Between Betrayal and Loyalty: The Futile Language and the Absolute Chineseness

Anqi Liu

University of Georgia

Based on Pekingese-like phonology and known as "common speech," Mandarin (Putonghua, 普通话), formerly the universal standard language spoken by the educated and officials during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1912) dynasties, has been adopted as the official national language since the early twentieth century.[1] With all the varieties of languages in China, such as Mongolian, Korean, and Uyghur, Mandarin *per se* functions as a universal vehicle to connect people and the nation-state regardless of cultural, linguistic, and social differences. In 2000, the PRC government promulgated and implemented the "Law of the People's Republic of China on the Standard Spoken and Written Chinese Language (Order of the President No.37)," which stated that the aim of promoting Putonghua as the normalization and standardization of the Chinese spoken and written language is to uphold "state sovereignty and national dignity, to the unification of the country and unity of the nationalities, and to socialist material progress and ethnical progress."[2] In other words, transcending the lexical and syntactical delimits, the hegemony of Mandarin is now developed as a political tactic in order to maintain

[1] W. South Coblin. "A Brief History of Mandarin." *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 120, no. 4 (Oct. 2000): 537-550.
[2] Article 5, Chapter I, "Law of the People's Republic of China on the Standard Spoken and Written Chinese Language (Order of the President No.37)."

national and ethnic unity. When all the citizens, Han and non-Han people alike, are required to learn and use Mandarin by the laws, the diversity and complexity of Chinese as a composite linguistic concept consisting of multiple languages are profoundly reduced and oversimplified.

Simultaneously, in the West, the hegemonic Mandarin largely homogenizes the question of "who can be Chinese?" As Chow claims, "Mandarin is, properly speaking, also *the white man's Chinese*, the Chinese that receives its international authentication as 'standard Chinese' in part because, among the many forms of Chinese speeches, it is the one inflected with the largest number of foreign, especially Western, accents."[3] Speaking Mandarin then becomes a form of performative and epistemological symbol for recognizing one's ethnic authenticity. Without questioning the validity of particularism-as-universalism, the enforcement of Mandarin in the West, as Chow suggests, "is rather a sign of the systematic *codification and management of ethnicity* that is typical of modernity, in this case through language implementation."[4] Mandarin, in this sense, replaces the plurality of other Chinese languages and now becomes the emblem of Chinese and Chineseness as a whole inside and outside China.

In the following sections, a focused analysis will be conducted on the role that language plays in marking the *home*, national identity, and ethnic borders. The writing experience of the Chinese diasporic writer Ha Jin will be contextualized to shed light on his struggle between language and national identity. Whereas Ha Jin proactively intervenes in the essentialist identity created by language through the other language, the following questions still arise: how solid is the relation between language and national identity? And as a literary diaspora who writes in non-Mandarin, to what degree is Ha Jin's Chineseness affected? By closely examining Ha Jin's

[3] Rey Chow. "Introduction: On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem," *Boundary 2*, vol. 25, no. 3 (Oct 1998): 11.
[4] Ibid.

self-Orientalist portrait of Communist China, this paper aims to debunk the myth that Ha Jin effectively constructs a more fluid and hybrid identity that transcends his predetermined Chineseness.

The Standardized Language as a Standardized National Identity

The approach to the relationship between language and national identity has long been an active debate in the arena of literary criticism. In terms of the postmodernists, the construction of national identity is portrayed as a dynamic process in relation to the subject's relational position. Stuart Hall as a prime example argues that nation is a linguistic representation while national identity is in essence "the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be 'spoken'. Identities are thus points of *temporary* attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us."[5] By circulating the discourses and representations, therefore, language becomes a crucial vehicle for inventing an "increasing fragmented and fractured identity".[6]

Based on the juxtaposition of the modernist view that nation is constructed and the postmodernist notion of the nation as a linguistic representation, theorists such as Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson also propose that the codified language is an integrated part of establishing a nation-state. In consequence, a codified language is regarded as an efficient administrative tool to not only hold a nation-state together but also formulate a national identity. In Anderson's accounts, a community can be "invented" and "imagined," and what makes a new community imaginable is the "interaction between a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communications (print) and the fatality of human

[5] Stuart Hall. "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?" Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay., Ed. *Questions of Cultural Identity*, (New York: Sage, 1996), 5-6. Emphasis added.
[6] Ibid, 4.

linguistic diversity".[7] As he articulates in *Imagined Communities*, in a univocal and universalizing society, when a new unified field of communication and circulation is created through a spoken vernacular, an imagined community is invented in order to transcend the ethnic homogeneity, unbroken ancestry links, and shared values across the definite geopolitical terrain. Thus, in the postmodernist context, language is a significant medium for the subject to imagine, invent, and adhere to a new national community, more importantly, to construct one's own identity actively and electively in relation to the external entity.

In the discourse and practice of Chinese diaspora, when Mandarin is perpetuated as an essential determinant of Chineseness—a form of national identity, for the diasporic intellectuals who write in foreign languages and do not necessarily expect or desire a diasporic return, their engagement in a dialogue across national borderlines endeavors to generate a form of transnational identity disassociated with their *a prior* Chineseness by opening up a third space—an imagined community—in which the binary antagonisms between the West and the East are blurred, challenged, and undermined. As Hall highlights in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," diaspora is changing the communities in the process of the absorbing languages, culture, and values they encounter in the foreign lands.[8] That is to say, when China-related subject matters are delineated by the foreign languages, there is a possibility that Chinese diasporic writers are capable of destabilizing their national identity—the essentialized Chineseness—that is formulated by Mandarin.

Between Betrayal and Loyalty: The Necessity of the Linguistic Convert

[7] Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised and extended edition., (New York: Verso, 1991), 42-43.
[8] Stuart Hall. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman., Ed. *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 227-237.

Born in China in 1956, Ha Jin headed to Brandeis University to pursue the Ph.D. degree after earning bachelor's and master's degrees in English language and literature. When the 1989 Tiananmen incident occurred, Ha decided to emigrate to the United States and write in English. In *The Writer as Migrant*, he describes the shift of writing language as his "the ultimate betrayal":

> No matter how the writer attempts to rationalize and justify adopting a foreign language, it is an act of betrayal that alienates him from his mother tongue and directs his creative energy to another language. This linguistic betrayal is the ultimate step the migrant writer dares to take; after this, any other act of estrangement amounts to a trifle.[9]

Ha Jin is aware that writing in a non-native language is essentially an alienation that uproots him from not only a language but also the sense of belonging tied to that language. More significantly, such a linguistic betrayal, in the words of Ha Jin, cannot be fully rationalized while, at the same time, inevitably triggering a sense of guilt in the migrant writers who share a collective existential and creative predicament with him.[10] However, in the name of survival, artistic integrity, and individual dignity, Ha Jin proclaims that sacrificing his mother tongue and converting to a foreign language is the only viable path to fulfill his loyalty to his art.[11] As he explains in an interview for *The Paris Review*,

> I wanted to separate myself from Chinese state power. The Chinese language has a lot of political jargon. You can talk at length without saying much, because these pieces of jargon become like formulas for public speech. And those expressions become a part of people's consciousness.[12]

In Ha Jin's accounts, the Chinese language is profoundly transformed into an ideal instrument for political manipulation and control in Communist China. If follow Foucauldian theory of

[9] Ha Jin. *The Writer as Migrant* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008a), 31.
[10] Ha Jin. *The Writer as Migrant* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008a), 31-32.
[11] Ibid, 59-60.
[12] Sarah Fay. "Ha Jin: The Art of Fiction No. 202," *The Paris Review*, vol. 191 (2009): 123-124.

"power-knowledge," the production of power is based on the knowledge and the usage of knowledge; in the meantime, power creates and recreates knowledge so that it is in accordance with the intention of power. As an expressive and communicative mechanism of knowledge, therefore, certain language—political jargon—is perpetuated by religious-like worship toward Mao's leadership and the prevailing political radicalism; and more importantly, it is exploited to further sustain the leadership as well as the Communist sovereignty. For any Chinese who is exposed to such political terrorism in which language has already been molded as a political propaganda system by the Communist apparatus, any attempt to question, comprehend, or resist is fully futile. In other words, when the consciousness entrenched by language transcends one's capability to rationalize or deny, one can only unconditionally internalize such consciousness and, as Jin suggests, be "brainwashed".[13] As a result, the soul is tamed, the mind is stifled, and the voice is muted.

Nevertheless, by creating in a non-native language, Ha Jin seeks to liberate himself from the dominant discourse and political rhetoric in the ideological as well as literary spheres. Portraying Communist Chinese society at distance, Ha Jin seems to retrieve the power that enables him to construct his own knowledge in relation to the motherland—the knowledge, or in other words, the truth that is not tainted by the "political jargon" and prevailing social consciousness. Therefore, at the cost of linguistic betrayal, Ha Jin is allowed to possess the autonomy and integrity of his works.

In 2008, Ha Jin was invited to deliver a speech at a small-scale forum organized by the Chinese visiting scholars at Harvard University. In his keynote speech, "禁忌的话题-国家与个人的矛盾," ("The Taboo Topic: the Contradiction between the State and Individual," my

[13] Sarah Fay. "Ha Jin: The Art of Fiction No. 202," *The Paris Review*, vol. 191 (2009): 131.

translation) Ha Jin inquiries into the Chinese myth of country/state, the condition of patriotism, and the relation between literature and the state. Significantly, Ha Jin's reflection recalibrates the criteria for patriotism. Since ancient China, the state and individual had been indissolubly interwoven together as a whole coexistence. When "国家兴亡，匹夫有责" ("everyone is responsible for the rise and fall of the nation," my translation) is profoundly internalized as a social norm for hundreds of years, "individualism," in the words of Ha Jin, ineluctably becomes an unpleasant and pejorative term that is associated with bourgeois ideology;[14] meanwhile, the subjectivity of the *Self* is reduced and even annihilated in the course of history. The criteria for patriotism in Chinese society, therefore, is transfigured as a kind of subordinate loyalty and devotion that requires one's unconditional obedience and sacrifice. Under such a circumstance, Ha Jin suggests,[15]

> 不管国家多大的事情，不管是作家、艺术家还是其他群体，都很难作出反应。比如今年修宪这么重大的事情，我们看不到任何重要的作家、艺术家或者协会社团公开发出声音，全部被噤声，万马齐喑。在这种情况下，艺术怎么能繁荣？人被剥夺了基本精神，对作家或者艺术家来说，是一件很残酷的事。
> ...
> ...比如我教书生涯头十年，从来不用"艺术"这个词，因为我觉得写作是手艺活的事，是一种 "craft"。但是慢慢地，我觉得这不光是个技术问题，需要一个超越国家、超越历史的价值系统。所以后来我也开始用"艺术"这个词，而且自己作为作家的价值，只能在艺术和传统中找到相应的位置，只有这样才能生存下去。
> Regardless of what happened, the writers, the artists, and other intellectual groups could barely make any response. This year's amendment to the constitution is a prime example, we did not see any influential writers, artists, or the related association make voice. They kept silent or were muted. In this case, how can literature and art flourish? The people were deprived of their spirit and basic rights, which is rather cruel for the writers and artists.
> …
> …the first ten years of my teaching, I never used the word "art". I tended to believe that writing is a form of "craft" but rather "art". Yet slowly, I felt it is an issue that is more

[14] Ha Jin. "禁忌的话题-国家与个人的矛盾," ["The Taboo Topic: The Contradiction between the State and Individual"] *Human Rights in China*, vol. 237 (June 2008b), https://www.hrichina.org/chs/zhong-guo-ren-quan-shuang-zhou-kan/ha-jin-mian-dui-guo-jia-de-shen-hua-wo-men-ying-dang-ru-he-jian
[15] Ibid.

> than "craft" because writing requires one to transcend the value system of the state and history. I then started to use the word "art". I can only survive when the value of myself being a writer is fulfilled through finding a relevant position in art and tradition. (My translation)

That is to say, the conflict between making concessions to the rationality of the nation and practicing responsibility as a Chinese intellectual is inevitable when one is required to speak and act as a unified whole to profess his loyalty to the country. Loyalty, however, is not in accordance with patriotism if one is coercively silenced by the collective will. The real sense of patriotism, according to Ha Jin, is to detach oneself from the predeterminate value system and perform his duty as a truth-speaker: a patriot must always devote himself to a higher faith without being bound by the state; he must make his own voice heard by the public, the voice that not only bears social responsibility but also occupies moral righteousness. In pursuit of truth and self-fulfillment, therefore, Ha Jin claims that converting to English is to "exist—to live a meaningful life."[16] And only through renouncing his native language—a type of "unconditional dedication and sacrifice,"[17] can his voice be heard, and his patriotism—another form of loyalty by his definition—fulfilled.

Moreover, oscillating between betrayal and loyalty, such an in-betweenness not only validates the necessity for renouncing the mother tongue but also profoundly subverts the enforced identity that is imposed on Ha Jin. Rather than fully cut off his past, Ha Jin chooses to stay in contact with his cultural roots in spite of the fact that he has not returned for decades. Without being constrained by the absolute identity invented by the place of origin or the place of residence, Ha Jin's English writing places him on the periphery of either side where he can negotiate the tension in affiliation between the diasporic community and host community

[16] Ha Jin. *The Writer as Migrant* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008a), 32.
[17] Ibid.

through flexibility and multiplicity: he is no longer bounded by one language, one culture, and one geopolitical terrain. Thus, by evoking the China-related subject matters in English, Ha Jin endeavors to block the naturalized relation between language and the nation-state. Meanwhile, by projecting his transindividual encounter into the protagonists, Ha Jin replicates not only his own struggle between betrayal and loyalty but also the ambivalent status quo he occupies. In the next section, two representative novels—*A Map of Betrayal* (2014) and *The Boat Rocker* (2016)—will be contextualized in order to further explore the attempts that Ha Jin has made to challenge and suspend the absolute Chineseness—not in himself—but rather in his writings.

The Flexible Identity in Multiplicity

Ha Jin's novels typically focus on the individual's transnational and transcultural experience in both Communist China and the West. Depicting the story of a Chinese spy, in *A Map of Betrayal*, Ha Jin exquisitely incarnates the ideas of double life as well as dual identity in the state of ambivalence and crisis. The protagonist, Weimin "Gary" Shang, is a Chinese Communist who graduated from Tsinghua University. After being recruited to infiltrate an American cultural agency within the C.I.A, he left his wife, who married him for only a few months and became a radio translator in Okinawa and then in the United States. In the novel, part of Gary's story is unfolded by his daughter Lilian—his child with his American wife. What Lilian discovered in Gary's diary, in addition to the chronicle of his life journey, is how he, a convicted mole, was used and abandoned by the Communist regime, and more importantly, how he is torn between his loyalty to the motherland and the growing affection for the adopted land that he is coercively betraying.

In part, Gary's fate has no significant deviation from other central figures who are manipulated and controlled by the Communist apparatus. When the U.S. government decided to

move the operation out of Japan, and Gary proposed to visit his family and parents in China, the higher-ups from Beijing not only denied his request but also required him to "stay in America as long as possible".[18] Feeling like an exile, Gary suggests that he was banished by his own comrades.[19] His sacrifice, however, is deemed necessary, as Gary's contact Bingwen Chun states, "A nail must remain in its position…and rot with the wood it's stuck in, so a spy of the nail type is more or less a goner. Gary must've known that."[20] Burdened with his habitual and ancestral loyalty, throughout his espionage career, Gary as a "nail"—a tool that served the Communist apparatus—is coerced to become a naturalized American citizen, permanently leaving his family behind in China, and staying at the CIA for decades.

On the other hand, living a double life, Gary begins to enjoy "the orderliness, the plentitude, the privacy, the continuity of daily life, the freedom of travel"[21] brought by Western democracy. In an ironic fashion, when Gary was under interrogation, he highlighted the detail that the FBI even asked about his preference and ordered a variety of Chinese food for him. Nevertheless, Gary's growing affection for the adopted country fails to resolve his homesickness when his longing for return becomes "stronger and more tempestuous day by day."[22] The debate over Gary's espionage business then circles back to the issue of his self-identification: who is he? Is he Chinese or American? which side is he serving? And which side is he betraying? If he is loyal to the U.S., why would he sell intelligence for cash and cause damage to U.S. national security? If he is devoted to China, why would he accuse Communist China of misusing him for gathering confidential intelligence over the decades? Gary's disadvantageous situation seems to

[18] Ha Jin. *A Map of Betrayal*. First edition., (New York: Pantheon Books, 2014), 126.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ha Jin. *A Map of Betrayal*. First edition., (New York: Pantheon Books, 2014), 20.
[21] Ibid, 135.
[22] Ibid, 257.

imply that he is loyal to these opposing forces while betraying them both. In the trial, however, Gary not only denied most of the charges but also "emphasizing that he was a patriot of both the United States and China."[23] As he argues,

> "The two countries are like parents to me," he said, "They are like father and mother, so as a son I cannot separate the two and I love them both. I can't possibly hurt one of them to promote the well-being of the other. …" … In short, it was he who had helped bring the two countries together to shake hands like friends. For that kind of diligence and dedication he should be recognized as a valuable citizen, if not decorated with laurels. "I am an American and love this country like every one of you," he concluded in a strident voice.[24]

What Gary and Ha Jin envision is a hybrid sense of belongingness that allows them to wander between two countries, two languages, and two cultures. Rather than being simply defined by either polar, through a transnational, transcultural, and translinguistic experience, Ha Jin not only further destabilizes the essentialist notions of betrayal and loyalty but also invites the increasingly interconnected world to transgress the borders delimited by the geopolitics, culture, and language: he is the one who can decide who he is and to which he belongs; without being shackled by where he comes from, the national identity he carries, instead, shall be decided by where he is landing.

A Map of Betrayal is not the only novel that probes into the issue of flexible identity. In *The Boat Rocker*, Ha Jin reveals a translational problem, transnational interaction, and transcultural movement between China and America by reflecting on the U.S.-China relationship in the post-9/11 era. The story focuses on Feng Danlin, an independent journalist who endeavors to disclose a national conspiracy and the unequal relationship between the nation and its citizens. Working for a Chinese newspaper in the United States, Feng embraces the privileges of free

[23] Ibid, 260.
[24] Ha Jin. *A Map of Betrayal*. First edition., (New York: Pantheon Books, 2014), 260.

speech and publication brought by his cultural capital as a Chinese intellectual in a liberal environment. However, struggling to escape from political taboos and fulfilling his national duty, Feng constantly confronts the choices between loyalty and betrayal, between national interests and individual obligation. As he confesses when being hesitant to be an American citizen,

> I understood their mind-set—on paper, I knew loyalty ought to remain undivided, though in my heart I sometimes felt torn, nagged by doubts about giving up my Chinese citizenship, even stung by something close to grief. Yet to survive, I had to break away, to find space where I could live safely and freely. Freedom and equality were precious enough to me that I was willing to go through the pain of uprooting myself.[25]

Aligning with Gary's dilemma, by questioning the awkward situation in which situation one's citizenship is absolute while the self-identification swings at both ends, Feng sheds light on the transnational and transcultural experiences that both individuals and society are wrestling with. Such an ambivalent double consciousness that Ha Jin addresses, on the one hand, challenges the presupposing national, cultural, and political identity in relation to Chineseness; on the other hand, surfaces a flexible awareness of nationality and self-identification. As Chung-jen Chen remarks in her analysis,

> …, prompted by a new awareness of transnationality, Ha Jin adopts the Chinese diaspora as his primary narrative voice. China, either as a form of cultural imagination or political identity, is presented not as an entity confined to a static historic moment but a multifarious conglomeration in a state of becoming, and his characters' sense of identity and nationality are subject to sometimes disturbing and often dramatic transformations. China, projected as personal identification or collective belongingness, exists not in singularity nor totality, but in flexibility and multiplicity, and is redefined through its encounters with other nations and cultures, such as the United States.[26]

It is Chen's argument that Ha Jin succeeds in constructing a flexible citizenship *vis-à-vis* globalization and multiculturalism. In Ha Jin's English writing and the central figures' English

[25] Ha Jin. *The Boat Rocker*. First edition., (New York: Pantheon Books, 2016), 44.
[26] Chen Chung-jen. "Mapping Transnationality and Flexible Citizenship in Ha Jin's The Boat Rocker," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, vol. 20, no. 4 (Dec. 2019): 528-529.

speaking, English as a cultural translator as well as mediator reveals their willingness to integrate and their desire for a new life outside China. The liberating power that language possesses not only frees Ha Jin and his protagonists from the *a priori* belongingness and the dominant discourse formulated by the Chinese language but also profoundly facilitates the process of de-Chineseness—in the spaces of a cultural and linguistic interface, they simultaneously seek to create an identity-building ground for exceeding the delineated borders of their pregiven national identity.

The Futile Language, the Self-Orientalist China, and the Visible Ethnicity

Whereas the prevailing criticism tends to give Ha Jin the credit for formulating a fluid identity, the question still hinges on the efficiency of Ha Jin's endeavor when flexibility is by no means in accordance with hybridity. In *A Map of Betrayal*, Gary positions himself in the state of in-betweenness: he neither fully belongs to either side nor is disassociated with any one of them; he asks one parent for understanding and forgiveness while appealing to the other parent for intervention— "President Deng, please bring me home!"[27] said Gary after the trial. However, his adopted land does not exonerate him, and Gary spent the rest of his life in prison. In the meantime, at a news conference, a Chinese ambassador denied the connection between Gary and Beijing: "Let me reiterate, I never heard of that man. China has no spy in the United States at all, so we have nothing to do with him. All the accusations against the Chinese government are baseless, fabricated by those people hostile to our country."[28] In other words, Gary as a waif is abandoned and jettisoned by his "parents" who are not willing to accept and admit him when the ideas of loyalty and patriotism are largely exclusive. As the instruction that President Deng gave

[27] Ha Jin. *A Map of Betrayal*. First edition., (New York: Pantheon Books, 2014), 262.
[28] Ibid, 263.

privately, "Let that selfish man rot in an American prison together with his silly dream of being loyal to both countries."[29]

The portrait of Gary neatly fits the status quo of Ha Jin himself. Being a Chinese American writer and a naturalized American citizen, he is tied up by his dual identity and double life. It occurs to Ha Jin that staying loyal to both China and the U.S. is merely a "silly dream," which leads to the identity crisis that he experiences: there is no room for Chinese-American; he is required to either de-Chineseness or de-Americanness. Rearticulating his status quo in an interview, Ha Jin said, "I think I'm in between, both an immigrant and also an exile, …. That's the reality, whether I like it or not."[30] When the self-identified in-betweenness selectively places Ha Jin into an ambivalent and conflicting state in which he is not fully associated with either side, Ha Jin inevitably falls into a hyphenated crisis in which, being permanently in motion between these two places, the Chinese diaspora can never fully arrive at the *home*, and, more importantly, they can never constitute *an* identity for defining who they are and to which they belong. From rootedness to rootlessness, the Chinese diaspora is forced to become a nomad who is eternally trapped in a dichotomic state of ghostliness: they are possessed by their nostalgia while they endeavor to pursue freedom and opportunity on new ground; they crave a home while they are simultaneously shunned by the motherland and the adopted land; they desire recognition and validation while they end up at being an *unidentified*. In other words, between betrayal and loyalty, the Chinese diaspora is not allowed to capture both Chineseness and Americanness at all once. The possibility of formulating a hybrid, flexible, and open diasporic identity through a foreign language, by the same token, is largely denied. What Ha Jin essentially stages, in

[29] Ibid, 274.
[30] Michele Filgate. "Departures". *Publishers Weekly*, vol. 268, no. 20 (May 2021): 31.

addition to the experience from uprooting in China to re-rooting in the U.S., is the failure of obtaining Americanness and getting rid of Chineseness in America and the failure of maintaining Chineseness in China.

Moreover, apart from the state of exception, the failure of reshaping a fluid identity as well as citizenship also lies in the distinctive Chineseness, or in other words, the visible ethnicity that penetrates through his English writing. In 1999, Ha Jin published his most well-known novel, *Waiting* (1999). Written in English and first published in the United States, the book won the National Book Award in 1999 and the PEN/Faulkner Award as well as the Pulitzer Prize in 2000. The novel and Ha Jin himself thus achieved great success in the West. When the Beijing Publishing Group decided to publish a Chinese version of the novel, in June 2000, Liu Yiqing, a professor from Beijing University, published an article in Chinese Reading News accuseing Ha of vilifying China to attain Western recognition. The book's success, as Liu claims, is "part of a plot by the American media to demonize China by showing China's backwardness and the stupidity of the Chinese people".[31] (Pomfret, 2000:3B). The original plan of publishing the Chinese translation of the novel, therefore, was halted and ultimately dropped. Throughout his career, a recurring criticism that Ha Jin receives is the self-Orientalist tendency of his writings. What he typically projects, in addition to his memory and post-memory, is the dichotomous cold war schema in which Communist China as the antithesis of the democratic West is portrayed as the embodiment of madness, irrationality, and totalitarianism.

From his first English novel *In the Pond* (1998), the PRC has always been in opposition to its people, and the storyline also has a repeated pattern: in Communist China society or under the influence exerted by Communist China, the progressive individual is not accepted by his

[31] John Pomfret. "China Halts Plans to Publish Ha Jin's Award-Winning Novel," *Ithaca Journal*, (June 2000): 3B.

government while his "deviated" acts tend to be regarded as a form of violation or crime. Conflict ensues when the individual struggle is met by the PRC's counterattacks. In order to justify his integrity, the individual is deprived of options and is permanently caught in the state of exception and in-betweenness. Regardless of Army doctor Lin Kong in *Waiting* (1999), Professor Yang and Jian Wan *in The Crazed* (2002), Gary Shang—a Chinese Communist mole within the C.I.A—in *A Map of Betrayal*, or Feng Danlin in *The Boat Rocker*, the victimhood of these protagonists is typically the result of conflicting patriotism and egotism, while, at the same time, their ultimate "betrayal" as well as "awakening" stands in sharp contrast to the habitual adherence to their native country's ideology. In the battle between the individual and state, between Chinese Communism and Western democracy, Communist China in Ha Jin's writing is proved to be an *inferior* entity lacking democracy, freedom, and basic human rights—an image that neatly fits the stereotypical view formulated by the Orientalist West. Under the Western gaze, therefore, his exhibitionist self-display conjures up a type of fetishism in relation to the scars and wounds that Chinese people bear.

In Ha Jin's works, Communist China as an Orientalist image is repetitively portrayed as an oppressive, manipulative, and irrational state that largely resonates with the Orientalist fantasy. In a helpless state, the central figures in Ha Jin's works are desperate to escape for survival. However, for those who successfully settle down in a foreign land, the price of freedom is permanent exile. Therefore, their desire for exile can only be rationalized by a sense of inferiority largely attached to their essentialist and insurmountable identity—who they are and where they come from: I am an unfortunate soul who suffers, endured, and perished in a sinful land. By admitting the *sin* rooted in his Chineseness—intrinsic inferiority—the impulse to self-exile as redemption is justified and sanctified. Through his writing that comes with a sense of

self-hatred, guilt, shame, and inferiority, Ha Jin admits and internalizes ethnic inferiority by making the very ethnicity of his works more visible and recognizable. The melodramatic staging of Communist China then not only accentuates the writer's own Chineseness but also confirms the ethnicity of his writings. When Ha Jin is presenting a "China" that is profoundly subalternizd and exoticized, his novels signal a form of "exhibitionism" that "returns the gaze of orientalist surveillance, a gaze that demands of non-Western peoples mythical pictures and stories to which convenient labels of otherness such as 'China,' 'India,' 'Africa,' and so forth can be affixed".[32]

Now, let's try to solve the question I raised earlier: can the disjunction between language and subject matters transcend the role that language plays in marking the national identity and cultural borders of imagined communities? My answer is no. Regardless of which language is adopted, the fundamental function of language is not to invent a flexible identity but rather to produce an *open discourse* by transcending the spatial and cultural limits. With the aid of English, the possibility as well as the opportunity for self-expression, self-representation, and self-fulfillment increase. However, when Ha Jin's writing, in a self-Orientalist manner, is laden with a variety of nostalgia in relation to the cultural symbol and the collective past, he still repeats the very *epistemic violence* in Spivak's discourse: possessing the problematic spokespersonship, he remains to be the one who can only speak for his "authentic" ethnicity. Ha Jin's thoroughly naturalized Chineseness, by the same token, is not destabilized but further reinforced and sustained. In other words, the shift of languages is not the guarantee of de-Chineseness. As long as China—a self-Orientalist China in particular—is looming in the writing, Chineseness never fully fades away.

[32] Rey Chow. *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995): 170-171.

Conclusion

In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson revolutionarily defines the notion of nation as "an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign,"[33] which radically interprets "nation" as an idea that invisibly binds people. As Anderson articulates, nation is a cultural phenomenon constituted by "a deep, horizontal comradeship"[34] that allows a certain group to perceive themselves as a community by inventing a more complex and multifaceted understanding of national identity. If borrowing the reinterpretation of "nation" from Anderson, "diaspora" is not a concrete and inherent entity but the imagined communities as well. However, when the diasporic identity is shackled by the "imaginary orbit"[35] that no matter how distant the overseas reach, the presupposing Chineseness will ceaselessly thwart them from constructing or reconstructing any fluid and heterogeneous identity, the diaspora, in Anderson's words, would inevitably feel "entitled to belong to ancient bounded communities that nonetheless stretch impressively across the planet in the age of 'globalization'".[36] By the same token, in Writing Diaspora, Rey Chow describes such a diasporic predicament as a form of "violence" that "going far beyond the responsibility any individual bears for belonging to a community".[37]

In part, Ha Jin's linguistic convert manages to debunk the *a prior* misconception that Chineseness is "belonging to the Han race, being born in China proper, speaking Mandarin, and

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[33] Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised and extended edition., (New York: Verso, 1991), 6.
[34] Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised and extended edition., (New York: Verso, 1991), 6.
[35] Ien Ang. "Together-in-Difference: Beyond Diaspora, into Hybridity," *Asian Studies Review*, vol. 27, no. 2, (June 2003): 144.
[36] Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised and extended edition., (New York: Verso, 1991), 131.
[37] Rey Chow. *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993): 25.

observing the 'patriotic' code of ethics".[38] What makes the very Chineseness of himself and his works more recognized and visible, however, is Ha Jin fails to resist the allure of becoming a "patriotic" spokesperson who claims to be a truth-speaker while enthusiastically imitating, fetishizing, and commodifying an Orientalized image of China by admitting the ethnic inferiority generated by the ethnic difference. Between betrayal and loyalty, Ha Jin voluntarily restricts himself in not only the "violence" in Chow's sense but also a rather rigid and stereotypical myth in relation to China. That is to say, his Chineseness is incapable of transcending the very ethnicity inscribed in his essentialized national identity—he and his protagonists must speak not only *as* a Chinese but also *like* a Chinese. As a result, the role that language plays in reconstructing a more flexible and hybrid national identity is profoundly reduced in this process. What is prioritized, instead, is the message delivered by the language—the authenticity of one's Chineseness.

[38] Tu Wei-ming. *The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1994): vii.

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