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The Making of a Eurasian: Writing, Miscegenation, and Redemption in Sui Sin Far/Edith Eaton

by Juanita C. But

> I have come from a race on my mother's side which is said to be the most stolid and insensible to feeling of all races, yet I look back over the years and see myself so keenly alive to every shade of sorrow and suffering that is almost pain to live. Fundamentally, I muse, all people are the same. My mother's race is as prejudiced as my father's.
>
> Sui Sin Far/Edith Maude Eaton[1]

If there is one persistent struggle that exists in the life of Edith Eaton, also known as Sui Sin Far, it is the coming to terms with her racial identity/identities in an environment of prejudice and intolerance. This lifelong struggle has become the enduring impetus for her writing; it is her intention to create a discursive space for a territory of issues, thoughts, and experiences that remain otherwise repressed in open discussions. There is no doubt that the rough terrain of race relations does not emerge only in her generation. Amidst the numerous discourses advocating segregation and hostility between races in the prolonged history of racism in America—the discriminatory agenda of which was further intensified by the extreme Sinophobia during the late 1800s—she felt the exigency to present an honest and sympathetic account of a group of Chinese immigrants who find themselves in situations of racial strife in a society of different values and tradition.

Raised by her English father and Chinese mother in Central England and North America, Sui Sin Far gained an intimate insight into the complex and difficult relations between races that were intricately enmeshed in various individual misunderstandings and communal prejudices. From her experience, to survive in a racially mixed family is to be confronted with the constant choice between the Chinese and the white races which she found extremely difficult, if not impossible, to simultaneously embrace.

Despite Sui Sin Far's history of growing up and being educated in a predominantly Anglo-American culture, she feels very close to the Chinese heritage. Yet the development of this kinship is not an immediate result of her innate preference; it only materializes after a lengthy and excruciating process of introspection. Her choice of the pseudonym Sui Sin Far, which means "Chinese

[1] Sui Sin Far, "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of a Eurasian" (223). Sui Sin Far, Edith Eaton's pseudonym will be used throughout this essay to indicate the writer's preference in relation to her identity and authorship which will be discussed later.

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Lily," already reveals her passion for her Chinese roots in spite of her Western upbringing.[2] Her choice makes a bold statement in identifying herself with a people who are deemed outcasts and inferior by mainstream America.

The weighty burden of the two races and the two sedimented traditions laid upon her only produces an urge to question the conventional racial enterprise and to reinvent her own identity. In this paper, I will examine the literary itinerary of Sui Sin Far as a Eurasian writer and the way her authorship is shaped through the signifying process of her personal history.

Convulsion of the Signifier: What is in a Chinese?

The beginning of this process is nowhere better seen than in her autobiographical piece, "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of a Eurasian." It opens with a crucial episode:

> When I look back over the years I see myself, a little child of scarcely four years of age, walking in front of my nurse, in a green English lane, and listening to her tell another of her kind that my mother is Chinese. "Oh Lord!" exclaims the informed. She turns around and scans me curiously from head to foot. Then the two women whisper together, Tho the words "Chinese" conveys very little meaning to m mind, I feel that they are talking about my father and mother and my heart swells with indignation. (219)

No matter how little the word "Chinese" might mean to the child Sui Sin Far, the distress occasioned by its utterance has already imprinted a permanent mark in her mind. Emerging as a by-product of the process of symbolic representation, this impression serves as an obscure marker differentiating her from other children. However, this difference is not yet a racial difference, nor does it refer directly to a racial origin, for the semantic link between the term "Chinese" and the category "race" has not yet been forged by the child subject. The significance of this pre-racial difference is that it establishes a symbolic precursor in the subject as an assurance and valorization of meaning in any future occurrence of the same signifier.

The semantic prefix of this difference makes its way into her narrative only by way of a reenactment from a present standpoint. She calls attention to an already established racial boundary by referring to the informed as another of her nurse's "kind," a kind that is opposed to that of her own. Her conscious choice of the word "kind" not merely addresses her racial difference, but also acknowledges her own subject displacement. Speaking retroactively, she clearly identifies the real cause for her indignation from this past event. It neither comes from the startling interjection nor the intrusive scrutiny of her physique from the stranger. Instead, she is offended by the fact that her parents are turned into

[2] S. E. Solberg attributes her public identification with a group that was treated so contemptuously in America to her allegiance to the principle of sincerity in Confucianism, as depicted in her autobiography "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of a Eurasian" (1909).

objects of impertinent chattering simply because her mother is labeled as different.

Since the cultural significance of being Chinese was still unseen by the child Sui Sin Far, the initial recognition of her racial difference was primarily experienced only as a symbolic interruption of her subject integrity. It is not only until a later incident that she feels the full impact of this initial symbolic event, at this point the signifier "Chinese" becomes attached to its long-separated referent:

> My parents have come to America. We are in Hudson City, N.Y. and we are very poor. I am out with my brother, who is ten months older than myself. We pass a Chinese store, the door of which is open, "Look!" says Charlie. "Those men in there are Chinese!" Eagerly I gaze into the long low room. With the exception of my mother, who is English bred with English ways and manner of dress, I have never seen a Chinese person. The two men within the store are uncouth specimens of their race, drest in working blouses and pantaloons with queues hanging down their backs. I recoil in a sense of shock.
> "Oh Charlie, "I cry. "Are we like that?" (219)

The symbolic meaning of the word "Chinese" remains hidden as long as a safe distance from the actual object it represents. Sui Sin Far's initial and only encounter with the Chinese before this incident has been limited to her mother. Yet with her English education and upbringing, her mother has already been largely Anglicized and is therefore atypical of people from her race.[3] Having in mind the image of Chinese represented by this Anglicized model, Sui Sin Far's immediate reaction to the sight of the Chinese men was one of fear and bewilderment. Contrary to the "civilized" and "well-bred" appearance and demeanor of her mother, those two men, in her words, are the "most uncouth specimens" of their race. In her eyes, the images of the two exert an unknown power that both restores and dissolves the process of representation. On the one hand, they are supposed to be the evidence of what they really are in reinstating the hitherto impoverished symbolic content of the word "Chinese." On the other hand, such an abrupt restitution of meaning inevitably destroys certain set knowledge Sui Sin Far upholds and in turn alienates her from what she considers to be intimate and familiar.

This destabilizing process can be read as a struggle between the polarized worlds that originate from the same signifier and simultaneously collapse into and repel one another. Though the signified that emerges later--represented by the Chinese men—seems to contain a fuller picture of what the term "Chinese' really represents. It never really complements the formerly incomplete signifying process. Instead, the new signified only negates and overthrows the existing one by taking over its inadequate signification or lack. But this transaction of lack is just another incomplete process that causes further confusion and disturbance in the signifying field. The competing existence of the wayward signified found in

[3] According to the obituary of Sui Sin Far's father Edward Eaton, her mother, Grace, was taken from China to England as the protégé of a Sir Hugh Matheson, who brought her up and gave her an English education.

the crude figures of the Chinese men and the compliant signified found in Sui Sin Far's mother in no way presents a clean and unadulterated substitution of meaning. In fact, when the two moments of signification confront one another, what takes place is a traumatic address of something which adamantly resists incorporation into the signifying process, something that interrupts the autonomy of the symbolic features representing the Chinese. This rupture is precisely what indicates the realm of the uncanny, the failure of representation, and more importantly, the place where Sui Sin Far feels perplexed and shamed by what can be called an inscrutable obscenity of the Chinese. In order to understand the nature of this obscenity and the logic in which it is seen as a primary trait of the Chinese, one has to look beyond the symbolic dimension.

There are some key questions need to be considered. First of all, what exactly is it that causes Sui Sin Far to judge the two Chinese men as the crudest of their race? And what makes them appear to be intrinsically vulgar and obscene to their onlooker? The following may provide an important clue to these questions: "An obscene object, like an ugly object is in 'itself' out of place, on account of the distorted balance between its 'representation' (the symbolic features we perceive) and its existence" (Zizek 165). With respect to this analysis, the perception of the Chinese men as obscene is not due to their repulsive appearance or any inherent vulgarity. It is certain that when viewed from the perspective of their fellow countryman, their presence would never even incite the remotest connection to the kind of obscenity perceived by their American Eurasian audience. It is not difficult for one to see, in this consideration, how racial aesthetics becomes relevant to the location and dislocation of people. [4] What makes the Chinese obscene is the fact that they are improperly located, out of place. They are considered aesthetically displeasing and shocking simply because their appearance suggests a radical transgression of some established norms of judgment specific to the place they occupy but do not belong. Coming out from this transgression is their uncontainable existence that threatens to overflow the conventional boundary of the place. This can be elucidated by Lacan's definition of the immaterial substance *lamella*, which is also described as a mythical presubjective 'unclean' life substance that always returns in the form of non-symbolizable stuff (197-198). The obscenity Sui Sin Far perceives in the Chinese men is therefore that which exceeds representation, that corpulent immateriality that floods the symbolic margin of the visual signifier.

The body of Sui Sin Far that "recoils" from the horror of the sight of the Chinese can be seen as a physical manifestation of what takes place in the signifier. Even having exhausted its symbolic capacity, the signifier is still unable to adequately absorb the excess meaning that floods its signifying zone. Like the writer's cringing body that gestures a desperate withdrawal from the fearful and incomprehensible objects, the signifier simply throws up the sudden surge of meaning. In an instant, the skin of the Chinese bodies appears to be a source of obscenity, the uncanny stuff that swamps the symbolic surface and threatens to engulf its subject. The child Sui Sin Far feels powerless to flee from such a traumatic invasion of obscenity. Her channel of escape is immediately blocked

[4] From an anthropological perspective, Mary Douglas elucidates the relationship between racial aesthetics and the expression of a general view of the social order in which the dislocation of people are perceived to be a social contamination. See Douglas (3-4).

when the signifying system fails to register and contain the obscenity at its source. This failure can also be explained by the symbolic association of two opposing realities that are produced by only one signifier. The word "Chinese" immediately reminds Sui Sin Far of two antithetical definitions attached respectively by her mother, "the good and the civilized," and the two men in the store, "the bad and the vulgar." This radical shift of meaning creates much more than just a state of undecidability. In fact, wrestling in the battlefield of the two vying meanings—themselves the products of the utter convulsion of their parent signifier—Sui Sin Far's subject integrity is violated by the traumatic coercion to identify with the object of obscenity. Her subjection to this violence is reflected by her question addressed to her brother: "Are we like that [the Chinese men]?" This question does not serve so much as an interrogation than an interjection of helplessness and shock. Despite the rejection it voices, it only reveals an involuntary compliance or a compulsive identification of herself with her objects.

In this traumatic encounter with the Chinese men, the child Sui Sin Far is neither able to grasp the whole meaning nor to fully articulate her experience. The disruption of discourse occurs the moment when her speech reaches its limits. The question she asks immediately signals a failure of representation and a breakdown of her subject integrity. Her inarticulate phrase reduces her experience to only one meaning—the feeling of pain and bewilderment.

The Half-Chinese Writer

Writing for Sui Sin Far is a tool and a process through which she can regain her subjectivity. Just as her essay "Leaves from a Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian" demonstrates, this task of articulation is achievable only if she recalls and renders full meaning to her past experience. Yet more often than not, remembering is an intense and disorienting process for Sui Sin Far. Her repeated efforts to put together fragments from her personal history do not always restore a perfectly intact picture. What this process requires is "a painful re-membering, a putting together of dismembered past to make sure of the trauma[5] of the present" (Bhabha 63). The retroactive construct very often involves a reevaluation of the subject's status of being in the initial scene of trauma by calling forth a then absent judgment. For instance, Sui Sin Far's saying that the Chinese men she saw years ago were to her "the most uncouth specimens of their race" is not just a spontaneous expression. The highly prescriptive tone of this statement not only reflects her conscious distance from them, it also expresses the prevailing racial norm in which she involuntarily partakes. Obviously, when reconstructing the scene, she is not unaware of the racist accent of the statement, nor does she try to conceal the ambivalent racial consciousness and its foundation by erasing her critical intonation.[6]

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[5] In his discussion of Fanon's historical memory, Homi Bhabha specifically defines this trauma, one that is also akin to Sui Sin Far's experience, as something pertinent to the subject's memory of the history of race and racism, as well as the question of identity.

[6] In keeping this critical intonation, Sui Sin far did not intend to undermine the influence of racial prejudice on her perception of race relations and her history of growing up in a Sinophobic environment. However, the realization of her childhood misconception of races also became a

Her confounded view of racial difference and discrimination as a Eurasian child in the Western world was fully articulated only when she started her writing career during a time when miscegenation is still largely inadmissible or even unthinkable in America. As Annette White-Parks notes, "In 1880 the California state legislature extended previous laws prohibiting marriage between 'whites' and 'Negroes and Mulattos' to include 'Mongolians' and in 1905 declared such marriages illegal and void' (106). Though at that time no anti-miscegenation law had been passed in Canada where she was raised, the Chinese Immigration Act was enacted and Sinophobic sentiments were palpable in different parts of the country.[7] Despite the judicial injustice, the racial intolerance and bigotry, as Sui Sin Far observes, are not only from people of the white race, but also men and women of the Chinese race. Her predicament as half-Chinese is translated into a marginal existence in an estranged world made up of a constant "neither-nor," a world that neither of her parents understands. Being fully aware that her own voice is constantly threatened with losing its meaning, she is eager to declare her long repressed childhood anguish: "They would not understand. How could they? He is English, she is Chinese. I am different to both of them—a stranger, tho their own child" (222).

It is not hard to perceive that her writing career is considerably built upon the perpetual anguish and agony of being shut out from the two worlds from which she desperately strives to gain acceptance. In another autobiographical piece, "Sui Sin Far, the Half Chinese Writer," she specifically reveals a seminal vision of her book:

> I attend school and must have been eight years old when I conceived the ambition to write a book about the half Chinese. This ambition arose from my sensitiveness to the remarks, criticisms and observations on the half Chinese which continually assailed my ears, also from an impulse, born with me, to describe, to impart on others that I felt all that I saw, all that I was…
> I came here with the intention of publishing a book and planting a few Eurasian thoughts in Western literature. My collection of Chinese-American stories will be brought out soon, under the title "Mrs. Spring Fragrance." (288-289)

The anguish that propels Sui Sin Far to make her Eurasian experience known is transformed into a volume of stories that shows the complex and contingent

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motivation and reference from which she developed a commitment to fight racism against the Chinese. This is reflected in the articles she had written for *Los Angeles Express* (1903) on the conditions of people living in Chinatown. In these articles, she sought to redeem individual sacrifices and acknowledge contributions of the Chinese immigrants in the American society.

[7] In 1872, the British Columbia Qualifications of Voters Act denied the Chinese the right to vote. In 1885, the federal government introduced the Act to Restrict and Regulate Chinese immigration into Canada, which required Chinese entering into Canada to pay $50.00 head tax per person. The head tax was respectively increased to $100 and $500 per person in 1900 and 1903. In 1906, Newfoundland passed a law requiring all Chinese immigrants to pay a head tax of $300. In the following year, an anti-Asian riot swept through Chinatown in Vancouver and damages Chinese and Japanese businesses. From 1917 to 1918, four provinces passed laws making it illegal to hire Chinese women in Chinese-owned restaurants and laundries. In 1923, the Chinese Immigration Act (the Exclusion Act) prohibits Chinese from entering into Canada, with a few exceptions.

relations between races, genders, and classes that express the inevitable and empirical nature of prejudice and intersubjective history.

Writing Miscegenation

With her western upbringing and appearance, as Vanessa Holford Diana points out, Sui Sin Far "could pass into white culture and live free from the direct racism the Chinese suffer, but her sense of injustice over that racism and her allegiance to the Chinese is too strong to allow her to sacrifice identity for comfort" (180). It is Sui Sin Far's Eurasian consciousness that empowers her to advocate for those who are subject to the vicious criticisms deeply rooted in a general fear and dismay of miscegenation. The plight faced by children from interracial marriages in North America is clearly expressed by the experience an American woman who married a Chinese recorded in her journalistic piece "Half-Chinese Children":

> She says that these children, who, for most part live in the Chinatown of the Cities, are not by any means to be envied, for the white people with whom they come in contact that is, the lower-class, jibe and jeer at the poor little things continually, and their pure and unadulterated Chinese cousins look down upon them as being neither one thing nor the other—neither Chinese nor White. (187)

Children of mixed heritage at that time are deemed impure and interracial marriages as menacing for people of both the Chinese and the white race. The suspicious ears and prejudiced eyes of the full-blooded Chinese to which biracial children are subjected are no less vicious than the slurs and smears from the white people. Though Sui Sin Far has a different upbringing from that of the half-Chinese children in Chinatown, as a child she is never free from racial prejudice and scrutiny, particularly from the white community. In her "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian," she recalls instances in which she is subjected to curious and dehumanizing gazes that turn her into a muted object of display and inspection. She recalls one occasion in which she overhears the remarks from a man who learned of her mixed heritage: "Who would have thought it at first glance. Yet now I see the difference between her and other children. What a peculiar coloring! Her mother's eyes and hair and her father's features, I presume. Very interesting little creature!" (218). When she is called from her play "for the purpose of inspection" (218), she adamantly refuses to reduce herself into an exotic creature, a spectacle just to entertain: "I do not return to it. For the rest of the evening, I hide behind a hall door and refuse to show myself until it is time to go home" (218-219).

Sui Sin Far reiterates this childhood experience in her short story "Sweet Sin" (1898), in which the title character also rejects the objectifying gaze from her white observers: "It is just because I'm half Chinese and a sort of curiosity that she likes to have me there. When I'm in her parlor, she whispers to the other people and they try to make me talk and examine me from head to toe as if I were a wild animal—I'd rather be killed than be a show" (226). In defense of her own subjectivity, Sweet Sin steadfastly protests against those who try to turn her into an object. However, this triumph is short-lived. As the story develops, Sweet

Sin eventually becomes a victim of prejudice against interracial union. Succumbing to the fear of bearing children who will suffer from racial prejudice, she chooses to end her life. In her analysis of the story, Lori Jirousek points out, "In light of fears of mixed marriages, perhaps Sui Sin Far intended the 'sin' in Sweet Sin's name to allude to the supposed 'sin' of miscegenation. However, coupling 'sin' with 'sweet' would also reflect a challenge to conventional condemnations of interracial marriage" (31).

This attempt to challenge the deep-seated prejudice against miscegenation is further articulated in her narrative "The Story of a White Woman Who Married a Chinese." As its title suggests, this story is about an interracial marriage of a white woman and a Chinese man. The characters and circumstances depicted in the narrative address one of the most sensitive issues at that time in America. Chinese people, most of them migrant workers engaged in low-paying jobs, were considered to be people of the most inferior race by white people. Racial boundaries were strictly observed not only ideologically but physically. For their entire life, the majority of Chinese people lived and worked in Chinatown, an insulated and self-contained enclave that separates itself and is separated from the rest of America. They seldom interacted with white Americans whom they considered the possessors of power and agents of oppression over their people. Between the two races, there was virtually no dialogue, no understanding, nor the slightest attempt to reach out to one another. This pervasive climate of hostility, and the communal surveillance it entailed, made miscegenation contemptible. Even when once in a while interracial marriage did occur, the price it exacted was inconceivably high.[8]

"The Story of One White Woman Who Married a Chinese," a short fiction written in 1910, is an honest portrait of an interracial marriage. At that time, the immediate interest the story's title evokes can best be expressed by turning it into a question: "Why did a white woman marry a Chinese?" This is a query that can hardly be ignored by a population who adopts a widely shared antagonism against interracial marriage. Since it is almost certain that the motive of her narrative is going to be turned into a subject of inquiry by her readers and critics, in anticipation of such queries, Sui Sin Far poses the question through Minnie, the story's main character, and warrants a valid response:

> Why did I marry Liu Kanghi, a Chinese? Well, in the first place, because I loved him, in the second place, because I was weary of working, struggling, and fighting with the world; in the third place, because my child needed a home. (67)

This opening excerpt is as provocative as it is unexciting. At first glance, the rudimentary logic of the narration appears to proceed fluently in the narrator's lucid and straightforward manner of expression that leaves virtually no room for conjecture or ambiguity. Likewise, as transparent and uneventful as they can

[8] Sui Sin Far published her works in the U.S. during a time of growing antagonism against the Chinese and extreme restriction over Chinese immigration. In 1880, the anti-miscegenation laws in California were enacted, which prohibits the Chinese from marrying white Americans. Two years later, the Chinese Exclusion Act was put into effect in 1882, preventing the growth of the Chinese population and its assimilation into the U.S. society.

possibly sound, the question and answer are enacted to present a felicitous case of a decision of marriage. In order to understand this discursive provocation, one has to examine the structure of the question, and the accompanying answer, which in themselves demonstrate an unbalanced economy. The interrogative nature of the question, though seemingly neutralized in the voice of the narrator, essentially communicates a collective consciousness consorted with a highly critical disposition. This consciousness simply turns the question into a judgment of interracial marriages. Given its set agenda, the narrator's question is predisposed to occlude any genuine appeal to knowledge.

It is Sui Sin Far's intention to displace the authority of this question by claiming it as an initial site where her protagonist, presumably the subject under interrogation, constitutes her voice. Her strategy is to restore the proper function of the question and to disengage it from the bondage of judgment. She does it by transplanting the question from its designated public/social context to a mediated and personal one. As long as the question of miscegenation is raised in the public context with the full weight of widespread opposition, one could almost expect an array of defenses rallied by the parties in question. Yet despite their intended objective, these defenses eventually only end up confirming the parties' transgressions.

Refuting the charges based on communal animosity, the narrator's reasons for marrying a Chinese man subtly destabilize the semantic balance of the predetermined racial binary under the logic of prejudice. Compared to the motive and controversy of the question suggests, her answer sounds perfectly simple and natural. She is no exception to women who married for the most conventional reasons—love, security, and the wellbeing of her child. Her uninspiring explanation, however, turns out to be the perfect response to reinstate the status and legitimacy of miscegenation as a form of marriage that is ordinary and honorable rather than perverted and debased. More importantly, her responses also foreclose the social relevance of racial difference miscegenation entails. The generality of her statements shows that she prioritizes the universal need for love as the decisive factor for her nuptial choice. This priority transforms her statements into a compelling force that effectively wipes out the racial/ inter-racial marker of her marriage.

Rewriting the Primal Scene

The abrupt end to her abusive marriage to James Carson, her American husband leaves Minnie and her child homeless, destitute, and on the verge of self-destruction. Liu Kanghi is the man who rescues her and helps her establish a new life. Despite the fact that he is Chinese, she admits that this man who later becomes her second husband does not appear to be different or foreign to her even at the very beginning:

> I allow myself to be led into light…I followed him, obeyed him, trusted him from the very first. It never occurred to me to ask myself what manner of man was succoring me. I only knew that he was a man, and that I was being cared for as no one had ever cared for me since my father died…I did not recoil—not even at first. (72)

This initial encounter presents a sharp contrast to Sui Sin Far's own traumatic encounter described in her "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of a Eurasian," in which she recoils with a sense of indignation at the sight of the two crude-looking Chinese men. The word "recoil" she uses to depict the impact of both encounters is not just a contingent choice; its metonymic reference reveals a preconscious association of the fictional and the autobiographical moments. It seems clear that this specific event in her story partially fulfills the writer's underlying wish to revisit and rewrite her own traumatic encounter with the Chinese race recorded in her autobiography. In the childhood primal scene, her unwanted racial identification is confirmed by the relentless racial slurs directed towards her by other children —"Chinky, Chinky, Chinaman, yellow-face, pig-tail, rat-eater" — in an unwelcome answer to her question "Are we like that?" (219)

A less spontaneous but more elaborate narration is found in her fictional version of the primal scene, in which she makes an explicit effort in rationalizing Minnie's unexpected indifference to the initial presence of her Chinese encounter. Written in a predominantly explanatory rather than descriptive manner, this account gives the impression of a self-analysis rather than a mere recollection of an event. In her attempt to make sense of her somewhat involuntary reaction, the narrator cannot do so without adding a series of self-examination and reasoning. And so she does. As she recalls:

> It may have been because he was wearing American clothes, wore his hair cut, and, even to my American eyes, appeared a good-looking young man—and it may have been because of my troubles; but whatever it was I answered him, and I meant it "I would much rather live with Chinese than Americans." (72)

Her reasoning starts with how the perception of identity comes to be invested with visual aesthetics. She believes that conformity to mainstream American aesthetics is instrumental to the breaking of racial barriers. Contrasting to the crude-looking Chinese men whose appearance petrifies Sui Sin Far, Liu Kanghi's Americanized image strikes his encounter as rather pleasant and good-looking. It is probably his Western attire, as Minnie assumes, that makes the Chinese stranger look less unfamiliar and hence less threatening to her. Conclusive as it may sound, this account concerns only the external features she perceives, which still has no explicit relevance to her own condition.

This is perhaps the reason for her to further explain the situation along a more introspective line of reasoning. Or maybe she simply cannot expect to be adequately excused from her "inappropriate" reaction, which is insufficiently justified by external motives alone. As a result, she seeks to absolve herself by attributing her behavior to a lack of judgment. She imagines that it is her "troubled condition" that prevents her from discerning the strangeness of the Chinese. But no matter what kind of justification she comes up with or how convinced she is by it, the reality that persists is her preoccupation with certain racial presuppositions she seeks to overcome. In fact, this is exactly the struggle Sui Sin Far faces throughout her life and that which becomes highly visible in her work.

The rewriting—or the writing over—of the primal scene not only helps Sui Sin Far settle the anguish and indignation that runs through her Eurasian experience, it also reopens the discursive space from the past in which she is able to rectify the gross injustice perpetuated by dominant racial prejudice. The important message highlighted in "Story of One White Woman" is that, as the narrator says, "the virtues do not all belong to the whites" (74). As an average white American, Minnie reaches this understanding not through instinct, but by living among the Chinese, being acquainted with them and knowing them as authentic human beings instead of as abstract foreign subjects. It is this personal engagement with the Chinese that enables her to lose altogether "the prejudice against the foreigner" (74) in which she had been reared.

Yet to repudiate the prevalent racist thinking and to embrace humanity with an unbiased measure in an overtly racist society almost always invites hostility rather than harmony. Because she is married to a Chinese man, Minnie already anticipates contempt from people of her race, one that reminds her only of "the world which had been cruel" (72) to her. Yet despite the ordeals she endures, she has not a tinge of regret for her choice:

> Loving Liu Kanghi, I became his wife, and though it is true that there are many Americans who look down upon me for so becoming, I have never regretted it.
> No, not even when men cast upon me the glances they cast upon sporting women. I accept the lot of the American wife of a humble Chinaman in America. The happiness of the man who loves me is more to me than the approval or disapproval of those of my dark days left me to die like a dog. My Chinese husband has his faults…but he is always a man, and has never sought to take away from me the privilege of being a woman (77).

Spoken in the least sensational and the most candid manner, this personal revelation discloses a common yet earnest human sensitivity. For Minnie, it is the meeting of her rudimentary needs for love and respect, not the gaining of social acceptance that truly grants her the status and significance of a woman. This status, which was taken away by her American husband, is duly restored by her Chinese one. Despite the plain language used in Minnie's narrative, her authentic voice is charged with a penetrating power that does not only challenge the established prejudice against the Chinese, but more importantly, enables an essential recognition of the true features of humanity.

With respect to the transcending quality of Sui Sin Far's work, it is not surprising for one to find a significant correspondence of her thoughts with aspects of what Heidegger vigorously puts forth in his philosophy of Being, some twenty years after her story was published. Succinctly defining one of the primary features of Being is the following recollection of the story's narrator: "he [Liu Kanghi] succored and saved the strange woman, treated her with reverence and respect; gave her child a home, and made them both independent, not only of others, but of himself" (77). In the vocabulary of Heidegger, the generosity represented here is what constitutes the "solicitude" of Being, the average everyday love for human and social good (157). It is a mode of giving that does not relegate the other to a position of subjugation; a manner of loving that exerts neither power nor domination. The fullness of Liu Kanghi's act of charity dwells

not so much in his tangible or material gifts, but in his unconditional and enabling love, which establishes Minnie's absolute independence from others, including him. Giving as such is a pure and disinterested deed entirely free from the expectation of any return or recognition. As a necessary exception and supplement to the solipsistic register of Being, this aspect of giving—the external concern of Being—crucially interrupts the self-referential cycle by opening an invaluable and authentic access to the Other[9]. This access, itself the realization of neighborly love, also provides the essential foundation for a hospitable and habitable human community.

The Triumph of a Eurasian

No reading of Sui Sin Far can dispute the fact that race relations remain the infrastructure of her narrative. Yet to acknowledge merely the empirical significance of this central framework in her writing does not really suffice to define the deeper subtext she delivers. Her urge to rebuke racial injustice comes largely from her Eurasian background; its deepest roots, however, lie in the fundamental exigency of human existence, which goes beyond the external differences of skin color and race. From the little girl who cringes at the sight of two Chinese men to the author who passionately embraces and advocates for the Chinese race, Sui Sin Far has reached a crucial point of inner reconciliation.

This is clearly reflected in her writing across genres. Her autobiographical pieces not only record her personal experience but also serve to and substantiate her biracial identity and define her mission as a Eurasian writer. In her journalistic writings, she moves from a personal realm to address the vital issues and concerns of the Chinese community in American Chinatown. Her main objective is to give voice to the marginalized and disenfranchised. Most of the stories in her collection, *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, approach the complex issues in interracial encounters between the Chinese and White Americans from a humanitarian and ethical standpoint.

Her body of work, which is largely dedicated to articulating and attempting to reconcile racial difference, is pivotal not only to American literary history, but also to the reckoning of her personal history and identity. On the one hand, her narratives solidify her views on interracial relations in an attempt to shatter the taboos of miscegenation, and on the other, they expose the racist lies told under the pretext of inherent superiority claimed by the white Americans. Through her personal involvement and identification with the Chinese community, Sui Sin Far not only produces thorough and multi-dimensional accounts of the lives of Chinese Americans, but also establishes a distinct voice of authority that insists that mainstream America acknowledge and respect their Chinese others, not as strangers but as neighbors.

Unlike the anguish and confusion that are so much part of her account of being a mixed race child in her autobiographical piece, the poise and certitude found in the tone of her narratives about the Chinese Americans to a large extent demonstrates a discourse of liberation and redemption that are reflected in Sui

[9] Emmanuel Levinas' ethical philosophy proposes that the self's consciousness can only be fully recognized through its access to the Other, by responding to the utter destitution of the Other with authentic care. See Levinas (74).

Sin Far's life. From the fearful and indignant child Edith Eaton in the "Portfolio of a Eurasian" to the half-Chinese author known as Sui Sin Far, Sui Sin Far chronicles a journey in which she frees herself from the complex developed from her Eurasian identity and redeems herself from the prejudice she once had. She does so by offering herself to the course of restoring what have been taken away by racial injustice, specifically love for the Other in humanity. After all, her inspiring belief that "the spirit is stronger than the body," which helped her endure her childhood years, has not failed to bring her the ultimate triumph as a Eurasian writer.

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