

**Nomadic Desire:
The Schizo-Identity in *Mona in the Promised Land***

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore a nomadic desire of the second-generation Chinese-Americans in Gish Jen's *Mona in the Promised Land*. The paradigm of diaspora in the United States has shifted from the *moved-to-here* immigrants to *born-here* immigrants, from the longing for the *re-turn* to the authentic origin to the longing for the emergence of a self-affirmative nomadic subjectivity. Mona, the heroine of the novel, torn between the anxious *hope* of being firmly rooted and the imminent *fear* of being fully totalized, is lost and wanders from place to place in her nomadic journey of identity. In this paper, I will mainly use Deleuzo-Guattarian theory to explore the idea of nomadic desire, a *simultaneous* double-desire of the nomadic subject *per se*. Then I hope, within this theoretical framework of nomadic desire, to cast light upon the emerging identity problems of the America-Born Chinese in this novel.

Keywords: desire, identity, nomad, Deleuze, Guattari, Chinese-American, Gish Jen

Nomadic Desire of Schizoanalysis

The life of the nomad is the intermezzo. Even the elements of his dwelling are conceived in terms of trajectory that is forever mobilizing them. (Deleuze and Guattari, *Nomadology* 5)

Desire constantly couples continuous flows and partial objects that are by nature fragmentary and fragmented. Desire causes the current to flow, itself flows in turn, and breaks the flows. (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 5)

What is desire? The definition of desire varies from one to another in our contemporary theory: the essence of the subject to Lacan; the objectified energy in hyperreality to Baudrillard; and the transcendental ethical relation with the Other to Levinas. My exploration of nomadic desire will be mainly based on Deleuze and Guattari's immanent and affirmative concepts of desire and schizoanalysis. Drawing the links between the political and libidinal economy, Deleuze and Guattari believe that psychoanalysis works with capitalism to channel and control desire, not to liberate it. Hence, they offer us a radical critique of both psychoanalysis and capitalism, "schizoanalysis," which I find particularly suited to my project of scrutinizing nomadic desire, the one that is, to borrow Derrida's words, "marked out by the undecidable syntax of *more*" (*Dissemination* 43). The term "schizoanalysis" is coined in order to express Deleuze and Guattari's aim of destroying the holy trinity of Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis: the law's prohibition, castration's lack, and the sign-systems of the unconscious or the signifier's structured absence in the production of subjectivity.

To this end, Deleuze and Guattari extract a long neglected social and political strength from the "desiring-machine," a strength intended to repeatedly resist the power of "Oedipalization." "Desire," they claim, "is revolutionary in its essence" (*Anti-Oedipus* 116). The process of repressing desire is termed "territorialization," whereas the resistance against the repression to free the flux of energy generated by desire is called "deterritorialization." For that reason, they aim at taking apart the group identities constructed by its "molar lines"¹ and its presuppositions, and at energetically keeping on "breaking through" without "breaking down." They write:

The task of schizoanalysis is that of tirelessly taking apart egos and their presuppositions; liberating the personal singularities they enclose and repress; mobilizing the flows they would be capable of transmitting, receiving, or intercepting; establishing always further and more sharply the

schizzes and the breaks well below conditions of identity and assembling the desiring-machines that countersect everyone and group everyone with others. (*Anti-Oedipus* 362)

In terms of praxis, Deleuze and Guattari's endlessly destructive task is to continue haunting capitalism, to erase the boundaries capitalism places on this deterritorialization. This task consequently frees the desiring-machines and dismantles the subject and the tyrannical State. Celebrating the revolutionary force of exploring the unconscious discourses of affirmative desire (such as the subversion of canonical concepts of representation and fluid combinations of surrealistic images), Deleuze and Guattari both insist that Kafka's novels are significant with regard to deterritorialization. Kafka's novels, for them, set excellent examples of this revolutionary task, as opposed to simply portraying the desperate Jewish mysticism they are often seen as doing. The books, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* and *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (the sequel to *Anti-Oedipus*), offer their practical critiques of psychoanalysis and capitalism with the politics of "rhizome" (a new term for the dynamic deterritorialization movement). These two discursive exercises in the affirmative and productive desire that *Anti-Oedipus* to elaborate a postmodern theory of non-totalizable multiplicity, especially they could be employed in schizo-subject and schizo-literature. If the nature of schizoanalysis is destructive, it is then, for them, also a necessary and positive destruction, in a more creative sense.

For instance, nomadic desire for a diasporic subject, signifying the ontological hunger of an exile dreaming of home, something to be overcome and quenched, is not purely destructive: a one-handed desiring machine. Rather, it is a two-handed machine: one machine marks a new homeland territory while the other periodically erases the mark; one is always coupled with the other. Accordingly, there is always a flow-producing machine² connected to a flow-interrupting machine, which draws off part of the first flow. The homeland which nomadic desire *desires* is always "out-of-joint" and yet always "to-come"—an imaginary homeland, *there*. As Susan Stanford Friedman, in "Bodies on the Move: A Poetics of Home and Diaspora," rightly point out, "[h]ome comes into being most powerfully when it is gone, lost, left behind, desired and imagined" (202). Such an imagination of a *lost home*, lying in the domain of the subjectivity of transference, which is the very product of desire, then becomes the affirmative source of a subject-in-process (*sujet en procès*). "Desire constantly couples continuous flows and partial objects that are by nature fragmentary and fragmented. Desire causes the current to flow, itself flows in turn, and breaks the flows" (*Anti-Oedipus* 5). That is, the discontinuity irrevocably breaks off part of the

continuity, but the continuity disseminates across the discontinuity. The productive and affirmative synthesis of nomadic desire is thus inherently infinite—an infinite progress. This two-handed desire machine also illustrates the function of writing. In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Deleuze and Guattari write: “Writing has a double function: to translate everything into assemblages and dismantle the assemblages. The two are the same thing” (47). If so, we may say that diasporic writing in general and Asian American writing in specific with their schizo-desire often demonstrate just this kind of double function of the two-handed machine.

The Deleuzo-Guattarian politics of revolutionary desire to construct the economy of nomadic desire is not unproblematic, however. In *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations*, Steven Best and Douglas Kellner point out: “Like Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari fail to articulate a normative position. Whereas Foucault failed to account for the legitimacy of radical politics, Deleuze and Guattari have no theory of why revolutionary desire is preferable over fascist desire” (108). That is, just as Foucault argues that power is not only repressive but also productive (*Power/Knowledge* 119), so Deleuze and Guattari accept that desire can be both subversive and fascistic (Guattari, *Molecular* 86). However, celebrating the subversive drive of the unconsciousness, Deleuze and Guattari obviously prefer the revolutionary desire to the fascist desire. The problem is—if there is a possibility of a better and newer identity for a nomadic subject in the operation of the two-handed desiring machine, then one must admit that some form of territorilization in accordance with the social codes in its context of existence is surely necessary. Thus, the core problem of the Deleuzo-Guattarian project of schizoanalysis is: On what ground precisely does Deleuzo-Guattarian radical politics rest its subversive force? Best and Kellner explain their criticism: “How nomadic desire is compatible with new forms of social organization is not specified, nor do Deleuze and Guattari ever state what kind of social codes they would accept as legitimate.” (Best and Kellner 107).

Best and Kellner therefore state that if there is an ethics of radical politics in all three postmodern theorists [Deleuze, Guattari and Foucault], it is in favor of the aesthetics that are typical of postmodern theory (107-8).³ To put it into another perspective, one may contend that Deleuze and Guattari’s schizoanalysis promotes what Derrida calls an “economy of violence,” “violence against violence” (*Writing* 117) but without telling us its specific ends. More exactly, if Oedipalization is the violence of fascism, one must fight against violence with a certain other violence; a violence of revolutionary action against a violence of police action. It is this endless cycling of violence which makes the economy of violence irreducible. And yet, Deleuze and Guattari’s irreducible economy of violence tends to reduce the politics of resistance to an endless signifying movement of life, like the endless flowing meaning

of text, without any direct and clear guidance of moral consciousness or messianic hope. As a result, one may argue that the predicament of Deleuze and Guattari's idea of schizoanalysis is that the territory of both literature and literary criticism can only ever be a battlefield of violence, a schizo-turmoil, an everlasting displacement of their radical political potential.

Since even a roundtable dialogue doesn't imply that all interlocutors are equal in power, to put the violence-using politics of schizoanalysis into question doesn't imply a case for a non-power and non-violent resistance. Doubtless, using violent action to combat evil is necessary. Where there is the violence of repression, there is also the violence of resistance—and to pursue a violence-free resistance is certainly very utopian. However, radical politics needs a clear ethical end to justify its means, to draw on violence against violence in a human society or an ego-centered subject. Focusing on the liberation of desire and the theory of becoming, Deleuze and Guattari, in a sense, refuse to offer any clear "end" of their desire-producing politics of schizoanalysis. To this criticism, their possible response would be: "The means is itself its own end." Yet, in coping with the problem of diasporic identity, decentering politics by depriving it of an end (which is always already an "imaginary homeland") is like today without tomorrow to come, often producing the fear of "fallenness" (to use a Heideggerian term) and a destructive void in the dark without hope. Accordingly, we must clarify the Deleuzo-Guattarian politics of schizoanalysis in developing the idea of nomadic desire here lest it is misunderstood as a kind of nihilistic revolution or desire.

It is important to know that to promote the radical politics of nomadic desire certainly doesn't mean to embrace a *negative* destruction (I will discuss a *positive* destruction later), in which all established values and orders are smashed by a single destructive stroke of a hammer, or a postmodern nihilism, in which one ends up becoming a shapeless and aimless signifier floating in the nebulous world of Baudrillardian simulations and hyperreality. On the contrary, without pretending that the essence of the identity problem can be smashed by a single heavy stroke, the schizophrenic politics of nomadic desire attempts to remedy the situation of fascism planted in our heads in multicultural societies via constant and *positive* destruction as a rigorous self-*re*-shaping. It is a *breaking-through*, not a *breaking-down*. If anything is destroyed in the process of deterritorialization, it is the habitual Oedipalization of the ego, not the ego itself. That is why, at the end of *On the Line*, Deleuze and Guattari claims that "[t]he question of revolution's future is a bad one, because, as long as it is posed, there are going to be those who will not *become* revolutionaries. It is precisely why it is done: to prevent the becoming-revolutionary of people everywhere and at every level" (114). Nihilistic revolution or negative destruction is

surely not the aim of nomadic desire.

Instead, a schizo-identity of nomadic subject always tries to avoid turning itself into an ontological purity or closure. It is a dialectical result of a “recognition” (to use Taylor’s word) of active differences or radical virtuality. That is, owing to the schizo-desire of the nomadic subject, the Deleuzo-Guattarian subjectivity of the nomadic subject is neither a crystallized identity nor nihilistic indifference. Rather, it always *flows*. It always *differs* and *defers* to constantly construct a new fixed identity as a productive synthesis. Therefore, if the revolutionary politics of nomadic desire is structured to articulate a normative position, it is structured, but not organized, by dialectical moments of breaking-through and synthesis. While admittedly accepting a normative position or fascist desire of the ego, nomadic desire opens up a space that the former cannot subsume. It always safeguards this space for the unknown newness to come, albeit a *subject-in-process*, allowing the Deleuzo-Guattarian type of the nomadic subject to hear and answer for the various heterogeneous voices in our age of multiculturalism.

For instance, in the territorialized chain of signification, no nomadic desire of the diasporic subject is of and by itself without its potentiality or its “virtuality” (to use Deleuze’s term). Therefore, it is reasonable to say that everything that flows in the economy of diasporic identity as an unfolding of potentiality (and as a *re-inscriptive* disturbance of the fascist Oedipalization of the subject) is but a nomadic desire. That is to say, nomadic desire for a diasporic subject exists only in the phenomenon of unfolding to an imaginary homeland, *there*. Lacking secure subjecthood, immigrants, exiles or postcolonial subjects often suffer from such a *simultaneous* double-desire, struggling with anxieties of securing identity in ambivalent times. Contemporary Chinese American writers, especially the second generation immigrants and writers, provide us with a good instance of our examination of this double desire of nomadic subjects.

Schizo-Identity in *Mona in the Promised Land*

Dialectics is the consistent sense of nonidentity. (Adorno 5)

“Asian-American literature remained almost literally a sealed book” (Daniels IX) to mainstream American literary history and culture until after World War II. Indeed, the rapid growth and development of Chinese-American literature has echoed the imminent *re-turn* of the multi-ethnic literature as the repressed otherness to challenge the long dominance of canonical literature in the United States. It also has mirrored the changing experience of Chinese immigrants and their hybrid cultural identity in

successive eras since the 1960s. In *Chinese American Literature Since the 1850s*, Xiao-huang Yin points out that “the decade of the 1960s changed the Chinese American literary scene forever. . . . More Chinese Americans were led to participate in creating literature that had expanded readership, a broadened scope, and reshaped thematic concerns. As a result, Chinese American literature entered a distinctively new phase of development” (229).

Like most “write-back” postcolonial literature and other American ethnic literature, Chinese American literature aims at giving voice to hitherto silent people with an overlooked or repressed and therefore unknown history. For that reason, by probing “immigrant memory” and “historical imagination,” Chinese American literature usually *re-tells* significant personal and historical events (often about the Cultural Revolution in China) or prominent legends—such novels like Frank Chin’s *The Year of the Dragon* (1974), Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* (1976), Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), Rae Yang’s *Spider Eaters* (1997), Adeline Yen Mah’s *Falling Leaves* (1997), Leslie Chang’s *Beyond the Narrow Gate* (1999), Ha Jin’s *War Trash* (2004), Gene Luen Yang’s *American Born Chinese* (2006) and Lan Samantha Chang’s *All is Forgotten, Nothing is Lost* (2010). Instead of dealing with monumental historical events or Chinese legends, Gish Jen investigates the identity-related notions of culture, race, religion, class, gender and sexuality by deftly casting *Mona in the Promised Land* as a modern, operatic and rollicking melodrama. That is, Jen’s novel depends less on the cultural China of the past and more on the American life of the present to highlight the differences and conflicts between young immigrants’ diaspora and that of their forebears.

Quite a few reviewers and critics (such as González 230-31 and Rody 89-90) point out that whereas Jen’s first novel—*Typical American*⁴—is about Mona’s parents and aunt (the first generation of Chinese Americans) and their struggle to secure their Chineseness while pursuing their “American dream,” her second novel, as the sequel to the first, is about young Mona (the second generation of Chinese Americans) and her losing Chineseness and turning Jewish in her multi-ethnic existence. *Mona in the Promised Land* can be regarded as one example of how recent Chinese American novel tries to illustrate the nomadic resistance against the diasporic identity of first-generation Chinese Americans.

Mona, born and brought up in a Chinese Catholic family, gets confirmed in the Catholic Church under “a certain big roll of the eyeballs” (32). She doesn’t choose to be a Catholic but is made to be one in the way she is supposed to. Nomadic desire serves as an identity alarm clock to Mona, one of the ways the heart nudges itself into attention with regard to the unknown otherness, disrupting the amnesia of ego. It even forces Mona to decide what is significant in life *here* and *now* in order to prepare

today for what is to arrive tomorrow. So she decides to convert to Judaism, becoming a Chinese-American Jew by her own will and choice, or, more precisely, her own impatience with the messianic response.

In truth, rich in literary flavor and multicultural exploration, the novel opens with a comedy-like narration: “There they are, nice Chinese family—father, mother, two born-here girls. Where should they live next? The parents slide the question back and forth like a cup of ginseng neither one wants to drink” (3). The family finally moves to the predominantly Jewish suburb of Scarsdale, New York.⁵ The comic element as such have serious connotation in Jen’s novel. Erika T. Lin points out:

Jen’s comic elements also point to larger and more serious issues: these very racialized understandings of the relationship between culture and body have been exemplified in attitudes that paint Asian Americans as foreign others who may be immersed in “American” culture but are never an inherent part of it. This irony, this humor, operates as a hyperbolic citation because it draws attention to assumptions about the body as racial signifier that might otherwise go unnoticed. (53)

That is, true to her unique satiric style, Jen takes delight in Mona’s experiment in identity-switching as a means of questioning the traditional notion of cultural identity. In the beginning of the story, Mona tries to persuade her grade-school boyfriend, Sherman Matsumoto, to “switch” his Japanese identity: “You could become American anyway,” Mona says. “Like I could become Jewish, if I wanted to. I’d just have to switch, that’s all” (14). Switching one’s identity in the United States seems to be easy for Mona in her youth, simply because she believes that “American means being whatever you want” (49). “You only have to learn some rules and speeches” (14), says Mona, if you want to “switch” your sense of belonging to some other culture or religions. Sherman disagrees at first, but eventually he accepts and parodies her switching theory in order to persuade Mona to marry him:

I’m only thirteen.
But when old? Sixteen?
If you come back to get me.
I come. Or you come to Japan, be Japanese.
How can I be Japanese?
Like you become American. Switch. (19)

In spite of this amusing oversimplification of the complexity of identity issues in the

United States, there is a serious and affirmative side to Mona's idea of nomadic identity-switching and why she wants to be a Jew. Mona comes up with her own definition of being a Jew: "The whole key to Judaism is to ask, ask, instead of just obey, obey" (137). To obey, one territorializes one's desire, while to ask, one liberates it. In truth, to question the fascism planted in our heads with our subversive desiring-machines in quest of self-discovery is, one may argue, what Gish Jen tries to achieve in terms of the problematization of an immigrant's nomadic desire. To put it another way, the task of Gish Jen's schizoanalysis is, in Deleuze and Guattari's phrase, to set up a "body-without-organs." This means not a physical body that has no organs, nor a body whose organs have been removed by an operation, but a body of mind without any fixed "organization," a deterritorialized body, liberating itself from the ideological prisons of identity by continually questioning the disciplined, subjected and rooted senses of belonging (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 149-66). That is why, Deleuze and Guattari state that "[a] body (*corps*) is not reducible to an organism, any more than *esprit de corps* is reducible to the soul or an organism" (*Nomadology* 26).

As a matter of fact, Mona's conversion is influenced by two Jewish friends: Barbara Gugelstein and Seth Mandel. Barbara, an upper-middle-class Jewish American, is Mona's chief companion through her teenage life. They do almost everything together. They even "both wear ponchos, peasant blouses, leotards, bikini underwear. Hip-hugger bell-bottoms. Water-buffalo sandals" (25). It is not difficult to understand that the reason why Mona who "happened to pick being Jewish" (49) is because her best friend, Barbara, is a Jew. Moreover, Barbara is proud of being a Jew, thereby encouraging Mona to share her heritage, which, to her, is ethico-politically correct. She tells Mona that "being Jewish is also great because it's about fighting for freedom. We're the original Freedom Riders. Just think if everyone in the world were Jewish, how much better off we would be" (135).

Seth Mandel, Mona's other Jewish friend, helps her understand better the nomadic spirit of Judaism through his own process of anti-oedipalization. Seth is a sporty, intelligent and radical Jewish young man, who becomes Mona's husband at the end of the story. Having a strong flux of nomadic desire, he doesn't accept Judaism as it is. He also refuses to go to college and lives in a teepee, making himself "an authentic inauthentic Jew," who is "more ethnic than religious" (112), in order to tilt against the territorialization of authentic Jewishness. That is, he allows the flux of his nomadic desire to flow relentlessly in an attempt to become "an authentic inauthentic Jew" (which, according to Mona, cannot be confused with "an authentic Jew"). Mona explains: "This foray into Judaism is one part of finding out who he is, and that is why he didn't go to college—because he needs time to see what takes hold in him, what he does with himself. When he looks back on this period of his life, he says, he will

know more” (112).

Seth’s search for “an authentic inauthentic Jewishness” echoes the Jewish philosophy of becoming emphasized examined by Deleuze and Guattari in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. That is, it is not enough to *be* Jewish (or a minority), one must *become* Jewish. Jewish and minority identities have neither an origin nor an end, for they are always in an ongoing and dynamic movement of becoming. Seth believes that “the oppressed should stand together.” The three friends agree that “they are one nation—no, nationless. However, pro-Israel” (141). Being new generation immigrants, they prefer Adorno’s dialectical “nonidentity”⁶ (4-6, 146-51) over any form of authenticity and multicultural hybridity over any structure of purity.

Nevertheless, the task of deterritorializing (or of schizo-) identity *in* the head is surely not as easy as changing a hat *on* the head. Mona is forced to keep her conversion a secret lest her mother attack her for her identity-switching. However, the secret is eventually revealed—she has no choice but to engage in a struggle, a battle between a rebellious daughter and her iron-willed mother. Helen, Mona’s mother, is dismayed and angry to learn of Mona’s childish conversion. She believes it brings shame on the family. When Mona comes home, she gives her, a lecture on this issue:

“You are daughter. Daughter. Do you remember what is a daughter?”

“I remember.”

“Who are you?”

“I’m your daughter.” (45)

Helen, basing her identity on hard-core Chineseness, continues to question Mona in order to *re*-territorialize Mona’s nomadic desire. For her, Mona’s rebellion is useless and worthless because a girl, according to the Confucian way of thinking, has no authority and will of her own. A daughter does what she is told. Helen questions: “How can you be Jewish? Chinese people don’t do such things” (45). “They don’t?” Mona questions this back in “her smallest, meekest voice—just wanting by this point to say the right thing, the thing that will make Helen look hurt again” (46). Helen is greatly convinced that Mona’s conversion is less an act of self-discovery than an act of rebellion against the roots of their cultural and religious identity, or, in a way, an act of questioning the authority of the Mother. One day, Helen is furious with Mona when she threatens to move out if there is no freedom in the house. “She slaps Mona in the face” (250)—twice. Everything has price, and Mona’s nomadic conversion is no exception. Mona is humiliated and angry, and as a result, she runs away from home.

Trapped between Oedipal anxiety and nomadic desire and torn between the anxious *hope* of being firmly rooted and the imminent *fear* of being fully totalized,

Mona is lost and wanders from place to place. Finally, she finds herself at Harvard, her sister's college. In contrast to Mona, her sister, Callie, is the apple of their parents' eye. "Callie's got the kind of beauty that makes you consider where you stand in life, whereas Mona doesn't see why they should have to hold their heads up" (5). Besides, Callie, with her intelligence and obedience, is speeding toward worldly success at Harvard in the decent and respectable way their parents pave for her. While Mona converts to Judaism, Callie, under the influence of her African-American roommate, Naomi, raises her Chinese consciousness and immerses herself in her Chinese heritage, learning Chinese, *Tai qi*,⁷ and other Chinese traditions with keen interest in her spare time. In short, Callie signifies the ideal realization of the parental hopes and dreams in Mona's family.

Driven by her nomadic desire, Mona desires a new start, a new self, a new identity—a rebirth. Since Callie is out of town with Naomi for a school project, she decides to deterritorialize her Jewish identity by playing the role of her sister. "Mona sleeps in Callie's bed, in Callie's nightshirt. She washes her face with Callie's soap, she brushes her teeth with Callie's toothbrush" (266). She even attends Callie's courses and ends up with many of Callie's friends mistaking her for Callie. She also answers Callie's phone; on the other end is her mother, and yet Helen cannot recognize Mona's voice. Therefore, Helen speaks to Mona as if she were Callie. When Helen asks Mona (whom she mistakes for Callie) whether Mona has called, Mona lies to her mother, saying that Mona has gone to France and is going around topless on beaches. Mona wants to annoy Helen for revenge, and it works. However, the truth is her mother's careless confusion only frustrates Mona even more. Before long, Mona realizes that the result of her mimicry of Callie is in effect the same as that of her conversion: the "final signified" of her identity remains at a seductive distance, *there*. She needs to set out to search for her new self again.

Seeking to deterritorialize the "body-with-organs," Salman Rushdie poses his well-known postcolonial questions: "[h]ow does newness come into the world? How is it born? Of what fusions, translations, conjoinings is it made?" (8) The answer which Salman Rushdie provides is "hybridity"—"change-by-loss," "change-by-fusion" and the refusal of the absolutism of the Pure. Likewise, Jen points out that "...it's not so easy to get rid of your old self. On the other hand, nothing stands still. All growth involves change, all change involves loss" (268). Accordingly, one may safely state that Mona's nomadic desire, which constantly drives her to face up to "change" and "loss," is how the "newness" keeps on entering into her life. Through this constant struggle with self-fashioning, Mona knows better who she is and who she wants to be, although such a struggle is never pleasant or completed. A nomadic Being, like a phoenix, needs to rise from its ashes again and again.

Andrew Furman, in “Immigrant Dreams and Civic Promises: (Co-)Testing Identity in Early Jewish American Literature and Gish Jen’s *Mona in the Promised Land*,” points out that:

Mona in the Promised Land is not so much about the Jewish American rise to socio-economic and cultural confidence, nor is it about the Chinese-American’s parallel evolution, Jen goes after decidedly bigger fish as she engages the paradigm shift regarding the immigrant ethos, precipitated in large part by the multicultural enthusiasms of the 1960s that continue apace today. (213)

Nomadic desire is essentially about connection and renewal. Actually, it resembles Deleuze and Guattari’ idea of rhizome. There are six characteristics of the rhizome: connection, multiplicity, a-signifying rupture, cartography, decalcomania (*On the Line* 11-25). That is, nomadic desire always eagerly unfolds its rhizome-like multiplicity to connect with unknown potentiality in the pure immanent life plain. Therefore, it constantly *re*-news itself in and through time, handing itself down from generation to generation with a shift toward new paradigms. The first generation of Chinese immigrants usually came to the United States, e.g. during the Californian Gold Rush years, with nothing but a ship ticket (which was usually paid for by mortgaging farms or houses or by the sale of some personal possessions) in their pocket, the American dream in their head and Chinese nostalgia in their heart. Being minority immigrants, they built up their new home in a difficult and unfriendly environment with two bare hands. “As many scholars have pointed out, early Chinese immigrants in the United States confronted grueling labor and racial prejudice” (Yin 15). Hardship, bitterness and nostalgia were surely what characterized much of early Chinese immigrants’ nomadic experiences and struggles in the late nineteenth century.

However, their descendents are different. On the one hand, unlike their frontier-like parents, the so-called ABCs (America-Born Chinese) have a much easier life, better education and more liberal and hybrid cultural identities. Besides, most of them can hardly master their native language like their parents, let alone appreciate their Chinese heritage, such as a five-thousand-year history, a unique culture and a rich literature. For that practical reason, it is always hard for them to put themselves in their parents’ shoes, trying to understand their parents’ nomadic struggles to survive in a foreign land and their ever-increasing longing for cultural roots. While on the other hand, their skin color and features are obvious signifiers of an outsider in the West, always force them to accept the cast-iron fact that they are not simply what they think they are—authentic Americans. Their identities are thus often caught in-betweenness

and ambivalence.

In other words, the paradigm of diaspora in the United States has shifted from the *moved-to-here* immigrants to *born-here* immigrants, from the longing for the *re-turn* to the authentic origin to the longing for the emergence of a self-affirmative hybridity. For the ABC, identity given in large part by stronger multicultural enthusiasm is not just a matter of personal anchorage, cultural roots, self-location and self-assurance like their parents', but also an issue of dialectical deterritorialization (endless search, struggle and breakthrough) in the country where they are born. For them, the mind-projected homeland is not based on true experience and reality, but on recanted stories and imagination; something to be *dis-covered*, *re-newed* and *re-gained* with great effort and, oftentimes, with pain in accordance with their hybrid and changing experiences within and surrounding the self. The new diaspora of Chinese Americans in the United States becomes more ambivalent, uncertain and thus more schizophrenic.

Mona, as a new nomadic subject, is caught in her envisioning of a multicultural society. She is constantly threatened by her very lack of a sense of deep-rooted subjecthood. The nomadic journey of a search for the unknown self in the States presumes that Mona, in trying to answer the call of the unknown Other, is, in a manner of speaking, "unfinished." In reality, all nomadic subjects are incomplete beings, with many mysteries and hitherto unexplored parts of themselves, or of newness, that lie fallow all their lives unless they actively and constantly keep their nomadic desiring-machine running. As the story progresses, Mona doesn't regain her Chineseness as her sister Callie does, becoming the nice and successful Chinese girl her parents expect, nor does she victoriously switch to be an authentic Chinese Jew. After her nomadic journey of self-discovery with all the confusion, commitment, struggle and breakthrough in her teenage years, Mona, at the end of the novel, is forgiven by her parents. She is her own mimicry, her own montage, her own hybrid world and is "big enough not to need to be told" (295).

Mona's nomadic desire presented in quest of her unknown subjectivity can be seen as a flowing signifier of feminine economy which is forbidden and repressed by Oedipal Chineseness in the story. The economy of her nomadic desire is, unlike an Oedipal territorialized economy, an open system of signification for circulating the unorganized energy which does not necessarily bring together opposites or assimilate differences into the Same. Rather, it maintains in a state of disjunction, out-of-jointness, so that it can multiply exchange through a constant play of *differing* and *deferring* meaning. It is an unorganized, dynamic and pre-Oedipal flux which exceeds the masculine structure of suppressed differences by destabilizing and complicating the opposition between the Self and the Other on the one hand and the

hierarchy of identity between them on the other.

Being a feminine flux of impulses, Mona's nomadic desire may be regulated in the symbolic order⁸ by the Oedipalization of parents, society, religion and state, like a coherent syntax or a beaten pathway. However, the schizo-identity of the second generation immigrants can never be pinned down as a sign, whether signifier or signified. With the constitutive nature of undecidability, radical incompleteness and untotalizability, nomadic desire is actually a positive source of new beginnings, whereby semiotic resistance always keeps on flowing beneath the symbolic pathway. Furthermore, this schizo-flow of Mona's nomadic desire is not an ego-centered nostalgia of return to the origins of authenticity and purity. Rather it is an infinite recurrence of repressed heterogeneity and hybridity. Mona's nomadic desire thus mimics the oscillation of difference in respect of cultural identity, and continues to flow toward her imaginary homeland, the Promised Land, of which she dreams. The whole novel can thus be read as an affirmative process of nomadic desire against fixed, pure and fetishized notions of identity--answering the call of the schizo-and-unnameable identity from the imaginary Promised land.

Conclusion: the Unnameable

But the Unnameable was not in the wind. And after the wind, an earthquake; but the Unnameable was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake, a fire; but the Unnameable was not in the fire. And after the fire a still small voice. (I Kings 19:11-12)

One might again consider the commonplace of humanity's evolution: man, *the deterritorialized animal*. (Deleuze and Guattari, *On the Line* 88)

Being a subversive drive, nomadic desire is *ipso facto* a spectral phenomenon of language; the ghost-like signified (absence) is endlessly traced by the signifier (presence) through which the endless growth of the meaning of life is promised and indicated. This spectral characteristic of nomadic desire makes the nomadic subject *re-presentable*. The haunting and intersecting relationship between the Self and the Other, between the signifier and the signified, between the nomadic desire and the fascist desire, as I have argued, is nevertheless not truly representational but both ethical and political.⁹ This is because the phenomenon of the endless deterritorialization of identity can be viewed as, in Nietzsche's phrase, "the eternal recurrence," the infinite inscription of the nomadic subject itself, not of the *same* but of *difference*. The politics of difference in *re-making* the nomadic subject is eternally

ethical.

The nomadic desire discussed in this paper leads to a *re*-consideration of the imaginary relationship between the Chinese second generation immigrants and their ambivalent and nomadic condition of existence in the United States. In fact, globalization and technology have dramatically expanded the means through which people nowadays can remain both actively involved in and influenced by diverse ways of life in other countries. Henceforth, when the seeds of race, ethnicity, cultures, histories, politics and religions are increasingly scattered over much of our multicultural world, the nomadic desire of the diasporic subject has arguably become a postmodern way of daily life, a universal experience, one that has carried on into the 21st century to renew our identities.

In “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” Stuart Hall, according to his own accumulated Jamaican diaspora experience, states that “diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (402). Friedman, in “Migrations, Diasporas, and Borders,” also states that, “Blurring the boundaries between home and elsewhere, migration increasingly involves multiple moves from place to place and continual travel back and forth instead of journeys from one location to another” (261). If this is true, we may surely assert that it is the thrust of nomadic desire that constantly shapes and *re*-shapes both Mona’s and Jen’s identities in their postmodern multicultural condition of existence. Accordingly, her nomadic experiences associate homeland not with a particular country or geographic location but with unknown “journeys from one location to another.”

In truth, my interpretation of nomadic desire is indebted to Deleuze’s and Guattari’s schizoanalysis as an affirmative postmodern identity politics. Beyond Oedipalization, nomadic desire is thus a desire of *more*, of potentiality *par excellence*. Only as such can nomadic desire remain irreducible and unspoken to the fascist desire of ego. Hence, a nomadic subject is always a life “creator” rather than a “carrier.” Deleuze writes: “To create is to lighten, to unburden life, to invent new possibilities of life” (*Pure Immanence* 69). That is, to deterritorialize a given identity in our head is to invite the radical potentiality to crack open the nutshell of the established identity—such a task always requires critical consciousness, cast-iron commitment and endless struggles to constantly tease warring forces of territorialization out of our heads. Rough and thorny may be the way, and yet how sweet is the conqueror’s song! This conqueror’s song in the Promised Land, to Mona, remains “to come”—always “out-of-joint,” always “there,” yet always “to-come”—an infinite progress, indeed.

After putting Mona’s nomadic journey of self-discovery driven by her

transgressive simultaneity of nomadic desire under scrutiny, we discern that once a cycle of deterritorialization—the call, the search, the struggle, the breakthrough and the call again—is done, this nomadic journey should not be understood as a linear time-bound signifying system, but as an organic story, a metaphoric model that portrays the higher and more ethical life in all its mysterious and manifold possibilities. It reminds us that the double desire in its two-handed deconstructive nature cannot be anything but *avenir*, always *to-come* and without teleological guarantees. It is performative, a *perhaps*, due to its structural anxiety, an irreducible interval between the impossibility and possibility for the *re*-presentation of what is virtual within life as a pure immanent plain. Due to the incalculability and openness of nomadic desire, Mona must take apart her identity once she territorializes it; accordingly, she is able to prepare today for what is to arrive tomorrow.

Closing, and then putting down *Mona in the Promised Land*, we seem to hear Mona murmur: “Yes, after the wind, the earthquake and the fire, there is still a small voice, the Unnameable, *there*.”

Notes

1. Deleuze and Guattari make a distinction between “molar” (indicating hierarchy, stratification, and the rigid subjectivity) and “molecular” (meaning unstable, deterritorialized, and nomadic movement). Hence, Oedipalization is constructed in molar lines while schizoanalysis is constructed in molecular lines.
2. This flow-producing desire streams from a mechanistic unconscious, which is productive like a performative factory, rather than from a Lacanian linguistic unconscious, which is like a passive or lack-motivated theatre. Deleuze and Guattari write: “The psychoanalyst becomes a director for a private theater, rather than the engineer or mechanic who sets up units of production, and grapples with collective agents of production and anti-production” (55).
3. Best and Kellner explain that “Deleuze and Guattari do not explicitly call for an aesthetic transformation of life as Foucault sometimes did, but such a project is implied in their efforts to creatively engage desire and transform everyday life” (108).
4. *Typical American* (1992), a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award, tells us about the story of three Chinese immigrants (Ralph Chang, his wife Helen, and his sister Theresa). Together they set out to pursue the “American dream” and struggle against the pressures of cultural assimilation, a combination of both

comedy and tragedy. The novel is a representation of a migrant's dilemma: to change or to hold on to the identities of selfhood in new and different circumstances. The phrase "typical American" is used by them to tease the concept of Americanness, to which they believe they don't belong; however, they all become "typical Americans" themselves at the end of story.

5. Gish Jen herself was born in 1955 in New York. Her family, like Mona's, later moved to the Jewish suburb of Scarsdale.
6. Adorno, in *Negative Dialectics*, suggests that identity is the primordial form of ideology. The critique of ideology is thus a critique of the constitutive consciousness which shows dialectical contradiction within identity itself; namely, nonidentity (146-151). He writes: "Contradiction is nonidentity under the aspect of identity; the dialectical primary of the principle of contradiction makes the thought of unity the measure of heterogeneity. As the heterogeneous collides with its limit it exceeds itself. Dialectics is the consistent sense of nonidentity" (5).
7. Tai qi (or Tai Chi Chuan), which translates as "Supreme Absolute Fist," originated in China over 1000 years ago. Based on the Taoist and Chinese philosophies of Yin and Yang (expansion and contraction, compression and extension, sinking and rising), taught in *the Book of Changes* or *I Ching*, Tai Chi is a powerful blend of self-discipline, self-defense and healing. It is an art which has grown over the millennia to include hundreds of forms and variations, and can easily take a lifetime to master.
8. In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva transforms Lacan's distinction between the *imaginary* and the *symbolic order* into the a distinction between the *semiotic* and the *symbolic* to set out to understand the interaction between the two phases which constitute the signifying process in language. The symbolic is the logical, coherent syntax and rationality of the adult while the semiotic, being linked to the pre-Oedipal primary processes, is the endless flow of subversive impulse to undermine the symbolic order. She writes: "We shall call *symbolic* the logical and syntactic function of language and everything which, in translinguistic practices is assimilable to the system of language proper. The term *semiotic*, one the other hand, will be used to mean: . . . the return of these facilitations in the form of rhythms, intonations and lexical, syntactic and rhetorical transformation" (Kristeva 68). In terms of literary language and cultural praxis, Kristeva believes that the feminine poetic language brings in the subversive openness of the semiotic across society's closed symbolic order.
9. The ethical and political dimensions of *dispora* in the postmodern condition are worth examining and theorizing, I believe. However, owing to the limit of this paper, I will explore it in my next paper.

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