. Theorists of the canon commonly suggest that canons are products of place and time, that canonical choices are shifting and subjective, and that the values reflected in canons are not only political, but also personal. Bennett and Brown’s bias towards modernism in the 1982/83 edition of *Anthology of Canadian Literature in English* reflects the critical biases of the period. While the editors adjust their approach in later editions, particularly in the 2002 *New Anthology of Canadian Literature in English* where they acknowledge “changes in the way we view literature” (xiv), they continue even in later editions to evade questions of their own critical positioning.

In an essay on canon and genre, Bennett herself writes that “we must know who the canon-makers are to understand the canon” (133). Traditions of literature and criticism are mutually reinforcing. Steven Scobie raises the point that, since “[t]he process of canon-formation in Canadian literature has largely taken place over the last twenty-five years,” modernist values have engulfed “the canonical mainstream of contemporary Canadian literature” (57-8). It is a view shared by Carole Gerson, who, in examining the inter-war canon of Canadian literature, criticizes the “male modernist attempt to construct a literary history devoid of women” (55). Gerson offers an analysis
about the ways in which modernist concerns with myth, form and structure focused attention and study away from writing by Canadian women in the inter-war period. Her essay goes on to examine how modernist values came to dominate literature and literary studies in Canada. The discourse of modernism that pervaded Canadian literary studies for the better part of the twentieth century also diverted attention from conversations about the inclusion of multicultural literatures in the canon. Gerson cites Paul Lauter, who writes about the “academic institutionalization of reading choices” in the United States in the 1920s (Lauter qtd. in Gerson 47), and she suggests that a similar process happened in Canada during the inter-war period with the release of numerous literary histories and anthologies of Canadian literature by authors/editors who also held academic positions (47-8). Gerson argues that, until the 1940s, an “invisible college” of (mostly male) “publishers, editors and English professors” served as “Canada’s canonical ‘gatekeepers’” (47-8). To some degree, anyone who participates in processes of writing, publishing, editing and teaching literature functions as a kind of “canonical gatekeeper.” At the same time, Gerson argues, convincingly, that certain “gatekeepers” have more power than others, and that those who serve in multiple and overlapping roles as writers, publishers, editors and academics, far from being neutral observers, are deeply invested in the politics of inclusion and exclusion.

Jeffrey R. Di Leo notes that “[j]ust as anthologies can empower subjects, ideologies, and canons, making them relevant to students and faculty, they can also disempower them and make them irrelevant” (2). Although it is fair to say that the 1982/83 edition of Anthology of Canadian Literature in English is a product of the pervasive critical theories and practices of its time, Bennett and Brown’s persistent
editorial silence on matters of multicultural representation constructs a version of national culture and history which elides ethnic and immigrant Canadian subjectivities. Apart from A.M. Klein and Layton, Frederick Philip Grove (a German emigrant) is the only writer represented in the first volume of the 1982/83 Canadian Literature in English whose ethnic background is not Anglo-Canadian, Anglo-American or British. Ethnic representation in the second volume includes Polish Canadian Louis Dudek; Jewish Canadians Miriam Waddington, Eli Mandel, Henry Kreisel and Mordecai Richler; Canadian-born Mennonite Rudy Wiebe; Icelandic Canadian W.D. Valgardson; Michael Ondaatje, who was born in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), educated in England and settled in Canada in 1962; Polish Ukrainian Andrew Suknaski; and Italian Canadian Michelle Di Michele. Ondaatje is the only minority writer included in the entire 1982/83 edition of Anthology of Canadian Literature in English whose ethnic background is non-European, a fact which raises issues over not only the representation of visible minority writers and the politics of race in Canadian (multicultural) literature, but also more broadly, access to writing and publishing.

Bennett and Brown’s New Anthology of Canadian Literature in English, released in 2002, includes significantly more works by Canadian writers of non-Anglo European descent. However, Bennett and Brown maintain their editorial silence on matters of race, ethnic, and cultural difference in the Preface and author introductions in the New Anthology. Such a silence undermines the critical and political implications of inclusion. Not only does the silence create a frame of invisibility around the texts (by suggesting that that multicultural difference is a non-issue in Canadian culture and literature), but it also excuses the silences of the past. In Anthology of Canadian Literature in English (to
an extent, in all its editions) the theoretical and aesthetic influences of modernism
combine with the ideological influences of nationalism to produce Bennett and Brown’s
cohort "master narrative" of Canadian literature. Bennett and Brown support the idea,
articulated by Dewart in the nineteenth century, that a national literature is an essential
part of forming a national identity. But by choosing to avoid the topic of multicultural
difference in their representation of a national canon, they overlook the significance of
multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-racial subjectivities as a factor in national identity
formation.

III. Anthologizing multicultural Canadian literature: Approaches to Difference in Other
Solitudes and Making a Difference

Miki articulates the danger of multicultural elision when he writes, “[t]he
blindness to subject positions . . . allows the reader from the majority white ‘we’ to
inhabit the text” (143). Multicultural anthologies such as Other Solitudes and Making a
Difference reposition the Canadian reading public within a “we” which is fundamentally
multicultural. For example, Hutcheon refers to “our multicultural identity” (emphasis
mine 15) in an Introduction which ties multiculturalism with immigration policy and
emphasizes an image of Canada as a nation of immigrants. In the Introduction to Making
a Difference, Kamboureli similarly draws attention to the indisputable reality of Canadian
multiculturalism. She writes, “Canadian Multicultural Literature. In some respects, one
word too many. For Canadian literature is, should be thought of, as reflecting the
multicultural make-up of the country” (xvii). Both Hutcheon and Kamboureli address the paradox of producing a “multicultural Canadian” anthology, a paradox to which I also (parenthetically) refer in the title of this chapter. On one hand, to specifically label certain works or writers as “multicultural” sets them apart from Canadian literature as a whole and risks further marginalization of both minority literatures and identities. Worse, such anthologies stand to be accused of a literary ghettoization which exacerbates racial and cultural tensions amongst perceived majority and minority groups. Robertson Davies’ attitude towards special institutional support for multicultural literature illustrates the point. In response to an interview question, he states, “When you start financing literature that does not find acceptance on its own, then you are in very bad trouble [. . . ] I think it is a mistake to continue helping people to stay non-Canadian while they are taking everything that Canada has to give them” (362-3). Hutcheon notes that several of the writers represented in Other Solitudes actively resist labels which highlight ethnic distinctions or which put them in a position of “speak[ing] for any group as a whole” (4). On the other hand, the editors of both anthologies acknowledge that the term “multicultural Canadian” is a necessary redundancy. Multicultural anthologies address the uneven balance of representation in Canadian literature that results from a persistent elision of multicultural difference in the canon. Not only do multicultural anthologies stake a critical space in national literary discourse by identifying and addressing canonical absences, but they also provide perspectives from various multicultural authors which complicate issues surrounding literary production, identity and difference.

“We portray ourselves by reading together,” writes Kamboureli. Making a Difference thus portrays a Canadian “we” in constant negotiation of difference.
Kamboureli’s framing of difference in *Making a Difference* contrasts with Hutcheon and Richmond’s approach in *Other Solitudes*. Whereas Hutcheon and Richmond normalize difference by suggesting that the majority of Canadians come from immigrant backgrounds, Kamboureli theorizes difference and offers it as a strategy for reading multicultural representation in national literature. Although Kamboureli does not draw an explicit connection between her notion of difference and post-structuralist notions of *différence*, the implicit reference should be noted. Kamboureli’s self-consciously politicized editorial position emphasizes the multiple subject positions of minority writers. Her strategy of “reading together” frames the anthology as a heteroglossic “collage of voices” engaged in textual dialogue about difference on many levels, including pluralisms of gender, class, ideology and race (xvii). In comparison, Hutcheon and Richmond’s *Other Solitudes* emphasizes institutional connections between multicultural legislation, immigration policy and the development of national literature. Hutcheon writes that *Other Solitudes* “explores both the *lived* experience and the *literary* expression of multiculturalism in Canada at this particular historical moment” in the early 1990s (original emphasis 1). With its structure of prose fiction followed by interviews, *Other Solitudes* emphasizes the narrativization of multicultural experience and the interplay between institutional politics, immigration history and creative writing.

A discourse of “official multiculturalism,” or multiculturalism as defined and supported by government policy, symmetrically bookends *Other Solitudes* in its opening and closing pages. Richmond and Hutcheon each reference, in the anthology’s Preface and Introduction respectively, the passing of the 1988 Multicultural Act. They also thank the Department of the Secretary of State, Multiculturalism in their Acknowledgements.
The final pages of the anthology reprint in full the English-language section of Bill C-93, the Canadian Multicultural Act. Tseen-Ling Khoo argues in her comparative analysis of Asian-Australian and Asian-Canadian literatures, *Banana Bending*, that “[m]ulticultural policy in Canada, as elsewhere, can be interpreted as a strategy of containment, the management of social relations in the interests of national, cultural and political unity” (35). In *Other Solitudes*, Canadian multicultural policy is, furthermore, a literal “container” for the works in the anthology. The language of official multiculturalism frames the anthology’s representation of “multicultural fiction,” foregrounding the effects of multicultural policy on literary production. Hutcheon explains that “the purpose of this collection of fiction and conversations is to investigate not only how multiculturalism is lived but how it is written into Canadian life” (6). By including the text of the Multicultural Act in its entirety at the end of the anthology, the editors make a powerful point about the language of polity and how it “writes our lives.” Thus, the anthology delivers more than what the subtitle promises—that is, a mere representation of *Canadian Multicultural Fictions*; significantly, it also interrogates how we read fiction and non-fiction by representing a discourse on multiculturalism in three distinct genres (prose fiction, interviews and law) which speak to each other throughout the anthology.

*Other Solitudes* presents writing from eighteen Canadian minority writers who “have their roots in Czechoslovakia, Barbados, Russia, Japan, Iceland-Ireland, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Chile, Italy, Greece, India, the Ukraine, Trinidad, Turkey and China” (2). Each author is represented by a chapter in the anthology. Each chapter opens with a literary work, either an excerpt from a novel or a short story, introduced by the author’s name and year of birth. The second portion of the chapter is the interview,
which begins with a paragraph listing the author’s biographical information and publications and a similar paragraph about the interviewer (in most cases a professional literary scholar). A subsequent section titled “The First and Founding Nations Respond” features interviews with First Nations writer Tomson Highway, Francophone writer/filmmaker Jacques Godbout and “symbol of the British establishment in Canada,” Robertson Davies (Kailo interview with Davies 362). Interviews are a bridging device in the anthology, contextualizing the literary works within Hutcheon and Richmond’s overall narrative of (multi-)cultural unity. By “(multi-)cultural unity,” I mean a sense of national unity and identification which draws together around a “common culture” of ethnic and racial diversity. While the interviews represent varied, and sometimes dissenting, perspectives on Canadian multiculturalism, they also serve to consolidate the discourse on multiculturalism around certain key issues. The questions posed in the interviews steer the conversation about multicultural literature in the direction of Canadian policy, ethnic identification and the position of the minority writer in Canada. The editors of Other Solitudes raise an important point by suggesting that political culture and national ideologies materially affect literary production and values. Hutcheon makes a salient plea at the end of her Introduction that “we must work to grant everyone access to the material and cultural conditions that will enable the many voices of contemporary Canada to speak—and be heard—for themselves” (16). At the same time, the strict framing of multicultural literature within a context of national policy in Other Solitudes narrows the possibilities for reading and analyzing multicultural contributions to the Canadian canon. The language of legislated policy, therefore, defines multicultural “selves” in Other Solitudes—how they speak and how they are heard.
A number of the authors critique, in their interviews, the direction of multicultural policy, particularly the way it contains multicultural identities within a language of preserving cultural heritage and origins (Canadian Multiculturalism Act 3.1). For example, Czech-Canadian writer Josef Skvorecky expresses concern over an image of multicultural Canadians as “people who do cute dances in outlandish costumes and sing in funny languages” (30). Similarly, Québécois Godbout uses the analogy of a “cultural shopping centre” to describe Canadian multiculturalism (357). Godbout raises the image to critique “reductive conception[s]” of ethnic identity and culture (357). The editors of Other Solitudes acknowledge the challenges of official multiculturalism, but offer little in the way of alternative strategies to avoid reductive readings and representations of multicultural literature. For instance, several of the literary selections resonate with autobiographical details from the author’s lives, and these connections are subsequently explored in the interviews. A few examples: Yeshim Ternar’s story about young immigrant domestic worker, “Ajax Là-Bas,” is loosely rooted on her own experience cleaning houses, though Ternar makes it clear that the characters in her writing are instruments for exploring non-autobiographical themes; the main character in V.G. Valgardson’s “The Man from Snaefellsness,” much like Valgardson himself, is a writer with an Irish mother and a long patrilineal roots in Iceland; Joy Kogawa, a Japanese Canadian nisei writer who spent some of her early years in an internment camp in the interior of British Columbia, offers an excerpt from Obasan, her novel about a second-generation Japanese Canadian woman who comes to terms with her family’s internment experience; and the selection from Mordecai Richler The Streets is an excerpt from his
memoir which recalls the cultural tensions in the multi-ethnic neighbourhood around St. Urbain Street, Montreal, where Richler grew up.

The interviews in Other Solitudes consistently read the literary selections through the lens of personal experience. While much of fiction finds inspiration in autobiography and realistic situations, Other Solitudes overemphasizes the connections between “lived experience and . . . literary expression” (Hutcheon 1). Even in selections which do not contain any clear autobiographical connections, the issue of autobiography comes up. For instance, Michael Ondaatje’s selection “The Bridge,” from his novel In the Skin of a Lion, is a piece of historical fiction which blends events in the early construction of Toronto with the story of immigrants who participated in that history. In her interview with Michael Ondaatje, Hutcheon poses a question about Ondaatje’s decision to write about the Macedonian community in Toronto, and later steers the interview towards Ondaatje’s memoir Running in the Family. In an interview with Rudy Wiebe, Hutcheon similarly draws the conversation away from the literary selection included in Other Solitudes, the story “Sailing to Danzig,” and asks about Wiebe’s novel My Lovely Enemy. She states:

The protagonist of My Lovely Enemy is a Mennonite historian; Rudy Wiebe is a Mennonite historical novelist. Is there a relation here between your Mennonite background and your desire to write history—in the first place—and then, history in the particular fictional ways you have chosen? (84).

Hutcheon asks interesting questions about the writers’ literary decisions, subject matter and form; at the same time, her questions push ethnic writing towards genres of autobiographic and personal narrative. Such a perception of multicultural writing is not only restrictive, but it is also somewhat patronizing. Although it is tempting to read
multicultural writing as a reflection of multicultural experience and history, privileging autobiography as the primary “mode” of multicultural expression is reductive. In several of the interviews, the authors sidestep the direction of such questions altogether. For instance when Magdalene Redekop asks Kogawa “Is poetry somehow less ‘ethnic’ than fiction?”, Kogawa responds by problematizing the term “ethnic” and asking how we perceive ethnicity. Redekop’s question implies a hierarchy of value that places poetry in the more exalted position, and fiction in a lower position. More troublingly, Redekop’s question seems also to suggest that “ethnic” is a bad word.

Even as some of the writers in the volume expressly complicate their own multicultural subject positioning, Hutcheon suggests that the most “straightforward” way of reading their work is within a framework of representative ethno-cultural identities (4). She writes:

Each writer has a special agenda; each is working out his or her relations with a particular group and with the nation in individual ways. Having said that, I should add that there is also a sense in which their appearance in this volume unavoidably grants them all representative roles. (4)

The writers selected for inclusion in Other Solitudes are, in Hutcheon’s words, “unavoidably . . . representative” of Canadian multiculturalism. But, in what sense does a writer’s appearance in a multicultural anthology “grant them . . . [a] representative [role]?” Who does the granting, and what is being represented? How does resistance affect this kind of role-making? What are the factors involved in the politics of group identification? Hutcheon and Richmond raise the question of representation, but do not push it far enough to unsettle their primary narrative of (multi-)cultural unity. Hutcheon and Richmond’s decision to represent Canadian multiculturalism through a volume of prose fiction and interviews supports their goal to narrativize, and thus, create a
"straightforward," coherent account of (multi-)cultural unity. Hutcheon subtly universalizes multicultural identity for Canadians, a tactic which, in its own way, elides the possibilities of difference. She writes:

all Canadians other than native stock are originally immigrants from somewhere, and even the native people are and were plural—in other words, multicultural . . . Our country, in other words, was set up—historically and demographically—in such a way that the eventual formulation of something like multiculturalism might seem to have been inevitable" (10).

Not only does Hutcheon draw a problematic association between the cultural diversity of Aboriginal peoples and present-day multiculturalism, taking a socio-politically loaded term and applying it to an altogether different historic context, but she also suggests that Canada was ideologically “set up” for multicultural harmony, thus disavowing histories of discrimination, struggle and exclusion. Hutcheon’s language of the “unavoidable,” “eventual” and “inevitable” naturalizes multicultural pluralism by taking human agency out of the question. Instead, unaccounted for and unexplained “historic[al] and demograph[ic]” forces combine to produce conditions which (notably, in the passive voice) give rise to multiculturalism. Hutcheon’s description of Canadian multiculturalism allows for differences, but simultaneously neutralizes them. Difference is, thus, domesticated in Other Solitudes—it is “brought home” to Canada, that is, patriated, and therefore made safe, comfortable and natural.

The tone of Hutcheon’s Introduction celebrates and advocates multicultural ideals, even as it plays lip-service to “the dilemmas of diversity” (5). Hutcheon uses emotional appeals to construct an image of peaceful consensus around the idea of multiculturalism. In particular, she employs rhetorical contrasts—happiness and sadness, cynicism and optimism, richness and poverty—to nudge readers towards accepting the
principles of official multiculturalism. For example, she notes that the road leading
towards the passing of the Multicultural Act was not particularly smooth and that
negotiations over the definition of multiculturalism continue. Hutcheon writes, “The
subsequent decades [since the 1971 government report titled The Cultural Contributions
of the Other Ethnic Groups] have seen attempts, not always happy, to define how much
difference can be accommodated within a federal system of centralized cultural and
political authority” (15). By framing conflict over multicultural acceptance in terms of
“happiness,” Hutcheon not only oversimplifies the emotional consequences of ethno-
cultural negotiations of identity, but she also misrepresents the productive aspects of
conflict. Jon Stratton and Ien Ang critique policy-driven multiculturalism for its “top-
down” approach to managing diversity (qtd. in Khoo 2). They compare the multicultural
situation in the United States, where minority groups and advocacy arise from
community resistance, to the situation in other countries where legislated policy plays a
greater role in defining the multicultural make-up of the nation. Stratton and Ang write,
“in the United States, multiculturalism can only be conceived as subverting the national,
while the Australian [and Canadian] national can be represented as constituted by
multiculturalism” (qtd. in Khoo 2). Kamboureli questions Hutcheon’s normalizing view
of difference by commenting that, “Hutcheon’s method, as I understand it, involves a
double and simultaneous gesture: she redefines the Canadian nation as a multiethnic
state, and disengages ethnicity from marginality” (Scandalous Bodies 172). By
reframing Canada as a nation “always-already” multicultural, Hutcheon neutralizes the
possibility of resistance in and through difference. Hutcheon champions “the acceptance
of diversity that is appropriate for our democratic pluralist society” (15). Difference, she
implies, is a “positive possibility” (15) only insofar as it serves to ideologically unite Canadians under “democratic pluralist” ideals. Kamboureli responds to Hutcheon’s reading of difference by writing, “[d]ifference here becomes a banality, frustrating any attempt not only at revisiting history but also at recognizing the exigencies of the present” (Scandalous Bodies 172).

Canadian multiculturalism thus becomes, in Other Solitudes, a tool for suppressing difference and sustaining existing institutional power structures. Khoo argues that, “[i]n multicultural systems . . . difference ends up being accommodated and the structures of discrimination—of Anglophone domination—are left intact” (37). As several of the writers in Other Solitudes suggest, however, some differences are more difficult to accommodate than others. Dionne Brand explains that “[r]acism was the focus of [her] encounter with Canada, not immigrancy” (272), unsettling Hutcheon and Richmond’s premise that multiculturalism is primarily an immigration issue. “Yes, I came from another country,” Brand states, “but I didn’t think that the worlds were that far apart, and I knew that the problems that I would have would not stem from my being an immigrant, but would stem from my being black” (272). She continues, “If I had been white, within a generation my family would have been assimilated. I could escape being an immigrant, but along with the black people who have lived in this country for three centuries, I would not escape my race at any point” (272). Hutcheon does note that race is a significant issue in contemporary multiculturalism, but she denies its potency in identity formation by universalizing it and then quickly deflecting the conversation to other differences which cause multicultural tension. Hutcheon writes that “not only white Canadians are guilty” of racism, noting that racial tension exists in other countries
such as India and Japan and that a kind of "reverse racism" exists in some minority communities where people react with prejudice against whites (8). However, race issues are deeply rooted in the political, economic, cultural and institutional histories of nations. To ignore these contexts, as Neil Bissoondath does when he writes, "racism is as Canadian as maple syrup . . . but it is also as American as apple pie, as French as croissants, as Jamaican as ackee, as Indian as aloo, as Chinese as chow mein" (qtd. Hutcheon 8), is to make a reductive comparison. And, while many variously compelling factors contribute to the creation of multicultural tensions, racial difference is a visible marker which (at this point in time) is still tied to historical configurations of power.

*Other Solitudes* remains a significant contribution to Canadian canonical discourse because it was the first major attempt to anthologize and define multicultural Canadian literature. Moreover, it was, according to Kamboureli, "the first anthology of ethnic writing to have a broad critical and pedagogical impact" (*Scandalous Bodies* 162). It appeared during an important critical moment when, according to Kamboureli, a proliferation of ethnic writing was hitting the Canadian market and a discourse on Canadian canonicity began to materialize (*Scandalous Bodies* 158). At a time when these two events in Canadian literature were happening with little interaction, *Other Solitudes* brought the discourses together and solidified the importance of multicultural considerations in canon development. Hutcheon and Richmond reconfigure Canadian identity as fundamentally multicultural and showcase works by established multicultural Canadian writers. They also discuss and advocate the role of multicultural policy in supporting emergent minority writers. Hutcheon and Richmond read literature ethnographically through the lens of personal interviews and socio-political history. One
of the strengths of their editorial approach is that it highlights the ways in which literary discourses interact with other discourses. Hutcheon and Richmond show, in *Other Solitudes*, that texts—whether they be fiction, interview transcripts or legislation—are what history, and culture, are made of. Like other ethnic anthologies from the early 1990s, *Other Solitudes* also functions as a vehicle to “give voice” to minority experiences and perspectives. At the same time, Hutcheon and Richmond’s critical methodology does not address the major problems of multicultural representation. Their attempt to universalize multicultural experience by arguing that all Canadians are immigrants and that Canada has always been multicultural may have been rhetorically appealing enough to account for the widespread institutional acceptance of the anthology, but it also problematically eclipses difference by pushing out the possibility for conflict. Additionally, while championing the Multicultural Act for its pluralist ideals, Hutcheon and Richmond fail to mention the role of legislation in sustaining modes of systemic racism.

Kamboureli’s *Making a Difference* can be read as a response to earlier anthologies such as *Anthology of Canadian Literature in English* and *Other Solitudes*. In *Making a Difference*, Kamboureli presents an anthology which interrogates representations of Canadian multiculturalism and the politics of “imaginative coherence” (9). Kamboureli’s anthology contains some of the same selections and organizational principles as *Other Solitudes* and *Anthology of Canadian Literature in English*. Several of the authors represented in *Other Solitudes* also appear in *Making a Difference*, and in the case of Ondaatje and Rohinton Mistry, the same selections appear in both anthologies. The scope and organization of *Making a Difference* is comparable to
Bennett and Brown’s *Anthology of Canadian Literature in English*. Both are mixed-genre anthologies. Kamboureli’s anthology weighs in at 538 pages and includes work by seventy-one authors. The selections are arranged chronologically by year of author’s birth, and the literary selections, as in *Anthology of Canadian Literature in English*, are introduced by header notes written by the editor. Kamboureli expresses a desire in her Introduction, much like the editors of *Anthology of Canadian Literature in English* and *Other Solitudes*, to produce an anthology which allows the works and the authors to “speak for themselves” (6). However, Kamboureli’s differs from the two earlier anthologies in editorial framing. First, Kamboureli explicitly avoids thematic readings which seek to universalize Canadian multicultural literature or identity. Instead, she offers a succinct and theoretically-informed reading strategy based on the interrogation of difference and representation in Canadian ethnic writing. Second, Kamboureli acknowledges and discusses her own position in the process as a mediator between reader and text. Kamboureli’s work is, thus, an example of politicized scholarship which considers the role, responsibility and effects of the editor in constructing the literary canon. Kamboureli’s self-conscious positioning offers itself as an alternative critical approach to Bennett and Brown’s editorial distance and Hutcheon and Richmond’s institutional advocacy. Though Kamboureli herself acknowledges that “[t]he logic of self-location . . . [is] no less fraught with problems” (*Scandalous Bodies* 4), she yet throws herself into the precarious realm of representation. In doing so, she follows Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s advice “not to abstain from representation” (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 27). Kamboureli raises questions about representation which challenge the reader’s understanding of multiculturalism, canon and criticism; she also
asks those same questions of herself, and thus models a politicized approach to multicultural canon formation.

Kamboureli’s preoccupation with representation manifests first in her re-presentation of the canon. *Making a Difference* offers itself as a “counterreading” of the Canadian literary canon and, conversely, of a separate multicultural canon (*Making* 4). Kamboureli aims to deconstruct binary understandings of mainstream and minority literature, and, in the process “dissolve [the binary] of ‘centre’ and ‘margin’ [that] is part and parcel of Canada’s colonial history” (*Making* 7). Kamboureli’s “counterreading,” thus, re-presents a version of the Canadian multicultural canon. Her anthology does not dismiss established and well-recognized multicultural authors; instead, it reconsiders their work in light of how they contribute to a discourse on multicultural literature. Like Bennett and Brown’s *Anthology of Canadian Literature in English*, *Making a Difference* is an “overview” of Canadian literature which aims to be both “broad” and “historical” (*Kamboureli* 5). However, in contrast to Bennett and Brown, who suggest that their literary overview is objective and accurate, Kamboureli notes that anthologies which offer historical perspectives merely map out a “narrative path by which we can enter [literary] history” (*Making* 5). Kamboureli’s goal in *Making a Difference*, then, is not necessarily to obliterate the canon, but rather, to re-draw the lines of the map in order to see Canadian literary history differently.19

Kamboureli’s goal is to highlight writing that has traditionally been excluded “from the so-called main tradition” (1).20 Her literary history spans the twentieth century, beginning with Frederick Philip Grove and ending with contemporary writers such as Hiromi Goto, Zaffi Gousopoulos and Evelyn Lau. In addition to the authors’ names and
birthdates, Kamboureli also indicates the authors' places of birth in her table of contents. Victor J. Ramraj employs a similar strategy in the table of contents in *Concert of Voices: An Anthology of World Writing in English*. Ramraj's anthology represents a diverse group of post-colonial or "Commonwealth" writers in English. Not only do the writers come from different countries around the world, but their ethnic backgrounds also reflect histories of diasporic movement and displacement. In *Making a Difference*, the listing of birthplaces reveals diversity in the group of writers, while remaining somewhat neutral about ethnic and cultural labels. Kamboureli's acknowledgement of birthplace as a factor in multicultural identity formation allows her to include a writer such as Daphne Marlatt. While Marlatt's family roots are technically "Anglo-Celtic" (Kamboureli 1), her multicultural identity results from being an emigrant. Born in Australia and raised in Malaysia until the age of ten before then moving to Canada, Marlatt typifies a postmodern transnational subject. By selecting Marlatt as one of the multicultural writers in *Making a Difference*, Kamboureli points out the complicated negotiations of identity informing the work of diasporic writers in general, no matter what their ethno-cultural roots. Furthermore, the listing of birthplaces emphasizes the number of so-called "minority" writers who were born in Canada, including First Nations writers such as Lee Maracle and Daniel David Moses. To do so complicates the terms "ethnic," "indigenous," and "multicultural." Unlike Hutcheon and Richmond, Kamboureli gives equal space to the experiences of both immigrant and Canadian-born writers. Kamboureli's notion of "difference" is fluid enough to account for racial and ethno-cultural differences, as well as differences between naturalized and new Canadians. The
anthology thus makes room to consider a multitude of differences within and between cultural groups, as well as between minority groups and Anglo-European Canadians.

The prominence of “difference” as a pillar in Kamboureli’s theoretical architecture deserves some discussion. The title of the anthology, Making a Difference, echoes a quotation from Fred Wah, a “half Swede, quarter Chinese, and quarter Ontario Wasp [sic]” poet from Swift Current, Saskatchewan (Wah Diamond 36), in which he discusses his approach to language. Wah explains:

I’ve tried to make language operate as a non-aligned and unpredictable material, not so much intentionally difficult as simply needing a little complication—[ . . . ]—Before I do any writing I always stop whatever I’m doing—Whatever I’m doing might make a difference—Make a difference. (qtd. in Kamboureli 158).

For Wah, writing is action. The verb “make” connotes agency and volition—the will and means to create, do or perform. Writing is effective—that is, it effects change. “Making a difference” idiomatically refers to causing change, usually one with a significant impact. To make is also to construct. Wah implies that language is both constructive and constructed. Language, he describes, is the “material” of writing. Wah’s writing insists upon the recognition of “a little complication.” He means to show the reader that language and meaning are problematic, that they require effort. Kamboureli’s notion of “making a difference” could also refer to making différance, or enacting post-structuralist theory. Kamboureli alludes to an underlying deconstructive methodology when she evokes the language of presence/absence and play in describing the politics of representation. She approaches representation as a form of “serious play” which takes into consideration the way signs (“image . . . story . . . anthology”) interact with “differing contexts, places or people” (Making 2). Kamboureli, therefore, not only
reveals "differences" in and amongst multicultural writers, but, importantly, she also demonstrates to readers how to engage with difference as a reading strategy. She puts into practice Derrida's notion of "differance" that is "the movement of play that 'produces' (and not by something that is simply an activity) these differences, these effects of difference" (Derrida Speech 140).22

Kamboureli envisions the anthology as "a space . . . [for] dialogue" between the contributors (Making 1). The dialogue between writers takes place in their literary contributions, as well as in the quotations and excerpts from interviews Kamboureli chooses to include in her headnotes. Kamboureli's invocation of the term dialogue resonates with Bahktinian theory on the dialogic structure of the novel. Bahktin argues that the novel is generically most similar to verbal discourse, where meaning can only come out of looking at the totality of various speech acts. He writes, "[t]he authentic environment of an utterance, the environment in which it lives and takes shape, is dialogized heteroglossia, anonymous and social as language, but simultaneously concrete, filled with specific content and accentuated as an individual utterance" (272). Kamboureli's anthology operates in the same form of "dialogized heteroglossia" where multiple voices, each with their own "particular accent" (Kamboureli 1), contribute to the discourse on multicultural literature. In some cases, "accent" refers explicitly to the localized dialects and inflections used by some of the contributors in their selections. For example, in the excerpt from Harold Sonny Ladoo's No Pain Like this Body, the narrator not only uses vocabulary from the Indo-Caribbean dialect spoken by Hindus in Trinidad (words like "crappo fish" for tadpole, and "Tola Trace" for the road leading into the village), but he also imbues the sound of the dialect into the dialogue between the
characters. At the same time, Kamboureli uses the word “accent” in a broader sense to mean the multiple differences that characterize each of the writers—whether they be linguistic, stylistic, ethno-cultural, racial or political.

The dialogue between and among contributors is hyper-mediated by Kamboureli, who makes all the selections and writes the author introductions. Kamboureli reflects on the irony of this process in her Introduction, where she writes about her “wish to compile an anthology that would represent Canadian writing while calling into question representation itself” (Making 2). She acknowledges the multiple levels of representation involved in anthology-production—the authors’ self-representations, their responses to mainstream representations of multiculturalism and national identity, and her own editorial involvement in representing authors, their careers and their works—and thus raises questions about the stability of language and knowledge. As Barbara Johnson writes, headnotes “[confront] or [presuppose] assumptions about what it actually means to know” (384). As a transmitter of knowledge, the writer of headnotes must, moreover, grapple with how to model knowledge transfer. Johnson raises some further considerations:

What are headnote writers as writers—a writers about writers? Does one explain something as if one is inside it, an advocate for it, or outside it, a judge or mapper?

[. . .] With what authority does a headnote speak? Whatever you say will have a certain kind of authority. But are you therefore saying, ‘This is true,’ ‘This is said,’ or ‘You have heard it said, but verily I say unto you . . .’? Does knowledge have a plot or just a statement? How many turns are too many if your job is to teach first and foremost that from which turns can be made? (385)

If one of the primary functions of anthologies is pedagogical—as it is in the case of

*Anthology of Canadian Literature in English, Other Solitudes* and *Making a Difference,*
whose main audience is the introductory literature student—then the editor's role is also one of educator. Editorial decisions therefore influence more than just what students read—these decisions also impact how they read. As Laurie Finke argues, "education also transmits norms and values through [routinized] practices" and conventional forms (396). Kamboureli herself acknowledges that the anthology form has its limitations—"it can only exist within the ellipses it creates," she writes (2). At the same time, it is a useful and compact way to introduce the discipline of English studies to the introductory literature student; moreover, in complicating the issues surrounding multicultural Canadian literature, Kamboureli also introduces the student to methods for interrogating the canon.

The entry points which Kamboureli offers in her broad survey of multicultural literature have the most profound effect on burgeoning ethno-national literary communities. Not only does Kamboureli provide a vocabulary for engaging with different texts, but she also provides a wide and inclusive selection from a variety of authors. Kamboureli also acknowledges the complex and often ambivalent attitude of many "multicultural" writers towards issues of ethnicity and cultural identification. Kamboureli's avoidance of prescriptive readings leaves room for specific minority literatures to grow into themselves without the pressure of representation, and without the need for thematic or stylistic coherence. Her approach leaves room for both readers and writers to participate in the process of constructing the multicultural canon. A diverse group of Chinese Canadian writers including Fred Wah, Jamila Ismail, Jim Wong-Chu, Corinne Allyson Lee, SKY Lee and Evelyn Lau represent multiple approaches to writing and community identification. By examining these authors alongside one another, it is
possible to compare their works and consider the development of an ethno-national literary community—though one no less fraught with contradiction and conflict than any community. Important, Kamboureli’s selections from the Chinese Canadian community also reflect a diversity of institutional, political and community affiliations. By including Jim Wong-Chu alongside Jamila Ismail, for instance, Kamboureli reveals the existence and importance of both grassroots literary production and avant-garde poetic movements in the community. In the work of Corinne Lee and SKY Lee, it is possible to see potential coalitions between specific ethno-cultural groups and, for example, feminist groups.

Since the late 1980s, Oxford University Press has also produced more narrowly-focused anthologies of Canadian writing by previously marginalized groups. For example, in addition to Other Solitudes and Making a Difference, Oxford UP publishes An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature, edited by Daniel David Moses and Terry Goldie, and two anthologies of Canadian literature written by women, both edited by Rosemary Sullivan. By publishing anthologies of multicultural, ethnic and women’s writing, Oxford UP addresses and draws specific attention to groups of writers whose representation in more broad surveys of Canadian literature may have previously been lacking. In doing so, the Press makes an important foray into acknowledging difference in the Canadian canon. At the same time, the publisher continues to exert imperial form by absorbing the previously unrecognized groups into its sphere of influence. I do not mean to suggest that institutional support is bad or insidious. As other critics have observed, institutional support often entails the provision of material means and resources required to produce any kind of cultural work. Nor do I mean to suggest that Oxford
necessarily shies away from publishing scholarly work that might be considered resistant or politicized. However, while Oxford University Press’s recent investment into the publication, distribution and marketing of multicultural and ethnic literatures results in more critical attention to issues of multicultural difference in the Canadian canon, the investment also produces power for the Press.

Although minority writing benefits from recognition and endorsement by major publishers, its acceptance of and by Oxford’s institutional power affirms the institution’s position as the central arbiter of canonical legitimacy. As Miki notes, the danger of imperial form is that it “survives as long as the circumference keeps expanding, yet when the expansion stops it will try to maintain power through stasis, through its resistance to change” (42). Anthologies produced in a context of imperial form circulate canons which are, accordingly, resistant to change. Changes which do occur must be sanctioned by the centre and introduced in such a way as to protect the stability of the core “tradition.” Miki warns against the over-privileging of “university-sanctioned discourses,” recommending instead that we pay attention to “knowledge formed in the daily lives of those engaged in social struggles” (178). Miki does not denounce academic discourse so much as he petitions for the leveling of all forms of knowledge production, so that “involvement [is] participatory rather than the mere application of academic models of abstraction to serve the ends of institutional validation and individual proprietorship” (178). Although Kamboureli’s Making a Difference provides an alternative approach to studying multicultural literature, it is an academic approach which nonetheless adheres to particular institutional conventions and norms. Like Anthology of Canadian Literature in English and Other Solitudes, Making a Difference represents a
particular approach to Canadian literature which is informed by the critical and cultural norms of its time. Kamboureli recognizes this when she writes that “literature, like other cultural expressions, measures the pulse of a nation” (*Making* 6). I would add scholarship and criticism to this list, since they never follow far behind culture, and in many cases, significantly influence its direction. Nor can cultural work be separated from the institutions which discipline its practices.

Frank Davey in *Reading Canadian Reading*, writes more eloquently than I can here on the problematics of institutional support and academic infrastructure with respect to the production and consumption of Canadian literature (101-2). I raise the issue only as another layer of complexity surrounding the production of anthologies of national literature. The major issues at stake in anthology production include the roles that anthologies play in pedagogical contexts, their material production, and how their material production is affected by institutional infrastructure. Anthologies of Canadian literature have wide-ranging consequences for the ways in which the ideological imaginary of a nation is built. As Benedict Anderson writes, “[c]ommunities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (6). National canons “imagine” literature and literary values as metonymic representations of what is of importance to the national community. In turn, these values discipline power relationships, both within a community, as well as between a community and those outside of it, by demarcating community boundaries. “[P]ower produces,” Foucault writes, “it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth” (*Discipline* 194).
Notes for Chapter I

1 I owe my use of the term “comprehensive” to Knight, who distinguishes between comprehensive anthologies—or those with wide historical coverage and which aim to “represent the Canadian tradition” (147)—and anthologies with more narrow focus. Knight designates “anthologies of regional voices, of ethnic voices, of poets of a specific historical period, of new voices, and poets of special interests including specific genres” in the latter category (147).

2 I evoke the terms discipline and power in the Foucauldian sense—that is, power as a ubiquitous web of relations (*Sexuality* 94-5), and discipline as a “modality for [the] exercise of power” (*Discipline* 215). Foucault describes discipline as an “anatomy” (*Discipline* 215) of power, suggesting that discipline structures the operations of power, and in doing so, structures the ways we perceive, act out and comply with power relationships in society.

3 My discussion of “centres” of power is not meant to contradict my earlier reference to a Foucauldian notion of power as a ubiquitous web of relations. My understanding of power is that all agents in a system hold power and are invested with power; however, the kind of power held and the ability of agents to exercise power vary depending on what structures exist to discipline power relations in each case. In the case of Oxford University Press and Canadian anthologies, I argue that power relations are not only hierarchical, they are also (to use Miki’s words) “imperial” in that they mimic historical England/Canada colonial relations. Compliance with the authority of the centre does not suggest that “outside” agents are powerless; rather, it proposes that the authority to define power relationships and the operations of power are vested more deeply in the centre.

4 For critical assessments of the influence and role of editors in shaping Canadian literature, see Miki 1998 (34-5) and Davey 1988 (261).

5 Dermot McCarthy suggests that Atwood’s deference to her literary forbears confirms the truth-value of the canonical-tradition which she inherits. McCarthy writes:

> Atwood’s attitude to her predecessor [A.J.M. Smith], boldly expressed through the metaphors of ‘haunting’ and ‘propitiation,’ is her own powerful version of Eliot’s ‘historical sense,’ or a ‘perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence’ . . . Atwood’s additions to Smith’s canon are her additions to ‘an ideal order’; and her respect for that order results in selections that will add to its ‘completeness’ by extending rather than fracturing it. The mystification in Eliot’s notion of tradition—continued in Frye’s ‘totalizing’ imagery—is that the canon is always ‘complete’ if never finished: ‘complete’ before the ‘supervention of novelty,’ and afterwards. This is how the canon works as a teleological process. (41)

6 The “new” edition of Bennett and Brown’s *Anthology of Canadian Literature in English*, published by Oxford UP in 2002, includes additional writers (particularly those emerging post-World War II) and more excerpted materials, as well as a greater emphasis on different and unconventional genres of writing (such as “life writing”) which have gained “more important[ce] since [the publication of the two-volume anthology in the mid-1980s]” (Preface xiv). Bennett and Brown also acknowledge “changes in the way we view literature” (Preface xiv), and thus, redefine both their outline of Canadian literary history and some of their criteria for inclusion.

7 The influence of centralized institutional power arises again in issues surrounding the production of successive editions of an anthology. For instance, depending upon constraints imposed by publishing contracts, editors may be afforded a lesser degree of latitude to make changes to their selections. In conversation, one editor of a forthcoming survey anthology of Canadian literature noted that her contract stipulates a limitation on the changes between editions to no more than 20% new material. The editor also raised, however, the practical reasons for such stipulations, for instance, the strain on publishers to secure permissions, and the need to re-market and re-distribute editions with vastly different contents. In such cases, publishers not only materially affect editorial decisions, but they are also materially affected by broad socio-economic considerations.

8 As Charles Steele notes, “anthologists are inevitably literary historians” (78). However, despite (or because of) meeting the demands of historical coverage, many Canadian anthologies limit themselves to representing one genre at a time. Single-genre anthologies are the norm, notes George Woodcock in the Introduction to Robert Lecker and Jack David’s *New Canadian Anthology* (1988). Lecker and David’s
anthology includes both poetry and short fiction; the result of this decision is an anthology which, Woodcock points out, "[does] not have many predecessors" (xiii). Bennett and Brown's *Canadian Literature in English* joins *The New Canadian Anthology* in representing multiple genres. However, not only does *Canadian Literature in English* include different forms of poetry and short fiction in their anthology, it also adds drama and several forms of non-fiction to the body of its selections.

9 I use the terms elide/elision with thanks to Miki and his chapter "Sliding Scale of Elision: ‘Race’ Constructs/Cultural Praxis" in *Broken Entries* (125-39).

10 Editorial introductions and notes, whether implicitly or explicitly, guide readers in their encounters with the text. In the final chapter of *Reading Canadian Reading*, Frank Davey analyzes over a hundred Prefaces that accompany works of Canadian literary criticism. While his study does not directly relate to the editorial commentary of Canadian anthologies, his analysis of the ways that Prefaces interpellate readers, define the limits of how to read a text and identify the “national” characteristics of literature, are applicable to the prefatory remarks and editorial notes of anthologies. Davey writes:

[Literal] prefices operate to reduce the plurality of both reader-positions and textual significations. Although placed at the openings of books, they function not so much to open the texts they introduce as to narrow and restrict readings. They serve less as thresholds than as portal guardians. (261)

11 Lecker offers a useful critique of the rhetoric of "representation" in canon-forming processes. He writes:

[In English-Canadian literary theory], critics tend to focus on value as a function of representation. We have seen that the canon is frequently viewed as representing a dream of national unity, hierarchical tradition, or centralist notions of coherence and order. The assumption behind this reading of that canon is that representation itself is a value. (Canadian Canons 14).

12 Atwood and Alan R. Knight are among the critics who have commented on the proliferation of Canadian writers since the 1960s. Knight proposes that the 1960s signaled the emergence of a new “generation” of Canadian poets who responded to canonical traditions in various ways (148). Atwood also writes about the exponential growth of Canadian literature after the 1960s, stating that “the audience available to a poet increased at an unprecedented rate, and there was a corresponding increase in the number of books published, the average sale, the numbers of poetry magazines, and the numbers of aspiring and actual poets” (xxxvi).

13 Both Lecker and Charles R. Steele suggest that canons are products of value systems and structures. Steele notes that anthological selection always reflects personal choice. He writes, “whatever strategies and devices may be employed to disguise or to mitigate the fact, the making of anthologies, and therefore the response to them, is fundamentally personal” (77). Lecker takes the point further, stressing the social and political implications of literary preferences. Canon-makers, he argues, “are condemned to be political and act out [their] theoretical choices” (7).

14 Both Lecker and Miki argue that institutions of Canadian literature and criticism operate together to exclude works which do not conform to nationalist ideologies (Lecker “A Country without a Canon?” 4; Miki 131).

15 Christl Verduyn writes that it was not until the 1970s and 80s that issues of class and gender gained serious critical attention in Canadian literary and cultural studies—and not until the 1990s when issues of race and ethnicity entered into critical consciousness (9-10).

16 Writers, publishers, editors and academics who hold multiple and overlapping roles are all the more invested in the production of literary values, particularly when we consider how universities and English departments both institutionally support and comprise the consumer audience for canonical texts. Davey and McCarthy both observe and remark upon the effect of institutional politics in the production and consumption of literary texts (Davey 101-2; McCarthy 31). In an informal study of minority Canadian writers in university library holdings in 1996, Lutz finds that “[a]uthors who are critics or university teachers tend to be more prominent” (68). As Davey notes:

The role of Canadian universities [. . .] through their tenure and promotion policies, have in this century created another possibility: the writer who writes for a small educated audience, is rewarded not by royalties or stipends but by university position, who writes in relatively complex combinations of genres, and who relies on short-run distribution by literary or academic presses. (101-2)
Similarly, Re suggests that literary institutions, to an extent, create a market for their own products, including anthologies. "[T]he anthology," she writes, "is one of the instruments through which these institutions (critical and academic) preserve themselves and the socio-economic order upon which they depend while at the same time mediating between the producers and consumers of literature" (Re 585).

Kamboureli devotes a chapter in *Scandalous Bodies* to Grove and his disputed (auto-)biography. Up until the 1970s, most of what was known about Grove came from his own (later contested) autobiographical works, *A Search for America* (1927) and *In Search of Myself* (1946). In *F.P.G.: The European Years*, Douglas O. Spertigue reveals Grove’s account of his past as a wealthy Swedish emigrant who was born in Russia was a lie. Instead, Spertigue uncovers Grove’s past identity as Felix Paul Greve, a German expatriate who concealed his identity in order to flee trouble in Europe.

One of the key discursive strategies suggested by Lien Chao for the promotion of minority literatures is "dialogue" (23) which can only be attained once minority communities *come into voice*. Chao’s notes that communities must first become aware of, and then act upon, the empowering potential of voice. She writes, "it is important for the marginalized to see that its silence can be transformed to a voice in the dominant discourse, and so lead to social changes" (22).

Di Leo employs a similar metaphor when he describes the anthology as a “mapping of authors and writings” (1). The metaphor reveals the anthologist’s role as a cartographer and puts places the “map-reader” in an active position of engagement with the text. Maps are useful tools for finding direction, but it is also possible to go exploring off a map. Finally, a map suggests location in space and time. The borders on a map change in context with power relationships and alliances; the roads on a map are, similarly, under constant reconstruction.

Notably, Kamboureli also excludes Francophone writers from her multicultural anthology, an omission she does not address in the anthology. Carol M. Davidson calls attention to several omissions in a review of *Making a Difference* (1.2).

On the other hand, with its emphasis on "national" origins, the actual neutrality of listing birthplaces is questionable. Similarly, Barbara Johnson argues that chronological organization by birth date is one way to maintain a kind of neutrality towards writers and their texts by avoiding overly thematic or narrative groupings. Conversely, she also writes, “[o]rganization by birth date does not result from any interpretation—except of course, the massive interpretation that this is an appropriate way to organize an anthology” (386). Thus, even relatively simple editorial decisions about arrangement and organization reveal themselves to be tied to conventions, values and ideologies.

Derrida’s notion of *jeu*, typically translated as “play,” “freeplay” or “game,” refers to engagement in a structure without a centre, the “affirmation” of the “non-centre,” not the absence (or loss of) the centre (“Structure” 118). In relation to language and meaning, Derrida suggests that *jeu* is an alternative way to understand interpretation. *Jeu* involves recognizing and affirming the sign with no centre—no unified, stable referent (signified). In the place of a “transcendental signified,” there is only “the seminal adventure of the trace” (“Structure” 116, 118). Derrida’s notion of “différence” similarly relates to the infinite indeterminacy of meaning. He writes:

> The verb ‘to differ’ [differer] seems to differ from itself. On the one hand, it indicates difference as distinction, inequality, or discernibility; on the other, it expresses the interposition of delay, the interval of a *spacing* and *temporalizing* that puts off until ‘later’ what is presently denied, the possible that is presently impossible. Sometimes the different and sometimes the deferred correspond [in French] to the verb ‘to differ.’

(*Speech* 129)

For more on the effects of multicultural policy on multicultural literature see Hutcheon (1990, 15); the impact of government funding for arts and culture see New (1989, 226); a comparison between US and Canada policy towards supporting Native theatre and playwrights see Lutz (1996, 61).

Kamboureli argues that major presses only began to take an interest in producing ethnic anthologies after “multiculturalism gained literary and cultural currency” (*Scandalous* 134). She compares the impact of small and major presses on ethnic Canadian literature, writing that:

> [early ethnic anthologies] were published by small if not obscure presses, and hardly reviewed at all; thus their readership was actually very small. What these anthologies failed to do at the time of their publication ... has been accomplished more recently by the publication of works by individual authors, authors who have been published by major presses or firmly established smaller ones, and who have attained public
recognition of various degrees or become the subjects of critical discussion. (*Scandalous*
134)

Elsewhere, Kamboureli also fingers Oxford UP as “the publisher of some of the very anthologies that have solidified the Canadian tradition” and notes that acceptance by Oxford UP “guarantees [a text] wide advertising, distribution, and by extention, critical attention” (“Canadian Ethnic Anthologies” 45).
CHAPTER II:

Beyond Beyond Silence: A Re-consideration of Chinese Canadian Literature’s “Founding” Anthologies

We have begun to develop our own literary voice and to tell a story in a way most Canadians have never heard or understood, to share with other Asian Canadians the richness of our own style. (Garrick Chu et al., Inalienable Rice ix)

In Canada, we have no ‘originary’ event to look back to with nostalgia as the ‘founding’ moment of Asian Canadian studies. (Donald C. Goellnicht 23)

As a community-based minority literature, Chinese Canadian literature employs the anthology as a founding form and all the existing mainstream literary genres as its vehicles. (Lien Chao, Beyond Silence 18)

In this chapter I analyze how “founding” Chinese Canadian anthologies Inalienable Rice: A Chinese and Japanese Canadian Anthology (1979) and Many-Mouthed Birds: Contemporary Writing by Chinese Canadians (1991) function as canon-forming and/or canon-resisting texts. Anthologies represent a process of collection and documentation; they are, as Smaro Kamboureli explains, an attempt “to make a collective statement” (Scandalous Bodies 133). Whether they trace collective histories or bring to light new works, anthologies establish, reflect, and reposition the values that inform canonization. Inalienable Rice and Many-Mouthed Birds respond to the mainstream
Canadian canon by carving out space for alternative histories and an alternative canon. The anthologies represent a grassroots, community-based approach to literary production and promotion which resists forces of institutional canonization. At the same time, a persistent focus on history, origins, foundations, and beginnings in the rhetoric of the anthologies reveals an underlying need for the community to establish political and literary legitimacy. This implied call for legitimacy is both strategic—as it actively responds to literary and social histories which have failed to recognize Chinese Canadian participation and identity—and problematic, as it absorbs (and thus reinforces) the values of nationalism and canonization which have contributed to the marginalization of the Chinese Canadian community. Tracing the construction of “origins” in Chinese Canadian literature and literary studies reveals relationships between community, nation, and institution; by contemplating these relationships, we see how artistic production affects and reflects social struggles and political action.

Chinese Canadian anthologies anchor a conversation about Chinese Canadian literature as a categorical entity. Produced primarily outside of an academic environment, the first Asian Canadian anthologies reflect the practices of rhetorical communities concerned with developing ethno-national identities. A discourse of “foundings and foundations” exists both within the anthologies themselves and in the critical works that surround them. Both the Introductions to Inalienable Rice and Many-Mouthed Birds contextualize themselves in beginnings—or, as Bennett Lee writes, “relatively uncharted literary waters” (1). Chao argues that the anthology is a “founding form” of Chinese Canadian literature (Beyond Silence 18); she identifies Inalienable Rice and Many-Mouthed Birds as “landmark publications [which] have helped to reclaim
[Chinese Canadian] community history, to define and redefine the Chinese Canadian identity in a dynamic community” (Beyond Silence 50). Chao makes the statement in her 1997 work Beyond Silence: Chinese Canadian Literature in English, which itself is a ground-breaking attempt to theorize Chinese Canadian literature and to stake a disciplinary space for Chinese Canadian literary criticism. That Chao’s is the first and so far only book-length study of Chinese Canadian literature corroborates Donald Goellnicht’s argument in “A Long Labour: The Protracted Birth of Asian Canadian Literature” that Asian Canadian literature receives a relatively small amount of critical attention, in spite of its history of community-based literary activism that dates back to the early 1970s. Goellnicht, too, phrases his critique of the institutional position of Asian Canadian studies in terms of beginnings, stating that “we in the academy seem to operate in an almost perpetual state of announcing Asian Canadian literature, a literature that has taken, from our snowblind perspective, twenty to twenty-five years to be ‘born’” (2).

What function does this discourse about foundings and foundations play in the development of Chinese Canadian as an ethno-national literary category? And, correspondingly, what is its effect?

Chao’s project in Beyond Silence is to theorize the existence of what I call an ethno-national literature, “Chinese Canadian literature,” and to articulate its characteristics and boundaries. In a chapter entitled “Anthologizing the Collective: The Epic Struggles to Establish Chinese Canadian Literature in English,” Chao argues that Inalienable Rice and Many-Mouthed Birds effectively “launch[ed] an emerging minority literature” (35). Chao emphasizes the anthology’s function as a vehicle for bringing “silenced” voices to the attention of the mainstream canon (Beyond Silence 43). Both
*Inalienable Rice* and *Many-Mouthed Birds* showcase emerging talent; at the same time, they acknowledge the existing work of established artists and activists in the community and provide a snapshot of a community-in-progress. In each case, the anthology serves both introductory and cumulative purposes. Published in 1979 and 1991 respectively, *Inalienable Rice* and *Many-Mouthed Birds* also exemplify two distinct periods in the history of emerging ethnic and racial literatures in Canada. *Inalienable Rice*, produced in partnership between members of the Japanese Canadian and Chinese Canadian literary communities, is an example of what Kamboureli calls a “first wave” ethnic anthology, one which appeared around the time Canada introduced and adopted its multicultural policy (*Scandalous Bodies* 131-3). In contrast, *Many-Mouthed Birds*, the first anthology dedicated to Chinese Canadian writing, was published in the early 1990s, a time when, Kamboureli asserts, “ethnic writing became a privileged mode of literary discourse in Canada” (*Scandalous Bodies* 40). The ethno-national literary categories posited in *Inalienable Rice* and *Many-Mouthed Birds* (“Asian Canadian” and “Chinese Canadian,” respectively) are examples of catachresical naming, instances of imperfect and extraordinary metaphor which stand in for “imagined community” (Anderson 6). The use of catachresis is a discursive strategy employed to consolidate rhetorical community. The two anthologies can be read as narrative milestones in a community history which continues to write itself. At the same time, *Inalienable Rice* and *Many-Mouthed Birds* each represent a community’s attempt to define itself against the critical and cultural concerns of its time.

Chao refers to the publication of *Inalienable Rice* in 1979 as the “birth” of community-based Asian Canadian literature (*Beyond Silence* 33). In a footnote, Chao
explains her decision to concentrate on *Inalienable Rice*’s Chinese Canadian contributors, stating that “[b]ecause of the focus of this study, the discussion of *Inalienable Rice* will not include the Japanese Canadian writers found there” (*Beyond Silence* 192). The significance of the strategic coalition between Japanese and Chinese Canadian writers and activists in the 1970s which brought about the publication of the anthology should not, however, be overlooked. The idea to produce a joint publication had been bandied around between members of the Japanese Canadian Powell Street Revue and the Chinese Canadian Writers Workshop since 1976 or 1977. As Garrick Chu et. al. explain in the Introduction to *Inalienable Rice*, social and cultural networks already existed amongst the group of “predominantly third and fourth generation Canadian born” Japanese and Chinese Canadians who would go on to form the editorial team for the anthology (viii). The existence of these networks, and communications between them, can be traced back to at least the late 1960s (Wong-Chu 1). One particular nexus for the network of Japanese and Chinese Canadian community cultural activists who would go on to publish *Inalienable Rice* was the University of British Columbia, where, in the early 1970s, a group of undergraduate students formed the Asian Canadian Coalition and began exploring Asian Canadian history and identity through art, music, writing and conferences (Watada 83-86; Wong-Chu 1). The UBC group was initially influenced by the energy and ideas of visiting Japanese American professor Rôn Tanaka, who brought with him experiences in the Asian American activist movement and a more radical approach to “race” politics.

The Asian Canadian Coalition comprised of two groups, the Chinese Canadian Gah Hing (“Brotherhood”) and the Japanese Canadian Wakayama Group. The Coalition
worked in collaboration in 1972 to produce the Asian Canadian Experience photo exhibition and conference at UBC. The Asian Canadian Experience Conference prompted the two ethnic factions of the Coalition to take action; the groups began working in their own communities on separate projects, each eventually re-forming into different organizations. For example, in 1974, several members of the Gah Hing joined with other writers to form the Chinese Canadian Writers Workshop, which went on to publish a short-lived bilingual periodical, *Gum San Po* ("Gold Mountain News"). Two years earlier, a group of Japanese Canadian cultural activists in Toronto, under the leadership of Alan Hotta, had published one issue of *The Powell Street Review*, a newspaper aimed at radicalizing the Japanese Canadian *sansei* (third-generation); the Toronto group would eventually join with members of the Vancouver Wakayama Group to establish The Powell Street Revue artists’ collective. Both the Chinese Canadian Writers Workshop and the Powell Street Revue continued to initiate and support artistic projects which emphasized social responsibility and historical revisionism.

I provide this brief overview to give a sense of the dialogue—the organizing and re-organizing—which was happening within, between and across different groups, and to suggest that the editorial team of *Inalienable Rice* was one core group among several interested in Asian Canadian cultural issues at the time. *Inalienable Rice* came about as a result of the cooperation of activists in two ethnic communities concentrated around Vancouver, BC. At the same time, other Asian Canadians in other parts of Canada were at the same time forming their own political and literary coalitions. What is interesting to note about *Inalienable Rice*, however, is that in publishing the anthology, the editors marked a boundary around the term “Asian Canadian” which continues to influence the
ways the term is broadly applied and understood today. Chu et. al. invoke the term Asian Canadian to describe their “Chinese and Japanese Canadian” coalition (viii). The editors explain that their use of the term is one of “convenience, rather than an attempt to define the work or exclude other groups for any ideological reason” (viii). Chu et. al. step tentatively around the issue of naming. They maintain that their position is provisional, and, at the same time, raise some issues surrounding the politics of identification by explaining that their usage of “Asian Canadian” is descriptive and intentionally non-exclusionary. Nevertheless, by producing an anthology whose purpose is to showcase “material by, for and about Asian Canadians,” (viii) the editors of Inalienable Rice necessarily stake a claim about who Asian Canadians are (and are not), and what factors lead Asian Canadians to identify with one another. The term “Asian Canadian” still carries traces of the coalition of Chinese and Japanese Canadian artist/activists who came together to produce Inalienable Rice. Attempts have been made to realign the borders of an Asian Canadian ethnic coalition and to achieve pan-ethnic representation in Asian Canadian publications. These include Green Snow, an anthology of Asian Canadian literature which precedes Inalienable Rice, edited by Stephen Gill; Bayang Magiliw, a special issue of The Asianadian dedicated to Asian Canadian poetry, edited by Lakshmi Gill; and two editions of Another Way to Dance, the first dedicated to writing by Asian Canadian writers and the second expanding to include Asian writers from both Canada and the United States, edited by Cyril Dabydeen. For the most part, however, popular usage of the term Asian Canadian has only stretched so far as to include other members of the Pacific Rim Asian minority groups (East Asian, Southeast Asian and Pacific Island).
The act of identification has undeniable rhetorical and ideological consequences. I use the term "identification" to mean both to identify—in the sense of naming, designating or distinguishing something—and to identify with—in the sense of associating with, claiming membership in, or attributing similarity to. The act of naming a community instantiates ties between community members, while at the same time, it draws a boundary between what it is and what is not. Stuart Hall refers to identification as "a process of articulation, a suturing [...] across difference" (3). Poststructuralist notions of difference and différence underlie Hall's analysis here, deconstructing a binary figuration of what is and what is not, and instead suggesting that differences are constitutive in defining what is. In Hall's words, identification requires "its constitutive outside, to consolidate the process" (3). Ethno-national literary categories such as "Asian Canadian" name in one breath multiple allegiances and disjunctions, ones which invest the communities so interpellated in assumptions and disputes about the essential qualities of ethnic, racial and national identities, not to mention literary value. To anthologize "Asian Canadian experience" as Inalienable Rice sets out to do (viii), is to contribute to the genealogy of the terms "Asian Canadian" and "Asian Canadian literature" by at once forming and analyzing the coalitions which make up those terms.

"[O]ne cannot do without labels," writes Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (221). Labels suggest a necessary (albeit contingent) stability around which to form identification. At the same time, labels can only ever be understood as provisional because identification "always already" implies fracture—indeed, fracture and difference characterize its process. Because communities rely on naming as a way of articulating their discursive boundaries, we can, by attending to the genealogy of names, get a sense
of how identification reflects power relationships (and struggles). Names carry traces of their genealogies—their pasts. Yet their usage in the present also suggests that a shared understanding of the past shapes how communities identify in the present moment. We must understand that the position of “Asian Canadian” embraced by the editors of *Inalienable Rice* arises out of specific, historically-situated discursive circumstances. The anthology’s editorial collective reflects a partnership between leading Chinese and Japanese Canadian artists and activists who developed a vision of using the anthology to reach out to “other Asian Canadians” (viii). Not only was the anthology conceived as a way of reclaiming and inscribing lost histories, but it was also, importantly, a hailing of people (at the time, Canadians of Chinese and Japanese descent) under the name “Asian Canadian” and an attempt to build Asian Canadian community. Spivak explains that particular caution needs to be applied to terms which “name the margin” (“Poststructuralism” 220-21). Because claiming marginality can over-emphasize the differences and separation between margin and centre, thus supporting this asymmetrical configuration of power, we must pay acute attention to the positions from which marginalities are assigned and the reasons for which marginal positions are claimed.

It is useful to consider ethno-national literary designations such as “Asian Canadian” and “Chinese Canadian” in terms of catachresis. Catachresis is a rhetorical term used to describe the incorrect or “inexact” use of a word (*Art of Rhetoric*). Quintillian argues that catachresical terms adapt “to whatever has no proper term, the term which is nearest” (Quintillian 8.6.34). Catachresis also refers to an unusual metaphor, particularly one which evokes an unusual combination of ideas in the creation of meaning. The title of *Inalienable Rice* is, for example, a form of catachresis.
*Inalienable Rice* catachresically refers to the expression “inalienable rights.” Inalienable rights are a set of fundamental, incontrovertible human rights. The punning slippage of “rice” for “rights” changes and expands the meaning of the idiomatic phrase. *Inalienable Rice* claims “rice” as a positive identifier. If “rice” is a metonym for Chinese and Japanese Canadian identity, then the title of the anthology affirms the existence of this identity as one which cannot be invalidated. By recalling “inalienable rights,” the title points to the ways in which the rights of Chinese and Japanese Canadians were historically violated. The substitution of “rice” for “rights” evokes mispronunciation, or perhaps an accent; however, this slip of the tongue is intentional. The title is a deliberate subversion, and therefore a reclamation of rights and of rightful voice.

Spivak uses the term catachresis to define the postcolonial condition and marginality. She advises that postcolonial critique involves “[t]he persistent critique of what one must inhabit, the persistent consolidation of claims to founding catachreses . . . an incessant re-coding of diversified fields of value” (“Poststructuralism” 226). For Spivak, postcolonial subjects exist in a state of displacement which includes a rhetorical state of displaced meaning—that is, of having no “proper” names. In the context of Spivak’s work, catachresis initiates a process of “re-coding” meaning. When the editors of *Inalienable Rice* name their ethno-national literary coalition “Asian Canadian,” they choose a term which they know is incommensurable with the community they are trying to describe. At the same time, because of that incommensurability, there is also the potential for the growth of a community around the term of identification.

The ethno-national literary category “Asian Canadian” is, therefore, the name of a "rhetorical community” (Miller 67). Carolyn Miller defines rhetorical community as:
a discursive projection, a rhetorical construct. It is the community invoked, represented, presupposed or developed in rhetorical discourse. It is constituted by attributions of characteristic joint rhetorical actions, genres of interaction, ways of getting things done, including reproducing itself. (73)

Rhetorical communities are sites of discursive construction and contention. They are constructed by rhetorical "action" and "interaction"; in other words, they are the discursive arenas in which communities conceptualize and enact collective identity. Miller suggests that communities are rhetorical in the sense that they are "site[s] where centrifugal and centripetal forces must meet" (74). Sau-ling Cynthia Wong similarly uses the language of centripetal and centrifugal forces to characterize Asian American literary studies (8). Terms such as "Asian American," or alternately, "Asian Canadian" and "Chinese Canadian," require a constant negotiation of meaning. They imply coalitions which are fraught with simultaneous urges to, on the one hand, fracture and differentiate, and on the other hand, centralize and consolidate. Coalitions impact community-formation and the construction of a shared sense of identity. Wong identifies several overlapping coalitions involved in Asian American advocacy: at the level of "ethnic group," Asian Americans comprise a "political coalition"; Asian American literature is a "textual coalition," which, in turn, is supported by a "professional coalition of Asian American critics" (9). These overlapping coalitions act and interact—together and separately. In doing so, they discursively construct community.

In the Introduction to Inalienable Rice, Chu et. al. articulate how they formed their understanding of Asian Canadian identity both centrifugally and centripetally. They claim a specific generational perspective, one characterized by "a sense of separation from all things Asian Canadian" (viii). The majority of the artist-activists that came
together to edit *Inalienable Rice* had grown up in North America. Mainstream North American education and popular culture necessarily shaped their identities, but at the same time, provided few reinforcements for their identities as Asian Canadians. Chu et. al. explain that, "[f]or Asian Canadians in general, moving upward meant leaving what communities we had and assimilating into the liberal white middle class" (viii). The pressure to assimilate causes an alienating effect in identity formation. First, it reinforces racial differences and creates an unattainable ideal for cultural identity. Asian Canadians who view the "liberal white middle class" as normative will always experience division in their identity because no matter how liberal or middle class they are or become, they can never be or become white. Second, the pressure to assimilate alienates Asian Canadians from each other. It cleaves families by widening generational gaps, and it discourages Asian Canadians from coming together in communities. Community organization and initiatives counteract these centrifugal forces. *Inalienable Rice* is, itself, an initiative which evinces a shared desire to create and articulate Asian Canadian community. The fact that the anthology presents itself as the product of an editorial collective signifies an insistence on collective cultural and rhetorical values. Additionally, the anthology's contents reveal the existence of a shared symbolic economy made manifest in recurring metaphors, images and themes. What emerges out of the individual works in the anthology is "a sense of empathy" (Chu et. al. viii). It is this "sense of empathy," this mutual feeling, which holds communities together.\(^{11}\)

Individual works in *Inalienable Rice*, likewise, reflect centrifugal and centripetal forces at work in Asian Canadian communities. For instance, Glen Nagano's poem "To Our Own" illustrates the widening gaps between Japanese Canadian *Issei* (first
generation), *Nisei* (second generation) and *Sansei* (third generation). The speaker of Nagano’s poem describes the third-generation *Sansei* as:

*Children of the children of the sun*
*Raised on the rooster flakes*
*Superman and the Lone Ranger*
*Mighty Mouse and the Friendly Giant* (29-32)

The sun in Nagano’s poem represents not Japan, but first generation Japanese Canadians who are (notwithstanding the mixed metaphor) “the yellow tide” which “Nurtured life” in an inhospitable new land (6-7). The sun symbolizes the gravitational pull of *Issei* history in Canada, the centripetal nucleus of Japanese Canadian identity. The strength of that nucleus comes from the strife experienced by *Issei* in their effort for survival in Canada. Nagano writes, “The earth was tough/The Issei were tougher” (20-1). Only a few generations later, Japanese Canadian *Sansei* face different challenges. “Raised on the rooster flakes,/Superman and the Lone Ranger/Mighty Mouse and the Friendly Giant,” third-generation Japanese Canadians risk losing touch with their roots because they lack the same knowledge and experience of struggle as their parents and grandparents. The *Sansei*’s pop culture “heroes”—the rooster from a cereal box and television protagonists in capes, tights and cowboy hats—ironically overshadow the images of their Japanese Canadian forebears. The *Sansei* see the older generations only as sets of “parasol hands” covering the young from the rain (47). The synecdochic image emphasizes the degree to which *Sansei* children have been sheltered from their own pasts. “And I never knew/I never knew,” Nagano repeats (34-5). The centrifugal pull of North American pop culture, combined with a loss of connection with the older generations, distances third-generation Japanese Canadians from their community history and leaves them in danger of “fad[ing] away” (54-5).
Inalienable Rice contains writing in several genres: non-fiction articles and interviews, and creative fiction and poetry. The articles provide historical perspectives. Pat Chen, Bennett Lee, Randy Louis, Donald Yee and Clarence Sihoe, and Paul Yee write on topics ranging from Chinese Canadian economic, social and community history, to the diasporic relationship between Chinese Canadians and China, while Gordon Hirabayashi, Audrey Kobayashi, Yuko Shibata and Art Shimizu contribute articles on Japanese Canadians before and after internment. The interviews included in Inalienable Rice provide an oral history of the Asian Canadian community, while poems and fiction by emerging Chinese and Japanese Canadian writers begin to shape the outlines of an ethnic literary canon. When Bennett Lee and Jim Wong-Chu go on to edit Many-Mouthed Birds in 1991, they choose to reprint two poems from Inalienable Rice, Sean Gunn’s “And Then Something Went” and Paul Yee’s “Last Words II.” The two poems, along with Wayson Choy’s short story version of “The Jade Peony,” are the earliest published pieces to be reprinted in Many-Mouthed Birds. The republication of “And Then Something Went” and “Last Words II” in Many-Mouthed Birds recognizes and historically situates Gunn and Lee as important Asian Canadian community activists as well as important authors in an emerging Chinese Canadian canon. The act of republication thus roots the Chinese Canadian canon in a specifically community history. As Kamboureli explains, “by making available new as well as traditionally ignored and marginalized authors, these [ethnic anthologies] make visible, in direct and indirect ways, the cultural and political histories that inform the production of writing” (Scandalous Bodies 133).
The final piece in *Inalienable Rice* is an excerpt from the manuscript of Joy Kogawa’s first novel, *Obasan*. Kogawa’s *Obasan* would go on to be regarded as a canonical work not only in Asian Canadian literature, but also more broadly in Canadian literature and North American Asian literature. Its inclusion in *Inalienable Rice* reveals how ethnic anthologies play a role in lending exposure to the work of emerging writers. I do not mean to imply that *Inalienable Rice* brought about exposure that would lead to *Obasan’s* recognition as a canonical work of Canadian fiction. Indeed, the opposite appears to be true: as Kamboureli would argue, Kogawa’s wide acceptance as a canonical novelist lends greater credibility to the development of Asian Canadian literature as an area of literary study, not the other way around (*Scandalous Bodies* 134). It is safe to say, with a mere six-hundred copy production-run, *Inalienable Rice* exerted limited literary and political influence on national canon-forming practices. Kamboureli argues that “first wave” ethnic anthologies published in the mid-1970s and 1980s “remained virtually ignored . . . made no dent in the canon either at that time or later” (*Scandalous Bodies* 133). It is difficult to quantify the direct effects (if any) of small-run ethnic anthologies in the 1970s and 1980s on Canadian canon-formation processes. At the same time, it is possible to say that “first wave” ethnic anthologies provided opportunities (no matter how small) for writers to get their work into public hands, and in that sense, engendered a climate that encouraged marginalized writers to write, to publish, and to support one another in their work.

*Inalienable Rice* may not specifically frame itself as a Chinese Canadian anthology, but it nonetheless contributes to the development of Chinese Canadian literature. The significance of *Inalienable Rice* lies in its endurance as a historical and
social document of Asian Canadian community literature. The anthology is a “cultural artefact,” an example of genre performing a cultural function which then affects the routine deployment of genre in a community. Miller explains that genres can be seen as cultural artefacts, as “product[s] that [have] particular functions, that [fit] into a system of functions and other artefacts” (69). Genres are “recurrent patterns of language use” which help to counter centrifugal forces within rhetorical communities (Miller 68 and 74). Genres facilitate rhetorical action; in other words, they are structural frames for “acting together.” Miller writes that

social actors create recurrence in their actions by reproducing the structural aspects of institutions, by using available structures as the medium of their action and thereby producing those structures again as virtual outcomes, available for further memory, interpretation, and use. (71)

_Inalienable Rice_ accomplishes the goal of documenting an alternate history of Canada, one which includes Japanese and Chinese immigration and settlement, one which acknowledges community initiatives and intra-cultural dialogue. Not only does the anthology collate a narrative of Asian Canadian community history, but it also plays a narrative function in building that history. _Inalienable Rice_ posits a strategic coalition between ethnic groups and articulates collective values and experiences through the creation of a textual coalition. It therefore offers itself as a structural model for reproducing ethno-national rhetorical community.

Although Chao’s absorption of _Inalienable Rice_ into her literary history of Chinese Canadian writing may not be entirely accurate, a closer look at the connections between _Inalienable Rice_ and _Many-Mouthed Birds_ reveals that the earlier anthology indeed sets down foundations for generic reproduction in later Chinese Canadian
anthologies. By designating Asian Canadian literature as a valid category for literary production and interpretation, *Inalienable Rice* enables single-ethnic groups within and outside its textual coalition to identify in ethno-national rhetorical communities. The anthology thus becomes a functional genre for use in single-ethnic communities, such as the Chinese Canadian community, to rhetorically construct identity. As Hall writes:

> Though they seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond, actual identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from’, so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. (4)

The persistent focus on firsts and beginnings in the rhetoric of *Inalienable Rice* and *Many-Mouthed Birds* arises out of the need to establish an “origin,” or to write the anthology into the narrative of an ethno-national literary community’s historical past. As Miller explains, narrative is another centripetal device used to create a sense of cohesion in a rhetorical community (74). Anthologies take a snapshot of the community-in-progress: they collect and record artefacts of the past and, in framing these artefacts into a coherent whole, provide a picture of the present moment. Anthologies mark time in a community’s collective imagination. Importantly, they mark the beginning of the present moment and structure directions for “further memory, interpretation and use” (Miller 71). As Paul Auster observes, “One must resist the notion of treating an anthology as the last word on a subject. It is not more than a first word, a threshold opening to a new space” (qtd. in Di Leo 2). Anthologies, thus, represent liminal spaces. As much as they document literary history, they also deploy history to construct the outlines of community membership, shared values and rhetorical action. They actively create a notion of the past in order to anticipate future directions—to precipitate beginnings.
In contrast to *Inalienable Rice*, whose focus (both in framing and in content) tends towards articulating a sense of identity through community activism and historical reclamation, *Many-Mouthed Birds* focuses on trying to capture a sense of Chinese Canadian identity through literary sensibility, or what Lee calls “well-crafted and honest writing which could surprise, enlighten and entertain an ordinary reader” (1). Anthologies grapple with the question of how rhetorical communities represent themselves. As Lee remarks in the Introduction to *Many-Mouthed Birds*, the purpose of that anthology is to “bring together a representative sample of work by Chinese-Canadian writers” (1). To begin, he outlines a history of Chinese Canadian writing, both in the Chinese language and in English. Lee emphasizes particular cultural barriers in the Chinese Canadian community which, he argues, hindered the development of “any formal literature worthy of more than passing notice” (1). Lee attributes the barriers faced by Chinese Canadian writers to their experience as immigrants and the community’s “self-imposed silence” (8). Lee notes both internal and external factors contributing to “silence” in the Chinese Canadian community. Internal factors include what Lee describes as a cultural perception of the literary profession as being unstable and family pressures to pursue more traditional careers; external factors include the erasure of Chinese Canadian contributions to Canadian history, the lack of proper recognition of Chinese Canadians as legitimate citizens of Canada, and the historical evasion of responsibility by both Canadian government and society for exclusionary policies and practices against Chinese in Canada. *Many-Mouthed Birds* is, thus, an attempt to shatter the perceived silences and taboos of cultural identity and to demonstrate the literary awareness and competence of Chinese Canadian writers.
Lee’s repeated allusions to “literariness” indicate a desire to assert the literary legitimacy of Chinese Canadian writers. Like the editors of Inalienable Rice, Lee and Wong-Chu describe their editorial process as non-prescriptive—that is, they first looked for submissions and later sought patterns in the selections, not the other way around. Lee explains in the Introduction to Many-Mouthed Birds that the initial call for submissions was open to “any writing with a literary flavour, fiction, nonfiction or poetry, published or unpublished, in English or in Chinese, by writers of Chinese descent living or who have lived in Canada” (1). Ultimately, Lee and Wong-Chu decided not to include writing in Chinese because of translation issues. Lee justifies their decision by explaining that:

Chinese is a high-context language that assumes a commonly shared cultural identity and world view which requires explanation to make the translated text accessible to the non-Chinese reader . . . In the end we decided that compelling sociology did not necessarily make for engaging literature and included only writing in English. (3)

A lack of skilled translators prohibits quality representation of bilingual literature. As Gerry Shikatani explains in the Introduction to Paper Doors: An Anthology of Japanese-Canadian Poetry (1981), “That [poetry in languages other than English and French] has been sorely lacking is no reflection upon Canadian poets and editors. Translations from ethnic sources have not been generally available” (9). However, notwithstanding the technical concerns of translation, Lee’s framing of the Chinese-language submissions as primarily of sociological interest undercuts the literary value of writing in Chinese. Rather than using the opportunity to question the marginalization of literature in non-charter languages, Lee inadvertently contributes to that marginalization by unproblematically accepting, absorbing and naturalizing the values of “English/English-Canadian Literature.”
Gerry Shikatani and David Aylward's *Paper Doors*, on the other hand, is an example of a bilingual (Japanese/English) ethno-national anthology which advocates for writing in non-charter languages to be included in a public consideration of Canadian literature. As Shikatani writes, “poems written in English or otherwise by Canada’s other ethnocultures can serve to shape our collective conceptions of what poetry means in our country. It can expand our visions of the nature of the potential of Canadian literature, and that, in effect, will teach us much more about language itself” (13). Rather than working within the conventional standards and boundaries of canonical literature, *Paper Doors* instead uses the anthology to “expand” Canadian literature. The editorial argument in *Paper Doors* supports a point which Roy Miki makes about the role that editors play in establishing the boundaries of “Canadian English” (34). Editors who unquestioningly assume an understanding of literary excellence (or to paraphrase Lee, well-crafted writing whose purpose is to entertain and enlighten the reader) merely substantiate and ratify existing notions of literary value. As Miki explains, “[t]he editor who begins by saying that his/her journal [or similar publication] will publish the ‘best’ of contemporary writing is not divested of interest, but may (unwittingly or not) be subscribing to the standards of prevailing social and institutional expectations” (38). An alternative strategy is to practice difference in writing, to use writing to disrupt our usual understanding of “order.” Writing difference mimics the sense of disruption usually felt by those living in a position of difference. It also draws attention to the ways in which language use is thoroughly tied in with power-relations. By pushing the boundaries of Canadian literature, *Paper Doors* unsettles the unitary power of “standard English” and
instead finds productive art in what Shikatani calls “the wonderful diversities of language” (13).

Not surprisingly, the lone bilingual poem in *Many-Mouthed Birds*, Laiwan’s “The Imperialization of Syntax,” explores the disruptive potential of language. The poem is printed on back-to-back pages. The first page contains the title of the poem in English and the poem’s text in Chinese characters. In a footnote at the bottom of the page, Laiwan explains that “I work with Chinese translators as an exercise for me to perceive my dispossession of my origin and to research the impossibility of accurately embodying cultural meaning within translation.” As an ethnic Chinese Canadian immigrant who was “born in a british colony in africa” and who is unable to read or write in her heritage language (“Imperialization of Syntax” footnote), Laiwan’s sense of identity is displaced not only by her multiple positions as “other” (racial other/immigrant/colonial subject), but also by her loss of ability to communicate in Chinese. The visual contrast of English-language title and Chinese-language poem is enough to demonstrate the gap in communication that translation produces. A shift in thinking is required to be able to engage in two different languages. The meaning of the words on the page is secondary to the visual representation of those words. The language you use in large part shapes how you come to see and understand the world—the rules of syntax are also rules for conceptualizing the world and your place in it.

The poem’s representation of unmediated bilingual text suggests a sense of linguistic displacement which is reinforced by the poem’s contents. On the over page, the title appears again in Chinese characters and the text of the poem follows in English. Laiwan writes:
you had travelled long and far to be subject to another’s language,
another’s syntax.
Right away, those rules of grammar were the forgetting of yourself. (4-6)

[...]

Now you are here
do you remember your syntax, your language
that which would be the remembering of yourself? (12-14)

The important shift in the poem is one of mood, from declarative to interrogative. The
speaker of the poem begins by asserting that language colonizes by causing “the
forgetting of yourself.” The structure of language disciplines a person’s worldview to
such a degree that the sense of “self” can be lost in language. At the poem’s midway
point, however, the speaker switches to the interrogative, asking, “Now you are here/ do
you remember your syntax, your language/ that which would be the remembering of
yourself?” Laiwan’s use of a question subverts assumptions about heritage languages
and “mother tongues.” For a colonized subject whose first language is English, origins
are problematic. The deictic “here,” hanging at the end of line twelve, is purposefully
ambiguous. “Here” is where the supposed “remembering of yourself” takes place, in
contrast to an implied “there”—the place where “the forgetting of yourself” took place,
the place where “you” were colonized by “another’s language/ another’s syntax.” But the
use of a conditional “would” in line fourteen indicates uncertainty about what we have
been led to assume about “here.” “Here” is not the place which is the remembering of
yourself, but the place “which would be the remembering of yourself” (emphasis mine).
If “here” indeed refers to a place of origin, then Laiwan’s question overturns the stability
of our assumptions surrounding origins. She underscores the point in lines sixteen and
seventeen of the poem when she writes, “when you are told to go back to where you
come from, tell it back to he who has said it.” The resulting strategy—linguistic exchange or play, countering language with language—may not solve every problem, but it does a small part to overturn the status quo. Laiwan promises no easy solutions to the problems of colonization, but she does end the poem with the assertion that “Strength comes from a hard-worked life” (22).

Several of the selections in Many-Mouthed Birds, including Laiwan’s “Imperialism of Syntax,” express a yearning for origins, or a desire to find one’s roots in the past. Place, identity and family (or “the familiar”) are cornerstones in a thematic triangle of origin. In the final poem from a series called “The Sullen Shapes of Poems,” Lucy Ng begins and ends with contrasting images of place:

Chinese café, grocery, laundry—skipping rope rhymes—you want something different for me. (1-2)

[...]

You gave me these: a river, a boat, a bridge. The sullen shapes of poems. (8-9)

The poem moves from quotidian Chinese Canadian settings, to more fluid images suggesting travel. Ng literally shifts the ground underneath her poem from solid ground to water, and in doing so, summarizes the effect of her dual identity on her poetry. The “shapes of [her] poems” are, thus, like water—sullen, murky, capable of pulling you under, capable of holding you up. Ng’s poem suggests that her writing is complicated by an ambivalent relationship to place. Similarly, in a poem called “Port Moody,” Paul Ching Lee evokes place to suggest melancholy. Lee writes about moving away from “Strathcona,” an area neighbouring Vancouver’s Chinatown. In the poem, the senses and memories of his old neighbourhood slip away from him. What is left are only
unconscious traces which pulse in "the somnambulant blood" and vague regret over the "loss" of connection with place (16, 17).

Place is a potent ingredient in the recipe of identity formation, but the connections we draw through place are ephemeral and complex. To extend the metaphor, place is a tricky binding agent. In "Elite 1," Fred Wah describes his memories of Swift Current, Saskatchewan. Wah’s prose poem begins "at the centre" (1) and radiates out. But Swift Current is an unstable centre, built on Wah’s unreliable memories. "I know all these 'facts' existed once," he writes, "[... but the] facts seem partially unreal" (169). Wah also deconstructs the "centeredness" of Swift Current by representing the town as two bookends in his father’s life. "[Y]ou must have seen Swift Current just before Grampa put you on the train," Wah explains in dialogue with his father. "The train" will take Wah’s father in 1916 across Canada to a ship, which will further take him to China, the place where he is to spend his formative years. Later, when Wah’s father returns to Canada, he lands again in Swift Current, handling the family business at the Elite Café. It is, however, the father’s experience in China which sits at the centre of the poem, a gaping hole of absence, between the father’s birthplace and the place he returns to in his adult life. This centre is a place of "silence and anger" (170)—a place of disorientation and loneliness. The poet uses setting as a way of connecting to his father. Wah layers an image of himself walking alone through the streets of Swift Current—"me walking, alone in the town" (169)—over an image of his father walking through the same town, alone—"You, before you had a car, on the street in an overcoat, winter, to work. Always alone." (169-70). The two images recall one another, and in that sense layer over each other with the suggestion of meaning, of connection. But ultimately, the two images are separate
and isolated—"Always alone." Wah recognizes the limitations of language and memory
to make connections. He writes:

They weren't really important at the time. Your memory of such particulars. Mine. Does it matter?? The reason for the story is simply to count on it. What I remember or what you or anyone else connected remembers isn't the point. There isn't even any point. There is just this.

Wah comments on the impossibility of getting memories right. "Does it matter??" he asks, emphatically. Yet, Wah continues to write past the impossibility of finding truth in connections, past the "[t]here isn't even any point." Beyond pointlessness, "[t]here is just this": Wah's gestures towards imagination, senses and silences, and the eternal/internal alienation represented by the last two words in the poem, "hum, alone" (170).

Images and explorations of the family, familial relationships and family life suffuse many of the works in Many-Mouthed Birds. Kamboureli notes that one of the primary factors which defines the construction of an ethnic subjectivity is "the painful awareness of the loss of a familiar (no matter how troubled) world, the distancing from an indigenous past" (138). The lost connection with the "familiar" extends from of a loss of connection with the familial. It is primarily through the exploration of family relations that characters connect to their origins. For example, in "The Concubine’s Children," an excerpt from the memoir of the same title, Denise Chong describes how a trip with her mother to meet long-lost relatives in China precipitates a deeper investigation into the origins of her family in Canada. The emotional potency of the reunion offers Chong’s mother closure on her painful upbringing, and causes Chong to re-examine her maternal grandparents’ struggles as immigrants in Canada. Chong recounts how, as a child, she had been fascinated by old photographs of her mother’s family, particularly one photo of
two young girls, Chong’s aunts, who were born in Canada but sent back to China at an early age to be raised by the family’s First Wife. Chong’s visit to her ancestral village brings into relief her grandfather Chan Sam’s sense of duty to provide for two different families in two different countries. He can finally be forgiven for his pride in sheltering the family in China from the real conditions of life in Canada, and for his failure to hold the Canadian family together. Chong also begins to reconsider her grandmother May-ying’s maligned position in the family and the complicated negotiations of her identity. Chong re-claims May-ying’s position as the central provider of the family by titling the memoir *The Concubine’s Children*. The title of the work also highlights the contradictions in May-ying’s life story, shedding light on the ambivalences of her many roles—as concubine and child-bearer, as teahouse-waitress/prostitute and primary bread-winner, as neglectful mother and unhappy wife, and as alcoholic gambler and woman in despair.

In arranging the 1987 visit with her mother to Chang Gar Bin village in Guangdong Province, Chong is motivated by a hunger for documentation. She writes, “I thought the purpose of taking Mother to Grandfather’s birthplace would be to fill in some blanks on the family tree, take some snapshots for the Canadian family album” (60). Eleanor Ty writes that “photographs provide a sense of family and lineage that may otherwise not exist for diasporic peoples” (43). In geographically sundered families, photographs provide visual evidence of hereditary connections by recording mutual experiences and similarities in faces and features. Chong emphasizes the significance of visual signs of heredity and photographs when she describes the first meeting between her mother and her Aunt Ping:
The proud fine lines of Ping’s face were like Grandmother’s. The quickness of her movements and her girlish laugh were Grandmother reincarnated. Both sisters fumbled for the photographs each had brought for this moment. (76)

The initial bonding moment between the sisters happens over the sharing of old photographs. Even though the two elderly women have never met, their familial ties are instantly confirmed and cemented by the existence of photographic artefacts indicating their common lineage. Although she is initially nervous about meeting her estranged family in China, Chong’s mother feels an overwhelming sense of relief when she finally sees her brother and sister for the first time. Chong’s mother is also able to forgive her own parents after spending time with her sister Ping and her half-brother Yuen. Ping and Yuen are metonymic substitutes for May-ying and Chan Sam. Chong describes Yuen as “a thin man, with wavy hair and a face with Grandfather’s quiet strength and squareness” (76). Descriptions of Yuen and Ping summon the images of Chan Sam and May-ying. The siblings “reincarnate” their parents by displaying similar features and practicing similar mannerisms. Chong’s mother’s easy acceptance by the “reincarnated” Chan Sam and May-ying helps her come to terms with unresolved anger she feels towards her dead parents.

Diasporic subjects experience anxieties about birth and family. The family members in Chong’s “The Concubine’s Children” carry photographs to prove the legitimacy of their birth connections. Chong’s Aunt Ping carefully preserves a baby photograph taken with her in the arms of the concubine May-ying. Ping makes sure to show Chong and her mother the underside of the photo, which is printed with the name of Ping’s birthplace, “Vancouver, Canada” (Chong 76). Even though she is an ethnic
Chinese who has lived nearly all her life in China, Ping feels unsettled about her identity. Chong writes:

When times were bad, [Ping] had had to endure the villagers’ taunts that she had been left behind in China because she ‘must deserve to suffer.’ Time and time again, she had thought her plight was unfair: ‘I don’t deserve this; I was not born here.’ (77)

The anxieties about birth experienced by diasporic subjects relates to ambiguities surrounding their citizenship and the marginalization of their rights. Ping is technically an orphan in China. Although she views the woman who raised her, Chan Sam’s First Wife, as her mother, she carries the double-stain of being the biological child of a concubine and having an “alien” birth in Canada. Although her life is rooted firmly in China, Ping experiences feelings which echo those of other diasporic Chinese Canadians. The discrimination Ping encounters from the villagers, interestingly, points less at who she is (racially and ethnically) than at where she comes from and the familial ties that bond her to her current home. Thus, diasporic subjects experience a crisis of identity when they become conscious of the fact that “here” (to echo Laiwan) is not “home.”

Kamboureli observes that “birth metaphor[s]” consistently appear in ethnic anthologies (139). She relates recurring images of birth as figurative “mark[ings of] the moment the subject is ‘born’ as ethnic within the host society” (139). A moment of revelation for the ethnic subject comes when the subject becomes self-aware of his or her position as an ethnic “Other” (Kamboureli 139). In ethnic writing, this birth of the “other-self” or “other/self” signals the beginning of one stage of identity formation. A later “birth” occurs when the ethnic writer takes subjectivity into his or her own hands and begins to reconstitute the practices of ethnic marginalization. The latter birth is one which also gets recorded in anthologies. As Kamboureli argues, birth metaphors
additionally symbolize “how the subject initiates the process of self-definition, his attempt to articulate and dissemble his recognition of his othered self” (139). Orphaned, abandoned and otherwise “illegitimate” children appear in a number of the selections in Many-Mouthed Birds. Evelyn Lau’s short story “Glass” introduces a protagonist who is obsessed with glass and uses it to cut herself. Lau alternates between first- and third-person points of view, constructing a split protagonist who is at once narrator and subject of the story. The literary device reinforces the protagonist’s desire to cut herself (metaphorically) in two. Although the protagonist presents herself as someone who is obsessed with severing herself from her body, and her body from itself, she also expresses a yearning for wholeness, represented by the image of a baby: “But I know that the lines are not the problem; the problem is that she is like a newborn baby who will die without touch.” (44). The source of the protagonist’s pain is a deep, delicate, fetal loneliness. “I’m the only one who can love her unconditionally,” explains the narrator, “but she persists in looking outwards” (44). The protagonist turns to Allan, a successful business with an expensive car and penthouse apartment, for love. But Allan is merely a substitute father who will abandon and disappoint her. The image of a newborn also appears in Lydia Kwa’s “Hardhats and Safety Boots Must Be Worn on This Project.” The prose poem begins with the image of a baby: “CRADLE is the word, cradle me in your arms, babe.” (79). The speaker repeats this refrain, “Cradle me in your arms babe,” once again near the end of the piece, literally enfolding the poem in a hug. Kwa’s poem, like Lau’s, addresses unresolved feelings about fathers. The protagonist in Kwa’s “Hard Hats and Safety Boots” is the victim of physical abuse. The threat of violence overwhelms her life, even after her father has died. Because of the ever-present “risk of
being concussed into holy unconsciousness by falling debris, or of being pierced by rusty nails” (79), the protagonist in Kwa’s poem builds a wall of defenses up around herself. But she yearns for enough safety to be truly vulnerable, to be “naked as a newborn,” to be open enough to allow someone to cradle her (80).

Although anthologies position themselves as works which historically situate literature, they also actively create contexts for literary production and analysis. Thus, anthologies function as a bridge between literary past and future. *Inalienable Rice* and *Many-Mouthed Birds* both show how anthologies generically construct rhetorical community and provide opportunities for rhetorical communities to regenerate themselves. The two anthologies invoke a discourse of legitimacy to argue that Asian Canadian/Chinese Canadian writing has a rightful place in the Canadian canon. They respond to canon-forming practices by absorbing the language of legitimacy and rights, and by reinforcing a national conception of identity. *Many-Mouthed Birds*, in particular, upholds particular conventional standards of literary value rather than questioning those standards. At the same time, *Inalienable Rice* and *Many-Mouthed Birds* also both resist canon-forming practices by providing support for traditionally marginalized writers. The multiple references to beginnings and births in *Many-Mouthed Birds*, *Inalienable Rice* and the critical works that surround Asian Canadian literature may, on one hand, operate to legitimize it as a literary category, but they also represent the ethnic subject’s resolve to reconstitute and reposition are own self-image. As Kamboureli explains:

> Although it cannot always compensate the ethnic subject for the experience of loss, language both mediates and records these acts of knowing. More important, these anthologies demonstrate that as soon as the ethnic subject enters the site of her own discourse she becomes empowered. (Kamboureli, *Scandalous Bodies* 138-9)
Thus, in spite of some Chinese Canadian writers' ambivalences towards language and its ability to connect "self" with "place," the writing in *Inalienable Rice* and *Many-Mouthed Birds* reveals that providing more space for language production is one way to empower traditionally marginalized writers.
Notes for Chapter II

1 I contrast my conception of ethno-national identity and ethno-national literatures with Daniel Coleman and Donald Goellnicht's notion of the "institutionalization of racialized Canadian literatures" (14). Whereas Coleman and Goellnicht propose certain pan-ethnic racial coalitions as the basis for literary categorization, I argue that discourses of ethno-national identification (and self-identification) are more important in the development and classification of literary communities.

2 Jim Wong-Chu lists 1976 as the year when discussions began to develop Inalienable Rice (1), whereas Terry Watada reports that the idea for the anthology happened during a meeting of the Chinese Canadian Writers Workshop in 1977 ("To Go for Broke" 90). The editors of Inalienable Rice specify in the Introduction that the idea for the anthology was proposed in December 1977.

3 Social, economic and cultural networks have, of course, existed in Chinese and Japanese Canadian communities since immigrants from these countries began arriving in Canada. These networks were both formal and informal; many of them focused on advocating for civic and economic rights. Wing Chung Ng takes a close look at Chinese Canadian community networks in The Chinese in Vancouver, 1945-80: The Pursuit of Identity and Power, documenting what he calls Chinese Canadian "public organizational life" (7). Ng traces a comprehensive history of Chinese Canadian community organizations to conclude that an ongoing tension existed between "several generations of Chinese immigrants and their Canadian-born descendants . . . over the meaning of being Chinese in Canada" (4). Ng's history is useful because it contextualizes the work done in the 1970s by the Chinese Canadian editors and contributors of Inalienable Rice as the work of one group, in one generation, acting in response to a broader discourse on Chinese Canadian identity.

4 Goellnicht provides a comprehensive comparative summary of the development of Asian Canadian and Asian American literary movements, from their activist roots, to their current institutional structures in "A Long Labour: The Protracted Birth of Asian Canadian Literature."

5 Watada notes a shift in the focus of Japanese and Chinese Canadian cultural advocacy work after the Asian Canadian Experience Conference in 1972 from protest to activism ("To Go for Broke" 88-9). He identifies the shift with a quotation attributed to Bing Thom. Thom, who would go on to become a founding member of the Chinese Cultural Centre in Vancouver and a prominent architect, had just returned from studies at Berkeley when he is said to have declared, "Either you record history or you are part of it . . . Get your hands dirty!" (qtd. in Watada "To Go for Broke" 89).

6 Gum San Po and The Powell Street Review were attempts to establish a tradition of English-language periodicals which would create an audience and serve the interests of Canadian-born Chinese and Japanese Canadians whose roots went back multiple generations. Periodical traditions in both Japanese and Chinese heritage languages, however, can be traced back to the turn of the twentieth century. For instance, as Chao notes, The Chinese Times (est. 1907) and The New Republic/Son Mom Gwok (est. 1911) started up as a means to "[report] on the social and cultural activities of the community" (18). The earliest Japanese Canadian daily was the Tairiku Nippo ("The Continental Daily News"), founded in 1907. As Tsuneharu Gonnami explains, the first Japanese Canadian newspapers "functioned as a vigorous social and political conscience in the Japanese-Canadian efforts to build a B.C. society" (qtd. Tamai). Bilingual papers such as Gum San Po existed in both communities—the earliest and longest-running of these being the Japanese Canadian newspaper The New Canadian (1938-2001). And, while Gum San Po and The Powell Street Review are notable because of the radical tone of their politics, a few other English-language (and bilingual) periodicals such as the Japanese Canadian Tora circulated at the same time. For more on the history of Asian North American periodical writing, see Watada (1997).

7 For example, the Toronto-based Asianadian Resource Workshop began publishing The Asianadian: An Asian Canadian Magazine in 1978. The objective of The Asianadian was to "raise the consciousness of both Asians and non-Asians about the Asian experience in Canada" (Chan, "Editorial" 3). The Asianadian was a general-interest Asian Canadian publication, with no specific literary or academic focus. Among its features were interviews with Asian Canadians, educational resources on multicultural topics, profiles of advocacy organizations and community news. In the inaugural issue, editor Anthony B. Chan defines Asian Canadians as:

    peoples whose cultural heritage originated in East Asia (China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Macao), Southeast Asia (Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the
Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam), and South Asia (India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka) and now make their homes in Canada. (13) Goellnicht comments that “[although at first dominated by East Asian Canadians, the Asianadian quickly became a genuinely panethnic journal, including important work by South and Southeast Asian Canadians” (12). The mandate of The Asianadian, to “[transcend] specific ethnic affiliations such as ‘being Chinese’ or ‘being East Indian’ . . . To find a new meaning in being Asian in Canada through becoming an Asianadian” (Tony Chan qtd. in Sugiman 1), called for an ambitious and radical vision of pan-Asian Canadian unity.

8 For example, in 1976, Vesta published the first edition of Green Snow, edited by Stephen Gill. Gill identifies the context for his anthology as the “300,000 Canadians of Asian origin, including the ones who have settled here from Europe, Africa and South America” (6). The writers represented in Gill’s anthology are, however, primarily South Asian Canadian. In 1980, The Asianadian published a special poetry issue containing Bayang Magiliw: An Anthology of Poetry by Asians in Canada and Asian-Canadians, edited by Lakshmi Gill. The poets represented in Bayang Magiliw reflect The Asianadian’s inclusive definition of Asian Canadian. The short collection includes writing by both Asian immigrants and Canadian-born Asians, by Canadian citizens with multi-generational roots in the country and writers whose routes to Canada were varyingly circuitous. The ethnic backgrounds of the poets range from Sri Lankan to Guyanan, to Indian, Philippino, Japanese and Chinese. In 1990, Cyril Dabydeen edited Another Way to Dance: Asian Canadian Poets (Williams-Wallace). TSAR released a second version of Dabydeen’s anthology with a new subtitle and broader geographical scope, Contemporary Asian Poetry from Canada and the United States, in 1996. See Goellnicht 16-18 for a detailed synopsis of pan-ethnic representation in Asian Canadian journals and anthologies.

9 cf. Goellnicht 11.

10 I am influenced in my use of the term identification by Kenneth Burke’s rhetorical theory of identification, division and consubstantiality. Burke argues that rhetoric persuades by appealing to “ambiguities of substance” (21). Burke’s theory rests on several premises. First, that each person is substantially different from the next, and a person can be defined by a “an individual locus of motives” (21). People are characterized by division; that is, if we were all the same, rhetoric would not be necessary. Second, at the same time that all people are distinct, we can appeal to sameness in substance with one another. Burke calls this appeal to sameness, identification. While one person cannot be said to be “identical” with another person, he or she may identify with another person by “[joining] interests” or “acting-together” with someone (20-21). As Burke writes, “in acting together, men [sic] have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them consubstantial” (21).

11 bell hooks characterizes community as a place of communion and love. She writes, “[t]here is no better place to learn the art of loving than in community” (129). For hooks, communities are a necessary component of human socialization processes: communities teach norms, and they teach independence; they also provide space for refuge from danger or threat (130-1). hooks explains that communities form in many different ways, including rhetorically. She writes, “[t]alking together is one way to make community” (133).

12 King-Kok Cheung writes, “Partly because of the parallel experience of Japanese Americans and Japanese Canadians during World War II, Kogawa’s works have often been considered as part of the Asian American canon” (28).

13 The earliest Chinese Canadian immigrants of the mid-nineteenth and early-twentieth century were primarily poor, male sojourners from rural Southern China. Discriminatory immigration laws, as well as legislation which regulated economic and social mobility within Canada, prohibited these Chinese Canadians from fully participating in the “social, political and cultural mainstream of Canadian life” (Lee 1). Institutional racism had its effects on ensuing generations of Chinese Canadians. As Lee explains:

- The relatively few families that did manage to settle were exceptions and raised their offspring with great tenacity, extolling the virtues of forebearance and practicality as the key to survival. Parents taught their children to work hard, to be obedient, not to overreach or cause trouble. (2)

Silence, obedience and practicality are coping mechanisms for discrimination. In order to deal with their visible markings of “otherness,” Chinese Canadian subjects learned to turn inward, to conform, to be invisible. Interestingly, Lee’s argument foreshadows Lisa Lowe’s theorization on immigration and national cultural identity with respect to Asian Americans in her 1996 book, Immigrant Acts. Lowe’s title points to
the ways in which immigration legislation in the United States shaped identity formation for different Asian American groups through regulation of their political, economic and social opportunities. Lowe argues that the cultural experience of immigrants and immigrant communities shapes their political positions for multiple generations. She writes:

[T]he life conditions, choices, and expressions of Asian Americans have been significantly determined by the U.S. state through the apparatus of immigration laws and policies, through the enfranchisement denied or extended to immigrant individuals and communities, and through the processes of naturalization and citizenship (7).

The effects of immigrant identity flow through even native-born and naturalized citizens of Asian North American descent. Asian North American identities are, thus, multiply inscribed. First, they are marked as “other” by their racialized bodies. Second, they are written through with traces of “immigrant acts”—immigration policies, as well as immigrant “agency”—in their experiences as individuals, within families and in communities (Lowe 7, 9).

14 Cf. Chao, who writes that the Chinese language submissions for *Many-Mouthed Birds* were “inevitably marginalized” by the translation process (*Beyond Silence* 34-5).

15 Although Laiwan’s status in her birth-country may not be strictly “colonial” or “post-colonial,” her experience as a marginalized subaltern puts her in a sympathetic position with other colonized people. Similarly, as Eleanor Ty notes, “Though Chinese [North] Americans are not historically colonized or postcolonial people, their status as a minority in North America render them in other ways similar to colonized subjects. They occupy that space of the hybrid, or in-betweeness, where, as Homi Bhabha puts it, “what is at issue is the performative nature of differential identities”” (101-2).
CHAPTER III:

On Outcasts, Name-calling and Dealing with the In-crowd:

*Jin Guo, Swallowing Clouds* and *Strike the Wok*

Paul Lauter, an anthologist and critic of the American canon, writes, “To review the canon, we must create a useable past” (37). Chinese Canadian anthologies respond to the absence of Chinese Canadian voices in the national canon by collecting the works of emergent and established writers in the community and suggesting a new category for canonical consideration. Lauter writes that “[n]ew categories can bring into focus, rather than obscure, the experience and culture of people of colour . . . They allow us to illuminate the interrelationships of culture and other historical forces” (37). Chinese Canadian anthologies rhetorically construct a sense of community, or collective identification. Chinese Canadian anthologies are products of what Carolyn Miller terms “socio-rhetorical action” (73) in the sense that they use language and the artefacts of language to perform social acts. As Miller writes, rhetorical communities “‘exist’ in human memories and in their specific instantiations in words: they are not invented anew,
but persist in structuring aspects of all forms of socio-rhetorical action” (73). Thus, while
the community posited by Chinese Canadian anthologies is a constructed one that exists
in collective imagination, it nevertheless constitutes and motivates action in its own right.

Chinese Canadian anthologies imagine community in ethno-national terms, that
is, with emphasis on ethno-racial difference within a national framework. Andy Quan
articulates this point in the Introduction to Swallowing Clouds: An Anthology of Chinese
Canadian Poetry (1999) when he notes that the grouping of poets in the anthology is an
event representing

multiple creations. First of all, it is the creation of a community, a ‘we’
rather than an ‘I,’ a gathering of diverse people who presume a cultural
coherence due to our ‘Chinese’-ness. Next, we see how this characteristic
of race and culture attaches itself to a nation-state, the great snowy vast
plains and water country—oh, Canada. And then we see what creativity,
what creations in the form of poems come out of this place, location,
community, and culture. (7)

Quan suggests a name for what results from this alchemical act of creation: “Chinese-
Canada” (7). Quan’s “Chinese Canada” is a rhetorical community that is created and
regenerated in its anthologies. These anthologies articulate a community history marked
by beginnings, milestones, and significant figures. As Clarke suggests, a “certain
continuity in editorial intention” links a number of the anthologies together (127). She
writes, “Many-Mouthed Birds furthered a consideration of Chinese-Canadian specificity
following the publication of Inalienable Rice . . . Like Many-Mouthed Birds, Swallowing
Clouds both seeks and proliferates the connections between a range of voices gathered
together under the rubric of Chinese-Canadian poetry” (Clarke 127). Both Swallowing
Clouds and Strike the Wok: An Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Canadian Fiction
(2003), connect themselves in historical line with the earlier anthologies Inalienable Rice
and *Many-Mouthed Birds*. Quan traces the link from *Inalienable Rice* and *Many-Mouthed Birds*, through the publication of a special issue of *West Coast Line* featuring Asian Canadians and the Arts in 1981 (9), whereas Chao situates *Strike the Wok* within the “systematic” (*Strike the Wok* ix) genealogy of Chinese Canadian literary history she began to develop in *Beyond Silence: Chinese Canadian Literature in English* (1997). A further editorial link suggests continuity between the three latter anthologies: *Many-Mouthed Birds, Swallowing Clouds* and *Strike the Wok* are all co-edited by founding member of the Asian Canadian Writers Workshop (ACWW), Jim Wong-Chu. The ACWW, through Jim Wong-Chu, provides a measure of institutional support for Chinese Canadian anthologies, and conversely, has seen its organizational changes implicitly recorded in the anthologies.

In this chapter, I examine *Swallowing Clouds* and *Strike the Wok* alongside *Jin Guo: Voices of Chinese Canadian Women* (1992), a collection of Chinese Canadian women’s oral history narratives. Published one year after *Many-Mouthed Birds, Jin Guo* is not mentioned in the genealogies that link the other anthologies in a successive line. Chao provides analysis of *Jin Guo* in a chapter of *Beyond Silence* titled “The Collective Self: A Narrative Paradigm and Self-expression in Three Prose Works.” In the chapter, Chao categorizes *Jin Guo* as a “collective memoir” (*Beyond Silence* 88). While it marks a discontinuity in the rhetorical community’s narrative, *Jin Guo* makes use of many of the same discursive practices—such as the collection of linguistic artefacts from different sources and the translation (both literal and figurative) of the collected artefacts into another form (an anthology) through editorial intervention—to posit and consolidate community. The collection of oral narratives also projects similar community goals as
the “literary” anthologies, for example, recovering history, providing a platform for marginalized voices and resisting cultural assimilation. The title of this chapter reflects, with some lightheartedness, upon some of the issues that arise out of community identification and some of the motivations driving the urges to both look at things collectively and to be collective. Taken out of the context of the playground, outcasts, name-calling and dealing with the in-crowd represent three potential problems (and solutions) for community building and positioning.

“Outcast” is a word that Quan uses to describe the writers represented in *Swallowing Clouds*. He first asks, “What do we have in common?” (8), a question which lies at the heart of the effort to locate community. Quan answers his own question—“Poetry, first of all”—and goes on to suggest that poets are natural outcasts, whether because they are shunned for being obscure or irrelevant, or because they pose a threat in holding a little divine power through their special abilities to use language (8). Quan also notes that the anthologized poets are social “outcasts” because “[t]he colour of our skin, our race, makes us different” (8). Notions of difference and exclusion, of “outcastedness,” exist in all communities. Whereas difference can cause conflict, conflict can be productive, stirring discussion and keeping a community from becoming stagnant or insular. What can we learn when we reframe a community to include its “outcasts”? Or, to rephrase the question and level the inside/outside hierarchy, how can we maintain and use difference productively in the construction of a community?

“Name-calling” refers to the processes by which communities adopt categories or labels. I have discussed how the terms “Asian Canadian” and “Chinese Canadian” can be seen as instances of catechresical naming, or the deliberate application of an imprecise
metaphor that relies upon a stretch or paradox to create meaning (see Chapter 2).

Another topic related to naming is positionality, that is, *who is calling what by what name?* In an essay which looks at several collections of immigrant women’s writings, Eva Karpinski poses the following questions:

> The questions we can ask of the editors who assemble these anthologies are the same ones that might be asked of ‘editors’ of multiculturalism at large. What position do they occupy in relation to the anthologized voices? How do they justify their mediating role between different groups? How do they use power to include/exclude? Whom do they address through their texts—the powerless groups or the dominant culture for whose consumption the anthology has been prepared? (112-13)

Karpinski’s questions illustrate how positionality relates to power—who holds the power to speak for whom?—and ethics—what can we responsibly say? For members of minority groups who have been denied access to self-representation (whether political or cultural) engaging in the processes of self-identification and self-definition signify important exercises of power.

Finally, “dealing with the in-crowd” is my tongue-in-cheek way of referring to practices of “strategic essentialism,” which Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak defines as “a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (*In Other Worlds* 205). The “identities” posited by Chinese Canadian writers and anthologists defy unitary definition. They are necessary contingencies developed to further the political interests of marginalized subjects. Spivak, who explains that the concept of subjectivity (or subjective positioning) is fundamentally constituted in terms of “the West”⁴ (*“Can the Subaltern Speak?”* 24), argues for a “functional change in sign-systems” (*“Subaltern Studies”* 330) which deconstructs and repositions the subject. The purpose of this semiotic shift is to return agency to the hands of the “subaltern,” a subject
with "subordinate or inferior" "rank, power, authority [or] action" ("Subaltern").

"Subaltern" are those who have been radically disempowered through the loss of subjectivity. Thus, by challenging and dismantling current "sign-systems"—in part, by forging alliances and utilizing strategic essentialisms—people who are rejected or disempowered can "investigate, discover, and establish . . . consciousness" (Spivak "Subaltern Studies" 338).

*Jin Guo* stands apart from the group of "literary" anthologies because of its different institutional connections, editorial structure and, to some degree, its generic conventions. A publication of the Chinese Canadian National Council's Women's Book Committee (CCNC), *Jin Guo* articulates its primary function as not literary per se, but rather, documentary or historical. The Introduction to *Jin Guo* states that the "few texts which do mention Chinese Canadians talk primarily about the history of men . . . However, women's history is equally as important as men's history" (11). The documentary intentions of the collection reflect and support the Chinese Canadian National Council's social justice mandate, which is:

- To promote the rights of all individuals, in particular, those of Chinese Canadians and to encourage their full and equal participation in Canadian society.
- To create an environment in this country in which the rights of all individuals are fully recognized and protected.
- To promote understanding and cooperation between Chinese Canadians and all other ethnic, cultural and racial groups in Canada.
- To encourage and develop in persons of Chinese descent, a desire to know and to respect their historical and cultural heritage; to educate them in adopting a creative and positive attitude towards the Chinese Canadian contribution to society. (*About CCNC*)

Significantly, the final aspect of the CCNC's mandate mentions culture and history together, and suggests encouraging "creative" attitudes toward representing and
understanding Chinese Canadian history. From this connection, I want to make a case for reading Jin Guo as a text that makes both a literary and socio-historical impact, partly because it broadens our understanding of what is an acceptable literary genre, and partly because it addresses important “differences” within the Chinese Canadian community which the other anthologies do not.

To treat Jin Guo as a literary text raises the possibility of highlighting oral history and culture in Chinese Canadian communities. If one of the major cultural limitations for marginalized subjects is their access to the dominant language, then the recognition of orature provides significant possibilities for validating and documenting their experiences. The problems of cultural and language dislocation are emphasized in the Introduction to the collection: “Many of the pioneer women were thrust into an unfamiliar environment without the familiar village networks of support—without the language skills that would encourage interaction with the larger community” (Jin Guo 20). Metaphors of silence express a sense of frustration over not being able to speak, or be heard: the “untold contributions” of Chinese Canadian women create a “void” in the community’s (and the nation’s) history (Jin Guo 22-3). The lasting image in the Introduction is of countless women who were rendered mute and powerless because of geographical dislocation: “older women [who] spoke little or no English and had few friends,” who relied on their children to speak for them—to be their “eyes and ears” (Jin Guo 20-1). Significantly, their limited access to English leaves these women figuratively blind and deaf, as well as mute. The editors suggest that linguistic displacement alters the way people perceive the world, not just the way they are able to interact in it.
Ambivalences of language affected more than just the first generation of Chinese Canadian immigrants, as many of the stories in *Jin Guo* attest. For several of the women interviewed, such as Gretta Grant and Madeline Mark, who were born in Canada and spoke little to no Chinese, the loss of their heritage language causes a different kind of cultural dislocation. Madeline Mark explains, “I think if my husband dies, I’ll lose contact with the Chinese community because I don’t speak Chinese fluently, and I only know Chinese people to say hello to” (Jin Guo 38). Gretta Grant expresses mixed feelings about never learning to speak Chinese: “I’m sorry that I can’t help out in the Chinese community because of the language barrier,” she says, “but I’m still trying to find a way to get involved. A lot of us Canadian-born have lost the language, but I think you can still maintain your cultural heritage without having to learn the language” (Jin Guo 66). Both Gretta Grant and Madeline Mark suggest that the loss of language is a barrier to connecting with their community. Similarly Gein Wong addresses the issue of language loss in her short story in *Strike the Wok*, “Hole in the Wall,” about a protagonist who sifts through the “clues” of her past to understand why her parents never taught her to speak Chinese (137). The topic is also taken up by Ien Ang, an Australian Asian scholar, who considers the connections between language, identity, and place in her theoretical essay “On Not Speaking Chinese: Postmodern Ethnicity and the Politics of Diaspora.”

The editors of *Jin Guo* note that “[t]he value of oral testimonies lies in the truth of experience—of letting people speak for themselves about their daily lives and communities, their thoughts and feelings” (12). One story in particular illustrates the significance of oral culture in early Chinese Canadian communities. “Kim” is one of the
narratives that appears in the first section of the anthology. Jin Guo is divided into two sections; the first is called “Individual Stories,” and includes nine narratives which “appear essentially intact” (13). The title of each story in this section bears the name of a woman and a brief biographical note which lists information such as where and in what year the woman was born, (if she immigrated to Canada) when she arrived in the country, and where she currently resides. The woman’s story, edited from a transcribed interview and represented in a coherent narrative ranging from about five to eight pages, follows this header information. The second part of the anthology is sub-divided by theme, and features excerpts from interviews under titles such as “Work! Work! Work!” and “Our Mothers and Fathers.” The two sections are separated by twelve pages of black and white photographs, some of which are archival and some from personal sources. Kim’s story, presented under a pseudonym, is translated from Cantonese. In it, she talks about arriving to Canada in 1957 after marrying her husband in Hong Kong: “I knew that language would be a problem since there were hardly any Chinese in the small town where [my husband] lived in the Maritimes” (68). Kim says, although “[n]ow I can speak and read some English. And it seems like I can mix with the gui lau [sic], but actually it’s just superficial. No real friends” (71). Her words resonate with those of Madeline Mark, but in reverse. Language loss because of displacement or generational difference affects the potential for meaningful communication both between members of a single ethnic group, and between ethnic minorities and those who speak the dominant language. Kim’s story reveals that some immigrants, even those who have lived in predominantly English-speaking communities for most of their lives, do not undergo
linguistic assimilation. Instead, they find ways to cope by developing and living in a predominantly oral culture in their heritage language.

Evidence of oral culture suffuses Kim’s story. Her story includes many interjections in which she relates a tangential story to illustrate her point, or re-tells a story that someone told her: on how newly arrived immigrants were kept at the immigration building in Victoria before they were released into the country, Kim recounts, “My father-in-law used to talk about the ‘pig house’ where the immigrants were detained like prisoners” (69); as a counter-story to the strict regulations limiting the immigration of Chinese women to Canada, she explains, “There was an old woman who told us that she disguised herself as a man by braiding her hair and wearing the black cap that Chinese men wore in those days” (69); on the frugality of old-timers, she offers, “I talked to an old man yesterday who never bought himself any clothes, always wearing the few pieces he had until they were totally worn-out” (70). Kim’s digressions are second- and third-hand stories which range from personal accounts to gossip, and which have transformed over time into morality tales and Gold Mountain mythology. Myth, folk tales and Gold Mountain stories continue to inspire Chinese Canadian fiction and poetry. For example, in Strike the Wok, short stories “The Re-education of Ah Mow and His Subsequent Undoing Thereof” by Winston C Kam, “The Friends” by Paul Yee, and “The Gold Mountain Coat,” by Judy Fong Bates, are all versions of Gold Mountain tales. Additionally, Marisa Anlin Alps offers re-tellings of two Chinese fairy tales in her poems “Blossoms” and “The Empress’ Feet.”

Kim’s narrative in Jin Guo demonstrates the literary potential of oral narrative and the blurry line between literature and history. Larissa Lai writes, “What is history,
after all, but narrative? And she who inhabits narrative truly has ground to stand on. That grounding is necessary when her belonging to the land she lives on is so contested” (149). Through the process of oral transmission, these stories reproduce in order to remind people of the good- or bad-old days, to elevate unusual situations to legend, to teach lessons, and to affirm the existence of those who came before. By documenting Kim’s story, the editors of Jin Guo recover myths which sustained and entertained linguistically-marginalized immigrants and offer proof of how narrative was being used in communities to create collective memory and identity—to give these stories ground to stand on.

_Jin Guo_ opens up the possibility of including orature alongside more traditional literary genres (such as poetry and fiction) in a consideration of Chinese Canadian literature. Additionally, oral narratives have the potential to challenge notions of “standard English” when they represent the language of the speaker with little or no mediation. Admittedly, _Jin Guo_ is a hyper-mediated text. The process of anthologising involved interviewing, transcription, in some cases translation, selection of “Individual Stories” and selection of interview excerpts for the theme section. The “Individual Stories” were edited, at least to take out the interview questions, and more than likely also for length. There is no indication how much the editors may have altered the interviewees’ language to fit the conventions of “standard English,” although individual speech inflections are apparent in each of the interviews. For instance, Margaret Chan’s narrative gives the flavour of her voice and the nuances of her speech: “They paid $12 a week. No, that was not good! I borrowed $50 from Miss Martin, and went back to Hong Kong to try and get a teaching job. In those days in Canada, they discriminate against us
Chinese” (Jin Guo 28). Although the orature in Jin Guo is personal narrative and not, for instance, orally transmitted poetry like epic, the interviews do a good job of representing the poetry of everyday speech. Figurative language is no less figurative when it is spoken. Margaret Chan reveals this when she says, “You can’t live with a man that will not listen to reason. You talk horses, he talks cows” (Jin Guo 32).

Margaret Chan’s horses-and-cows metaphor brings us back to the second reason I argue for considering Jin Guo alongside Swallowing Clouds and Strike the Wok in the succession of Chinese Canadian anthologies. Jin Guo collects, and therefore recovers and protects, narratives from the perspective of a women from a diverse cross-section of ages and socio-economic backgrounds. Documentary records of early Chinese Canadian history from any perspective is not easy to come by, but the editors of Jin Guo emphasize that the presence of women in such records is even more scarce. The editors explain that “because many of the pioneer women were illiterate, they left few writings. Many of their male counterparts were also illiterate, but those who were able to read and write rarely considered the activities of women worth mentioning in their own memoirs” (Jin Guo 12). Thus, Jin Guo addresses an “imbalance” (Jin Guo 11) in the history of the Chinese Canadian community; it also emphasizes the importance of recognizing the different experiences of those who talk horses and those who talk cows. The presentation of Margaret Chan’s narrative, the first in the collection, also underscores the risk of not investing the effort and resources to record these stories. As the editors note in Margaret Chan’s biographical headnote, “In 1989, three years after her interview, Margaret passed away in Vancouver. However, her words will live in our collective memory—and in our hearts” (27).
Karen Kulkip, writing about the work of recovering texts for inclusion in a canon, asks readers to question traditional notions of excellence, representation and interest, in light of another potential criterion: “challenge” (115). She explains that “the ambition of the anthologist is to invite or propel readers to interrogate existing standards” (115). My inclusion of Jin Guo in this group of Chinese Canadian anthologies is meant to trouble the division between literary and “sociological” texts and, therefore, challenge existing definitions of anthology and literature. I do not mean to suggest that the challenges I raise are in any way new ones; nevertheless, by including this collection of oral narratives, I hope to reveal a few theoretical openings for consideration in future anthologies of Chinese Canadian “literature.”

On the other hand, life writing is not a new genre to Chinese Canadian writers. Although (as I mention in an earlier chapter) it is important not to overdetermine the autobiographical connections between ethnic writers and their work, some productive work has been done to examine the innovative ways in which multicultural writers in Canada have utilized and transformed autobiographical structures to complicate notions of identity and genre. In an essay titled “Displacement and Self-Representation: Theorizing Contemporary Canadian Biotexts,” Joanne Saul looks at four bio-texts written by minority writers. In particular, she investigates some loose thematic connections between the texts, for example “belonging and self-representation,” and she suggests ways in which the four texts “challenge . . . generic classification . . . [by] constructing subjectivities that are multiple, performative and in flux, while still acknowledging the political importance of the subject’s claim to legitimacy” (259-60). Saul categorizes the texts by Michael Ondaatje, Roy Kiyooka, Daphne Marlatt and Fred Wah as “biotexts,” a
term which Wah himself has theorized in relation to his own work. In the
Acknowledgements to *Diamond Grill*, Wah explains that biotext is "an innately
cumulative performance." He concludes, "These are not true stories, but, rather, poses or
postures, necessitated, as I hope is clear in the text, by faking it" (*Wah Diamond Grill*).

Interestingly, two of Wah’s prose poems are included in the poetry anthology
*Swallowing Clouds*, while three are included in the fiction anthology *Strike the Wok*, thus
illustrating the ways in which these works defy generic classification. In “On the Edge of
Centre. Just off Main,” Wah describes “the ubiquitous Chinese store.” The Chinese
store, like Wah’s biotext, defies generic classification. Wah uses layers of contrasting
images to describe the motley feel of the Chinese store: “an unmoving stratus of smoke,
dusky and quiet, clock ticking. Dark brown wood panelling, some porcelain planters on
the windowsills, maybe some goldfish” (“On the Edge of Centre” 263). The business
transacted in the Chinese store is equally sundry. Wah writes of accompanying his father
or cousin to the store to “get a jar of some strange herb or balm from an old man who
forces salted candies on us or digs for a piece of licorice dirtied with grains of tobacco
from his pocket” (“On the Edge of Centre” 263). The store represents heterogeneity and
the potential for mixing. Wah emphasizes the themes of mixing, and accordingly, of
play, by including images of dominoes and mah-jong games on the margins of the
Chinese store. Dominoes and mah-jong are both games which involve the mixing of
tiles, all hands together at the centre of the table, each person’s game dependent on luck
and skill. These opportunities for group play result in a cacophony of voices and sounds
which represent the chatter on the “edg[es of] race” (“On the Edge of Centre” 263)."
Wah writes of “the background of old men’s voices sure and argumentative within this grotto. Dominoes clacking” (“On the Edge of Centre” 263). These sounds fly out of the poem’s grip in its final paragraph, when Wah begins to describe what happens on the other side of curtained reality:

In a room at the back of the Chinese store, or above, like a room fifteen feet over the street din of Vancouver Chinatown, you can hear, amplified through the window, the click-clacking of mah-jong pieces being shuffled over the table tops. The voices from up there or behind the curtain are hot-tempered, powerful, challenging, aggressive, bickering, accusatory, demeaning, bravado, superstitious, bluffing, gossipy, serious, goading, letting off steam, ticked off, fed up, hot under the collar, hungry for company, hungry for language, hungry for luck, edgy. (“On the Edge of Centre” 263)

The front-end of the Chinese store in Wah’s poem is, ultimately, a liminal space which divides the free play of the back room from the outside world of Chinatown. Thus, the centre of the action in Wah’s poem is a place that is, actually, on the far edge of the margin, that requires passage through several doors in order to gain entry. Not only is the back room set apart from/(yet a part of) the Chinese store, but the Chinese store is, furthermore, apart from/(a part of) Chinatown: “yes, but further back, almost hidden, the ubiquitous Chinese store” (“On the Edge of Centre” 263). Chinatown, it only follows, is on the edges of (but also a part of) the city, located “On the edge of Centre. Just off Main” (263). “This store,” Wah writes, “part of a geography, mysterious to most, a migrant haven edge of outpost, of gossip, bavardage, foreign tenacity. But always in itself, on the edge of some great fold” (“On the Edge of Centre” 263). The “fold” in Wah’s poem is an axis. The fold is the trick of being two places at once, paradoxically at the centre of it all and at its outermost edges.
Saul describes biotexts as having a “process poetics in which writers become readers by writing themselves into the text as a subject of experience” (270). Although it makes no direct claims to autobiography as such, Iris Li’s “Snaps—A Satire” in many ways fits Saul’s description of a biotext. Li’s piece is a dialogue, represented by alternating paragraphs of reported speech enclosed by quotation marks. It defies classification as a script, since there are no stage directions and no cues, signals or distinctions which signify character. At the same time, “Snaps” contains no formal narrative aside from the dialogue. The story recounts a conversation between a female Chinese Canadian writer and a publisher who is trying to convince the writer how to produce a marketable text. The only part of the piece not enclosed in quotation marks is the word “[Silence],” which divides the writer’s final, climactic rant from another one of the publisher’s dismissive remarks (69). Li’s writer uses irony to undercut the publisher’s intelligence and to reveal his problematic attitudes. Li’s story complicates subject positioning through the quick transitions in the dialogue. Because Li does not provide any markers aside from line breaks and quotation marks to indicate who is speaking at what time, it is possible to lose track of who is saying what. At the same time, the distinct voices of the two characters, and their interactions, reveal how subjectivity is being positioned in the text.

Li writes her own subjective positioning into the text, then transforms the structure into a dialogue in which she also participates as a listener/reader. The story is presented as a conversation, which opens and closes with the words of the publisher. In both cases, the publisher makes personally offensive comments to the writer. “Do you have problems with your mother?” he asks at the beginning of the piece (66); and at the
end, after the greeting her last “Fuck you”-rant with “[Silence],” the publisher changes
tack and says, “Let’s talk about your author photograph. You’re quite big for an Asian
girl. Can you slim down a bit for the retakes?” (69). By book-ending the piece with such
confrontational dialogue, Li shows the reader what it is like to be “put in your place,” or
in effect, put in her place. She, at once, inhabits and performs the character of the writer
by participating in the dialogue. The unbroken exchange of “he said/she said” contains
the subject in the text. To paraphrase and play with an oft-quoted Derridian phrase: in
“Snap—A Satire,” there is no outside the dialogue and no outside the subject engaged in
dialogue.

“Snaps—A Satire” works through issues of belonging and self-representation
through the perspective of the writer. The contrast between the publisher’s stereotype of
what a Chinese Canadian novel should be, and the writer’s resistance to such stereotypes,
emphasizes the need for self-representation and self-expression. A staccato exchange
between the two characters illustrates the point:

“To me, she’s conflicted about her, as you say, hybridity.”
“Existential.”
“Inhibited due to internalised racial tension.”
“Self-possessed.”
“A social miscreant who lacks consistency.”
“Delightfully individualistic.”
“You don’t see what I’m saying here. She’s so fucking general! What
makes her Chinese?”
“Because she knows she is.” (68)

Li argues that the right of representation should fall on those who “know.” The writer
expresses a desire to represent her characters and her culture as she understands it—that
is, culture as “hybrid” (67) as something not “spelt in rifts or binary oppositions” (66).
By including works such as Li’s “Snaps—A Satire” and Wah’s biotext poems, Strike the
Wok offers work which pushes the boundaries of genre and innovatively advocates for self-representation. By the same token, by presenting these works as “fiction,” editors Chao and Wong-Chu miss an opportunity to discuss how conventional literary categories are, at times, insufficient to contain and describe the work of Chinese Canadian writers.

The attempt to link any heterogenous group of writers is tricky business at best. Much depends on how these connections are framed. In an article comparing several East Asian Canadian Women, Rita Wong writes:

To link these writers and their texts may be dangerously to ghettoize ourselves once again. Yet I am pushed by a necessity to sketch out some of the tenuous links between these women’s writings in my own search for an identity, no matter how brief and historical, no matter how unfinished; a moment of building an imagined community, a base for support, for action, since identity exists within a context, a group of women who say to me, yes, I know that feeling, yes you’re not alone. (119)

Wong is alert to what Lai calls “[t]he paradox of claiming a racialized space” (149). On the one hand, to claim racial identification is to give some credit to essentialized notions of race. On the other hand, it is impossible and dangerous to ignore racial difference—because these visible differences have real effects. Lai explains:

In the everyday discussions of politically active people of colour, lesbian, gay, or straight, I hear this nostalgic referring back to a homeland that no longer exists, indeed, one that never did. I don’t think this practice originates so much from naiveté as with a burning desire for a past, that it should have form, that it should have a body. Sometimes I feel our very survival in this country depends upon the articulation of this form, the construction and affirmation of this body. (Lai 150)

Lai articulates diasporic longing in terms of a longing for some form, some “body.” The “articulation . . . of this body” similarly preoccupies many of the writers which appear in both Swallowing Clouds and Strike the Wok. Articulating the body, therefore, becomes a instance of strategic essentialism, in which the racialized subject “construct[s] and
affirm[s]” the existence of a body to strategically challenge the positioning of this body in society.

Many of the short stories in Strike the Wok that thematically reference the body are written by women. The titles of a handful of these illustrate the preoccupation of these writers with corporeal symbols: “Eczema,” by Lydia Kwa; “A Porous Life,” by Ritz Chow; “Just Dandruff,” by Jessica Gin-Jade; and “Locks” by Alexis Kienlin. The titles of each of these stories introduce extended metaphors which structure the narratives and represent conflicts or feelings. A number of the short stories, as well as several poems in Swallowing Clouds, deal with the issue of violence to the body. For example, at the end of “Eczema,” it is revealed that the child protagonist’s skin problem relates to her sexual abuse. In the story, the child sees a physician who diagnoses her with eczema. The child wishes that the “eczema could go away” (39). She also tries to remember a time when her abusive father was not always angry with her (39). She sifts through some old photos and thinks, “Maybe photos were lies . . . Everyone smiles when their pictures are taken. Wasn’t it Papa who sneaked around to my side of the bed late at night, whose hair arm woke me up with its touching? Weren’t those his hands which held mine over his wet sticky thing? No photo of that” (40). Eczema, then, is a metaphorical representation of the invisible forms of violence which get enacted on bodies.

Ethno-national identification is, in some ways, problematic. First, it risks contributing to cultural ghettoization. I return to Rita Wong’s comments about ghettoizing writers by gender or race. To group minority writers together emphasizes their “minority” status, and therefore contributes to a major/minor power binary. Second, because ethno-national identification leaves the ideological structures of national
identification intact, it, in some ways, adds to the centre of national power. Guy Beauregard articulates the problem with respect to Asian Canadian literature when he asks:

Does Asian Canadian literature and its voices of dissent ‘disturb the calculation’ of Canadian nationalism? Or does it function as a regulated transgression given prominence precisely in order to reinscribe the putative ‘openness’ of Canada’s ‘multicultural’ identity? [...] does Asian Canadian literature participate in an ongoing critique of ‘Canada’ as it has been narrated in Canadian literary history? Or does it consolidate the flexibility, and hence the continued relevance of Canadian literary nationalism? (“The Emergence of Asian Canadian Literature” 59)

Clarke raises the same issue when she observes that Quan’s “Chinese-Canada” is an “identification that challenges certain canonical traditions of Canadian literature but seeks a reform that may in fact preserve a nationalist framework” (131). In this context, transnational or diasporic configurations of “community” and “place” provide intriguing theoretical possibilities.

In contrast to the concerns of ghettoization and reinforcing cultural nationalism, a third issue relating to ethno-national community identification is that it may not even offer a strong enough strategic coalition (for example, in comparison to a pan-ethnic Asian Canadian coalition) to have any disruptive impact on Canadian literature. The solution to this problem, Daniel Coleman and Donald Goellnicht suggest, is “[i]nstituting ‘[r]ace’” through the development of pan-ethnic racial coalitions capable of producing “recognizable disciplinary apparatuses [which are] supported by infrastructures such as research institutes, artists’ collectives, publishers, anthologies, and identifiable bodies of scholarly criticism” (14-15). These three problems represent an ongoing theoretical challenge for Chinese Canadian literature. However, Chinese Canadian anthologies, while framing the community in primarily ethno-national terms, actually position
Chinese Canadian literature at the intersection of multiple discourses (national, transnational, diasporic and Asian Canadian). Moreover, in spite of the challenges to ethno-nationalism, the production of Chinese Canadian anthologies reveals a persistent desire to form community identification in these terms. It is important to examine how communities choose to identify themselves in their own terms and to consider how communities situate themselves in multiple, overlapping discourses.
Notes for Chapter III

1 Wong-Chu, who leaves the work of writing introductions to his co-editors, maintains an intriguing editorial silence in the three anthologies. This silence can be construed in different ways, to varying effect. Clarke, for example, suggests that Wong-Chu’s poems at the end of *Swallowing Clouds* “stand as his closing, editorial commentary” (133). Noting the characteristic irony and suggestive metaphors in Wong-Chu’s poetry, Clarke observes that his work nudges readers toward the “possibility of re-engaging the collection” and the discovery of “intertextual connections” (134). Seen in this light, Wong-Chu’s editorial silence pushes readers toward poetry, and forces us to think differently about the ways we can choose to articulate resistance. Additionally, Wong-Chu’s undeniable presence, in spite of his editorial silence, challenges and resists the “silence to voice” paradigm for reading Chinese Canadian literature posited by Chao (*Beyond Silence* 17). At the same time, Wong-Chu’s refusal to voice his position constitutes, in some respects, problematic elision of responsibility. At the very least, from a critical standpoint, it creates an unanswerable question at the centre of the production of these anthologies. While it is beyond the scope of this project to resolve these questions, I will say that Wong-Chu’s decades of work on behalf of Asian Canadian writers—as a supporter and advocate—are well-known amongst Asian Canadian writers and activists.

2 *Inalienable Rice* was the product of collaboration between the Powell Street Review and the Chinese Canadian Writers Workshop, which later widened its membership to become the Asian Canadian Writers Workshop.

3 Several of the interviews were translated from Cantonese or Toisan dialects.

4 A term used by Spivak to connote Western-hemisphere colonial power and history.

5 In this essay, Ang uses the theme of “not speaking Chinese” to explore and complicate notions of identity, nationalism and diaspora. She emphasizes “the importance of paying attention to the particular historical conditions and the specific trajectories through which actual social subjects become incommensurably different and similar,” and she suggests that “we need to recognize the continuing and continuous operation of ‘fixing’ performed by the categories of race and ethnicity” (Ang 5). Ang accounts for the sense of loss or longing felt by diasporic subjects, at the same time as she releases those feelings from any notion of a stable or unified “Chineseness” (6). Diasporic longing, she argues, is “externally instigated, articulating and confirming a position of subordination in relation to western hegemony” (14). She notes that the history of Chinese emigration (particularly from Southern China) is a long one, that ethnic Chinese living in areas such as Southeast Asia had been, in many ways, culturally and linguistically assimilated, and that a sense of pan-Chinese nationalism did not arise until the early part of the twentieth century. Although diasporic longing also “often a sign of, and a surrender to, a condition of actual marginalization” (15), Ang argues that it is more productive to use the terms of diaspora to emphasize the slipperiness of ethno-racial identities and to investigate new ways of defining Chineseness that account for “hybrid practices” and “other Chinese cultures” (16).

6 The glossary at the end of *Jin Guo* translates “guai lo” as “literally ‘old ghost,’ perjorative term used to refer to non-Chinese, usually of European descent (Cantonese)” (235).

7 I could not help but think about Kim’s story in *Jin Guo* when I read “On the edge of Centre. Just off Main.” Kim identifies *mah-jong* as her favourite form of entertainment. She says, “I wanted to quit, but it gets addictive! It’s mysterious. If you didn’t play it, you didn’t have many other opportunities to socialize with other Chinese. Once you start playing *mah-jong*, you forget things . . . I’ve lost a lot, but sometimes you feel that it’s worthwhile because you feel so relaxed afterwards” (71).
CONCLUSION

A Country Not Yet Discovered

“Writing is an act that is never finished, that engenders more writing, thought, action.” (Wong 120)

“When people ask, she will say that her favourite country is one that has not yet been discovered.” (Thien 243)

In his Introduction to the special issue of *Canadian Literature* devoted to Asian Canadian writing, Glenn Deer writes on the topic of “transit,” a word he uses to describe both movement and transition. Vast amounts of movement (involving a great number of people, across great distances, over a long period of time) brought Asian immigrants to North America. These instances of migration instigated further movements—of ideas, of organization, and of activism. The notion of transit suggests how people moved across borders and in spite of geo-political boundaries. It also suggests people, communities and borders in constant transition—as they respond to the movement of time, adjust to new locales and make great leaps into the in-between. As I conclude my thesis, Deer’s words cause me to re-think the category “Chinese Canadian literature” and its stability. While all five of the anthologies I look at in my thesis use “Chinese Canadian” as a term of identification, the community which identifies itself as Chinese Canadian is in constant
flux. Each use of the term is the placement of a signpost which marks a specific formation of people in a particular moment in time.

Deer’s invocation of Asian North America also points me toward the scholarly potential of transnational and diasporic literary studies, theories of reading which, themselves, suggest movement and border-crossing. While my project considers a group of anthologies which frame their selections in ethno-national terms, other configurations of rhetorical community are equally powerful, and compelling. Writers who choose to situate themselves in multiple ways—who, for instance, identify as Chinese Canadian and Asian Canadian and female and from the Toronto arts community and involved in anti-poverty work (just to hypothesize a few ways a person can locate herself)—at once trouble stable notions of naming or identity, and show us ways that we can keep our labels without being pigeon-holed by them. Just as many of the women in Jin Guo “speak about the demands of being at once mother, wife and worker” (12) many of the writers showcased in Inalienable Rice, Many-Mouthed Birds, Swallowing Clouds, and Strike the Wok participate in and identify with more than one community. Some of the writers, indeed, prefer not to identify themselves as Chinese Canadian. Yet what continues to be important is the power of self-identification and the agency exercised by those who enact their (and I intentionally use Spivak’s term here) “consciousness” to challenge how we use language for power.

The word “transit” also causes me to reflect upon the process of writing and how any stability we rely upon in language is a stability that we grasp at, to take us from moment to moment, from idea to action. While working on this thesis, I was continuously moved to pursue different avenues of research, to read more, to change my
ideas and change my mind. In the midst of this, I often worried that I would never be able to stop reading, much less begin writing—and as I began writing, I found myself battling the urge to want to get it all down. I had to understand that "all" would never be possible and the only way to get anything down would be to keep moving. It seems to me, near the end of this process, that as much as we are always in transit, we sometimes need to be reminded to keep moving. Perhaps this is why Lien Chao chooses to end her anthology, Strike the Wok, with Madelein Thien’s story “Bullet Train,” which is told from three different points of view and which ends with the image of a “country . . . that has not yet been discovered.” Thien’s closing image complicates notions I raise in this thesis in powerful and productive ways, for it pushes the categories I posit into unknown territory, past conventional ways of viewing “country” and colonization, towards new approaches to seeing the places where we land and our hold on them. Writing, too, hurls you into what feels like a never-ending unknown territory. With this in mind, I feel a bit calmer about taking a moment now and then to have a good look at my surroundings. While this conclusion marks a brief landing, it is only the marker of one small transition.
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