The Politics of Re-homing: Asian Diaspora Poetry in Canada

Benzi Zhang

> A direct result of this race for speed that dominates life across the globe is the emergence of the migrant—the involuntary passenger-in-transit between cultures, for whom homelessness is the only home "state." (Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora*)

When Rey Chow says that homelessness is coming to be "the only home 'state,'" she is probably thinking as much about the general condition of modern diaspora as she is about her own personal life (1993, 197). The poignant expression of worldly homelessness, however, is not a denial of the hope for home, but rather an assertion of re-homing desire in the age of global diaspora. Modern diaspora disrupts the apparent closure of home and generates transnational, translocal communications and communities. Under such circumstances, the earlier conceptualizations of home based on a singular location are no longer adequate to describe the new dimensions and transformations of

Benzi Zhang is associate professor of English and comparative literature at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He has published extensively on Asian diaspora literature, cross-cultural studies, and comparative literature.

home, which has been re-versed in diaspora not as a "felicitous space" of living, but rather as a process of (be-)coming. In a sense, Asian diaspora poetry in Canada represents a paradoxical feeling of both homesickness and home-crisis, for the movement between multiple locations of cultures suggests a co-belonging dialogue which, by situating diasporas simultaneously inside and outside of a culture, intensifies both the desirability and the impossibility of a given home-place. As Iain Chambers points out, "wandering without a fixed home, dwelling at the crossroads of the world, bearing on a sense of being and difference, is no longer the expression of a unique tradition or history, even if it pretends to carry a single name" (1994, 4). With "a single name" yet decentralized sense, home has developed on constantly changing configurations of diversity and unity and, henceforth, become increasingly contingent on the interaction of different cultural passages. Situated "at the crossroads of the world," Asian diaspora poetry problematizes the political nature and meanings of home, and suggests a dynamic, complicated process in which different cultures not only conflict one another but are also converged and convoluted to produce new homes around "the simple axis of a mobility" (Kristeva 1991, 30).

The transfer of peoples and cultures from all over the world to Canada has generated an intricate trans-nationality and cultural globality, which are based upon the tension of interstices and overlaps of different cultures. The notion of home, as a result, has to be redefined in the liminal spaces between two or more cultural dwellings. The conventional association of home with a place of residence is no longer stable, since home has "become separated from the particular worldly space of living"; and "the space which is most like home, which is most comfortable and familiar, is not the space of inhabitance—I am here—but the very space in which one finds the self as almost, but not quite, at home" (Ahmed 1999, 331). Our sense of dwellings, to a certain extent, has already been de-homed in response to the effects of global diaspora, and there seems to be no place like home any more—even home has become increasingly unhomely. As Lucy Ng, a Chinese diaspora poet, illustrates in a poem about her father's diaspora experience, home can no longer be ascribed to a pre-given site of location, since it has constantly been dislocated in the process of diaspora. As a result, the emotional, cultural and psychological identification is often related to the difference, distance, and dislocation created by the substitution of "so-called home" for home:

> It must have been a relief after Hong Kong and
> Trinidad (mere islands) to find yourself in the
> wide expanse called Canada: British Columbia,
> thick fir trees, mountains solid as the back of
> your hand. You could buy a house, a piece of

land, plant yourself firmly in the North American
soil. Sometimes you even forgot this was the
second mainland you called home. (Ng 1991, 161)

To identify a foreign land with "home" is to redefine one's identity against the grain of primordial limitations and to reconstitute home outside of the overdetermined discourse of native land that excludes displaced differences from the landscape of origin. Although Ng's poem makes explicit reference to Chinese identification of cultural ancestry with mainland China, there is an interesting and deliberate tension created here between the conventional metaphor of the Chinese "mainland" as cultural home, and the poet's invention of "the second mainland" as a concrete metaphor for Canada as the place of permanent residence. To make a substitute home in a foreign land points to an "unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home" (Said 1984a, 49).

After relocating themselves in a new society and culture, diasporans must face various political, economic, and cultural forces that threaten their sense of home as a fixed, pure, and closed structure, which has been re-worlded from its original territory by their border-crossing experience. The complexity and ambivalence associated with redefining and revising home in relation to diaspora discourse present a challenging topic for our discussion, since the very term "diaspora," as we use it today, indicates not only a condition of "out-of-country" displacement, but also the mishmash "out-of-culture," "out-of-language" and "out-of-oneself" experiences. The manifold out-of-border movement over various discursive and non-discursive domains—linguistic, cultural, national, political, historical, has created a new homing sensibility—home has to be re-versed somewhere else, or in Nikos Papastergiadis's words, "Mapping elsewhere is also a homing device" (1998, 2). Diaspora hence refers not only to a movement from one place to another, but also to the transition that implicates a paradoxical, multilayered dehoming and rehoming process. Situated in an awkward trans-position between "here" and "elsewhere," diasporans have to establish a new sense of home at the crossroads of diverse dwellings. As Joy Kogawa writes,

For many years
androgynous with truth
I molded fact and fantasy
and where they met
made the crossroads home. (Kogawa 1985, 64)

Reconfigured between fact and fantasy, home is no longer a closed familiar place, but rather a dialectic sphere open to crossroads, or a shifting terrain related to far-away memories, or an ahistorical moment that has both passed and not yet arrived. The loosened structure of home involves two issues: one

is the feeling of non-authenticity of "home" and the other is the realization of the "home truth" about cultural imagination of "'ghostly' locations." As R. Radhakrishnan explains with reference to Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, "both the home country and the country of residence could become mere 'ghostly' locations," since "The home country is not 'real' in its own terms and yet it is real enough to impede Americanization, and the 'present home' is materially real and yet not real enough to feel authentic" (1996, 207). In this sense, diasporans have to reverse home constantly in a "ghostly" negotiation between fact and fantasy. Since diaspora develops crossroads that connect and span cultural and national borders, home occupies no singular cultural/national space but is situated in a web of social, economic and cultural links encompassing both factual and fantastic conditions.

In literature as well as in popular media, diasporans are often presented as strangers from elsewhere who, without a sense of belonging, never feel at home in a new country yet are unable to return to their homeland. As Chambers observes,

> To come from elsewhere, from "there" not "here," and hence to be simultaneously "inside" and "outside" the situation at hand is to live at the intersections of histories and memories, experiencing both their preliminary dispersal and their subsequent translation into new, more extensive arrangements along emerging routes. (Chambers 1994, 6)

Diaspora, which opens up new spaces for cross-cultural negotiation, creates a tension between two localities and a kind of spatio-temporal duality. While "most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home," diasporans and exiles "are aware of at least two, and the plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions" (Said 1984b, 170-72). Constantly traveling along "the emerging routes," diasporans have to revise home as a journey through "simultaneous" mediation of different cultural dwellings. As Ben Soo describes,

> Prentiss be a traveller
> gathering the accruement of song
> and assorted parentage
>
> for an empire to be lovely
> you claim a thought
> to a sanguine family
> a coast of gold and one of ivory
> firmer transport takes you on. (Soo 1991, 95)

The "assorted parentage" implicates a decentralized sense of belonging and inscribes a tension of rehoming between two cultural shores—"a coast of gold and one of ivory." In a recently published volume entitled *Two Shores*,

Thuong Vuong-Riddick, a Vietnamese diaspora poet, describes her own experience of traveling in a poem:

> Looking back over these years
> I see that we travelled
> from one continent to another.
> . . . . . .
> I went West, far, farther,
> looking straight ahead,
> never looking back, until one day
> I arrived at this ocean, the Pacific.
>
> I stand on the beach
> and the country I left behind is there
> in front of me. (Vuong-Riddick 1995, 116)

When reading these poems, we probably should not view home as static. As Soo and Vuong-Riddick so well express it, traveling between two shores may suggest a paradoxical re-homing process between two cultural locations, where the home left behind can be found and founded again in front of us. Therefore, the process of traveling itself "involves a reliving of the home," for movement is "the very way in which the migrant subject inhabits the space of home" (Ahmed 1999, 344).

Traveling from one socio-cultural space to another, however, may give rise to a psychological process of foreignization, in which one becomes an unhomely "other"—a foreigner whose "appearance signals that he is "in addition," notes Kristeva (1991, 4). Diasporans "with assorted parentage," in Kristeva's opinion, have to learn how to "live with the others, to live as others," and to be "reconciled with themselves to the extent that they recognize themselves as foreigners" (195). Designated as "visible minority" in Canada, Asian diasporans bear an unconcealable mark of foreignness:

> My black hair is a dark beast's mane
> framing a face etched in rain
> (I defy your expectation
> No, not pain)
> yes, rain)
> it washes away the expression:
> Aha! She's Asian! (Gill 1990, 30)

Facing racial, national, and cultural differences intensified by their border-crossing experience, a large number of Asian diasporans attempt to keep intact their original cultural identities, and they have come to terms with the roles of "foreigners." The determination "to live as others" reflects a kind of "aloofness" which, according to Kristeva, is "the foreigner's shield": "Insensitive, aloof, he seems, deep down, beyond the reach of attacks and

rejections that he nevertheless experiences" (7). The cultural difference, in addition, suggests more than a "shield," for it reveals something "unhomeable"—an origin, a seed, a core, which is a foreign element in the articulation of identity. Actually it is this "unhomeableness" that gives an extra dimension to the trajectories of diasporic subject that figures in the unsettling negotiation between an old and a new home.

There are also groups of Asian diasporans who attempt to disaffiliate from their old home cultures; and their desire to "pass" in a white dominated society indicates the impact of acculturation upon diaspora communities. However, their disregard for cultural difference often makes them feel more intensely "not at home" with the personae they assume. As Vuong-Riddick describes in a poem entitled "Day and Night":

> During the day,
> I was
> the happiest girl.
> At night,
> I cried.
>
> My Asian soul:
> nostalgia,
> and sorrow unconsoled.
>
> You need to be a Westerner
> to believe in God's hand,
> the master of the Universe.
>
> Twenty years of Christianity
> have not changed me.
> An Asian,
> a straw
> at night,
> I am what I am not. (Vuong-Riddick 1995, 70)

The unhomeable foreignness—"I am what I am not"—suggests a kind of cultural duality and a tension between dwelling and indwelling, which calls for the recognition of new meanings of home outside of the conventional parameters of home identity. The experience of diaspora as well as the increasing transnational communication in many aspects of human activities has changed the configuration of home. Different nations have permeated into each other's home spaces not only in terms of economy and politics, but also in terms of scattered cultural inheritances. However, mutual permeability does not always produce harmony. Caught between two or more different socio-cultural systems that cannot be fully integrated, Asian diasporans in Canada are subject to a constant re-homing process in which various ele-

ments of foreignness and otherness are reconfigured and repositioned in relation to new cultural dwellings and indwellings.

In Kristeva's opinion, the presence of "foreigners" as well as their visible cultural difference "awakens our most archaic senses through a burning sensation": "the foreigner's face forces us to display the secret manner in which we face the world" (1991, 3-4). In history, different nations and cultures often regarded one another as "savage" or "barbarian"; and this mutual demonization is based on the assumptions that home should be a familiar and unadulterated territory of belonging and that one would meet foreigners or barbarians only beyond the boundaries of one's home-range. In the age of modern diaspora, however, the situation has changed. "If we were to expand our definition of home to think of the nation as a home, then we could recognize that there are always encounters with others already recognized as strangers within, rather than just between, nation spaces" (Ahmed 1999, 340). To rehome, therefore, is to understand our differences and to accept new modalities of foreignness within home. The recognition of our own differences, in Kristeva's opinion, transforms foreignness into commonality, "promoting the togetherness of those foreigners that we all recognize ourselves to be" (1991, 3). In this sense, the recognition of "togetherness" is based on the awareness of "otherness" that paradoxically makes people come home together with the realization that they are all different and foreign. As Fred Wah describes in a poem:

> We are different
> from one another
> in the space between us
> a lot happens
> more than of only you or I
> .....
> One by one one can
> become the other (Wah 1980, 96)

The paradoxical transformation from "one" into "the other" is characteristic of diaspora experience; and homecoming in diaspora, in part, means the realization of the estrangement of home. Since diaspora involves a complex adjustment in which the mixture of various modes of cultural expressions has assumed an enhanced significance, the transformation from "one" to "the other" becomes inevitable. However, this does not mean a total loss of home, but simply indicates that an extra dimension of otherness or foreignness has been added to home identity; home, in "other" sense, is an interaction with a wide range of cultural passages. In addition, acknowledgments of otherness or estrangeness within home would lead to a better understanding of the self that can no longer be appropriated by means of autoreference. Cultural oth-

erness requires us to recognize and appreciate the value of alterity in identifying home outside of its conventional mode. "The demand of identification," according to Homi Bhabha, "entails the representation of the subject in the differentiating order of otherness," and "is always the return of an image of identity that bears the mark of splitting in the Other place from which it comes" (1994, 45). Since home today must be redefined across cultural and national differences, the unhomeable otherness is not only an inevitable element of inheritance, but also a notable mark of home as/in process. The inherited otherness may give rise to a process of rehoming in which the "foreign" is translated into measures capable of reinventing the self. Therefore, rehoming not only involves "the mark of splitting" that challenges the traditional models of pure culturalism and nationalism, but also, as a result of the encounter of different systems of cultural signification, activates new forms of cultural interaction that accommodate strategies for home revision by including otherness in self-recognition.

In the perspective of diaspora, home is not merely a place of origin but also a dis-placement of movement, for diasporans carry part of their home everywhere and translate it into various local discourses. The translation and transposition of home from "origin" to "elsewhere" presents new expressions of home. In terms of diasporic subject, says Kristeva, "His origin certainly haunts him, for better or for worse, but it is indeed *elsewhere* that he has set his hopes, that his struggles take place, that his life holds together today" (Kristeva 1991, 29). The paradoxical relationship between home-haunting and home-hunting as expressed in the language of "origin" and "elsewhere" is connected to the politics of belonging that is negotiated in the liminal spaces of cultural passages. Different from the enthocentric rootedness, cultural passages are deterritorialized and floating; and for that reason, the cultural code of rehoming, rather than that of home, becomes the primary signifier for the diasporic subject. In this regard, rehoming means to keep cultural continuity elsewhere and to engage in a continuous effort to write home out of the dislocation of life. What we witness is a mixture of contraditory trends: On the one hand, home has been diluted in the postmodern world; but on the other, the desire for home has been intensified ever more than before. Diasporic consciousness is hence predicated on a paradoxical process of home-haunting and home-hunting, in which diasporans may experience a radical discontinuity but, at the same time, they develop a desire for cultural reconnection—a kind of nostalgia for retrieving a home that has been lost in the past. Therefore, although absent from the cultural specificity of "this" moment, home is often retrieved or performed in the ambiguous mirror-space of recollection/reflection. As Cheng Sait Chia writes,

From the top of the hill
I see the city lights wane
in the glow of a chinook arch
My thoughts float to the East
where my village lies asleep
. . . . . .
A note long forgot
calls my vagabond soul
out of the garish hall of this alien house
to the hearth of my father's home in the East (Cheng 1981, 14, 26)

The village in the East serves as a mirror for the "vagabond soul," reflecting a longing, a yen, which gives shape and contour to a homeland that haunts the poet's heart. The paradoxical home-haunting and home-hunting seem to be a "mutual mirroring" process, to borrow a phrase from Wolfgang Iser, which "maintained the awareness of difference by simultaneously interrelating what was historically divided, be it the split between one's own cultural past and present, or between one's own culture and the alien ones to be encountered through a globally growing confrontation of cultures" (1996, 245). Mirroring "here and there," "past and present," "lost and found," home becomes a process of revisiting and remembering a plurality of experiences and connections that are reintegrated in the regions around the heart, as Evelyn Lau writes:

Once my father heard the monks sing
in a Buddhist temple. At home afterwards
he paced the living room up and down
singing their song
. . . . . .
I remember their song, he hummed it for days afterwards,
it was one of the last times
his eyes were shiny as bells, ringing
from some region around his heart. (Lau 1994, 44)

The "region around the heart" reveals geospiritual mediation related to the diasporic sense of home, which is engendered by and based on the changing mechanism of the international flows of various deterritorialized cultures. The "singing" here and the "ringing" there, on a subtle level, suggest a paradoxical inter-reference between two cultural dwellings that may cause people to review historical experience and cultural inheritance in a new perspective. The diasporic subject, says Chambers, "is perpetually required to make herself at home in an interminable discussion between a scattered historical inheritance and a heterogeneous present" (1994, 6).

To make oneself "at home" in a postcolonial and postmodern world, however, one needs to exit into other dimensions of history, where the mediation between "scattered cultural inheritance" and "heterogeneous present" opens up new spaces for cultural rehoming and establishes new linkages between cultural temporality and diasporic subjectivity. For diasporans, home identification is always related to certain moments in history and traveling through the barriers of time would give them new positions from which to reconnect their scattered inheritance. As Lydia Kwa depicts in her poem, "time travel," in effect, takes on special significance and meaning in diasporic discourse, for it suggests a journey into "another's history" where "nothing will be the same":

> now the scientists are saying
> time travel doesn't have to be
> fiction anymore
>
> like dough
> worked through by a woman's fingers
> ball stretched to a length, until the middle
> gapes with air:
>
> hole in time, through which we might
> enter another's history
> nothing will be the same again (Kwa 1994, 26)

Traveling through different temporalities, as Kwa suggests, means to move beyond the conventional constraints of time and history. The experience of diaspora produces a shift in perspective or "a hole in time" through which different cultural temporalities are re-configured against the spatial dislocation. Diaspora, therefore, should be understood not only in spatial but also in temporal terms, for it has transformed "a single time . . . into multiple spaces and tempos as the gap between words is negotiated, and histories are distilled into a specific sense of place and dwelling" (Chambers 1994, 12). In their attempt to represent the richness and complexity of (in)dwellings in diaspora, Asian diaspora poets often travel back and forth in time in order to reconfigure home at an unstable and untimely point where the past and the present meet. Relinking home with the diverse levels of scattered history hence becomes an obsessive feature of Asian diaspora poetry. "Forgive me./ I am obsessed with history / and always scratching for clues" (Kogawa 1985, 58). Diaspora, which is usually associated with the notion of cross-cultural encounter, involves change, transformation, and appropriation of cultural home in different historical temporalities. Ahmed observes that we should "consider how migration involves not only a spatial dislocation, but also a temporal dislocation: 'the past' becomes associated with a home that it is impossible to inhabit, and be inhabited by, in the present" (1999, 343).

Moving into different dimensions of history, diaspora has changed the existing paradigms of home; and as a result of the "temporal dislocation" of cultural passages, diaspora has disrupted old home structures and triggered them to take on new configurations.

The "obsession with history" embodies a longing for cultural reconnection that is embedded in the diasporic search for a home that assumes broad communal proportions in cultural memories. Communal home, observes Bonnie TuSmith, accommodates a sense of interconnection that may place "us in a different reality, a view of the world that is cosmic and holistic rather than compartmentalized" (1993, 122). This view of home is crucial for overcoming the sense of unbelonging produced by the experience of diaspora and displacement. The communal dimension of home, which suggests a transcending sense of belonging, cannot be confined to the boundaries of binarism such as "here" and "there" or "then" and "now." In diaspora discourse, community is multilocal, and the term "belonging" means cross-relation of cultures and border crossing in time and space in search for a collective. Diasporans count on community memories as a source of rehoming that suggests a kinship of rebelonging relations. In Edy Goto's story "The Dream," the protagonist, a Japanese diaspora woman in Canada, travels back in her dream to the home of her ancestors, the old Japan of a few decades ago. Wandering through the streets of old Kyoto, she looks for her great grandparents (1981, 5-8). This "traveling back" indicates a desire for home, to go back where you belong. The yen for cultural reconnection is related to an immanent bond that determines and describes one's sense of home. As Sally Ito writes,

> i am at my Teacher's house
> for my first calligraphy lesson.
> Grandmother has given me her old brush
> and her old inkstone
> and a blessing
> from her faraway Japan lips. (Ito 1996, 91)

Cultural reconnection, however, signifies the ambivalence of diasporic nostalgia that is not merely a sentimental reminiscence, but a way of reliving or performing home between the past and the present. Home, put another way, is reproduced in diaspora and shaped by the desire for cultural reconnection, which often draws on the cultural myths, tales and symbols of ancestry. The Indian diaspora poet, Uma Parameswaran, tells us:

> In our ancestral home
> Every newmoon day
> Father, as his father before him,
> in silk dhoti

vibhuti on forehead and chest
sacred thread dipped in turmeric
sat on wooden plank
facing the east
to repeat the purohit's chant
sprinkle holy water with darbha grass
and call upon our ancestors. (Parameswaran 1990, 88)

Writing about ancestry, for Asian diasporans, is a strategy of rehoming that internalizes the continual return to one's cultural origin and rebuilds home into a dialogue between "here/now" and "there/then." In this sense, home is a mode of traveling that reveals itself as caught up in the space between imagination and immanence. In response to the life of dislocation, diaspora poets attempt to bring home their own sense of belonging. In a symbolic poem, Kogawa writes:

I stand on the edg
If I enter the forest I am not
If I enter the clearing I am still lost
I move in a direction
Chanting a creed, "We belong. We belong." (Kogawa 1974, 18)

In Asian diaspora poetry, the desire to belong and to remember has been a central impulse to perform home that assumes not necessarily fixity but movement. The experience of taking home along in any "direction" the heart goes and of per-forming home on a move communicates a diasporic self-consciousness.

For Asian diaspora poets, home must be performed in a process of trans-relation among fragmented memories, which feed them the sounds, colors, and smell of a home that seems to be coeval with the totality of the experience lived and yet to be lived. In this sense, home is performable as a memory of a shared past that is already lost, but it also has the immediacy of the future characterized by the desires to have it, to embrace it, and to live through it again. Put another way, what home refers to is not a space of bygones but rather a mirror space of memories that reflects the desire for belonging and for the destination of the diasporic subject. These memories might be fragmented and partial; however, in Salman Rushdie's opinion, "it was precisely the partial nature of these memories, their fragmentation, that made them so evocative for me. The shards of memory acquired greater status, greater resonance, because they were *remains*" (1991, 12). Through these "remains," home is relocated somewhere between memory and longing, a space betwixt absence and presence. Viewed in a broad context, diaspora is both an anti-home and pro-home discourse in that it affirms the desire for

home but pluralizes home to the extent that home "disappears" in fragmentation. Tilottama Rajan subtly expresses this in a poem,

> This fragmentation is
> The iconography
> Of a Time imposed
> On shifting focuses;
> A time moving
> In sections, sections
> Held in images. (Rajan 1990, 86)

Home in fragmentation with its multiple locationalities implicates the passage of cultures that both legitimizes its production and undercuts its construction. Home, in diasporic discourse, can be considered as a proxy of both continuity and discontinuity where different cultures, languages, and values converge, or as an unstable marriage of different traditions based on a paradox of constant separation and reunion. Owing to the transrelation of different systems of cultural passages, home may take on special significance in a fragmented space where different cultural and historical elements are performed into a new "iconography" of home not in opposition but in accordance to worldly dislocation. In other words, cultural rehoming duly recognizes the fragmentation associated with difference in the articulation of diasporic identity, and includes otherness in the discourse of the self. Home, therefore, should be inclusive rather than exclusive; it contains the elements of estrangeness, includes other locations, and embraces homelessness as its extension, for the value of home today lies in its power to function as a paradoxical image that, on the one hand, expresses process, becoming, plurality and, on the other, represents connection, relation, and interaction. To rehome is to accept the many changes and transformations that have happened to what we remembered as "home."

Rehoming through cultural memories between and beyond the crevices of history acknowledges the dynamic politics of contemporality that implicates both continuity and discontinuity between the past and the present. The ambiguous contemporality inherent in diasporic discourse is often translated into expressions of an "untimely" coexistence of cultural differences. As Kogawa writes,

> once when we were rejected by each other
> (not fully rejected, not fully accepted)
> he said "We're totally different people
> what you need is a medieval knight"
> and he was a modern forward man
> scorning my reluctance to engage
> and called me untimely (Kogawa 1977, 56)

"Untimeliness" best describes a kind of contemporal home identity which, as Stuart Hall observes in a different context, is "formed at the unstable point where the 'unspeakable' stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of history, of a culture" (1987, 44). Hall's remark urges us to identify home with negotiable endurance among different time vectors and to reconsider home outside its indicative mold as the antipode to a coherent cultural constitution. Central to this uneasy untimeliness is a desire to resituate home in relation to contemporal cultural imaginations. In a self-reflexive poem, Jim Wong-Chu says,

> My father came
> from the rice fields
> to the city
> and there he stayed
>
> just yesterday
> I sat and wondered
> about all this
>
> what does it mean
>
> rice fields
> a glittering city
> I try to touch
>
> both ends
> are perhaps
> a bridge
> a causeway
> linking rainbows (Wong-Chu 1990, 102)

To rehome is not simply to go home but to undergo a constructive homing process, to set up a causeway that can "touch both ends," and to reconstruct cultural inheritances into an untimely presence of cultural contemporality with diaspora. The contemporal dwellings and indwellings of cultures are shaped by a double desire to reinhabit the past and to reintegrate the flow of time and tradition. In their attempt to establish an untimely home, diaspora poets have to negotiate with different temporalities that crisscross their ancestral "rice fields" and the modern "glittering city." To reclaim ancestral cultural fields within contemporality of historical continuity embodies a yen to accomplish home reformation without losing cultural origin:

> from green rice fields
> to glittering city
> the green and glitter merge
> steadily quietly
> outside my window
> it is raining

today the rain
nourishes rice fields
nourish the city
nourish me (Wong-Chu 1990, 102)

By merging different cultural traditions, home in diaspora activates and nourishes new frames of crosscultural interaction, which is not a simple combination of different cultural and historical elements, but rather a complex process that deterritorializes cultures for contemporal rehoming.

Rehoming carries special meanings for women diaspora poets, whose works often present a strong voice in their strife to challenge the hegemonic, totalizing discourse of male dominated ideology of home. Reversing home in their own ways, they develop a critical consciousness in diasporic discourse and adopt new approaches that embrace female-conscious counter-memories and counter-histories, questioning rather than celebrating the patriarchal values of traditional "home."

Sometimes
I feel like a female character
in an ancient forgotten Indian tale,
she used to talk a lot, all of a sudden with
some unknown curse she became dead quiet,
and her silence grew into a cancerous boil.
One dark night she went to a
deserted well among the ruins
and spoke into the well, whispered:
I've come to you as an ancient statue
forgotten, denied my stone body
I walked out of the ruins of relationships
and broke down the walls of tradition
I don't want to live death any more
There is life everywhere
Nobody knows how to live it.
No pain, now nothing hurts more:
nothing can touch me.
...and she left her words
hanging in the deserted well for ever. (Kalsey 1990, 46-47)

By examining the writings of women poets, we will gain a deep insight into the politics of home that has been complicated by the issues of gender, domesticity, and sexuality. Diaspora across different political, economic, and cultural systems, according to bell hooks, "requires the pushing against oppressive boundaries set by race, sex and class dominations" (1989, 15). In this sense, diaspora, as both dehoming and rehoming discourse, inscribes the changes and transformations of power relations, and unlocks new forms and

expressions of home. For many women diasporans, home is a contested cultural process of being and becoming. Unlike their male counterparts, women diaspora poets normally experience a twofold pressure caused not only by the experience of dislocation but also by the patriarchal values implicated in the ideology of home. As Himani Bannerji says in a poem entitled "To Sylvia Plath,"

> Sylvia,
> I was thinking about your death. It seems to me that
> you were done with fathers and sought a rest, returning
> to mother in that stove, that modern day hearth out of
> which life issues in the shape of food daily prepared, the
> brown warmth of the baked goods. The stove from its
> fixed centre draws the whole household. It is to this
> centre you returned, seeking to be lulled, to be
> regathered into that bellyshape. After all we cannot
> return anymore to the safe darkness of the mother body,
> to be rocked by the waves, barely hanging by a thin cord.
> When we emerge it is to the world of the fathers, strife
> gathers strength, we struggle and only in sleep return to
> that warm dark home. (Bannerji 1990a, 12)

It is essentially important to understand that diaspora women poets confront double challenge in their struggle to subvert the patriarchal conventions and, at the same time, to reverse home in relation to their diaspora experience. To rewrite home against "home" is a paradox that accurately expresses the challenging task faced by women poets. Many of their poems subtly describe women's difficult situation and articulate their frustrated feelings about sexuality and patriarchy. Moreover, some of them attempt to establish a counter-vision of home in their poetry, as they strive to incorporate awakened female consciousness into their efforts to rehome. Bannerji writes:

> I often think of her
> this thing called a wife
> What is she?
>
> I try to think of her
> even as I am
> a woman
> a small limited form
> marked by softness curves
> hair teeth two giving hands
> and a little resting place inside
> which expands with need (Bannerji 1990b, 3)

The study of diaspora women poetry will help us discern the deep connection between women's sense of home and their desire for freedom and inde-

pendence. Careful reading of the poems written by female diaspora writers reveals that their works, on the one hand, represent their attempt to break the constraints inherent in their sex roles, and on the other, reflect their longing for self-fulfillment and freedom beyond the "oppressive boundaries" of home. Literary creation is one of women's self-empowering devices—that is, a rehoming practice that empowers women to assert positive identity, to gain a sense of satisfaction and achievement, and to have a feeling of "being at home" in their own voice.

The voice of women diaspora poets has become increasingly noteworthy in recent years, and their writing articulates strong negotiating power in the English language. Actually, for both female and male diaspora poets, writing in English implicates empowerment, since the command of English itself is associated with power and control; and one of the notable themes of Asian diaspora writing is about reversing home in English which, in fact, must be remolded so as to express the specificity of their cultural experience.

> You've made the long
> migration through words
>
> to finally arrive, at home
> with English,
>
> a species of language
> that flocks the world over,
>
> a dominant breed. (Irie 1990, 47)

For Asian diasporans, to make English home is a complicated process where their "mother tongues" encoded with cultural memories have to be surrendered to a new form of expression:

> like you
> I too was mired in another language
> and I gladly surrendered it
> for English
>
> you too
> in time will lose your mother's tongue
>
> and speak
> at least as fluently
> as me (Wong-Chu 1991, 17)

Surrendering mother's tongue to English indicates an act of searching for appropriate discourse in a different language to express diaspora experience. According to the theorization of Abdul JanMohamed and David Lloyd, Asian diaspora poetry can be defined as "minority" or alien articulations within a major language (1990, 1-16). From their "minority" positions, nevertheless, Asian diaspora poets attempt to transcend the limitations of English by

accentuating their own cultural sensibilities in writing, which signifies as well as problematizes the socio-cultural condition of claiming home in English. As Rushdie says, "we can't simply use the language in the way the British did; that it needs remaking for our own purpose" (1991, 17). The use of English, according to Rushdie, indicates a critical consciousness, "because we can find in that linguistic struggle a reflection of other struggle taking place in the real world, struggles between the cultures within ourselves and the influences at work upon our societies. To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free" (17). Asian diaspora poets' effort, therefore, is not simply a matter of seeking to (sur-)render their stories to English, but rather to rehome and reclaim their cultural positions in a language that both denies and confirms their "arrival at home." Laiwan writes,

> The turmoil from war and opium and poverty
> made you leave your country.
> Exposed now to lands that will restrict your entry,
> you had travelled long and far to be subject to another's language,
> another's syntax. (Laiwan 1991, 58)

To be in diaspora means that one has to translate home from one language into another, from one culture into another. Home in translation, in other words, suggests a process in which home is reversed in a new "syntax" of relationships that gives diasporans an alternative position from which to reformulate their (re)visions of cultural indwelling.

The "examination of the concepts and structures we recognize as 'home' in the context of global English," Rosemary George observes, "generates a reassessment of our understanding of belonging" (1996, 1). For Asian diasporans, cultural rehoming is more than an act of making a disappearing tradition survive within a mainstream culture. It seems to be a search for another kind of home and another mode of belonging beyond the boundaries of a singular language, nation, and culture. Rienzi Crusz writes:

> Does it matter which way
> the road turns,
> there will always be another Grail,
> another son, another weeping.
> Wherever, the wind will never let go
> its secrets. Here on undivided ground,
> we'll fashion our own mythologies. (Crusz 1990, 25)

Rendering home into different languages and cultures implicates a mixable and flexible rehoming strategy that includes various combinations and revisions of cultural passages, enabling us to "fashion our own mythologies" with othering discourses and to perform home "on undivided ground" between the local and the global. Today, as cultural interchange and exchange advance

rapidly, the study of Asian diaspora poetry demands vigorous examination of the changing mechanism of the international flows of various deterritorialized cultures. In a sense, diaspora provides an opportunity to break spatio-temporal barriers and to open up new dimensions for transnational negotiation. Reversing home in diaspora, therefore, requires us to redefine the division between sameness and difference, and to redraw the home-range of a nation within the web of transnationality.

Kristeva points out, "The more so as we are all in the process of becoming foreigners in a universe that is being widened more than ever, that is more than ever heterogeneous beneath its apparent scientific and media-inspired unity" (1991, 104). Asian diaspora poetry, in this sense, can be considered as engaged in the reexamination of the concept of nationality in relation to the "unhomely" heterogeneity, for it changes and reshapes our national consciousness. What Asian diaspora poetry shows clearly is that the "otherness" and "foreignness" traditionally excluded from the national homestead have been rehomed as a productive part of new national identity. In this respect, Asian diaspora poetry presents a kind of second sight that enables us to perceive some previously unnoticeable transformations of home within a "widened" universe, which has become accessible to the increasing complexity of cross-cultural interactions. In one of her poems, Laiwan tries to resight/resite home as/in a new land across cultural differences, a land "no one could have laid claim":

> Here
> when you are told to go back to where you came from,
> tell it back to he who has said it
> This land
> where no one could have laid claim
> no one could have possession
> still it happened (Laiwan 1991, 58)

To claim "this land" is to perform and to relive home in both transnational and transcultural senses. These two aspects produce negotiational strategies for diasporans to deal with the tension between the dominant national discourse and various counter discourses, and to include the combinations and revisions of cultural passages without reducing them to rigid structures. To perform home in the age of modern diaspora, in other words, needs to break away from what Rushdie calls "a ghetto mentality" and to free ourselves from the "narrowly defined cultural frontiers" (1991, 19). When reading Asian diaspora poetry, we cannot continue to think of home as a geographical or ethnographic locality but, instead, we must reimagine and reverse home as a contemporal proxy of interrelationships, where interactions among differential cultural inheritances trans-relate various mythical, historical, political, and

psychological discourses into an accumulative entity that contests singular cultural dominance by admitting foreignness, otherness, alienated memories and dislocational experiences.

Home, therefore, is not fixed or given, but has to be redrawn and reversed in relation to the increasing transnational interactions. Diaspora suggests a loosened, decentered home structure, and opens doorways to multiple configurations and diverse expressions of home. Through the study of Asian diaspora poetry, we will have a better understanding of the changing nature of home that is not only a place of living but also a cross-cultural process of transition and becoming. Diaspora across different political, economic, and cultural systems challenges the overdetermined, canonized discourses on nation and home, and calls for the reexamination of how diaspora discourse interacts with national discourse, and how the complex strategy of local transformation is related to the global, transnational dimensions of home. Today, as Frank Davey notes, home has been relocated in the mediation between the local and the global "where one might expect to find constructions of region, province, and nation, one finds instead voyages, air flights, and international hotels. Home and family reside not within a nation but as nodes of international" (1993, 259). As a transnational practice that thrives on a process of constant resignification and recontextualization of established assumptions and meanings of home, diaspora has extended the range of home beyond national borders. Vuong-Riddick writes:

> I belong to a country
> you cannot look for
> on maps, in books, movies.
> . . . . . .
> I belong to a country of the mind
> with friends and relatives
> scattered in Canada, America, France, Australia,
> Vietnam. (Vuong-Riddick 1995, 1)

As the global interconnectedness grows rapidly, what was historically considered as national spheres has been diluted by transnational diaspora and what was remembered as "home" hence no longer exists "within a nation but as nodes of international." As part of a larger transnational discourse, Asian diaspora poetry contributes to the richness and complexity of the politics/poetics of modern rehoming. Diaspora, so to speak, has expanded both our personhood and nationhood that are no longer autoreferential to a singular homeland. "The homeland is," as Papastergiadis aptly puts it, "for a diasporic sensibility, both absent and present" (1998, xi). Exactly in this paradoxical sense, the diasporan "is fated to remain the same and the other—without forgetting his original culture but putting it in perspective to the extent of hav-

ing it not only exist side by side but also alternate with others' culture" (Kristeva 1991, 194). Side by side, differential global and local discourses translate various historical, political, and psychological presences into a process that demands and activates decentered transnational home, where both the "original culture" and the "others' culture" become dynamic home-making forces. Under such circumstances, home can no longer be formed with the ready-made names, concepts, paradigms or theories; but instead, we have to perform home through reimagining, redescribing and redefining various splitting and overlapping cultural passages. In the figural language of Asian diaspora poetry, we have found new expressions and reversions of home, which suggest not only a way of living but also a mode of thinking that transcends the discourse of nation, region and territory. Breaking away from the narrow "ghetto mentality," Asian diaspora poetry represents a reconceptualization of home as/in process that mediates between the global and the local and goes beyond territorial and temporal limitations:

> young ban yen had been thought
> italian in kathmandu, filipina in hong
> kong, eurasian in kyoto, japanese in anchorage, dismal in
> london england, hindu in edmonton, generic oriental in
> calgary, western canadian in ottawa, anglophone in
> montreal, metis in jasper, eskimo at hudson's bay
> department store, vietnamese in chinatown, tibetan in
> vancouver, commie at the u.s. border .... (Ismail 1991, 128)

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