

**Writing Nation from (Un)Homes—
Japanese American Families in Cynthia
Kadohata's *The Floating World*
and Lydia Minatoya's *Talking to
High Monks in the Snow****

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Abstract

This paper attempts to understand “Asian America” not as one nation, but as constituted by multiple families in a shifting web of space, time, genealogy, and identification. Analyzing the Japanese American families in Cynthia Kadohata's *The Floating World* (1989) and Lydia Minatoya's *Talking to High Monks in the Snow: An Asian American Odyssey* (1992), I restore Asian American studies to its familial dimensions, seeking in individual households the radical spaces from which a re-signification of “Asian America” is made possible. First, probing into the

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complicated implications of “unhome,” I demonstrate Kadohata’s attempt to re-read the seeming Japanese American “homelessness” in the post-World War II era into a position of socio-historical intervention. Then, I study the domestic complexities as presented by both texts, exploring how the makeshift nature and transnational origins of individual Japanese American families challenge the genetic continuity and domestic enclosure of a national family model. Asian American families as such must be known not simply as tools of genetic integration or cultural assimilation, but as spaces of national, ethnic, cultural transgressions and gender, generational, transnational negotiations. The change and development of Japanese American communities are, in one way or another, embedded in the establishment, extension, movement, and/or disintegration of individual families.

Key Words: Asian American Literature, Japanese American family, nation-family, Cynthia Kadohata, Lydia Minatoya

[F]rom the perspective of all those who have been displaced from the normative ground of authorized tradition, that both within “our own” culture, and certainly beyond, there are many other ways to think and live family. (Bammer, 1994: 92)

[D]omesticity is more mobile and less stabilizing; it travels in contradictory circuits both to expand and contract the boundaries of home and nation. (Kaplan, 1998: 583)

I. From Nation to Families

Increasing attention in recent Asian American studies has been devoted to a questioning of Asian America as a unified national unit.¹ Conceived in the wake of the Civil Rights Movements and the Third World Peoples Movement in the 1960s and 1970s, “Asian America” has been a political expedient to build a coalition among different peoples of Asian origin. It has never been clear, however, how peoples of diverse national origins, linguistic backgrounds, cultural identifications, and class associations can be lumped together in one single category of political empowerment.² This heterogeneity of Asian American

¹ Investigating the development of Asian American studies since the late 1980s, King-Kok Cheung, for example, points out in her introduction to *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature* that “whereas identity politics—with its stress on cultural nationalism and American nativity—governed earlier theoretical and critical formulations” of Asian American studies, “the stress is now on heterogeneity and diaspora” (1997: 1). Sau-ling Cynthia Wong further sheds light on the tripartite process of the Asian American “denationalization:” (1) the easing of cultural nationalist concerns; (2) the growing permeability between “Asian” and “Asian American;” and (3) the shift from a domestic to a diasporic perspective (1995: 1-2). Lisa Lowe’s *Immigrant Acts* (1996) and David Leiwei Li’s *Imagining the Nation* (1998), among others, are also written in the line of exposing the multicultural, heterogeneous, and transnational constitutions of Asian America.

² As Sylvia Yanagisako has pointed out in “Transforming Orientalism,” “‘Asian American’ poses the conundrum of how a category of people whose only common experience is that of having been labeled ‘Oriental’ in an

constitution was exacerbated after the U.S. government's 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act. The influx of new immigrants, migrants, refugees, travelers, and businesspersons rendered the male-centered and nation-based "Asian American discourse" even more inadequate to address the increasing national, gender, and class diversities of Asian American populations. It is clear that "Asian American" should not be reduced to a cultural icon, a fossilized ethnic label, which excludes "different" types of Asian Americans. Nor should "Asian America" assume the image of a stable center, a new "melting pot," awaiting the integration of differences into it. For "Asian American" to remain a living and useful category, it has to be constantly re-signified.³ Or, to borrow from Lacan, it has to remain "not-whole" (*pas-toute*), admitting that some part of itself remains underneath or outside the territorial confinement and temporal linearity of a nationalist representation, that something repressed or simply missing is always in the process of (re)emergence.⁴

This paper intends to excavate the constitutive differences of Asian America. Instead of reading "Asian America" as **one** nation, I attempt to understand "Asian America" as constituted by multiple

'Occidental' nation can forge for themselves a politically empowering ethnic identity" (1995: 275). She argues that Asian American identity is primarily a product of "academic and pedagogical practices" (1995: 275).

³ I am indebted to Kent A. Ono for the idea of "re-signing" Asian America, for he eloquently advocates a "re-signing" (refiguring) rather than "resigning" (retiring or replacing) "Asian America." My analysis in this paper, however, departs from Ono's in at least two aspects: (1) while Ono feels the need to "re-sign" Asian America largely because of the influx of new immigrants after 1965, my study of the heterogeneous constitutions of Asian America extends to the era before 1965; (2) while Ono emphasizes in his essay a "critical rhetorical analysis" (1995: 68), my analysis of Asian American families demonstrates more than "rhetorical" concerns.

⁴ Jacques Lacan introduces the idea of "*pas-toute*" mostly through his analysis of Woman (*La femme*) and Woman's jouissance. Being "*pas-toute*," in which Woman is never completely represented or appropriated by the phallic symbolic. She is there in the symbolic order "in full" (*à plein*); but there is "something more" (*en plus*) (1998: 74).

families of shifting space, time, genealogy, and identification. Of primary interest here is the complicated relationship between nation-building and family-construction. In both Eastern and Western traditions, nationality is usually connected to family. The family trope has been essential to the rise of modern European nationalism. Not only do we speak “nations” as “homelands,” “fatherlands,” or “mother countries,” the coining of the term “nation-family” figures nation in the seeming organic unity, continuity, and hierarchy of a family.⁵ Likewise, the alliance of family and the state-nation is not unfamiliar in Eastern cultures. In the imperial China, for instance, the extended family household served as the model of the immense Chinese territory and one’s ability to govern the state was premised on his ability to manage a family.⁶ Initiating the development of Japanese modernity, the Meiji Civil Code, moreover, took family as constituting “the first and fundamental element of Japanese society” (Beillevaire, 1996: 245). Patrick Beillevaire notes that modern Japan did not simply feature an analogy between family and nation, but affirmed “the basic identity of these two realities” (1996: 248): “The emperor was described as a father (*kachô*, “head of house”) benevolently guiding his people, and each individual family as a branch derived from the imperial house” (1996: 249). Taking family as “state-in-microcosm,” the Japanese idea of “state-family” (*kazoku kokka*) correlates the paternal genealogies underlying both a state-nation and a family. It justifies the state-nation’s “natural” status.

What is ironic in the nation-family analogy, however, is that families are not always as unified, continuous, or patrilineal as may have been expected. Whereas many people nowadays may conceive of “family” in terms of the EuroAmerican bourgeois

⁵ For a detailed analysis of the nation-family analogy in the Western tradition, see McClintock (1997: 90-91).

⁶ This relationship between family-managing and state-governing is specified at the beginning of the Confucian Four Books. For details about the Chinese family and the Confucian values, see Ebrey (1991).

nuclear model, emphasizing its institutional function to impose spatial boundary and ensure patrilineal reproduction, few “real” families feature idealized domesticity.⁷ For one thing, the bourgeois nuclear family as we know it is a fairly recent invention in the Western history. It did not arise until the nineteenth century, as a by-product of industrialization and urbanization. Moreover, even among the urban, middle-class populations, the “ideal domesticity,” defined as a household that is “closed off” from the outside world like a “private kingdom” (Hareven, 1991: 260), is usually not achievable in everyday reality. Studying the role of families in the context of the nineteenth-century European imperial expansion, Amy Kaplan suggests that domesticity mostly serves as “the ambiguous third realm between the nation and the foreign” (1998: 584)—“not as a static condition but as the process of domestication” of the wild, the unfamiliar, and the other, which keep intruding into the family (1998: 582). Analyzing the twentieth-century women’s writings, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar further describe families and homes as a “front” in gender and cultural wars (1994: xv). Both studies lay bare an inevitable blurring of the line between the domestic-private and the foreign-public even in the so-called Western bourgeois domicile.

The family structure becomes even more diverse when we take into consideration the rising divorce rate, the growing numbers of immigrant and migrating families, interracial marriages, families headed by same-sex couples, etc. Focusing her studies on contemporary American families, Teresa Chandler Sabourin notes that the increasing numbers of stepfamilies, single-parent families, families with different religious, ethnic, racial backgrounds, homosexual families, and even families with various cultural, racial,

⁷ Here, what I mean by “real” does not simply refer to “reality”; it is more or less a Lacanian “real” that is situated outside language and would return as the specter of reality. As will be demonstrated by my ensuing analysis, I am concerned not only about how most families appear in reality, but how their “real” underside keeps emerging to threaten their, albeit unified and harmonious, symbolic appearance.

and sexual blends in contemporary America have rendered the normative nuclear structure an ideological myth. For her, the contemporary American family is “characterized by flux” (2003: 51) and family life “involves the constant management of the tension between autonomy and connection” (2003: 8). Sylvia Yanagisako reaches a similar conclusion when investigating the development of kinship in the U.S.: “[t]he so-called modern American family is a folk model, a Weberian ideal type, that describes no one’s behavior, not anyone’s normative system—other than, of course, that of a hypothetical category of Americans” (1985: 258).

Just as the bourgeois nuclear domicile as a model does not hold in the Western everyday familial realities, so most Eastern families fail to live up to the official scripts of a “state-family.” Exploring the making of modern Japanese families, for example, Merry Issacs White probes into the discrepancies between “the official family norms for the ‘perfectly Japanese’ family” that fulfills the national demands of patrilineal reproductivity and welfare maintenance, and “the very plural and changing families where lives of individuals intersect, converge, and diverge over life courses and in the context of changing economic, social, and legal influences” (2002: 3). Pointing to the emptiness of the nationalist ideology of family-building and the necessity of most families to “make do” in order to survive, White explains why “grandmothers have a hard time answering the question, ‘What is a family?’ while politicians seem to have no trouble at all” (2002: 21).

Indeed, while “nation” usually appeals to a “family” trope to cover up its discontinuous history and heterogeneous constitutions, “family” could itself be a space introducing others’ interventions, generating everyday hybridities and transnational trajectories. “The family becomes,” summarizes Anne McClintock, “at one and the same time, both the *organizing figure* for national history and its *antithesis*” (1997: 91; italics original). Based on this understanding, to study Asian American families is not to consolidate “Asian America” into one nation, but to restore Asian American

construction to its domestic dimensions, which involve Asian American individuals' familial connections, productions, deviations, and hybridizations. In what follows, I take Cynthia Kadohata's *The Floating World* (1989) and Lydia Minatoya's *Talking to High Monks in the Snow: An Asian American Odyssey* (1992; henceforth *Talking to High Monks*) as two cases to study the familial dimensions of Asian American constitution, seeking in the Japanese American households the radical spaces from which a re-signification of "Asian America" is made possible. Briefly, Asian American families must be known not simply as tools of spatial confinement, genetic integration, or cultural assimilation but as spaces of national, ethnic, cultural transgressions and gender, generational, transnational negotiations. The change and development of Japanese American communities are in one way or another embedded in the establishment, extension, movement, and/or disintegration of individual families.

II. From Home to "Unhome"

What makes Cynthia Kadohata's *The Floating World* an interesting text of analysis in this paper is that it introduces an "other" kind of Japanese American family. Asian American literature has long been noted for its preoccupation with the establishment of families and homes in the United States. Building up a family symbolizes Asian Americans' successful integration into the American society. It helps the immigrant individuals and their offspring to confirm their American national identity and secure their genealogy in the land they choose, though for different reasons, to stay. And this desire to set up one's own family could be especially intense in the case of post-internment Japanese Americans. After the traumatic relocation and the disruption of their community during World War II, Japanese Americans craved to re-establish their families, preferably in the model of American bourgeois household, so as to feel and live like "Americans." One

obvious literary illustration of this can be found in John Okada's *No-No Boy* (1976), in which the protagonist-narrator Ichiro dreamed to purchase a house and build a family marked by paternity, progeny, and a participation in the "American" community life:

In time, . . . there will . . . be a place for me. I will buy a home and love my family and I will walk down the street holding my son's hand and people will stop and talk with us about the weather and the ball games and the elections. (1976: 52)

Similarly, in *Where the Body Meets Memory: An Odyssey of Race, Sexuality, and Identity* (1996), David Mura vividly describes how, after the internment, his Nisei father moved every seven years, from the city to the "calm suburban world," in order to build a typical American bourgeois household that was free from his Japanese American history (1996: 18). Both examples demonstrate the post-war Japanese Americans' strong desire to be assimilated into the mainstream American society. It seems that the possession of a suburban domicile—a "typical" nuclear bourgeois household—that separated the family from the world and the history provided an important way for Japanese Americans to sustain the self-enclosed stability of their American identities. Also set in the post-war socio-historical context, Kadohata's *The Floating World*, however, tells a different story.

The "unconventionalities" of *The Floating World* have been widely noted ever since its publication.⁸ Among them, what concern my discussion in this paper are primarily two points. First,

⁸ Stan Yogi, for example, reads *The Floating World* as conveying "a sense of rootlessness and randomness" (1997: 147). He attributes Kadohata's "hypnotic, sparse prose style" and "cinematic narrative structure" not as much to Japanese American literary tradition as to the South American magic realist writers (1997: 147). Other critics comment on the unconventional contents of the novel. Sheila Sarkar asserts that *The Floating World* presents "alternative stories" of Japanese Americans (1994: 80).

instead of writing to secure a stable home and a self-enclosed family for her Japanese American characters, Kadohata launches them into multiple traveling routes across the 1950s United States. The delineation of a type of Japanese American family that was usually on the way and ceaselessly moved toward the outside and the other restores our imagination of Japanese American families to their multiple images and functions. Besides, I am interested in what some reviewers claim to be the “unconventional” Nikkei characters created by the novel.⁹ Among them, the most notorious is the protagonist-narrator Olivia’s Issei grandmother, Obāsan, who married “three times” (1989: 2) and was still “consumed with an affair” at the age of seventy-six (1989: 13). Besides, Olivia’s mother married Charlie-O when she was “eight months pregnant” with Olivia (1989: 39) and had a series of extramarital affairs. Added to this list of “unconventional characters” is Olivia herself. She, together with her mother and her maternal grandmother, Obāsan, complicated the patrilineal order and genetic unity of normative families. In one way or another, *The Floating World* displaces the Asian American search for a self-enclosed, patrilineal household with its portrayal of traveling “unhome(s)” and makeshift families.

Here, the word “unhome” is chosen to indicate the multiple layers of Japanese Americans’ experiences with family and home. In its most obvious sense, the prefix “un” of “unhome” negates the idea of “home.” The “unhome” is “not” a “home,” or, more precisely, not a “home” in its traditional sense of providing spatial moorings and stable identity. If an idealized “home” is noted by its privacy and self-enclosure, an “unhome” could be extroverted, pointing to the alien and the unfamiliar. To move from “home” to “unhome,” one is, in a sense, exiled from a stable, fixed, and

⁹ Some reviewers point out that the characters in the novel are “not acting Japanese enough” (qtd. in Pearlman, 1993: 117). Some accuse this novel of not being “angry enough” and not “talk[ing] enough about the camps” (qtd. in Pearlman, 1993: 116-117).

self-enclosed place called “home” in which one’s identity is embedded.

In light of this interpretation of “unhome,” the movement and travels of the post-war Japanese Americans in *The Floating World* could be easily attributed to the forced dispersion of Japanese Americans immediately after the Second World War. As Sheila Sarkar makes clear, the years-long travels of Olivia’s family in Oregon, Wyoming, California, and Washington reflects “the forced dispersion of many Japanese Americans” after their relocation during World War II (1994: 84) and “the temporary jobs that Olivia describes among the Japanese American community” point to “the economic instability for many Japanese Americans at the time because their own property and financial means of survival had been taken away during internment” (1994: 83). Similarly, You-me Park and Gayle Wald read the three reasons Olivia mentioned for her family’s constant movement—the bad luck of her father, the fact of their being Japanese Americans, and the problems of her parents’ marriage—as coinciding with

the difficulties Japanese immigrants had to deal with in postwar America: the economic crisis brought on by slower economic growth, the racializing nationalist discourse that defined Japanese Americans only as Japanese, and the reconfiguring of gender relations within the family. (1998: 626)

Though due partly to “the reconfiguring of gender relations,” the Japanese American “unhomes” were generally the result of racism that permeated the post-war United States. Japanese Americans were exiled from “homes.” Their “unhomely” situation bore witness to their falling victims to socio-political persecutions.

Undoubtedly, Kadohata has taken the post-war Japanese American situation as the historical backdrop of her writing. I also agree that Olivia and her family members were to a certain extent victims of racial discrimination and economic exploitation. They did not establish a “normal” household partly because they could

not afford a house.¹⁰ What makes Kadohata's writing truly "unconventional," however, is that *The Floating World* does not describe this historical dispersion of Japanese Americans as a completely negative situation, which one had better leave behind in order to move into a brighter future. Instead of taking Japanese Americans' "unhomely" experiences as something Japanese Americans needed to outgrow as quickly as possible or considering their "unhomeliness" a mere prelude from which one could project unto the future an unproblematic Japanese American "homecoming" and national identity building, *The Floating World* seems to dawdle over these "unhomely" moments, treating them sometimes as valuable or even productive. In Olivia's words,

[i]t was always hard to leave our homes, but once we started traveling, a part of me loves that life. All the packing and moving was especially hard on my parents, but I think even they enjoyed some of the long drives I remember how fine it was to drive through the passage of light from morning to noon to night. (1989: 4)

The joy of travel was worth the pain of leaving home. Or, as Olivia's mother admitted, "[i]t's always nice when we start out somewhere, then it's less nice when we're almost there" (1989: 41). To be on the way, to move toward somewhere new, could be better than facing the end of one's journey. Indeed, Olivia never considered the possession of an "idealized" domicile the goal of her travels and movement. Even after Charlie-O finally purchased a garage in Arkansas and became a property owner, Olivia still decided to leave behind her Arkansas home—despite its "neatly trimmed lawn in front and a swing set in the large backyard" (1989: 120)—for the uncertainties of further movement:

¹⁰ Olivia narrated her family's difficulties in purchasing a house: her parents looked around model homes, each one "more beguiling than the one before," but the fact was that they "couldn't really afford a house" (Kadohata, 1989: 148).

My family has lived many places, and traveled many places. I thought then that Arkansas was the most beautiful place I had ever been in, yet I wanted badly to leave, and I knew that . . . someday I would have that freedom. (1989: 110-111)

Life on the road featured something to be privileged. The “unhome” in *The Floating World* was not necessarily an inferior home; it could be “better” in that it provided more living opportunities.

Here, by recasting the post-war Japanese American dispersion into an experience with positive prospects, Kadohata teases from “unhome” another layer of significance. “Unhome” does not simply denote a lack of home. It rather indicates an “other” kind of home, which is noted not as much by its self-enclosed boundary as by its extroverted tendency towards the open road. Rather than being a mark of “lack,” the prefix “un” here indicates the act to move “out” of a territorially self-confined home. To be “unhomed” is not “without” home, but to stay without, to be unbounded by a “home.” It is clear that Olivia could not tolerate a life of self-imprisoned stasis. Her sense of being “at home” was attributed at least in part to her physically being away from home. When staying in Arkansas, for instance, she preferred sleeping in the living room or wandering in the woods at night because she “wanted to feel separate from . . . her normal life yet protected within it” (1989: 71). When she turned fourteen, she began to have “two lives”—her life at home and her life with her friends (1989: 72). Moreover, she liked her apartment in Los Angeles because it gave her the “old feeling of being displaced and safe at the same time, like when . . . she used to play in the small woods back of . . . her house at night” (1989: 126). Like her younger brother’s caterpillars that would still venture into an open space even though they were well-fed in a glass jar, Olivia preferred “unhome” to a traditional “home” because the former challenged the segregation of the public and the domestic spaces. It conjoined her sense of familial belongings to the freedom provided by the

world outside a “home.”

Implicit in an “unhomely” situation is thus the intervention of the domestic and the private into the public. As we shall see, most characters in *The Floating World* were not passively “homeless” despite their “unhomeliness.” Kadohata’s writing at this point bears strong echo to Homi Bhabha’s famous rendition of the “unhomely:” “To be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the unhomely be easily accommodated in that familiar division of the social life into private and the public spheres” (1997: 445). Reading the “unhomely” not simply as paradigmatic of the postcolonial situation, but as prevalent in all socio-historical conditions of cultural differences and power negotiations, Bhabha further points out that the “unhomely” features the space of “cultural dissensus and alterity,” the space not yet accommodated by the calcified dominant (usually national) spatialization (1997: 449). The “unhomely” as such can be understood as the “meeting place” or as the “contact zone” between the domestic and the public, the everyday (un)home and the regulating state-nation. It is where the traumatic, psychic, personal, and ethnic experiences emerge to inscribe their symbolic presence. In Bhabha’s own words, the domestic “unhomely” usually turns into “sites for history’s most intricate invasions” (1997: 445).

Blurring the line between the world and the (un)home, *The Floating World* presents many textual examples to manifest the apparition of Japanese American communities from their “unhomely” travels, movement, and transgression. When Olivia’s family set up households among “gas station attendants, restaurants, the jobs . . . it depended upon, the motel towns floating in the middle of fields and mountains” (Kadohata, 1989: 2), it became unclear whether one should mourn for their “homelessness” or acclaim their survival in multiple public spaces. Although at the most pessimistic moment of her life Olivia compared the migrant Japanese American farm workers to “animals migrating across a field . . . moving from the hard life just past to the life, maybe harder, to come” (1989: 149), in most

places *The Floating World* describes these migrant Japanese Americans as being able to exert agency in the mapping of America. Olivia, for example, did not always consider herself “floating;” the world was “floating,” but her self was “stable, traveling through an unstable world” to test the various possibilities of dwelling and forming communities (1989: 3). The novel’s description of the Japanese American chicken sexers in Arkansas further casts into relief a close-knit Japanese American community out of the seeming absence of Japanese Americans in the U.S. public. Moreover, it is not without significance that Olivia inherited from her real father, Jack, not a “home” but a vending-machine route. In appearance, Jack failed to establish a “home” to hand it down to his daughter; he remained frequently “unhomed,” tending a vending-machine route that ran across California, Arizona, and Nevada. It turned out, however, that several home-communities had grown along his vending-machine route. When Olivia serviced the route in her own turn after Jack’s death, she realized that she had inherited from her father home-communities that cropped up along the route:

A couple of the most out-of-the-way places were tiny offices for which Jack had simply laid out candy on shelves, with no machines, and the office workers paid on the honor system. He’d gotten to know the people in those offices better than the people at his more profitable locations. I thought maybe he’d told some of those smaller customers about me, maybe showed them picture, if he carried any. In any case, “Jack’s girl” is what a couple of them called me. (1989: 157-158)

And Jack was not the only one who inscribed his Japanese American presence into the U.S. public sphere by owning and servicing a route. In another significant passage, Olivia described how the migrant ethnic workers formed “three main rivers” in the United States: “I read once that there were three main rivers in the country, one on the West Coast, one on the East, and one in the

Midwest. The rivers, made up of migrant farmworkers, traveled down the country every year during the growing season” (1989: 146). Constituting a major part of these migrant farmworkers, Japanese Americans re-wrote the American national landscape in spite, or because, of their “unhomeliness.”

III. From Genetic Continuity to Makeshift Families

The previous section is devoted to an analysis of the Japanese American traveling “unhome” as embodied in *The Floating World*. Probing into the complicated implications of “unhome,” I demonstrate Kadohata’s attempt to re-read the seeming Japanese American “homelessness” into a position of socio-historical intervention. On the one hand, the post-war dispersion seemed to render Japanese Americans invisible. The disintegration of their families and communities resulted in their being removed from any fixed place called “home.” On the other hand, their being specifically no-where ended up—ironically—with the possibilities of their being everywhere in the United States. Infiltrating into the world through their travels and movement, Japanese Americans inscribed their presence into multiple places through their “unhomely” existence.

Yet, as I have also pointed out at the beginning of the previous section, the Japanese American family in *The Floating World* is “unconventional” not simply because it was not territorially bounded, but also because it challenged the genetic unity and patrilineal continuity of an idealized family. Olivia’s was not only a household that sprawled toward the outside, but also a domicile that generated the foreign, the unfamiliar, or, in the Freudian term, the “uncanny” from within its own structure. Significantly, the Freudian “uncanny” is precisely “unhomely” (*unheimlich*) in its original German. It adds another twist to our understanding of “unhome” as Freud interprets the prefix “un” not as a “negation” or an “opposition” but as a “repression.” The

“uncanny” is the re-occurrence of the repressed and the forgotten. Freud reiterates that it is not the completely new or the unfamiliar that gives rise to the feeling of the “uncanny.” What accounts for *unheimlich* is rather the return of “something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression” (1955: 241). There is, thus, no sheer opposition between *unheimlich* and *heimlich*. “Unhome” sheds light on what has been repressed or forgotten in the process through which the “home” assumes its unified and continuous appearance. It reveals the hybridities in the constitution of a household from within itself. Freud makes this clear in his assertion: “This *unheimlich* place . . . is the entrance to the former *Heim* [home] of all human beings” (1955: 245; italics original). “Unhome” restores a “home” to its more hybrid and convoluted shape.

Drawing upon this Freudian insight on the “uncanny”/“unhomely,” this and the next sections study the domestic complexities of Japanese American families first in *The Floating World* and then in *Talking to High Monks*. As already noted, implicit in Freud’s theory of the “uncanny” is a radical re-conception of “home” from its interior. A home is never as “unified” and “self-enclosed” as might have been imagined; it only appears “unified” and “self-enclosed” after a process of repression. And since this process of “repression” is never complete, “repression” in a household bespeaks the “return of the repressed.” A “home” as such is never free from its “unhomely” underside. This explains why an “idealized domesticity” (as well as an idealized nation-state) can only be projected unto the future or embodied in one’s nostalgia. As demonstrated by the examples of Ichiro and Mura, Ichiro dreamed about a future family/home, which nonetheless remained not-yet-achievable in *No-No Boy*, and Mura had grown to be aware of the existence of a hybrid Japanese American history and identity the moment he commented on his father’s attempt to set up an American bourgeois household. In the case of *The Floating World* and *Talking to High Monks*, the lack of

an absolute paternal power, the disruption of genetic unity, and the (maternal) other's interventions most obviously characterized the "unhomely"/"uncanny" underside of Japanese American families.

It is quite clear that Olivia's family in *The Floating World* was not built upon a strict patrilineal order; nor did it assume the appearance of a harmonious household of bourgeois idealization. It was by nature a makeshift family originating from the need of Olivia's mother to find a legal husband when she was already eight months pregnant. If we do not count Olivia's real father Jack, her mother's extramarital dates, and the other families or individuals the family traveled with, Olivia grew up in a family made up primarily of seven members: Olivia, her mother, her step-father Charlie-O, her three younger half-brothers born between her mother and Charlie-O, and Obāsan. That this family did not develop out of a clear paternal line was evident in many aspects. First, while Olivia did narrate the immigrant background of Obāsan, there was no mentioning of Charlie-O's background through the novel. Though Olivia liked him and addressed him as "my father" (in contrast to her calling her real father "Jack"), the father's story—particularly the ancestral lineage on his side—was left out by Olivia's narrative. Olivia confessed that "I don't know exactly how my grandmother found Charlie-O;" she only heard from Obāsan that "she'd first brought him to Fresno to meet . . . her mother" when the latter was already pregnant (Kadohata, 1989: 39). Secondly, Charlie-O was not presented in the novel as a father with paternal authority. The readers are told that Charlie-O was an amateur painter who sold paintings only "in his imagination" (1989: 39). Also, he loved Olivia's mother, yet was "loud and undignified," whereas Olivia's mother was "graceful and pensive and intellectual" (1989: 39). Another thing we know about Charlie-O is that he never owned anything until his purchase of the garage in Arkansas. Worst of all, Olivia once commented upon the power relations between her parents: "though my mother was several years younger than Charlie-O, she always struck me as

womanly, whereas my father was boyish” (1989: 43). Last but not least, while the change of Obāsan’s family name from “Satō” in Japan to “Fujiitano” in the United States was described in details, Olivia only mentioned in passing Charlie-O’s family name as “Osaka” and left completely unmentioned her real father Jack’s family name. Nor were the three fathers of Olivia’s mother remembered by their last names. Well-known is the importance of preserving the name of the father in maintaining a family’s patrilineality. *The Floating World* nonetheless presents a world with many fathers whose names were either forgotten, rendered unimportant, or, as in the case of Obāsan, changeable.

To some readers, the failure to remember or maintain paternal names may remind one of the prevalent Japanese American anxiety about ethnocide during and after World War II. To be noticed, however, is that the absence or the changeability of the name-of-the-father did not seem to pose an issue of concern to most characters in *The Floating World*. Kadohata writes in a way to counteract worries about Japanese American ethnic extinction. Her novel presents a family that developed and grew despite (or in effect because of) the lack of a clear paternal lineage. One of the most obvious textual examples is that, although the marriage between Charlie-O and Olivia’s mother was marked by endless problems, Olivia’s family continued to grow and thrive. After Olivia, three sons were born to this family. Even when the household fell apart because of the marriage problems between the parents, the community came forward to organize a makeshift family for the children. Olivia and two of her younger brothers were sent to stay in Nebraska with Charlie-O’s friend as their “foster parent” when Charlie-O and Olivia’s mother were broke (1989: 12). And when the parents came back to stay together again, they picked up their children and continued their family life on the road. This makeshift nature of families in the novel is also seen through the life story of Olivia’s mother. Olivia’s mother grew up through three households with three different fathers, ending up remembering little about her real father. In fact, the father Olivia’s

mother remembered the most was her second father, Bill; similarly, Olivia was in better terms with Charlie-O than with Jack. "I spoke to . . . Jack only a couple of times," Olivia confessed, "Charlie-O was the one who was 'Dad'" (1989: 151).

Briefly, characters in *The Floating World* were concerned more about the makeshift communities that could emerge anytime on the road in response to their needs of company and help than about genetic unity or patrilineal order that defines a traditional bourgeois family. Everyday trifles, not paternal lineage, bound people together. Olivia pointed out that it always took her by surprise "how naturally and quickly new people covered the surface of . . . her life" (1989: 152). To her, a car accident on a bus station was able to cause the formation of a community on the road by binding together a group of people from different places and with unknown identities. Moreover, despite the apparent differences in personality between her mother and Charlie-O, she claimed that they "matched" because they "lived in the same world, used the same shampoo, ate the same foods" (1989: 43). Olivia was also interested in the "unplanned quality" in the development of the Japanese American community in Arkansas: "It is as if a giant had taken a bunch of houses and thrown them randomly on the ground, and people took up residence wherever the houses happened to land" (1989: 96). So long as there were people around and communities available, who cared about patrilineality? Near the end of the novel, although Olivia inherited from Jack his vending-machine route, the patrilineal implications of this episode, again, are cast into question. First, it was Charlie-O who accompanied Olivia, though only halfway, to undertake her first journey servicing the route. Moreover, when Olivia encountered what she claimed to be the "ghost" of Jack at one station of the vending-machine route, she found she had so little to tell him that she poured out the news about her three half brothers in a tone that cast Jack to be an outsider to the family about which she was truly concerned:

Did I ever show you any pictures of my brothers? Walker's pretty quiet, but he's not really shy, the way he used to be. He just doesn't like to talk to people if they don't interest him. Ben's the opposite. He has too many friends. Walker and Ben are in high school. Peter's in grammar school. He skipped a grade because he's so smart. (1989: 160)

Olivia even talked to Jack's face: "If it weren't for you, maybe my mother would have loved my dad more" (1989: 160). Indeed, after saying this, Olivia started to worry about her work in the station and "forgot about Jack" (1989: 161). The return of the "real" father as a ghost ended up being a mere bluff. As he was simply forgotten, fading into the background of a dark night, the daughter appropriated the vending-machine route as her own.

IV. From National "Courtyards" to a Transnational Family

In comparison with Olivia's family, the Japanese American family presented in *Talking to High Monks* is more "conventional" at first sight. The protagonist-narrator Lydia grew up in a fairly "typical" American middleclass family. Her father was a Nisei possessing a Ph.D. degree and served throughout his career as a research scientist in a private laboratory. His life story, including his moving farther and farther away from his parental home in the east Washington desert until finally settling down in Albany, New York, his idolization of his white employers for whom he worked as a child servant, and his being a loyal and excellent employee all his life, figured strikingly his efforts to be assimilated into the American mainstream. It was actually narrated in one episode that Lydia's parents, in a gesture echoing the attempt of Mura's father, tried to move to a "suburban neighborhood, where daughters were expected to graduate from four-year colleges or universities" (Minatoya, 1992: 26). Moreover, when Lydia was born, her father searched hard for a "conventional" (so that she could merge into

the national mainstream without difficulties) yet “uncommon” (so that she won’t be easily disregarded as nobody) name for her. The father finally came up with “Lydia Minatoya,” which, according to him, was meant to prepare Lydia for the “full true promise of America” (1992: 31).

“Lydia Minatoya,” however, is not Lydia’s complete name. Her complete name has a “Yuri” in-between “Lydia” and “Minatoya,” secretly marking Lydia’s Japanese origin as well as her mother’s intervention into Lydia’s naming process.¹¹ Similarly, the attempt of Lydia’s father to set up an idealized American household ended up being not as successful as had been expected. The powerlessness of the father was revealed most clearly in that, three years before his retirement, he learned that he had been paid “the same salary of his laboratory assistant” (1992: 21). More ridiculous than this was that the father refused to sue the laboratory for this unfair treatment. His reason was that he did not like to assume the role of a victim. Instead of filing a suit he would certainly win, he chose to negate the fact that he had been discriminated against at work. The seemingly successful story of a Japanese American as such turned into a self-deceiving myth, which Lydia gradually saw through as she grew up. In 1981, holding “a brand-new tenure-track contract to teach graduate studies in a large university” and “a doctorate degree that was two weeks old,” Lydia moved to the heart of Boston, the cradle of the U.S. civilization and “the Hub of Universe” (1992: 55). Although in appearance she was already on her way to setting up a “foothold” on Beacon Hill and lived “near to America’s oldest, wealthiest families,” she started to realize that American dream did not necessarily apply to her. She wondered

¹¹ According to one episode in *Talking to High Monks*, Lydia’s middle name, “Yuri,” was chosen by her mother. Besides, her mother wrote “Yuri” not in its traditional character that means “lily flower” but in a character that means “clever.” She secretly instilled her wish for her daughter into the name “Yuri:” “Too many flowers already. In America, it is better to prepare a child to be clever—to be open to the world, to accept imagination, to see the unseen” (Minatoya, 1992: 226).

how she could define her self and her family when “everyone knew all real American families were white” (1992: 32).

Talking to High Monks thus does not tell a simplistic story of the ascendancy of Japanese Americans as model minorities in the United States. Weaving together Lydia’s narrative of her family history, her personal story, her traveling experiences, and her conversation with her mother, the text exposes a complicated underside of a seemingly “conventional” Japanese American family. While *The Floating World* demonstrates how the dispersed Japanese American families after the war intruded into the American open roads, *Talking to High Monks* shows how a seemingly male-dominant, self-enclosed, middle-class Japanese American household was haunted by its own immigrant history, particularly by a missing maternal ancestral lineage due to the banishment of Lydia’s grandmother from the family. Certainly, the complexities of Olivia’s family were more self-evident than those in Lydia’s family because the former featured an obvious makeshift household that contributed to its “unhomely” emergence. As one shall see, since Olivia’s family members kept adding “pictures of whatever appealed to . . . them” (Kadohata, 1989: 96) to the family pictures hung “on the wall behind the cabinet” (1989: 95), the household grew with few constraints on the road. Moreover, the immigrant past of the family had been passed down without difficulties to Olivia as her Issei Obāsan “talked on and on” through their journey (1989: 1). Lydia’s family, on the contrary, did not allow such an easy and smooth inclusion of the heterogeneous into its boundary. Excluding the unwanted and the unfavorable, it first banished the divorced Issei grandmother and then negated the racism it confronted in the United States. The fact that the conversation between Lydia and her mother was punctuated by pauses and silences further testified to the gaps and repressions of her family history. For one thing, the memory of the Japanese American relocation during the Second World War was “the wall” that her “mother’s music could not scale” (Minatoya, 1992: 14). For another, the circumstances of her Issei

grandmother's banishment had "remain[ed] a family secret for over forty years" (1992: 5). The family also attempted to hide its Japanese association. In an interesting episode, Lydia narrates how her cousins were scared by their possible exposure to television cameras when they visited Japantown: "They hid from exposure like white-collar criminals caught in some scandalous indiscretion" when "the television cameras swept the crowd" (1992: 45). Lydia's cousins were afraid of being spotted in "Japantown." They were, as one of them insisted, "*California*" girls (1992: 45).

The family's insistence on its image as a successful "American" family made Lydia's attempt to excavate its immigrant underside difficult. The first two chapters of *Talking to High Monks*, entitled respectively "My Mother's Music" and "My Father's Career," best illustrate how Lydia had been torn between her mother's and father's guidance since her childhood. If Lydia's pursuit of an academic career marked her effort to follow her father's footsteps and seek the promises of the American dream, her decision to undertake international travels to Japan, China, Nepal, etc. followed her mother's advice to "soar" beyond the "Courtyard walls" (1992: 3). Literally, the "Courtyard walls" in her mother's story referred to the walls of a traditional Japanese household into which a married woman disappeared. For Lydia, the "Courtyard walls" further referred to the national boundary of her family and her identification. The child and adolescent Lydia assumed that, unlike her mother as well as her other female ancestors, she was an American daughter "indulged" by her family with the freedom to leave and return home (1992: 119). Yet after reaching her adulthood, she could not but admit that it was not true that she could "grow up to be anything" she wanted (1992: 34). Her freedom in America had been limited: why did she suffer from a "crush" on a white teacher who cared not a bit for her? Why did she always "fake good" and score high in the good-impression scale? Also, why did she have to sacrifice her health, yet still find herself unable to fulfill the requirements of a tenure-track teaching position? In the chapter entitled "Mirror,

Mirror on the Wall,” she wondered why she ought to force herself to fit into Boston, a city holding the strictest ethnic/racial lines, and why she did not meet a Japanese American who was not her relative until she was twenty. Lydia joined the 1983 gathering of East Coast Asian American women at the Boston University, which brought many Japanese Americans face to face, like “toddlers,” shocking at the similar appearances they shared with each other (1992: 59). All of a sudden, Lydia realized that she had to “soar” beyond the boundaries not only of her family in Albany but also of the United States as a whole, in order to meet people and communities who bear an appearance similar to hers, and share historical memories with her.¹²

Talking to High Monks can be understood as a bildungsroman. The book traces the meandering of Lydia’s life story, evolving out of a remembrance of her parents’ life, their marriage, the establishment of their family, Lydia’s childhood learning experience, her career as a young professional, her “youthful identity crisis” (1992: 50), her travels beyond “home” and the United States, and ending—exactly what usually happens in traditional bildungsromans—at Lydia’s wedding ceremony. Subtitled “An Asian American Odyssey,” *Talking to High Monks* features Lydia’s life “odyssey,” which concluded at Lydia’s establishment of her own family. The question is: to what extent did this establishment of her own family mark Lydia’s assimilation into the United States? Furthermore, whether “assimilation” was what Lydia still wanted after she traveled abroad and achieved a better understanding of the transnational connections of her family? In her exploration of Asian American bildungsromans, Patricia P. Chu

¹² Lydia’s question of her “American” identity is best demonstrated by the children’s story about a bird that she remembered from her childhood: The bird “was hatched far from his nest.” Although he was happy for a while and other animals “tried to teach him their way of survival,” he soon realized that he did not belong to them and set out to look for his real mother. He ended up asking “every creature he met one question, ‘Are you my mother?’” See Minatoya (1992: 66).

studies Asian American writers' various strategies of assimilating into the United States. Whether they "deploy" or "interrogate" traditional narratives of Americanization, most of the writers discussed by Chu strive to write into "the city of words," to "make a place in the American national literature where their stories belong" (2000: 3). *Talking to High Monks*, however, provides a quite different kind of Asian American bildungsroman. Essential to my understanding of this text is that it seeks not as much a place within the American national boundary as a space beyond the existent borders of a "nation-family." It seems that instead of writing into "the city of words," Minatoya in a significant way writes to transgress the confinement of the "city." The family Lydia established towards the end of the text, as I will contend below, was not necessarily a "typical" American family. It could instead be understood as a Japanese American "extroverted" household, evolving from Lydia's transnational traveling experiences and the recovery of the maternal genealogies of her family.

Once unfolded to reveal the repressed and the forgotten, indeed, Lydia's family was by no means less complicated than Olivia's. While Olivia's Obāsan was notoriously "unconventional," Lydia's grandmother was "a romantic, an adventurer" (Minatoya, 1992: 5) who read "all the European, great romantic novels" (1992: 6) and talked to her children "about science and foreign countries" (1992: 5). In Japan, she "caused scandal when she bought a set of encyclopedia" (1992: 5); after getting married and moving to the United States, she "fell in love with a young Filipino who could read and speak Japanese" and "courted her by bringing books" (1992: 6). Due to her extramarital affair, she was sent back to Japan with her children, divorced after five years, and then banished perpetually from the family network. She entered into her second marriage afterwards and moved to Manchuria where she lived until the end of her life without ever again returning to Japan or to America.

The Issei grandmother was not the only divorced woman in Lydia's maternal line. Auntie, the elder sister of Lydia's mother,

was also a divorced woman. In fact, divorce was “her choice” (1992: 113). With four children to support after the divorce, Auntie worked first in a sweatshop as a modest sewing laborer, but soon determined to “step away from the rigid code of her past” (1992: 113) and became a “hostess” in restaurants. Although she could have been disowned and exiled, like her Issei mother, if her father lived to see her work as a “hostess,” Auntie achieved, at least in Lydia’s eyes, an alternative kind of success. While others expected her to become “a hardened woman, losing her youth, wheedling drunken men” (1992: 114), Auntie remained “willful” and “beautiful” (1992: 113): she made money, purchased a house, and saved enough money for her daughters’ college education in the United States.

The stories of the exiled women and unwanted daughters thus constituted the underside of Lydia’s family history. They form counter-stories to the dominant family history that emphasized the genetic purity of the family lineage. The chapter titled “The Family Union” recites the dominant history: Lydia’s maternal line was noted by “centuries of glories and affluence” in Japan—a line produced out of “eight hundred years of inbreeding” (1992: 87). In the chapter “The Patriarch,” the Issei grandmother’s younger brother—the current patriarch of the family—gave Lydia a lecture that “wove a narrative of [Japanese] national history and family honor” (1992: 101). He urged Lydia to be proud of the family’s glories in Japan and asserted that “[t]his is who you are” (1992: 101). Yet, how could the “glorious” past of a Japanese national family define Lydia’s Japanese American identity? The patriarch’s assertion, made out of a complete lack of understanding of Lydia’s Japanese American background, sounds self-deceiving, if not ignorant. As one shall see, instead of being a product of “intermarriage” between affluent Japanese families of the same region (1992: 88), Lydia was born out of a “new familial network” that was formed in America between a Kibei girl and a Nisei boy

(1992: 11).¹³ In addition, the patriarch apparently neglected his family's underside, constituted by exiled women and disowned daughters, while boasting the purity of his family's blood. Luckily, the authoritative father did not provide the only voice of interpellation for Lydia, who grew up also under a maternal influence.¹⁴ Every time Lydia's father iterated: "I have encouraged my girls to be nurses or librarians. Daughters need duty, not daring" (1992: 115), her mother gave her an "other" education, filling her "timorous world with flight dreams" by transforming her Issei grandmother and Auntie into "heroines" (1992: 115). Lydia remembered how her mother usually listened to her father's teachings, politely smiling, but would afterwards drag her to the kitchen, "fiercely" hissing to her ear: "Do not listen to those old men . . . Soar as high as you can. Go as far as you want. *Never* let anyone stop you" (1992: 115; italics original).

Driven by this desire to "soar," Lydia's journey to Japan and her visit to her grandmother's family must not be interpreted as a simple attempt of roots-search. Rather, it can be understood as a venture to restore her Japanese American family to transnational dimensions. While *The Floating World* delineates a Japanese American family's meandering through the U.S. national time and space, bringing otherness and heterogeneity into the U.S. national presence, *Talking to High Monks* not only retrieves the repressed and the forgotten in a single Japanese American household, but further defines the Japanese American family as transnational. The re-inclusion of Lydia's Issei grandmother into her family circle, for example, rendered her Japanese American family, no longer simply landed in Albany, New York, but remaining linked to Japan and even to Manchuria. The Kibei background of Lydia's mother also

¹³ Further elaborations on the marriage between Lydia's mother and father are attempted in the concluding section, "Domestic Interventions."

¹⁴ Lydia claimed, not without significance, that "[t]he Japanese love their mothers . . . To them, the creative force *must* be maternal" (Minatoya, 1992, 113; italics original).

added transnational dimensions to Lydia's family. A product of a series of makeshift households, Lydia's mother was born in her parents' house in America, moved to Japan when her Issei mother was sent back to her parents' house in Wakayama, relocated to a separate domicile belonging to her father's sister when her mother was divorced, and eventually handed over to the care of a seventeen-year-old cousin when her father's sister died. In total, she spent fourteen years in Japan before returning to the United States.

In addition to her grandmother's and mother's experiences, Lydia's travels to Japan and her later decision to work in Okinawa and China furthered her family's transnational trajectory. By undertaking her journey to Japan, Lydia "relinquished stability and embraced mobility" (1992: 69). She even changed her appearance to look like an "Asian-blooded Brigitte Bardot" (1992: 73) or, in the words of Lydia's actress friend, like "a composite of all those immigrant brides at the turn of the century" (1992: 74). Lydia did not completely agree with her friend's comment, though. Instead of being an immigrant bride who was passively married to the United States, Lydia contended that she be one of the brave "immigrants"—the "pioneer women" who dared to venture out and live "within a kaleidoscope where familiar shapes lay shattered in shards of color: dazzling, fascinating, infinitely varying" (1992: 74). In a significant manner, Lydia displaced her stable American citizenship with her "immigrant soul" (1992: 74). From Albany, Boston, Wakayama, to Okinawa, Lydia opened up new routes for her family.

Talking to High Monks concludes with Lydia's wedding. At first glance the epilogue of the book seems to mark Lydia's successful "homecoming," a symbolic narrative "closure" that is usually seen in traditional bildungsromans. This seeming "period" of Lydia's story, however, is made problematic as soon as one probes into the way it is presented. First, although Lydia married a white American, what is emphasized in the narrative is neither the racial background of the husband, nor Lydia's prospective

“assimilation” into the American mainstream, but the fact that the husband was the man “with whom . . . Lydia taught in China and traveled in Nepal” (1992: 266). This marriage was thus a product of Lydia’s transnational travels. It heralded a new kind of (mixed-race) family that grew out of one’s world acquaintances. Secondly, the text arranges Lydia’s uncle to visit Lydia’s family on this specific wedding day. As the eldest son in the family of Lydia’s mother, this uncle had spent years traveling between the United States and Japan to trace the story of his missing Issei mother. In addition to bringing to the wedding a family photo, in which Lydia’s Issei grandmother posed the last time with her children on the day before she was banished from the family, he also brought the news of his newly-found half-brother (the son the Issei grandmother gave birth to in her second marriage) and revealed, right after the wedding ceremony, a shocking story about the Issei grandmother: the grandmother once planned to murder all her children before her separation from them; the family line continued in effect only because this plan fell through. The epilogue as such links up dramatically Lydia’s wedding, the recovery of a family photo, the reclamation of a family member, and the revelation of a piece of the previously unspoken family secrets. With subtlety, it associates the wedding with the continuation of the family’s maternal line. To me, the story of the Issei grandmother’s attempt of murder, be it true or not, could be taken as reflecting the family members’ general anxiety about the extinction of their family—an anxiety derived from the banishment and disappearance of the Issei grandmother. Yet as soon as the secret was spoken, the anxiety lost its command. Lydia’s mother declared that she gained a “son” and found her “half-brother” (1992: 269) on Lydia’s wedding day. She knew that her family had survived and thrived no matter the difficulties. Both her Issei mother’s second marriage and Lydia’s marriage built new affiliations that contributed to the extension of her family.

V. Domestic Interventions

Before concluding, a few more words will be devoted to Lydia's marriage in the epilogue as it reminds us of another important marriage described earlier in *Talking to High Monks*. Of the many family stories Lydia heard from her mother, the marriage between her parents remained her favorite. Lydia and her sister repetitively urged their mother to re-tell "the whole story . . . in correct sequence" (1992: 10). This strong interest in the process of the courtship and marriage of their parents might be dismissed as young girls' general fascination with whatever romantic. Or, one may argue that the marital union between parents is always important for their children, as it provides the children with a sense of safety, a feeling of familial belonging, and a guarantee of their familial unity. Yet studied in the context of Japanese American fear of ethnic extinction, Lydia and her sister's strong interest in the story of their parent's marriage could also be attributed to this marriage's special position in preserving and extending Lydia's family line. The fact that this marriage took place during the wartime Japanese American relocation added further to the symbolic significance of this marital affiliation. First, the union between a Kibei mother and a Nisei father—two persons of different backgrounds—testified to the family's ability to grow by taking in the different. As Lydia asserted, the marriage between her mother and father created a "*new* familial network" (1992: 11; emphasis mine). Moreover, arranged during the Second World War, when most Japanese Americans were under the threat of familial disruption and community disintegration, the marriage featured a wish-fulfillment for most Japanese Americans. It symbolized the strength and resilience of a Japanese American family that grew despite the hostile socio-political situation. In a sense, Minatoya has intervened into the writing of the Japanese American wartime experience as she recasts Japanese American relocation into a chance-ground for two Japanese Americans, who

would otherwise remain strangers to each other, to meet and achieve a marital union.

Briefly, this paper explores the possible domestic interventions into our conception of Asian America. Paying special attention to the domestic dimensions of Japanese America in *The Floating World* and *Talking to High Monks*, I have tried to make clear how an “unhomely” Japanese American domicile intervenes into the open world with its constitutive complexities. Both texts present Japanese American families as temporally-shifting and territorially-unbounded. The familial present is perpetually invaded by the emergence of its past in the form of telling-stories or re-told histories. Moreover, the open road, be it domestic or international, is—to quote from *Obāsan*—always of “too much magic” (Kadohata, 1989: 32) and provides the space for unpredictable developments and the emergence of Japanese American families. The writing of a family, a home, and a domestic space remains inseparable from our conception of the community, the nation, and the public domain. The fluidity of families mirrors the heterogeneity of a nation. Never completely self-enclosed, the family life intervenes into the nation with its everyday convolutions. As this paper has demonstrated, when unfixing the boundary of Japanese American families, both *The Floating World* and *Talking to High Monks* help us conceive a Japanese America that ceaselessly stretches to other people and different places. Making mobility and contacts with others the dominant mode of existence, the two texts restore our conception of Japanese America to its “real” hybridities, porosity, movement, and transgression.

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書寫國族於家與「非」家
——辛西亞·門畑《浮世》與湊谷百合子
《話予雪地高僧》中的日美家庭

李秀娟

摘 要

本論文從家庭構成的角度想像亞美，主張還原泛亞美單一國族想像於個別家庭構成之多層時空、多源系譜、與多重認同。論文首先點出「家」／「國」譬喻中「國」以「家」為本，「家」為「國」血脈一統雛形的矛盾，申論日常現實中家庭複雜多元的組成往往與國族一元想像背道而馳。緊接著，以當代日美作家辛西亞·門畑《浮世》(1989) 以及湊谷百合子《話予雪地高僧》(1992) 為主要文本，論文分析二次戰後遷徙於美國內陸的日美（「非」）家庭([un]home) 如何介入美國地理空間與歷史書寫，日美家庭的跨國移民背景與複雜家族組成又如何挑戰「家／國」想像中父系血脈一元、家裡國外壁壘分明的迷思。門畑與湊谷筆下的日美家庭絕非維繫國族一元的利器；它們在國家、種族、與文化罅縫間繁衍，並且不斷斡旋性別、世代、與跨國政治。

關鍵詞：亞美文學、日美家庭、國一家、辛西亞·門畑、湊谷百合子