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Not Here, Not Now: Remaking Singapore's Chinese Diaspora in *The Inlet*

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Abstract: Through an examination of characters' relationships and encounters in Claire Tham's novel *The Inlet* (2013), I argue that state narratives of racial identity and national progress may dislocate Singaporean Chinese subjects from a sense of homeliness by engendering nostalgia for an uncertainly located cultural hinterland. My analysis, which addresses the heterogeneity of class and linguistic identities among these subjects, corrects the common misidentification of the Chinese in Singapore as de facto members of a universal Chinese diaspora. Instead, my reading grounds characters in the homeland of Singapore but explores their attitudes toward social and spatial elements that produce a feeling of cultural alienation and challenge their sense of national belonging. In this way, I assert that the pressure to constantly reinvent themselves can unmoor Singaporean Chinese from their psychic and physical landscape, especially amid recent immigration from China as well as historical and ongoing urban redevelopment. This process of reinvention leads to a nostalgic yet anxious subjectivity that characters—and critics—may confuse with belonging to a global Chinese diaspora.

Keywords: Singapore, diaspora, nostalgia, nationalism, race

I. Introduction

The term "diaspora" is often invoked to describe the Chinese in Singapore, who are assumed to be part of a global Chinese diaspora—Lisa Lowe, for example, writes of both Chinese immigrants to the United States and "the Chinese diaspora in other parts of Asia, such as

Malaysia or Singapore" (66). Such phrasing constitutes an acceptance of a claim made across diaspora studies, such as William Safran's argument that "[t]he far-flung Chinese expatriate communities also constitute genuine diasporas" ("Diasporas" 89). Even Safran's concession that there may be less "diaspora consciousness" among the Chinese in Singapore rests on his assumption that the Singaporean Chinese have managed "to recreate a Chinese community outside the original homeland, but with more appealing political and economic conditions" ("Diasporas" 89). He presumes a continuity, rather than a rupture, in the historical movement of people from China to Singapore. However, the placement of all ethnic Chinese under the banner of "expatriates" or the framework of diaspora—which assumes a longing for a single motherland—is inadequate as an explanation for national alienation among Chinese people in what is the only majority-Chinese state outside East Asia. Instead, the inability on the part of autochthonous Singaporean Chinese to recognise Singapore as home, alongside Chinese immigrants' engagement with a Singaporean ethos, often provokes a misidentification of rootless Singaporean Chinese as part of a Chinese diaspora.

Today, engagement with diasporic identification by some Singaporean Chinese may appear entrenched enough that, in 2018, Amy Qin, China correspondent for *The New York Times*, wrote an article that included Singaporean Chinese in what she called "the vast Chinese diaspora." Yet the Singaporean Chinese presence, which dates primarily to nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonial migration, troubles conventional narratives of diaspora. Most notably, it evades some of the fundamental criteria for diaspora enumerated by Safran. For example, Singaporean Chinese, far from ranking among the world's "expatriate minority communities" (Safran, "Diasporas" 83), have been a demographic majority in Singapore since the British colonial period (Yeoh, *Contesting Space* 317). This fact suggests that they cannot meet Safran's requirement that they "feel partly alienated and insulated" from wider society by virtue of minoritisation ("Diasporas" 83).

Claire Tham's novel *The Inlet* (2013) takes up the question of how Singaporean Chinese identity is experienced by a heterogeneous racial group. The novel is broadly based on the fatal drowning of migrant

worker Li Hong Yan in 2010 and opens by following the character of Wang Ling, a dissatisfied lab technician in China who decides within the span of the first chapter to move to Singapore to work in a karaoke lounge. The story then shifts to two years later, when her naked body is found in a gated community. Ling's death ruffles feathers in high society because the pool in which she drowns belongs to property magnate Willy Gan, with whose nephew, Jasper, she spends her last night.

With the narration moving back and forth in time but climaxing in Ling's last moments, *The Inlet* traces the investigation into her death through the eyes of police officer Cheung Fai; his estranged wife, Li Ching, a crime reporter; and Ling's former lover Min Liang, a self-made man. Other characters include Cheung Fai's ambitious superior, Winston; Ling's boss, Ms. Fung; the philandering tycoon Willy; and Willy's long-suffering wife, Theresa. The full dramatis personae thus present a cross-section of the racial category of the Chinese in Singapore: autochthonous and immigrant; working to upper class; Sinophone and Anglophone; Christian, agnostic, and folk religionists—all of them also divided by ethnolinguistic and regional origin.

Although the novel's cast runs the gamut of the kinds of Chinese people who could be found in Singapore in 2010, that the novel's plot is precipitated by the death of a lounge hostess from China immediately casts the presence of new immigrants—rather than any other type of social difference—as disruptive. Angelia Poon observes that "[a] recurring preoccupation in Claire Tham's writing has been the close relationship between language and class divisions in modern polyglot Singapore society" (422). *The Inlet* takes up this problem of division in light of how recent immigration from other parts of Asia has catalysed ethnic tensions: immigrants cannot be neatly sorted into the state's socio-legal categories of race, a taxonomic frustration that geographer Brenda Yeoh predicted would happen as early as 2004 ("Cosmopolitanism" 2438–41). Such tensions occur despite the fact that one aim of Singaporean immigration policy has been to preserve the country's racial demographics, including its Chinese majority (Yang et al. 15).

Understanding diaspora and Singaporean Chinese subjects' relationship to this concept is therefore critical to reading *The Inlet* precisely

because cultural theorists often take the community's membership in a global Chinese diaspora for granted. Over the past two decades, scholars of diaspora have increasingly moved away from definitional approaches, which Lily Cho argues "reduce diasporas and diasporic communities to the status of objects" (14). Yet while I recognise the salience of the subjective approach, the abandonment of definition must be undertaken with caution because there are ramifications to stripping the term of objective meaning, and it is on definitional grounds that I challenge the applicability of diaspora to Singaporean Chinese as a whole. For instance, if a myth of return is fundamental to a diaspora, as Safran suggests ("Diasporas" 83), the next question is whether China constitutes the natural emotional centre of ethnic Chinese everywhere, Qin's careful quotation marks around "motherland" notwithstanding—or whether, as Sau-ling C. Wong cautions, situating cultural works as diasporic runs the risk of both facilitating state nationalism and eroding pan-ethnic or multicultural solidarity (40). Indeed, the label of diaspora can be co-opted and wielded rhetorically for political ends.[1] For example, Aaron Koh, analysing early-2000s Singaporean state rhetoric, argues that ideological efforts "to historicize the genealogy of Singapore as a nation of diasporas" are deployed to justify an open-door neoliberal immigration policy (235) that dislocates even autochthonous subjects from Singapore and ultimately reduces both local and foreign workers to economic agents. Similarly, Aihwa Ong argues that diasporic identification can be both "political rhetoric" (*Neoliberalism* 60) and "an ethnographic term of self-description" (62) when it is mobilised by "elite diasporic subjects" who then separate their ethnic identities from a localised societal structure (60). She and Donald Nonini also note that diasporic sentiments can be manipulated among global Chinese communities to engender a transnational "ethnic chauvinism [that] feeds larger global antagonisms expressed by reactionary attachments" ("Toward a Cultural Politics" 328).

Granted, the rhetorical deployment of diaspora can be an act of political agency and even of protest. Diasporic identification destabilises the hegemony of the nation-state since, as Eddie Tay observes, "[t]o invoke the condition of diaspora is to testify that one is not at home within

the socio-political space of the nation and hence to reconsider issues of identity and representation" (110). But Singaporean Chinese identification with or against diaspora has, again, historically depended on a binary identification with or against the ancestral China, which is no longer as applicable, especially post-independence. Even as a fraction of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya threw their weight behind China's pro- and anti-revolutionary factions at the turn of the twentieth century (Duara 49), members of the Straits Chinese elite, early settlers in the region, had already developed identities as creolised subjects who were less "China-oriented" (Hung 261). Although Celina Hung persists in calling such Straits Chinese "diasporic subjects" (261), I am intrigued by why the spiritual successors of these Chinese subjects are drawn to participating in diaspora. Indeed, while I argue that the concept of diaspora is misplaced in describing the Singaporean Chinese relationship with China, the "conditions of its formation," as Cho describes a consciousness of diasporic subjectivity (21), still deserve attention because of how they pertain to intra-ethnic relations within a heterogenous racial group and how they illuminate a changing sense of place in Singapore in the two centuries that have elapsed since a Chinese immigrant presence was established in the country.

If Singaporean Chinese are not oriented toward a homeland in China, how, then, can they be oriented toward diaspora? As scholars of diaspora note, diaspora entails an unhomely feeling. What Hung calls the "continuous self invention [*sic*]" of the Straits Chinese (261)—in other words, the redevelopment of the self—can, I argue in the case of contemporary subjects, be interpreted as a result not of their having left China but of the constant redevelopment of the island of Singapore, which impedes Singaporeans' ability to identify it as home. Singapore can be said to exist, as per its national narrative, in a state of perpetual crisis (Heng and Devan 351); this narrative, which demands a frequent refreshment of the population amid the demographic crisis of an inadequate birth rate, mandates and precipitates a constant redevelopment of the self. Because physical redevelopment disrupts citizens' relationships with place—a phenomenon that Yeoh and Lily Kong characterise as nostalgia (57)—their experience of the nation becomes marked by the

not-here and the not-now, which constitutes, to borrow a phrase from Kim Butler, the "temporal-historical" dimension of diaspora (192).

But, despite some degree of unhomely feeling among Singaporean Chinese, another challenge to configuring them as diasporic stems from the fundamental notion, "based on the Jewish diaspora as a paradigmatic one," that diaspora entails collective identification as a community—not just a group culturally distinct from the rest of society but one that is also marked by "ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity, which reach across political boundaries" (Safran, "The Jewish Diaspora" 37). Such a criterion of supposed collectivism is implicitly frustrated in Singapore, both by a self-serving individualism that sociologist Teo You Yenn attests is cultivated by Singaporean state institutions (171), and the state's unstable construction of Chinese racial identity. As my reading of several scenes in Tham's novel will show, encounters between Chinese characters often fail to establish common ground and are troubled by heterogeneity and difference. As such, *The Inlet* finds Singaporean Chinese subjects moving in and out of diasporic subjectivity—that is, they show a variable sense of national alienation from Singapore, which is accompanied by shifting orientation toward and away from Chineseness. These movements through unhomeliness expose the true crisis that underlies their belonging to a supposed Chinese diaspora. Their sense of a diasporic identity is not a political identification with another nation-state but a self-contradictory dialectic of racialised nationalism, the urgencies of which are intensified by social redevelopment.

II. Encountering the Other

Just as Ernesto J. Martínez suggests that queerness can be illuminated by focusing on how heterosexual characters perceive queer subjects (227), the experience of diaspora in *The Inlet* is a relational exercise. The multiplicity of Chineseness depicted in the novel—which speaks to the constructed nature of Chinese identity in Singapore—also recreates, through Ling, the historical encounter between the Straits Chinese elite and the later wave of immigrants that Hung argues pushed Straits Chinese to ask "how their collective sense of self would fit into the

current state of discourse about the 'Chinaman,' or 'being Chinese' at all in a British colony" (263). These encounters produce variable experiences of diasporic subjectivity.

One such encounter takes place in Ling's workplace. The nightclub, Chungking Express, is introduced with a garish description: its name is "scrawled in hot-pink neon lights across the front window" (Tham 60). Here, the immigrant Ling, a country girl who had earlier moved from her home village to an unspecified Chinese city that was neither Beijing nor Shanghai, is employed by Ms. Fung, a Singaporean citizen originally from Hong Kong.

But it is Cheung Fai's social interaction with Ms. Fung and his response to the club setting that offer a telling example of how the shared cultural ground of co-ethnics can prompt diasporic subjectivity to emerge—albeit briefly. After Ms. Fung's first police interview with Cheung Fai at the nightclub, he takes her to the mortuary. He helps her light a cigarette in defiance of anti-smoking rules—an act that immediately lends an intimate, illicit quality to the scene. He then asks if her lounge was named "after the Wong Kar Wai movie," to which she replies, "as though any other answer would have been heretical, 'But of *course*'" (Tham 70; emphasis in original), establishing an expectation that Cheung Fai would have recognised the name of the lounge. The reference to Hong Kong filmmaker Wong Kar Wai in a Singaporean Anglophone novel and the familiarity of both characters with his work exemplify cultural products' transnational travel. Both characters were born in pre-1997 Hong Kong; she takes their shared birthplace as the basis of a presumed relationship, and with her statement of "of *course*" reasserts a privileged social position as cultural insider, even though he is interrogating her. Yet even before these characters identify themselves to each other explicitly as Hong Kong-born Cantonese, they already derive a shared ethnicity from their mutual awareness of Wong Kar Wai films, or what Ong identifies as Chinese subjects' "sense of a broad cultural public that is dependent on TV, films, magazines, and videotapes" (*Flexible Citizenship* 161). In fact, as ethnic Cantonese, the two characters belong to a smaller ethnolinguistic group within Singapore's mainly

Hokkien or Teochew (Minnanese) Chinese landscape. Ms. Fung makes overtures to Cheung Fai based on this linguistic heritage, referring to Cantonese as "our" language, in opposition to Mandarin (Tham 66).

Not originally from Singapore, nor Minnanese, Ms. Fung is an immigrant who still identifies culturally with Hong Kong. As a character who is therefore affiliated with Chinese diaspora, she expects a similar diasporic consciousness from Cheung Fai—a supposed co-ethnic and compatriot—that he lacks. The delight of their mutual recognition evaporates in the face of their individual understandings of being Singaporean, Chinese, and even Cantonese.[2] Indeed, Ms. Fung's identification with Cheung Fai is restricted to their Cantonese-speaking identity since she immigrated to Singapore as an adult after marrying a citizen whereas Cheung Fai came over as a child. Therefore, although they both hold Singaporean citizenship, Ms. Fung downplays their shared nationality; when referring to the obliteration of non-Mandarin Chinese languages by the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) administration, she distances herself from the nation-state by saying, "*Your* government has done a fantastic job of suppressing the soul of the Chinese people" (Tham 66; emphasis added), which describes the government as Cheung Fai's rather than her own. Her identification of southern Chinese languages—rather than Mandarin, or a cultural marker besides language—as "the soul of the Chinese people" challenges the state's self-appointment as racial arbiter even while it cedes ground to the state's racial constructions, which determine mother tongue as "an ascribed language based on one's father's ethnicity (which is also an ascribed category, based on one's father's race)" (Bokhorst-Heng and Wee 164).

Confirming the central role of language in determining race in Singapore and drawing on two distinct English- and Chinese-language literary traditions, critics Sim Wai-chew and Poon provide sharply divergent readings of *The Inlet*. Sim views the novel as a pro-Anglophone assimilation morality tale that demands "high levels of deracination" through cultural and linguistic homogenisation (185). His assessment contrasts with that of Poon, who describes the narrative as a "hard, clear-sighted and cynical" critique of privilege (424) and responds to Sim's analysis by stating that, "while Tham presents the world at the

end of the novel as one where an Anglophone elite thrives . . . , she does this *cynically*" (431; emphasis in original). Hampered by the assumption that "narrative art glosses description as prescription" (Sim 186), Sim misreads Cheung Fai's dwindling Cantonese ability as proof that—based on his putatively heroic status—"competency in English trumps other considerations" in Singapore (186). But Cheung Fai's response to the turn that his conversation with Ms. Fung takes is, in fact, confusion over her use of the shared "our" to describe their relationship with Cantonese. He "wonder[s] whether to disabuse her, to let her know that the accident of his birth meant nothing to him" (Tham 66) then privately muses on his inability to communicate in Cantonese with his mother, who is also forgetting her mother tongue. Cheung Fai pushes back against Ms. Fung's categorisation of the PAP government as his by retorting that gerrymandering and walkovers (that is, default electoral wins when parliamentary seats go uncontested) have deprived him of ever having the chance to vote. When Ms. Fung seizes on this demographic inexperience as another commonality—she too has never voted in her two decades of citizenship—she expresses it by commenting that it is a "[s]trange sort of democracy *you* have here" (67; emphasis added), with the use of the second person once more indicating her disidentification with Singapore and rejection of their shared nationality. Indeed, the tension between Cheung Fai and Ms. Fung points to the diversity that exists even within the ostensibly easy class-based division of the Chinese community into Anglophones (like the "small group of pro-British, English-speaking upper and upper middle classes" among the Straits Chinese [Hung 274]) and Sinophones.

Depicted romantically in Tham's text, Cantonese is a social outlier—a *real* mother tongue, the novel implies, in contrast with the state's imposition of either Mandarin or English. As Cantonese oldies play over the sound system in Ms. Fung's nightclub, Cheung Fai recalls the tunes as "the kind of music that his mother had listened to when he was growing up, music that seemed to him then sleepy and slow and lush with regret" (Tham 64). He associates the language, multiple times, with the mother he is slowly losing to neurodegenerative disease—a plot detail that establishes a recurrent link between language, moral failure for those

who cannot speak their so-called mother tongues, and physical loss. The nightclub setting would thus seem to fall within the translational logics of diaspora that Tan Eng Kiong proposes, in which Sinophone Singapore, based on a wider definition of Sinophony that also includes the marginal Chinese languages, constitutes "place- and time-based sites to revise and form new subjectivities" (35). In line with such a framework, the meeting in Chungking Express offers Cheung Fai and Ms. Fung the potential to establish a diasporic sense of collective identity. But the possibility of communal diasporic identification is then subverted because the characters' connection is partial and ends at the tip of the tongue, going no further than their shared Cantonese linguistic heritage. Contrary to Sim's interpretation, the emphasis in Ms. Fung's scenes may be not so much on the inexorable dominance of the English language as on the many ways of being Chinese that compete with the state's racial definitions.

The relational nature of Singaporean Chinese diasporic identity is cultivated not only by the marginalisation of minor Chinese languages like Cantonese but also by the linguistic split between English and the dominant Chinese language of Mandarin. For example, when Ling's bereaved parents touch down at Changi Airport, her father gives a statement to the media scrum that is incomprehensible to Theresa:

> Theresa turned to the Chinese man next to her. "What did he say?"
>
> He translated and looked at her oddly. "Are you Singaporean?"
>
> "I'm English-educated," Theresa said pleasantly, as though this were a disease. (Tham 246–47)

Theresa and the stranger are, like Ling's parents, characterised as racially Chinese, yet the smattering of group markers—"Chinese," "Singaporean," "English-educated"—scores the scene with a sense of division rather than a common background, identity, or purpose. The narration draws a link between Anglophony and pathology with the description "as though this were a disease," highlighting how the economic privilege of access to English can run aground in the face of a neo-Confucian disavowal of Anglophony.[3] Thus, the brief exchange between

Theresa and the unknown man—a minor character who, again in keeping with Singapore's postcolonial social taxonomy, is identified solely by his race—raises the question of whether, in terms of separation from the anchor of ancestral culture, the deracinated Anglophone Chinese are more diasporic than their Sinophone counterparts or less so because they hold the cultural capital of an English education and are sheltered from one material form of social inequality. In any case, Theresa's inability to understand Mandarin is used by the unnamed Chinese man to question her citizenship in a way that conflates ethnolinguistic, racial, and national identity under Singapore's racial regime.

The novel also foregrounds racial difference beyond the issue of language. Cheung Fai, surveying Ling's corpse, deduces that she is "probably East Asian from her skin tone" (Tham 21); Sanjana, Jasper's wealthy teenage neighbour and an immigrant from India, thinks that Ling "could have been Chinese, or Korean, or Mongolian" (57); other characters define themselves either in relation or opposition to her Chineseness. Fazil, Cheung Fai's Malay deputy, quips to his boss: "You all look the same to me. Mainland Chinese, local Chinese," but the free indirect discourse that follows belies this statement by highlighting his awareness that "the whole island was overrun" with "millions of newcomers . . . all speaking new languages and dialects" that exceed his grasp of Malay, English, and Hokkien (296–97). In other words, the text marks this new Chinese population as distinct even to the point of phenotypical, biological, and ontological difference. Other characters' relationships with Ling—attraction, aversion, ambivalence—also come to stand in for their relationship with Chinese nationals and the idea of China itself. This phenomenon is on display from the first moment that Cheung Fai, at the crime scene where Ling's body is found, thinks not of the scene at hand but of a one-time mistress whom he and later Li Ching can name only as "the China girl" (31).

To be fair, even though Ling's corpse turns up in the first chapter, the novel's extensive flashbacks provide her character with substantial interiority. Still, she is ultimately stuck in the narrative function of a sexual and plot object—evidence of what Sim, citing both "the China girl" and the presence of a South Asian labourer who attacks Li Ching

in the rainforest, calls "exclusivist inflections surrounding certain figures consigned to the margins of the text" (188). Ling is thus shaped by the xenophobic stereotypes of the characters around her, even as she exists as the novel's sole and perpetual representative of all migrant Chinese. Sim complains that "the novel's liberalism is relatively intolerant" (185), and the novel bears this criticism out: Tham is much more interested in the social set-up of the autochthonous Singaporean Chinese than in the Chinese-national subjects who ultimately exist only as their obverse and the Other.

III. Empty Spaces

The uneasy position of Chinese nationals in Singaporean society underscores the notion that, for the Singaporean Chinese, their homeland may not lie in China. Indeed, the concept of home cannot be securely fixed in Singapore; Tay identifies, in Singapore and Malaysia, a discomfort with postcolonial "state-sponsored discourses of nationalism . . . built on ambivalence" to the point that "one cannot forget that the nation as home is also a site of ideological contestation" (92). At the same time, historian Loh Kah Seng, building on Yeoh and Kong's study of nostalgia, finds that Singapore's state narrative of progress has constrained the ability of the citizens who were moved from urban slums into public projects to honestly articulate their feelings around home and housing policy. He concludes that "the sense of self is also couched in an acute awareness of the social and personal price that development has exacted, which has led to a loss of agency" (19). Similar to the process of "diasporization" that Hung discusses in relation to the Straits Chinese, in which identity "is most acutely felt and shaped at moments of displacement" (263), the instability of home can morph into dissatisfaction, even as it presents opportunities for the redevelopment of the self. In this context, Tham's novel uses the theme of development and the imagery of emptiness to critique the state-driven narrative of national progress, which unmoors residents from locating home either in Singapore or abroad.

The public housing estates into which Loh's interviewees moved constitute a source of nationalist pride, by virtue of housing most of the nation's citizens, and are a distinctive landscape feature in Singapore,

both physically and ideologically. They serve as a psychic hinterland—characterised by former prime minister Goh Chok Tong as the "heartlands"—for the city-state (Tan, "Sexing Up Singapore" 411). But redevelopment—such as the changing of a public flat for costlier private housing—can involve aspirational transformation and mobility, and the novel's characters reinvent themselves in line with the national call for constant upgrading. There is an emotional investment in the process of home upgrading, which is compounded by advertising rhetoric that urges aspiration toward the private market in which Willy deals. The attractive force of this capitalist narrative of progress is strong enough that even—or especially—those who know how the sausage gets made can still be caught up in its spell; the orphaned boy Jasper, taken in by his uncle Willy, becomes the namesake for the project that is Willy's pride and joy (Tham 98). Although the adult Jasper will later disavow "Jasperville" as a nouveau riche monstrosity, the text's suggestion that he never quite recovers from his role in the process—which is described in traumatic terms, with the land reduced to "raw, reddish-brown earth, churned and pitted as though raked through by a giant's angry hands" (89)—presents a continued national complicity, naturalised as faith ("no reason to doubt" [98]), in the mechanism of capital transformation.

That the novel uses characters' types of housing as shorthand for their socio-economic status is a practice instantly legible to the Singaporean reader familiar with how a cultural hierarchy of housing types is validated by policymakers, who use the number of rooms in a domicile and whether it is public or privately leased and an apartment or a house as a proxy for welfare means-testing. Min Liang's trajectory from working-class youth to oil trader to victim of the global financial crisis is thus shown by how he sells his apartment to feed his gambling addiction, with the text contrasting "its glass-walled solitude after work" with the "narrow little room in the HDB [Housing Development Board] flat owned by his sister and brother-in-law" (112). The narrator adds: "One view of his current situation—the typical Singaporean view—was that his life was a wreck. Through another view—the zen view—his life had been pared down to a level of liberating austerity" (112). In contrasting the two views, the narrator highlights a narrative ingrained in the

Singaporean psyche that exhorts and valorises linear progression. The supposed "typical Singapore view" calls for a redevelopment of the self through the redevelopment of property, in a ceaseless upward movement from subsidised HDB flat to private apartment to house. Similarly, Ling's migration from the "small, mud-walled house" of her childhood (269) is a transnational extension of that logic, which presents the difference between Singaporean Chinese lives and the conditions in their ancestral country of origin as proof of both Singaporean progress and Singaporean exceptionalism.

In the end, however, the transactional emotional ties that the state cultivates between citizens and their living environments, the "typical Singaporean view," cut both ways. Jasperville is demolished to make way for an even newer project during the boom of the mid-2000s, on the cusp of the financial crisis. Willy, mourning the tangible destruction of his vision, lands himself in a drunk-driving wreck on its former site (110). Min Liang's downward spiral from apartment to HDB flat occurs two pages later. The textual juxtaposition of the ruins of Jasperville and the ruins of Min Liang's life highlights the precarity of development in Singapore.

Meanwhile, Ling, the daughter of the mud-walled old world, is prompted to reminisce about her childhood home after walking out of the casino where Min Liang indulges his addiction—a casino that the novel describes as "located within a vast, high-vaulted, chilly, high-end shopping mall, corridors of luxury goods stretching into infinity" (269). The paragraph that follows the description of the eerily deserted mall features an account of an out-of-body sensation that Ling first experienced as a child. Her mother would break the dissociation by letting her feel the difference between the sensation of dreaming and her awareness of "their small, mud-walled house" (269) with its windows, doors, pots, and pans. The text implies that the mud-walled home was real in a way that the casino cannot be, thus reinforcing its portrayal of international capital as illusory and Singapore's pursuit thereof as futile.[4]

The illusory nature of these temples of capital imply that, in contrast to their artifice, there is, somewhere out there, a real, authentic Singapore that was left behind. If, as Poon argues, *The Inlet* is

cynical in its outlook, then Cheung Fai's boss, Winston—a senior police officer who parrots the party line while in pursuit of political power—illustrates how internalisation of the narrative of redevelopment leaves citizens emotionally constrained. Winston, who before his Oxford days went by his birth name of Jui Kwan, grew up on a Choa Chu Kang pig farm that was seized by the government when he was twelve—a tale of humble origins that he trots out as a rags-to-riches success story when he goes for a sit-down with a Cabinet member to assess his electoral chances with the ruling party. Winston, who associates the pigs at the feeding trough with "sheer indignity" and "a brutish subsistence world" (Tham 172), glibly tells the minister that "[i]t's a way of life that's gone for good" (171) and rehabilitates his actual feelings about the government's acquisition of his father's livelihood—"wild, sweet, treacherous relief that he will not, after all, have to take over the farm" (172)—by falling back on propagandistic reasoning: "We're a very small country. With urbanisation, land constraints—I understand the need to be pragmatic" (172). Ingeniously, Winston repurposes the communitarian trappings of the state narrative to suit his individual ambitions, in parallel with how the slum residents interviewed by Loh renegotiated their relationships with the past to meet the demands of the same narrative.

Yet those interviewees balanced nostalgia with "genuine support" for the state (Loh 16), whereas Winston's negotiation of history—which shows how state discourse can be redeployed for selfish, rather than patriotic, ends—indirectly disrupts assumptions about the truth of historiographical rhetoric as lying entirely with either citizens or the state. Winston remembers covering up his satisfaction over losing his childhood home to placate his broken-hearted farmer father:

> In the evenings, the teenage Winston always knew where to find him—standing in the middle of the scrubby piece of open land next to their block of flats which the neighbourhood boys used for football, poking at the ground with a stick. "Cheap soil, this," his father would say with a frown, "nothing will grow in this." Winston would nod, not having the heart to

> point out that it didn't matter because the land was state land earmarked for public housing. (Tham 173)

On one hand, Winston, who in his constant lip service to party doctrine performs the role of the oracle of state ideology, tells himself that it does not matter that the land cannot sustain crops. He privately reinterprets and recreates the state preference for industrial over agrarian production in its postcolonial rush to develop. On the other hand, his father's choice of words in stating that "nothing will grow" negates the language of development because it implies that public housing does not constitute growth. The conflict between Winston's conception of history and the state narrative exemplifies the contestations over place and time that provoke anxiety in Singaporean subjects.

IV. No Place Like Home

In putting forward a theory of transnational Chinese modernity, Ong and Nonini suggest that "there are multiple subjective senses of Chineseness that appear to be based not on the possession of some reified Chinese culture but on a propensity to seek opportunities elsewhere" among other factors ("Chinese Transnationalism" 26). Though they stop short of saying that this restless, migratory quality is intrinsically Chinese, their argument still evokes—even flirts with reifying—the concept of an inherent, shared Chineseness. Yet the restlessness experienced by the characters of *The Inlet* is located not in Chinese ethnicity but in the specific social conditions of Singapore—a technique of localisation that Ong employs when she names "tensions between transnational networks and local ethnic situations in particular locations" (*Neoliberalism* 60). Despite Ling and Li Ching's vastly different stations in life (one a Chinese villager turned lounge singer, the other a Protestant Anglophone heiress in Singapore), *The Inlet* makes these two characters foils for one another, even though they never meet. Unlike how Ms. Fung and Cheung Fai are able to find some cultural continuities, the gulf between the ways in which Ling and Li Ching are Chinese—cultural and linguistic, racial and national—suggests that there is not necessarily any shared understanding of the accident of descent that manages

to span two nation-states. What the two women do have in common is a desire for more—the Chinese restlessness conjured up by Ong and Nonini—but this yearning is refracted through individual motivations that the text presents as metonymic of their birthplaces, contradicting a unifying view of Chineseness.

In one scene, Li Ching goes out on a run around her parents' home on the edge of the rainforest and meditates on "[t]he Singaporean dream of migrating to Perth, Australia, for wide, open spaces and cheaper cars and housing" (Tham 159). The deliberately oxymoronic juxtaposition of an ironically, incoherently defined "Singaporean dream" and Australia calls to mind the brevity and artificiality of "Singaporean" as a post-1965 national identity; yet in keeping with government rhetoric, Li Ching conceives of emigration as "borderline treasonous, a moral failing" (159). Her objection to Perth, however, is founded on how "nothing, in her opinion, was more boring than Perth except possibly watching golf on television" (159), a bourgeois judgement quite at odds with the government's argument that departure expresses a lack of faith in its rule and deprives the state of emigrants' economic production. As Li Ching continues on her run, she is distracted by the sight of a tree that has been chopped down to make way for "a giant hoarding in a patch of open land, promising *Gracious Urban Living in the City*" (159; emphasis in original). The novel presents two emotional reactions in quick succession: "Her first thought was, was it an offence to deface a hoarding? Her second was that the juxtaposition of 'gracious' and 'urban' was an oxymoron that affected her like a fingernail being drawn across a blackboard" (159).

The text presents an immediate contradiction between Li Ching's idle dream of Australia's "wide, open spaces" and her visceral response to the "yawning gap" (159) that was produced by the felling of the rain tree. Aside from the contrast the texts draws between Singapore and Perth, however, the next marker to appear in the narrative that associates Singaporean identity with landscape is the billboard. The source of offense for Li Ching—the supposed oxymoron of its tagline adjectives—suggests a rejection of urban life, even though she still enjoys the semi-rural setting of her parental mansion. Just as her opposition to the supposed boredom of Perth is born out of an elite, blasé attitude,

her resentment of the billboard stems from an aesthetic objection to lexical choices rather than any principle impelling political action on her part. At the same time, the billboard's mantra is no less emblematic of Singapore's ideology of incessant, autotelic redevelopment than the impotent fantasy Li Ching generates in response when she imagines upgrading from the concrete and steel of Singapore to "wide, open spaces" in another land.

Just as Li Ching observes a gap between the Singaporean reality of redevelopment and the Singaporean dream of Australia, Ling also resists being typified by nationality, in her case during a scene in which Min Liang takes her to a resort island in neighbouring Malaysia. While he goes diving in the open sea, Ling strikes up a conversation with the skipper—a "shirtless Malay youth with fake Gucci sunglasses" (236)—in a language that the text twice takes care to specify as English. It is also a language that is highly unlikely to be the mother tongue of either character. Via their exchange, Ling reworks the typical colonial settler-indigenous encounter, although she does so as part of the most recent generation of migrants or newcomers rather than in the originary crucible of colonial contact:

> The skipper says in English, "Where are you from?"
>
> "China."
>
> "But you live in Singapore now?" She nods. "A lot of foreigners in Singapore," he continues.
>
> "I suppose so."
>
> "I hear Singaporeans are not happy about it."
>
> She's tried to understand this unhappiness from the perspective of someone from a monocultural country with a history and tradition stretching back thousands of years. At times, that history and tradition can seem stifling, crushing. She thinks that, personally, she would prefer a place where the identity is still evolving. A place, in other words, more like herself.
>
> She shrugs. "They are not happy about a lot of things."
>
> He grins; he has very white teeth. "They want too much, that's the problem."

She finds this a ludicrous observation. "What's wrong with that?"

"Oh, I forgot," he says. "You're from China." (237–38)

Despite their differences, Li Ching and Ling share the same aversion to being tethered to a specific place: Li Ching transfers her desire from Singapore onto Australia, while Ling shifts hers from China onto Singapore. Moreover, the text stresses that Ling is looking for "[a] place, in other words, more like herself," phrasing that creates distance between her and her birthplace while drawing new affinities between her and Singapore. As a transnational migrant, Ling locates a sense of home in Singapore at precisely the moment that she is named as being "from China," while Li Ching rejects what she dubs the "Singaporean dream" as a "treasonous" fantasy that therefore, in defiance of the term, cannot be Singaporean. The texts contain another contradiction that parallels the equation of the "Singaporean Dream" with emigration to Australia: the skipper identifies her desire for more as quintessentially Chinese, even though Ling has just realised that she falls short of a presumedly Chinese perspective, which is that of "someone from a monocultural country." The narration in *The Inlet* works hard, as per Sim's criticism, to counterfactually essentialise China as "a monocultural country" crushed by millennia of tradition. However, the nonsensical exchange between Ling and the skipper—in whose indigenous mouth, just as in Fazil's, the text places the remark that Singapore no doubt comprises "[a] lot of foreigners"—shows how national belonging and diasporic disidentification, at work in Ling's tortuous mental gymnastics about Chinese perspective and her alignment with Singapore as a place "more like herself," confound both social expectations and state exigencies.

Additionally, Li Ching and Ling's understanding of what being Singaporean entails goes beyond the postcolonial industrialisation drive and the ambivalence it produces; it extends into the territory of the precolonial. Both the rainforest and the sea are the borderless, archipelagic precursors of the densely populated city-state that blur the division between Singapore and the rest of maritime Southeast Asia. The rainforest, specifically, is viewed with suspicion in the colonial episteme:

Kenneth Paul Tan writes that the jungle is "primal, fertile and dangerous" and calls it "the abject maternal that highly developed Singapore must, but cannot fully, exclude from its urbanised, industrialised, hyper-individualistic and legal-rationalistic society" ("Pontianaks" 158). In *The Inlet*, these precolonial remnants are subjected to increasing development—whether the real estate project that Li Ching finds or the tourism industry in which Ling participates—because they are excluded, in their original state, from incorporation into the concept of home.

Given the failed prospects of reconciliation, an assumed common racial interest among Singaporean Chinese is insufficient to engender mutual recognition between them—whether across national boundaries, as with Li Ching and Ling, or within them, as with Ms. Fung and Cheung Fai. While *The Inlet* proposes that social and spatial relations can prompt a sense of unhomely alienation that leads to diasporic subjectivity, it is not enough for characters to experience flashes of cultural alienation; diasporic subjectivity would also require conscious dislocation from the national project of Singapore as would-be home. Indeed, Cho, writing that "one becomes diasporic through a complex process of memory and emergence" (21), suggests that the markers that form diaspora are threefold: "homeland, memory, loss" (15). In line with Yeoh and Kong's point that "[o]n a personal level, not only do places change, people change places frequently in Singapore" (62), *The Inlet* demonstrates that, though its characters' psychic rupture may be displaced onto a Chinese ethnic identity, the absent "homeland" is not China but the cultural hinterland of a forgotten Singapore.

Near the close of the novel, Min Liang, who has begun driving a taxi for a living, heads to Tiong Bahru, where he grew up, for a late meal at "a famous coffee-shop in the area," only to find that it, like other landmarks of his youth, "seemed to have vanished overnight":

> Experimentally, he sniffed the air but caught only whiffs of freshly roasted coffee from the cafes and smart restaurants that had mushroomed in the area. Among the expatriates and the not-so-youngish but modish people who now thronged the streets, the old people who'd lived here forever—the bent old

> ladies dragging their wire-mesh baskets behind them, the old men in their singlets and baggy shorts stacking their cardboard boxes—seemed precariously marooned. His appetite was gone. (Tham 352)

The picture that the narrative paints is permeated with displacement. Not only are "the old people who'd lived here forever . . . marooned," as might be expected under gentrification, but the text, by identifying some of the agents of gentrification as "expatriates," also implies that these café-goers have no sense of home either. As with Tham's propensity to gut the halls of the casino, here she provides a stark equalisation between the material poverty of the elderly residents and the spiritual bankruptcy of the transnational and cosmopolitan elite. The text parenthetically elaborates that "[t]he thing about the past was that you always expected it to be there, pickled in aspic, even as you turned your back faithlessly on it" (352). The accusation of faithlessness—which occurs in an ambiguous instance of free indirect discourse, where "pickled in aspic" is an incongruous lexical choice to be attributed to the Sinophone Min Liang—seems to reproach citizens for their complicity with redevelopment, as the novel does earlier with Jasper and Ling. The text's implicit criticism recalls how Yeoh and Kong identify citizens' home-upgrading obsession as a consequence of "the insistent emphasis on economic development, higher standards of living and the achievement of excellence" (62) without exploring how deliberately the evolution of Singaporeans' "value system[s]" (62)—Yeoh and Kong's own phrase, which conflates capital and moral value—have been cultivated, and to what end. In fact, their observation that Singaporeans are "caught in the process of upgrading" their homes, owing to "an ever-escalating set of expectations"—a phenomenon they worry will dilute citizens' feelings of attachment to a sense of local place—is delivered in a largely passive voice (62). This inability to clearly lay the national trajectory exclusively at the feet of either the state or its citizens yields uncertain identities in Singapore's dislocated subjects—in other words, people, like Ling, whose "identit[ies] [are] still evolving" (Tham 238) without any resolution so far.

At the same time, the way the scene closes is a reproach to the state narrative of a dog-eat-dog world. In 2017, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, the son of former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, exhorted union leaders to "make sure you steal somebody else's lunch" ("A Conversation"). In a later speech, he added, using a Singlish term for making a reservation: "Somebody is always trying to steal your lunch and we have to guard our lunch, and if there is any other lunch out there which nobody is '*chope*-ing,' there is an opportunity for us" ("PM Lee Hsien Loong"). Min Liang, who had earlier imagined while on a losing streak in the casino "that luck was a finite resource and that all of it was being funnelled into the high roller, leaving nothing for anyone else in the room" (Tham 113), finds the same zero-sum attitude in the gentrification of Tiong Bahru, where the elderly poor are squeezed out by the caffeinated affluent. As the downtrodden outsider, however—the only character in the novel whom Poon believes "retains a cultural and emotional integrity" (431) amid what she calls "the claustrophobic smallness of Singapore society" (428)—Min Liang exits the lunch-stealing system in the only way available: he loses his appetite; he refuses to bite.

Yet even though Tiong Bahru may be a contested site where urban heritage runs into capital displacement, any faith in the potential counter-valences of its cultural authenticity is also susceptible to being manipulated, as Yeoh and Kong suggest when they cite the conservation of the Chinatown, Kampong Glam, Little India, and Civic District precincts as a reaffirmation of the 1822 Raffles Town Plan (which partitioned downtown Singapore into racial housing enclaves) that validates a racial taxonomy of Singapore residents (61). Such a struggle over the authentic also extends to how Winston capitalises on his HDB upbringing as evidence of his working-class roots and his ability to represent the people. Poon notices this class-based performance of national authenticity elsewhere in the novel: for example, although Willy acts like a coarse Chinese-speaking towkay or businessman, "he hails from an English-speaking middle-class family," just as "Cheung Fai is not exactly the man of the people he seems to be as we are told how he liked to affect a kind of 'boorishness'" (423). Conditioned by a Singaporean upbringing,

characters cannily engage with accepted conceptions of who constitutes an authentic subject and how home should be defined—similar to how Winston, during his political interview, smooths over his traitorous emotions about the pig farm.

Still, Poon misreads the text when she stresses that Willy's and Cheung Fai's choices to turn away from Anglophone society "manifest a kind of unpretentious honesty and authenticity that parallels their choice of a seemingly more genuine form of Chineseness" (424), which I find akin to a celebration of Min Liang's values. Her assertion obscures the privileged position that affords Willy and Cheung Fai the power to even engage in what Daniel Goh describes as the "semiotic struggle over Chineseness" (57).[5] Though Poon is spot-on in calling the characters' ethnic performances "essentialist assumption[s] of Chinese authenticity" (424), this essentialism emerges from within the bounds of state discourse, including Goh Chok Tong's justifications of socially conservative state policy as respecting the wishes of a more authentic constituency. Such rhetoric assumes a cultural divide between "heartlanders" and "cosmopolitans" and is an approach that seems to embrace HDB residents as a moral bulwark, as Kenneth Paul Tan argues, against the dubious and questionable loyalty of Westernised Singaporeans ("Sexing Up Singapore" 411). Certainly, both Poon and Sim cling to Min Liang as a tragic character: Poon describes him as "true to his Chinese-speaking roots" and suggests he illustrates how "Tham's sympathies appear to lie with the Sinicised characters" (423), while Sim interprets his romantic failure more pessimistically, as proof that the text "assuages the anxiety that English will no longer be the right language to ensure social mobility" (188). But in making a hero out of Min Liang, Poon reductively essentialises his heritage; meanwhile, in defending Min Liang against the author's supposed Anglocentrism, Sim ignores the text's condemnation of a postcolonial capitalism embodied by the Anglophone elite.[6] In fact, the reactionary valorisation of either heartland or cosmopolis is an exercise in futility: Willy and Winston may fulfil the self-reinvention ethos of Hung's Straits Chinese subjects, but their efforts yield only a mimicry of inconsistently constructed authenticity.

V. Conclusion

On the dichotomy between Anglophone and Sinophone—what Sim calls the novel's "insistence on a pronounced cultural caesura between the English and vernacular worlds in Singapore" (187)—Sim and Poon profoundly differ over its implications: Sim finds that the text symbolically neutralises any orientation toward a culturally "Sinitic" identity (188), while Poon suggests that the novel offers a sympathetic portrayal of its "Sinicised characters" (423). But the disagreement between Sim and Poon can be reconciled by accepting that *The Inlet*'s essentialist valorisation of authenticity is precisely the method by which Tham neutralises the Sinophone political position in her exploration of national concerns. To be sure, Poon writes pessimistically that "[n]o character in the novel is able to bridge the English-Chinese linguistic and cultural divide in a morally satisfactory manner" (423), yet it is this divide, this "pronounced cultural caesura" (Sim 187), that constitutes the locus around which Singaporean Chinese identity is signified in the novel. Shared by both the Anglophone (Li Ching) and the Sinophone (Min Liang), the native-born (Winston) and the immigrant (Ling), a Singaporean Chinese experience of diaspora, when it does emerge, is not connected to another "home," located somewhere-not-here. That is, there is no sense of a continuous transnational community with other Chinese people or a geographical affinity with China. Despite the situational encounters of the Singaporean Chinese with diasporic consciousness in Tham's novel, they nevertheless exhibit a strenuous disidentification with an ancestral motherland. Because recognition of that motherland is a foundational criterion for belonging to a diaspora, they should not be considered part of the Chinese one. Instead, *The Inlet* transposes diasporic consciousness onto the concern that Singapore, the place that *should* be home, has been anchored on unstable foundations since both the island and its people are constantly in flux.

A national narrative of perpetual upgrading, which generates the Singaporean Chinese characters' destabilising diasporic consciousness, is likely to intensify as physical and psychic redevelopment continue. More than that, an increasing volume of transnational labour—from China, Malaysia, India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, the Philippines, and

other locations throughout the Asia-Pacific and the world—will be required to fulfil the Singaporean state's demands for biological and economic production, even as the workers' presence perturbs its racial and national categories. Ling aside, other such characters appear in passing throughout the novel, such as the South Asian worker who attacks Li Ching on her morning run and the Chinese cook whom Cheung Fai's team finds killed outside the national theatre. These new diasporas, which Yeoh anticipated in "Cosmopolitanism and Its Exclusions," enter Singapore in the context of entrenched marginalisation and a degree of prejudice from autochthonous communities. The communal dynamics engendered by their presence contribute to the misplaced sense of displacement that feeds diasporic consciousness among Singapore-born Chinese; in fact, the capacity of privileged Anglophone Chinese to identify as diasporic—to, against all expectations, reject identifying Singapore as home—unmasks a weakness in the nation-building project, which is translated into anxiety in Tham's novel. Even the behaviour of characters like Willy and Cheung Fai, who cling to the veneer of working-class Chinese identity, makes a stab at a marginalised diasporic identity that performatively confers authenticity while implicating the national narrative as inauthentic. Born out of autochthonous subjects' reactionary anxiety from the arrival of new immigrants and their racially fraught relationships with one another, these Singaporean Chinese acts of self-reinvention erode the old valences of diaspora and strip denotative meaning from the term.

Redevelopment is so woven into Singapore's national history that it is a resonant trope for writers to explore well beyond the strictures of Chinese diasporic subjectivity. For instance, two recent English-language debut novels, Balli Kaur Jaswal's *Inheritance* (2013) and Jolene Tan's *A Certain Exposure* (2014), follow lower-middle-class households whose children bear the burden of parental aspirations of social mobility in the 1980s and 1990s. These private dramas are entwined with the cultural and political changes of their temporal setting and cannot be unmeshed from the HDB estates where they play out; the decision to situate them in Singapore's development decades lets the authors, who are attentive to the role of racism and homophobia in Singaporean

nationalism, argue for a reconsideration of the city-state's history. But, in the contemporaneously published *The Inlet*, the subjective nature of diasporic consciousness bridges the gap between the mere experience of cultural displacement and the deeper problem of Singaporean Chinese identity. If diaspora is contingent upon material conditions of alienation, it follows that some Singaporean Chinese—the Sinophone and working-class—are in diaspora, while others, like those whose Anglophony is linked with cultural and economic capital, are not. Yet Min Liang realizes that "[t]he divide between the English-speaking middle class and Chinese-speaking lower-income groups is not just monetary but cultural" (Tham 223), which Sim identifies as "arguably the key line in the novel" (187). It illustrates how the psychic conditions of living amid redevelopment in Singapore can transmute diaspora into a subjective experience—a cultural one—that defies material reality. As the interior monologues of characters like Fazil and Li Ching suggest, the transnational presence of Chinese migrant workers like Ling generates national anxiety among Singaporean subjects, regardless of their race, but it also evokes a racialised anxiety—the fantasy of diasporic subjectivity—among the autochthonous Singaporean Chinese who are attached to an unstable sense of the nation.

Meanwhile, Sim exhorts readers to turn to Sinophone and other vernacular literature as well since "an exclusively monolingual focus may limit the socio-economic reach and quality of literary analysis" (195). While narratives and ideologies around social redevelopment in Singapore can unsettle Chinese diasporic identities, such a framework does not necessarily map onto the experiences of other diasporas in Singapore, nor onto other communities' experiences of immigration and redevelopment. Moreover, more investigation is needed into how a Chinese insistence on diasporic identity in Singapore inflects the relationships between the majority Chinese and other racial groups that lay their own claims to Singaporean national identity.[7] As such, Tham's *The Inlet* presents anxieties about contemporary Singaporean Chinese identity against the totalising vision of a "Chinese diaspora," but it cannot be read in isolation.

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Notes

1 We might think of the warnings of Wong (40) and Lye (265) on the Singaporean staging of David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* in 1990.

2 Conflating race and ethnicity in defiance of the accepted sociological distinction between these two characteristics, the Singapore Department of Statistics states that "[e]thnic group refers to a person's race" and consolidates everyone from Hokkiens, Teochews, and Cantonese to Foochows or Hockchews, Putian or Henghuas, and Shanghainese under the homogenising label "Chinese."

3 Goh suggests that national leaders' rejection of English on moral grounds may hegemonically reify the power of the postcolonial elite "to semiotically discipline Chineseness" (62).

4 In discussing the cover art for Singapore apologist and former diplomat Kishore Mahbubani's book *The New Asian Hemisphere*, Bahng makes a similar observation: "This scene . . . feels like an already haunted future, in which New Asia has become an empty lot, evacuated of its denizens and prepared to signify the sheer potential of capital" (120). Singapore is thus dogged by the fear that its monuments do not, in some sense, matter.

5 Shih, arguing against "such essentialist notions as 'Chineseness' and 'the Chinese'" (189), goes so far as to remark that "[t]he claim of rootlessness by some nostalgia-driven, middle-class, first-generation immigrants is . . . oftentimes narcissistic" (190).

6 Chong dubs this phenomenon "the romanticization of the working-class 'heartlander'" (880), who may appear, like Min Liang, in the archetype of "Chinese males who are poorly educated and dialect or Mandarin-speaking, and are often portrayed as victims of global capitalism and/or the PAP state's education, bilingualism and foreign talent policies" (892).

7 Since both diasporic and Indigenous identity can be invoked for strategic political purposes, the question remains as to what both Singaporean and non-Singaporean actors stand to gain from their claims that Singaporean Chinese are members of a global Chinese diaspora.

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