2 : p.27-69

# Linguistic Regionalism and the Emergence of Chinese American Literature in Sui Sin Far's *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*

*Marjorie Pryse*

ABSTRACT

Beginning by suggesting that Sui Sin Far/Edith Maude Eaton (1865–1914) readily fits none of the categories recent critics have established within Chinese American literature, this essay situates her as a regionalist writer whose work demonstrates her struggle against mainstream representations of the Chinese in the late nineteenth-century American press and who achieves artistic form and a strategy for helping her readers see differently through her use of the English language in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*. The key to understanding Sui Sin Far's contribution to American literature lies in analyzing her use of English in this volume that serves as the culmination of her career. Writing what Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse have called "language on the border land" (192), or what I am calling in this essay the linguistic bicultural, Sui Sin Far, after years of struggle, discovers in the structures of English itself how to represent the Chinese experience in America. She refashions English in such a way both as to reflect that experience and to demonstrate her immigrant characters' consciousness of the ways the English language encodes a dominance that reflects U.S. politics of the period. The essay contrasts Sui Sin Far's regionalism with "local color" representations of the Chinese in the writings of Bret Harte, and offers a linguistic reading of several stories in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*—"Mrs. Spring

Fragrance," "The Inferior Woman," "In the Land of the Free," "The Wisdom of the New," "The Americanizing of Pau Tsu," and "'Its Wavering Image.'"

KEY WORDS

American literary regionalism, Chinese immigrant experience, Asian American literature

> "I think," said Go Ek Ju, "that when I return to China I will write a book about the American people."
>
> "What put such an idea into your head?" I asked.
>
> "The number of books about the Chinese by Americans," answered Go Ek Ju. "I see them in the library; they are very amusing."
>
> "See, then, that when you write your book, it is likewise amusing."
>
> "No," said Go Ek Ju. "My aim, when I write a book about Americans will be to make it not amusing, but interesting and instructive. The poor Americans have to content themselves with writing for amusement only because they have no means of obtaining any true knowledge of the Chinese when in China; but we Chinese in America have fine facilities for learning all about the Americans. *We go into the American houses as servants; we enter the American schools and colleges as students*; we ask questions and we think about what we hear and see. Where is there the American who will go to China and enter into the service of a Chinese family as a domestic? We have yet to hear about a band of American youths, both male and female, being admitted as students into a Chinese university." (Sui Sin Far, "A Chinese Book on Americans" 1909) [1]

Sui Sin Far (Edith Maude Eaton) doesn't readily fit into any of the categories Te-hsing Shan brings into relief in "Redefining Chinese American Literature," one of two essays on the topic included in Werner Sollors's collection, *Multilingual America*. She belongs neither

to the group of writers who were born in China in the twentieth century, emigrated to the United States, and write and publish in Chinese, nor to the group of Chinese American writers who were born in the United States and "write in English about things (Chinese) American" (Shan 117).[2] Born in England in 1865, Edith Eaton grew up with an English father and Chinese mother and would later describe herself as "Eurasian." The family moved from England to North America in 1873, first arriving in Hudson, New York, then settling in Montreal, where the young Edith attended school and, as she writes in an autobiographical essay, where she first discovered discrimination when her schoolmates learned that her mother was Chinese.[3] As an adult she became a journalist and also wrote fiction based on the Chinese immigrant experience; Edith adopted the Chinese name Sui Sin Far and moved to San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Seattle. Her career included a brief sojourn in Jamaica, and near the end of her life, three years in Boston, where she was living when her only book, a collection of short fiction, appeared in 1912 under the title, *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*. She returned to Montreal shortly before her death in 1914 (White-Parks, *Sui Sin Far* 9; 47–49).

Based on Xiao-huang Yin's analysis of the limitations writing in English has placed on Chinese writers (in the second essay on Chinese American literature included in Sollors), we would expect Sui Sin Far's writing to reflect those limitations. In describing the difference between the "characteristics of Chinese-language literature in America" and "writing in English by Chinese-American authors," Yin identifies as a "hallmark" of Chinese-language literature in America the freedom such writers have from the restraints of the "social codes of mainstream society" (177). In addition, while American-born Chinese writers "tend to delve into the broad issues of ethnic identity, cultural conflicts, and sentiments of the native-born," what distinguishes Chinese-language writers "is their persistent focus on immigrants" (178). Yet the stories from *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* manage at the same time to critique the "social codes" and the political constraints the United States placed on immigrant Chinese in the late nineteenth-century, to focus on the complex responses of various

Chinese immigrants to their immigrant experience, and to reflect on the issue of ethnic identity for persons of biracial origin such as Sui Sin Far. According to Annette White-Parks, Sui Sin Far may have used the term "Chinese-American" for the first time in print in the series of sketches of Chinese life in America she published in the *Westerner* in May 1909 ("Introduction" 174).[4] In other ways as well, critics have considered her unique. Yin, among others, identifies her as the first Chinese-American woman writer (176); S. E. Solberg calls her the first "Chinese-American fictionist"; and Frank Chin sets her apart from the "pack" of Christian Chinese Americans who wrote autobiographies in the nineteenth century, calling her "a lone champion of the Chinese American real" and asserting that her essays and contemporary portraits of Chinatowns "are the only knowing and sympathetic writing on Chinese America of the time" (12).

This essay situates Sui Sin Far/Edith Eaton as a writer who attempted to reflect Chinese immigrant experience back to her white American readers in such a way as to help those readers come to view themselves differently and to change their attitudes and behavior toward the Chinese. She was able to do so because, in the aftermath of the Civil War and particularly after the completion of the transcontinental railroad (ironically, given the role Chinese laborers played in the project), magazine editors began to publish writers from and about the varied regions of the United States in an attempt to unify the postwar country and satisfy readers' curiosity about life in the regions. However, unlike many of those writers who wrote "local color" literature, Sui Sin Far/Edith Eaton adopted an insider perspective on the Chinatown region from within which she wrote, thereby differentiating herself from the "local color" writers and aligning her work more with regionalism.

I will explore Sui Sin Far as a regionalist writer whose work demonstrates her struggle against mainstream American representations of the Chinese and who achieves artistic form and a strategy for helping her readers think differently through her adaptation of English syntax in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*. The key to understanding Sui Sin Far's contribution to American literature as well as to Chinese

American literature lies in analyzing her use of English in the volume that serves as the culmination of her career. Writing what Judith Fetterley and I have described as "language on the border land" (*Writing out of Place* 192), Sui Sin Far discovers in the structures of English itself how to represent the Chinese experience in America. She refashions English both to reflect that experience and to demonstrate her immigrant characters' consciousness of the ways the English language encodes dominance. In the process she reconstructs the English language "as a site of cultural encounter" (197), thereby demonstrating to her American readers, in their own words so to speak, their potential to think in ways that are less dominant and more modest—characteristics Sui Sin Far associated with the "humble, kindly, moral, unassuming Chinese people of America." [5] Before approaching Sui Sin Far's innovations in the use of English, however, it is necessary to situate her as a regionalist. [6]

## I

As the first Chinese-American woman writer, Sui Sin Far clearly contributed to the emergence of Chinese American literature, but how does it help a reader understand her work to place her also in the context of American literary regionalism? It is significant that she published her earliest Chinese stories in *The Land of Sunshine*, a California magazine edited by Charles Lummis, who expressed his interest in publishing "the best Western literature" as well as unknown "writers of promise" (White-Parks, *Sui Sin Far* 86–87). Writing for a "Western" publication gave Sui Sin Far an opportunity to write about the Chinese. At the same time, her work joins that of other nineteenth-century regionalists in expressing the voices of disenfranchised people.

Such expression characterizes literary regionalism. For example, as early as 1852 in her "Preface" to *Clovernook,* Alice Cary writes that she hopes her sketches "may perhaps interest if they do not instruct readers who have regarded the farming class as essentially different and inferior. . . ." [7] Sarah Orne Jewett, in her 1877 sketch "The Circus at

Denby," describes what happens when her two female protagonists visiting from outside the region decide to enter the side-show tent that houses the "Kentucky giantess" with a woman from the region, Mrs. Kew—and Mrs. Kew discovers that she knew the "giantess," Marilly, before she fell on hard times and had to enter the circus in order to make a living. As Mrs. Kew becomes reacquainted with the woman she once knew and Marilly tells her story, the "giantess" moves from side-show exhibit to speaking subject (*American Women Regionalists* 187–97). And when Zitkala-Ša writes about her journey by train away from her village on the Yankton Sioux reservation to attend Indian schools run by Quaker missionaries in the East, she describes how she became an object of curiosity: "Directly in front of me, children who were no larger than I hung themselves upon the backs of their seats, with their bold white faces toward me. Sometimes they took their forefingers out of their mouths and pointed at my moccasined feet. . . . This embarrassed me, and kept me constantly on the verge of tears" (*American Women Regionalists* 548).

In literary regionalism, the political location of the narrator with respect to the region determines whether or not the reader will empathize with or laugh at the regional characters who inhabit the text. Indeed, regionalism emerged, Fetterley and I demonstrate, as a resistant discourse to the "local color" mode prevalent in American prose writing after the Civil War. We differentiate between "local color" and regionalism primarily by virtue of the text's positionality with respect to the inhabitants of regions and note that this distinction "can be summarized as the difference between 'looking with' [regionalism] and 'looking at' [local color]. If a text looks 'with' regional characters, location becomes marked rather than transcended and the text retains its 'geography.' When a text looks 'at' the region, however, geography and location characterize only one aspect of the text while the perspective of the one who looks is framed as universal and transcendent" (*Writing out of Place* 36).

The resistance of regionalist discourse to "local color" emerges from the responses of regional people to being made the object of scrutiny, "queered" and "othered" by mainstream and urban society

and by "local color" narrators. Such treatment of regionals has much in common with the objectification of immigrant and ethnic persons. As Ruth Frankenberg has observed in an early contribution to "whiteness" studies, "it has . . . for the most part been Other, marked subjects rather than white/Western, unmarked subjects whose racial and cultural identities have been the focus of study" (17), or, in "local color," the focus of objectification. But even the white characters in "local color" fiction become less "white" by virtue of their becoming "Other, marked subjects." By writing from within the regions, regionalism emphasizes the subjectivity of regional people, whatever the reasons for their disenfranchisement—whether they are poor, elderly, unmarried, children, mountain people, women, and/or persons of color.

Regionalism creates a fictional space to contest the ruling relations that subordinated rural people and other groups who possessed limited power in mainstream U.S. society and did so by developing the subjectivity of regional persons. Sui Sin Far joins other late nineteenth and early twentieth century writers of color who aligned their own critiques of political dominance with geography and writing with a resistant regionalist discourse, writers such as Zitkala-Ša, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, and Charles W. Chesnutt.[8] For these writers—and their white regionalist counterparts—place represents more local and bounded geographies than conventional understandings of regions in the United States (e.g., South, Midwest, Northeast, West). "Sui Sin Far's 'region' is the urban Chinatown of Seattle and the West Coast—hardly the same 'West' as that of Bret Harte's . . . . [F]or Zitkala-Ša, the 'West' is complicated by her identity as Dakota and her upbringing on the reservation. [Kate] Chopin, [Grace] King, and Dunbar-Nelson all place their fictions in Creole Louisiana, a 'region' hardly metonymic for the 'South'; . . . for Dunbar-Nelson 'region' connotes a hybrid space where to be Creole may also mean to be part African" (*Writing out of Place* 12).

Because the geographies of the fictions are so specific, regionalist writing, while often tied to geographical place and conscious of its social and natural environment, emphasizes an understanding of "region less as a term of geographical determinism and more as

discourse or a mode of analysis, a vantage point within the network of power relations that provides a location for critique and resistance" (11). Inhabitants of a region share a vantage point based on the relationship between their region and the larger cosmopolitan centers of political and economic power with which that region must interact. The etymology of the word "region" "does not suggest any connection to 'natural' or geographical boundaries. To be ruled is to be *regional* (the word deriving from the Latin *regere*)"; he who rules is the *rex*, the territory of the ruled is the *realm*, and the words "'region' and 'regionalism' therefore convey political relations of domination" (5). Even so, place matters; literary expressions of a region's geography (or, as in the case of Sui Sin Far, of a city's Chinatown in relation to its surrounding urban center) may either contribute to developing the vantage point of the regional speaker or they may overrule and mute that vantage point, may "regionalize" it by appearing to naturalize the ruling relations of domination over regions.

The more local the regional perspective, the easier it becomes for a narrator to break down the larger monolith represented by categories such as South or West, and in so doing, regionalist writers foreground plural subjectivities among persons who have in common geographical and/or cultural disenfranchisement. Celia Thaxter writes about growing up on a few acres of rock off the coast of New Hampshire in the Atlantic Ocean where her father took the job of keeper of the light. Although the lighthouse where her family lived was the only residence on the small island, Thaxter identifies many regions of the island in her 1873 book *Among the Isles of Shoals*, thereby suggesting that no place is too small to have its own regions. Similarly, no group of people regionalized by their location (e.g., Chinatown) is too small to have its own diverse subjectivities. Regionalism adds to a study of Sui Sin Far's work by providing a literary and theoretical frame for her examination of the Chinese immigrant, assimilated Chinese, and Chinese American subjectivities; at the same time, the writing of Sui Sin Far also contributes to our understanding of that theoretical frame.

Within the regions, monolithic discourse becomes displaced by a range of minority discourses that we call dialects. Dialect and a sense

of place both emerge from the local; further, dialect retains its connection to place, whether that place marks the speaker's exile or his or her lifelong residence. Dialect retains the "Other, marked" characteristics of the speaker's difference from the mainstream, and in "local color" may serve as a way to stereotype. In regionalism, however, dialect allows the speaker to become "free to say"; it offers silenced and muted characters discursive freedom and thus transforms regionalized objects into regional subjects. [9]

The dialects themselves help illustrate the relationship between the speaker's difference from the mainstream and the transformative effects of literary regionalism. Consider the following examples of dialect speech. When Harriet Beecher Stowe turned from the injustices of slavery in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) to a depiction of the injustices of gender in rural Maine in *The Pearl of Orr's Island* (begun 1852, published in book form, 1862), she wrote the speech of Aunts Roxy and Ruey in dialect: "Well, . . . 't a'n't much matter, after all, *what* they call the little thing, for 't a'n't 't all likely it's goin' to live . . ." (*American Women Regionalists* 28). New England writer Mary Wilkins Freeman allows her character Mis' Green to narrate the entire inset story about her aunt in "On the Walpole Road" in dialect: "This happened twenty year ago or more. . . She was allers such an own-folks sort of a woman, an' jest the best hand when any one was sick" (308). Tennessee writer Mary Noailles Murfree writes in dialect that is the most pronounced in all of regionalist fiction, and she uses it extensively throughout her work, although one example will suffice. "The 'Harnt' That Walks Chilhowee" opens with Simon Burney commenting on his neighbor's chickens: "An' it air a toler'ble for'ard season. Yer wheat looks likely; an' yer gyarden truck air thrivin' powerful. Even that cold spell we-uns hed about the full o' the moon in May ain't done sot it back none, it 'pears like ter me. But, 'cording ter my way o' thinkin', ye hev got chickens enough hyar ter eat off every pea-bloom ez soon ez it opens" (256). In Dunbar-Nelson's "The Praline Woman," the Praline Woman narrates a very short running commentary about her life and her interactions with the customers who buy her pralines. She worries at the end of the story about the New Orleans levees breaking and about

her own advanced age: "'Here come de rain! Now I got fo' to go. Didele, she be wait fo' me. Down h'it come! H'it fall in de Meesseesip, an' fill up—up—so, clean to de levee, den we have big crevasse, an' po' Tante Marie float away'" (481). White writers Stowe, Freeman, and Murfree write about "white" characters and African American writer Dunbar-Nelson appears to be writing about a woman of African heritage, yet all use dialect in the same way—to empower their regional speakers.

None of these writers are immigrants, and yet their language resembles what Evelyn Nien-Ming Ch'ien, in her study of late twentieth-century immigrant writers, calls "weird English." Ch'ien associates "weird forms of English" with "the authors' bi- or polycultural status and context influencing this English" (4), which would seem to imply that white writers do not write "weird English," and yet as I have indicated, white regionals in the late nineteenth century United States became "Other, marked" in ways that called their "whiteness" into question. Ch'ien makes several observations about immigrant language, geography, and politics that transform the earlier stigmatized language of ethnic Americans into "vernaculars that have only recently become cool, instead of a freaky linguistic indulgence" (5). Much of what she says about "weird English" as written by contemporary ethnic writers applies equally well to the language of nineteenth-century regionalism. Consider the passages in the previous paragraph while reading the following statement and substitute "regional" for "foreign": "Because weird English possesses the extra dimension of a foreign language, it requires not only interpretation but also translation. Weird English revives the aesthetic experiential potential of English; we see through the eyes of foreign speakers and hear through their transcriptions of English a different way of reproducing meaning" (6–7). For Ch'ien, "weird-English writers become conscious of language as a practice of their ethnicity" (20), but as I have indicated, regionalist writers—whether writers of color or white—became conscious of language as a practice of regional people's resistance to being "othered," to being represented as the objects of "local color" writing. Ch'ien analyzes Maxine Hong

Kingston as a contemporary writer who creates a sympathetic hybrid discourse—Chinglish—that both critiques a stereotyped "Changlish, a purposeful parodying of Chinese speakers using English" (111) and creates a space for the creation of a new literary language. Ch'ien's discussion of Kingston in effect distinguishes between a regionalist use of "weird English"—Chinglish—and its "local color" parody—Changlish. Taking into account the politics of regionalist dialect speech suggests that "weird English" has a history and that regionalism's resistance to the prevalent "local color" approach to difference in the nineteenth century helped create a sympathetic readership for the emergence of ethnic as well as white regional writers.

In the late nineteenth-century depiction of the Chinese, even in the more sympathetic portraits of Bret Harte, the difference between a "local color" perspective and a "regionalist" perspective clearly emerges. A brief detour to Harte's 1874 story "Wan Lee, the Pagan" will demonstrate this point. In "Wan Lee, the Pagan," the male narrator writes as follows:

> Before I describe him I want the average reader to discharge from his mind any idea of a Chinaman that he may have gathered from the pantomime. He did not wear beautifully scalloped drawers fringed with little bells—I never met a Chinaman who did; he did not habitually carry his forefinger extended before him at right angles with his body, nor did I ever hear him utter the mysterious sentence "Ching a ring a ring chaw," nor dance under any provocation. He was, on the whole, a rather grave, decorous, handsome gentleman. His complexion, which extended all over his head except where his long pig-tail grew, was like a very nice piece of glazed brown paper-muslin. His eyes were black and bright, and his eye-lids set at an angle of 15º. . . . (552)

The "pantomime" to which the narrator refers includes his description of Hop Sing's warehouse with its "mysterious foreign odor," its "array of uncouth looking objects," and "a great many other indescribable

objects" (552). While it may appear that the narrator wishes to dispel the reader's stereotype of the "idea of a Chinaman," and says as much, in fact Harte's lengthy description both of Hop Sing's warehouse and of Hop Sing himself entirely objectify the character. While Harte's narrator may argue that Hop Sing does not speak "Changlish," writing that "nor did I ever hear him utter the mysterious sentence 'Ching a ring a ring chaw'" in effect both allows him to appear to distance himself from stereotype and at the same time to parody the Chinese language and its speakers.

Harte must take credit for producing the most damaging stereotypes of the Chinese in literature. In his 1870 poem, "Plain Language from Truthful James," Harte introduced the character of Ah Sin into late nineteenth-century discourse as the "heathen Chinee" who stands for "Chinese cheap labor" and takes jobs away from the Irish. The poem, offensive to twenty-first century readers, characterizes Ah Sin as "peculiar" and attributes to the Chinese "ways that are dark" and "tricks that are vain." In a well-researched discussion of the poem's popular reception, Gary Scharnhorst argues that Harte "*intended* his poem to satirize anti-Chinese prejudices pervasive in northern California among Irish day-laborers, with whom Chinese immigrants competed for jobs" (378). However, despite Harte's intention, his poem "was read by many a xenophobic reader as satire not of the Irish card-sharks but of Ah Sin and the 'yellow peril' he seemed to represent" (379). It was much-parodied and much-reprinted. In short, whatever Harte's intention, the poem performed the cultural work of fueling anti-Chinese sentiment. Such is the consequence of the "local color" stance toward a regional character; the narrator's willingness to objectify the object of narration becomes entirely subject to misconstrual by readers for whom such objectification of the racial or regional "other" serves to confirm the superiority or dominance of the mainstream perspective, often using humor as the vehicle for its influence.

In "Tian Shan's Kindred Spirit," one of the stories included in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, Sui Sin Far quotes "Plain Language from Truthful James." The story opens, "Had Tian Shan been an American

and China to him a forbidden country, his daring exploits and thrilling adventures would have furnished inspiration for many a newspaper and magazine article, novel, and short story. As a hero, he would certainly have far outshone Dewey, Peary, or Cook. Being, however, a Chinese, and the forbidden country America, he was simply recorded by the American press as 'a wily Oriental, who "by ways that are dark and tricks that are vain," is eluding the vigilance of our brave customs officers'" (*Mrs. Spring Fragrance* 119). Since the story purports to quote "the American press," it does not provide definitive evidence that Sui Sin Far associated the quote with Harte, but it does make it clear that she saw herself writing in a different mode than did the author of the line she quotes. As Amy Ling writes, "Bret Harte had used Chinese characters in his Western stories, but he always presented them from the white man's perspective. Sui Sin Far gave to American letters the Chinese perspective on racial prejudice, economic harassment, and discriminatory immigration regulations" (42). Xiao-huang Yin also argues that Sui Sin Far attempted to reverse the "local color" representations of the Chinese, writing, "prior to her 'Chinamen' were chiefly used as a rich source of local color to reinforce the exotic effects of various kinds of tall tales" (56). In so doing, Sui Sin Far identified her work with the vantage point of the regionalist rather than that of Harte's "local color."

Regionalism as literary stance and narrative method enhances her advocacy on behalf of Chinese Americans and Chinese immigrants, although we can understand from the trajectory of her work and her reliance on editor Charles Lummis that it took more than a decade for Sui Sin Far to bring together the narrative approach of the regionalist writer with her empathic non-fiction portraits of Chinese life in the United States. In Sui Sin Far's early writing, her journalistic pieces rather than her short fiction better accomplished the work of resistance to dominant modes of objectifying the Chinese in America. As Dominika Ferens has convincingly argued, prior to the fiction that Sui Sin Far would include in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, her earlier newspaper and magazine stories, "framed on all sides by the dominant discourses of the day, are particularly useful for contesting the boundary we draw

between accommodation and resistance" (53). The stories on the other hand "tend to be more archetypal, detached from the local context, and less overtly political" and Ferens sees "an author whose positioning in relation to the Chinese minority and the white majority was unstable and who vacillated between endorsing and contesting orientalist discourses" (59). In her early fiction we can detect the tension between writing about Chinese life in ways that would be palatable to American readers and writing about Chinese experience in ways that would challenge American stereotypes.

This vacillation is particularly evident in the only short story Sui Sin Far (as "Sui Sin Fah") apparently published in the *Overland Monthly*, the same magazine that had published "Plain Language from Truthful James" in 1870. Although Harte served as editor of the publication in 1870 and was no longer editor in 1899, the orientalism of Sui Sin Far's "A Chinese Ishmael" and its sensationalism (Ferens 88) reflect the limits of what editors would publish about the Chinese in America in the years following the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.[10] At the same time, buried in this fable about Chinese lovers whose story becomes the source of myth, Sui Sin Far includes some facts about Chinese immigrant experience that move in the direction of the fiction she would produce in the following decade and include in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*. One of the protagonists of "A Chinese Ishmael," Ku Yum, has immigrated as a slave girl owned by the Lee Chus, immigrants from one of the classes exempt from the Chinese Exclusion Act. The Lee Chus want to sell Ku Yum to a man of dubious morality named Lum Choy. Leih Tseih, the hero of the story, immigrated to San Francisco "through the agency of the Six Companies" ("A Chinese Ishmael" 44) and owes an immigration debt for their agency on his behalf.[11] Ku Yum agrees to run away with Leih Tseih once he pays his debt, but Lum Choy discovers the "theft" of the slave girl he has just bought from Lee Chu and asks the Six Companies to intervene. The political center of the story involves the disposition of the case by the leaders of the Six Companies. This disposition includes three points: first, that since Leih Tseih has now paid his immigration debt, the Six Companies have no further jurisdiction over him; second, that the "purchase of slave-girls,

which is just and right in our own country, is not lawful in America" and thus both Lum Choy and Lee Chu may have "much to answer for"; and third, that the leaders advise Lum Choy "to let matters rest," asking, "is it not better to forgive an injury than to avenge one?" (48). While this point of advice does not carry the day, and Lum Choy devises an act of revenge that will frame Leih Tseih as Lum Choy's murderer even though he is innocent of Lum Choy's self-inflicted death, Ku Yum and Leih Tseih commit suicide together because they believe Leih Tseih will not be able to prove his innocence.

Although Sui Sin Far does not specifically connect the Six Companies' advice or Leih Tseih's framing to the political climate for the Chinese in America, as she does in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, she is on the cusp in this story of incorporating a vantage point in her fictions that begins to resist the cultural imperialism of the United States at the turn of the twentieth century with respect to the Chinese. This resistance, as it appears in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, helps to characterize the distinction between "local color" fiction and regionalism, for the title character of "Mrs. Spring Fragrance" in the lead story in Sui Sin Far's volume finds a way to construct a critique of American imperialism that cannot be misconstrued in the ways Scharnhorst argues Harte's portraits of the Chinese could and were. Mrs. Spring Fragrance stands in for all of Sui Sin Far's narrators by virtue of her expressed wish to "write a book about Americans for her Chinese women friends" (*Mrs. Spring Fragrance* 28) in the volume that actually becomes a book about American attitudes even though most of the characters in the fictions are Chinese.

Ferens calls this impulse in Sui Sin Far's writing ethnographic, suggesting that "by reversing the conventional positions of the observer and the observed, Edith began to probe the politics of ethnography" (80–81). In Ferens's view, Sui Sin Far/Edith Eaton found in Charles Lummis, editor of the West coast publication the *Land of Sunshine*, "an editor passionately interested in race, who combined his interest in anthropology with his literary interests" (83). Lummis published several of Sui Sin Far's Chinatown sketches in the *Land of Sunshine*, but Ferens argues that he was only interested in "short tales about

Chinese 'types,' allowing no room for character development or psychological depth" (87), and therefore was not interested in Sui Sin Far as a writer. "Though Edith may not have realized it, Lummis had no special interest in the Chinese as an ethnic group, nor did he believe they could or should become American citizens" (88); rather, she "was perceived by Lummis as a native informant/ethnographer rather than a woman of letters" (94). Still, Lummis kept her career alive by offering her rare venues for publication and introduced her to regionalist Mary Austin, at least through the pages of his magazine if not at the Southern California ranch where he hosted numerous turn-of-the-century writers, including both Austin and Sui Sin Far. Ferens argues that Lummis "ambiguously positioned" Sui Sin Far "between the makers of high culture, such as Mary Austin and Grace Ellery Channing, and the occasional nameless or named Mexican and Native American informants who told their folktales to the white ethnographer or made impassioned pleas against civil rights violations" (86).

Ling describes political changes around 1905 in response to the Open Door policy that established friendlier political relations between the United States and China (18), and Ferens notes that U.S. foreign policy during this period "also made editors and the reading public more receptive to Edith's vision of the Chinese" (109). While changes in editors' attitudes toward the Chinese may have contributed to the brief visibility of Sui Sin Far's work before her death, I argue in the second half of this essay that it is her ability to adapt the English language that makes her a self-conscious, even a modern regionalist writer, no longer Lummis's "native informant" and much more than an ethnographer. Her reconstruction of English aligns her with the "weird English" writers and establishes a relationship between regionalism and early Chinese American literature in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*.

## II

Any analysis of Sui Sin Far's relationship to language must acknowledge the fact that she herself did not speak Chinese. She writes about the suspicion with which she is initially viewed by the Chinese

merchants in Chinatown; because she does not appear Chinese, they regard her as they do other "unscrupulous white people" who have imposed on them. "Another drawback—save for a few phrases, I am unacquainted with my mother tongue. How, then, can I expect these people to accept me as their own countrywoman?" ("Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian," *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* 227). [12] Her biographer, Annette White-Parks, further notes, "Nothing indicates that Sui Sin Far was fluent in any language except English" (*Sui Sin Far* 56, n. 59). And in a late essay, "The Persecution and Oppression of Me," Sui Sin Far writes that after moving to Boston about 1911, she was "in the habit of giving about half an hour to a Chinese manual every morning" (422).[13] At the same time she served as a translator of sorts, writing in "Leaves," "I meet many Chinese persons, and when they get into trouble am often called upon to fight their battles in the papers. This I enjoy" ("Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian," *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* 223). Sui Sin Far clearly understood the role of language in creating a bridge across cultures, but English was the only language in which she herself possessed fluency. However, as her own art matured, and perhaps encouraged by expanding opportunities to publish her fiction during the first decade of the twentieth century, she developed her use of English itself to serve multiple linguistic purposes.

In effect, Sui Sin Far reclaims English syntax both in order to use it better to reflect the experience of the Chinese in America and also to alter the English-speaking reader's relation to his or her own native language in such a way as to give that reader direct access to the world of the immigrant—and in such a way as to make the monolingual white American a linguistic bicultural. While on rare occasions her immigrant characters speak a fractured English dialect, she seems to recognize that such written speech only has the effect of further marginalizing and stereotyping her characters—would give them, perhaps, the "Ching a ring a ring chaw" that Harte associates with the ordinary American reader's "idea of a Chinaman" in "Wan Lee, the Pagan" or that Ch'ien calls "Changlish." Instead, she creates her own syntactic English usage, one in which her Chinese and Americanized

Chinese characters do not speak (and the narrator does not typically use when she is speaking directly for them) in syntactic constructions that subordinate and dominate. Instead of constructing "complex" sentence constructions for these characters, she much more often uses "simple" or "compound" sentence constructions, which Fetterley and I have argued creates "an alternative conceptual space within which the American reader can 'think' about the Chinese" (*Writing out of Place* 193). Such an alternative conceptual space does so, Sui Sin Far implies, because ideology subtends syntax, and by habituating the white American reader to think about the experience of immigrant Chinese using non-dominant sentence constructions, that same reader not only becomes separated from the use of the English language to dominate but also enters a textual space that allows a glimpse of Chinese experience from within the very thought patterns that Sui Sin Far suggests more accurately represent Chinese characters than the prevalent stereotypes. Her non-Chinese American characters, on the other hand, make free and full use of syntactic subordination and domination. She thus creates the effect of two syntactic systems—one spoken by her Chinese characters, the other by her white American characters—that bring into dialogue different worldviews and value systems, but that do so invisibly for the native-English speaker.

As Jonathan Culler summarizes the relationship between language and thought in a discussion of late twentieth-century theory, "speakers and readers can be brought to see through and around the settings of their language, so as to see a different reality. Works of literature explore the settings or categories of habitual ways of thinking and frequently attempt to bend or reshape them, showing us how to think something that our language had not previously anticipated, forcing us to attend to the categories through which we unthinkingly view the world" (59–60). Such indeed describes the effect of *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, and at the same time, that effect becomes ideological for Sui Sin Far. Complicating her earlier journalistic note, "A Chinese Book on Americans," that serves as the epigraph to this essay, Sui Sin Far writes about her narrator's expression of intent in "The Inferior Woman": "As [Mrs. Spring Fragrance] walked along she

meditated upon a book which she had some notion of writing. Many American women wrote books. Why should not a Chinese? She would write a book about Americans for her Chinese women friends. The American people were so interesting and mysterious" (*Mrs. Spring Fragrance* 28). While Sui Sin Far's white American readers were intrigued by her sympathetic representations of the Chinese in America—"[t]o judge by the handful of available reviews, this was the work her first readers appreciated most" (Ferens 110)—Sui Sin Far is actually writing a book about the American perceptions of the Chinese for her American friends. "[A]lthough the ways of European Americans are a major theme of *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, the reviews made no mention of them. Yet to bring before the scrutiny of European Americans images of themselves offset by those of Chinese Americans was an important part of Edith's work" (Ferens 110). Sui Sin Far's linguistic constructions allow her to accomplish this ideological work.

This argument runs somewhat counter to Ling's description of Sui Sin Far's style. Ling writes that "her use of literal translations from the Chinese—as in proper names, honorific titles, and axioms—results in a flowery, exotic language somewhat at odds with her purpose of rendering the Chinese familiar to whites" (43), and Ling calls her occasional renditions of Chinese immigrant dialect a syntax that "more realistically reproduces Chinese English," resulting in "linguistic portraits [that] may seem at times quaint or strained" (44). While this view may resonate with native English speakers' initial readings of some of the texts, Sui Sin Far pushes for and often accomplishes a much more sophisticated, even modern, even "weird," use of English. If we expect to find exoticism, we will; but very often in the stories collected in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, the surface evidence of "flowery, exotic language" serves as sleight-of-hand, distracting the reader from the linguistic strategies Sui Sin Far actually employs. Analysis of some of the fictions will demonstrate these points.

The opening paragraphs of "Mrs. Spring Fragrance," the title story in the collection, move the English-speaking reader into an alternate syntactic system and counterpose two ways of thinking in English. The first emphasizes the use of subordinate clauses,

particularly of the left-branching variety, to create complex sentence constructions that reflect the American reader's expectation of canonical conventions in literary writing. The second foregrounds the use of independent clauses, sometimes linked by coordinating conjunctions *and*, *but*, *or*, *nor* and *for*, to create simple or compound sentence constructions. In these simple or compound sentences, subordinate clauses (if they appear at all) are positioned as right-branching constructions that might not necessarily inscribe canonical conventions of literary language but even so, do not mark themselves as deviant uses of English. Left-branching sentences are those in which a subordinate clause precedes the main clause, or in which a subordinate clause is embedded in a main clause, and researchers have determined that such sentences are more difficult for speakers to hear or readers to comprehend. Right-branching sentences are those in which the subordinate clause follows the main clause, if a subordinate clause appears in the sentence.[14]

"Mrs. Spring Fragrance" opens with the following eleven sentences:

> When Mrs. Spring Fragrance first arrived in Seattle, she was unacquainted with even one word of the American language [1]. Five years later her husband, speaking of her, said: "There are no more American words for her learning" [2]. And everyone who knew Mrs. Spring Fragrance agreed with Mr. Spring Fragrance [3].
>
> Mr. Spring Fragrance, whose business name was Sing Yook, was a young curio merchant [4]. Though conservatively Chinese in many respects, he was at the same time what is called by the Westerners, "Americanized" [5]. Mrs. Spring Fragrance was even more "Americanized" [6].
>
> Next door to the Spring Fragrances lived the Chin Yuens [7]. Mrs. Chin Yuen was much older than Mrs. Spring Fragrance; but she had a daughter of eighteen with whom Mrs. Spring Fragrance was on terms of great friendship [8]. The daughter was a pretty girl whose

> Chinese name was Mai Gwi Far (a rose) and whose American name was Laura [9]. Nearly everybody called her Laura, even her parents and Chinese friends [10]. Laura had a sweetheart, a youth named Kai Tzu [11]. (17)

With the exception of sentences [1] and [4], all of the remaining sentences are either simple sentences, a compound sentence joined by a semi-colon [8], or a simple sentence with right-branching clauses [9]. This pattern continues to characterize "Mrs. Spring Fragrance," a pattern broken, as in the first eleven sentences, only by the exceptional complex or left-branching sentence. For example, as the story's main action begins, the narrator writes, "Laura was with Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Mrs. Spring Fragrance was trying to cheer her" (18). When Laura and Mrs. Spring Fragrance address each other, they continue to use simple or compound sentence constructions, as when Laura tells Mrs. Spring Fragrance, "'That is the walk,' she sobbed, 'Kai Tzu and I so love; but never, ah, never can we take it together again'" (18).

Even when Mrs. Spring Fragrance travels to San Francisco without her husband in order to engage in matchmaking between Laura and Kai Tzu and writes her husband a letter, she continues to follow the same mostly simple or compound, not complex, sentence structure and, if complex, mostly right-branching, not left. The passage addresses Mr. Spring Fragrance as "Great and Honored Man," and begins, "Greeting from your plum blossom, who is desirous of hiding herself from the sun of your presence for a week of seven days more." This right-branching complex sentence is followed by a compound sentence with a right-branching final clause: "My honorable cousin is preparing for the Fifth Moon Festival, and wishes me to compound for the occasion some American 'fudge,' for which delectable sweet, made by my clumsy hands, you have sometimes shown a slight prejudice" (21). In both of these sentences, the nonrestrictive clauses (that begin with "who is desirous . . ." and "for which delectable sweet") are used as modifiers (of "plum blossom" and "American 'fudge'"); neither emphasizes the grammatical subordination of one idea to another, and

"conjunctions such as *however, therefore, thus, although, or unless* are almost entirely absent except when those conjunctions are used adjectivally. Nonrestrictive relative clauses tend to be noun or adjective clauses, and adverbial and qualifying conjunctions and clauses are rarely used except to identify time and place and on those occasions when a white character is speaking or when the narrator is presenting the perspective of that character" (*Writing out of Place* 193).

At the same time as "Mrs. Spring Fragrance" appears to be constructing a much less complex English syntax that includes apparent orientalisms such as the letter's form of address to Mr. Spring Fragrance and references to Chinese tradition (Fifth Moon Festival), Sui Sin Far allows this non-dominant, virtually non-threatening syntactic form to contain an ironic critique of U.S. imperial attitudes toward the Chinese. Thus, Mrs. Spring Fragrance reports to her husband that "an American lady, known to my cousin" has "asked for my accompaniment to a magniloquent lecture" whose subject is "America, the Protector of China!" (21). She writes,

> It was most exhilarating, and the effect of so much expression of benevolence leads me to beg of you to forget to remember that the barber charges you one dollar for a shave while he humbly submits to the American man a bill of fifteen cents. And murmur no more because your honored elder brother, on a visit to this country, is detained under the roof-tree of this great Government instead of under your own humble roof. Console him with the reflection that he is protected under the wing of the Eagle, the Emblem of Liberty. (21)

While all three of these sentences, though longer, continue the pattern of initial compound or simple sentence construction followed by a final right-branching clause, the less dominant the syntax the more striking the contrast between the simplicity of the style and the extent of the irony and the critique. The series of infinitives in the first sentence ("to beg of you to forget to remember") leads the writer stylistically into a critique of the discrimination practised by the American barber on the

Chinese client; the parallelism of metonymy between "roof-tree of this great Government" and "your own humble roof" underscores the irony of the "honored elder brother's" detention; and the metaphoric replacement of "the roof-tree" by "the wing of the Eagle" tropes an implicit orientalism ("roof-tree") on an explicit Americanism ("Eagle"). In such a trope, she suggests Americanism is also prone to a "flowery, exotic language" that English speakers do not view as such when it describes U.S. culture, but which Sui Sin Far demonstrates to be as much an object of curiosity for the Chinese in America as orientalism is for the Americans.

Further, in eschewing grammatical dominance, Sui Sin Far's prose also refuses to represent Chinese immigrant experience as one of political subordination. Her Chinese characters remain measured in their thought patterns at the same time as her prose indicts the United States as exactly the opposite of the "Protector of China." Her ironic representation of "America, the Protector of China" and her troping on Americanism-as-orientalism creates in her fiction what Lisa Lowe has termed "immigrant acts." "'Immigrant Acts' names the *agency* of Asian immigrants and Asian Americans: the *acts* of labor, resistance, memory, and survival, as well as the politicized cultural work that emerges from dislocation and disidentification. Asian immigrants and Asian Americans have not only been 'subject to' immigration exclusion and restriction but have also been 'subject of' the immigration process and are agents of political change, cultural expression, and social transformation" (9).

The stories collected in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* may be understood as acts characteristic of such "political change, cultural expression, and social transformation." Ferens suggests that "in turning the ethnographic gaze on white Americans and in parodying fieldwork, they foreshadow the self-reflexive current in contemporary ethnographic thought" (102). She suggests that *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* is "an ethnography—a book that brings the daily lives, customs, rituals, and lore of one ethnic group before the scrutiny of another" (101) and constructs an integrated middle-class Seattle neighborhood that works toward social transformation. Sui Sin Far's neighborhood census

includes both the "Americanized" Spring Fragrances and two sets of next-door neighbors. On one side live the Chin Yuens, a more traditional Chinese family whose daughter is Mai Gwi Far but "whose American name was Laura" (*Mrs. Spring Fragrance* 17). On the other side live the Anglo-American Carmans, with whom the Spring Fragrances have close neighborly relations and on which relations the plot of "The Inferior Woman" turns. Ferens notes that "all three families are busy learning from each other, contrary to the American belief that minorities must assimilate to the dominant culture" (102). For example, Mr. Spring Fragrance asks Will Carman questions about the American practice of love and the answers he receives lead him temporarily to mistrust his wife, but "Mrs. Spring Fragrance" ends happily—with the Chinese lovers Laura and Kai Tzu married and the Spring Fragrances reunited.

In the opening two stories in the collection, "Mrs. Spring Fragrance" and "The Inferior Woman," Sui Sin Far establishes her approach to Americans as comedic in the sense that, despite the embedded political critique apparent in Mrs. Spring Fragrance's letter to her husband, her interest lies in helping two cultures understand each other, and she brings her lovers together as synecdoches for cross-cultural union and appreciation. She understands translation to be an "immigrant act." Like the first story, "The Inferior Woman" also establishes Mrs. Spring Fragrance as a translator or matchmaker—but this time, between classes of Americans. Will Carman is in love with a woman from an "inferior" class, and his mother strongly opposes the relationship. Mrs. Spring Fragrance in conversation with her husband ironically characterizes the Americans in language the Americans of the time used to characterize the Chinese—"Ah, these Americans! These mysterious, inscrutable, incomprehensible Americans! Had I the divine right of learning I would put them into an immortal book!" and she asks her husband how she should proceed. He replies, "It is the way in America, when a person is to be illustrated, for the illustrator to interview the person's friends. Perhaps, my dear, you had better confer with the Superior Woman" (34).

Using deliberately caricatured methods of both ethnography and

journalism, Mrs. Spring Fragrance arrives uninvited at the home of Mrs. Evebrook, the mother of the "Superior Woman" Eve Evebrook, whom her neighbor Mrs. Carman would prefer as a daughter-in-law. She sits outside on a veranda rocker and eavesdrops on the two women inside reading aloud letters written both by Mrs. Carman about Alice Winthrop, the "Inferior Woman," and by Alice herself to Eve. As a result of overhearing this conversation, Mrs. Spring Fragrance now has all of the information she needs to plead Alice Winthrop's case to Mrs. Carman. Eve Evebrook happens to glance out the window and sees Mrs. Spring Fragrance "calmly writing in a note-book" on the veranda, perfectly obvious under her pink parasol (37). Mrs. Spring Fragrance tells the women, by way of explaining why she neglected to ring the bell, "I have an ambition to accomplish an immortal book about the Americans, and the conversation I heard through the window was so interesting to me that I thought I would take some of it down for my book before I intruded myself. With your kind permission I will translate for your correction" (38). Positioning herself as the translator willing to take "correction" from her American listeners allows Mrs. Spring Fragrance to serve as a matchmaker. By the end of "The Inferior Woman," Mrs. Spring Fragrance has helped bring a second set of lovers together—this time, the American couple Will Carman and his "Inferior Woman," Alice Winthrop. Sui Sin Far also positions herself as one willing to be "corrected" in her translation—and in the process, to bring closer together the Americans and the Chinese in America. She "translates" in several other stories in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, where she continues to embed her critique in the reconstruction of English syntax that will help her American audience reexamine their own attitudes toward the Chinese in America. In these stories, however, the comedic endings of the first two disappear and the fictions end much more starkly for the characters and more critical of American attitudes toward the Chinese at the turn of the twentieth century.

"In the Land of the Free" takes the theme of detention by immigration authorities alluded to in "Mrs. Spring Fragrance" and traces its impact on three Chinese immigrants, Hom Hing, his wife Lae Choo, and their two-year-old son, Little One, who was born in China

because when Hom Hing learned of his wife's pregnancy, he asked her to go back to China to have the baby. As Hom Hing explains to the immigration authorities, in the same syntactical pattern that is characteristic of Sui Sin Far's Chinese characters, "After my son was born my mother fell sick and my wife nursed and cared for her; then my father, too, fell sick, and my wife also nursed and cared for him. For twenty moons my wife care for and nurse the old people, and when they die they bless her and my son, and I send for her to return to me. I had no fear of trouble. I was a Chinese merchant and my son was my son" (94). The immigration authorities, unlike Sui Sin Far's reader, are unmoved by Hom Hing's combination of mostly simple and compound sentence construction; for despite his explanation, the parents are forced to leave the child with the immigration officer "until tomorrow's sun arises," as Hom Hing consoles Lae Choo (95).

Although Lae Choo daily expects to learn that Little One will be coming home, five months pass and the child is still being cared for in a mission run by white women; "the great Government at Washington still delayed sending the answer which would return him to his parents" (97). Hom Hing contracts for the services of a lawyer, James Clancy, who at first appears to write letters on the child's behalf, but tells the couple that in order to really "hurry the Government for you," he will need five hundred dollars "to start with" (99). When Hom Hing tells him "I have next to nothing left and my friends are not rich," and Clancy moves toward the door, Lae Choo says, "Stop, white man; white man, stop!" (99). She brings out all of her jewelry, "pure China gold," and although "something within [Clancy] arose against accepting such payment for his services," he does so (100), and in the story's last section, Lae Choo is finally reunited with her son. However, in "the land of the free," Little One, "who had been rather difficult to manage at first and had cried much for his mother," has apparently forgotten her. In his "blue cotton overalls and white-soled shoes," he shrinks from Lae Choo and hides himself in the white woman's skirt: "'Go 'way, go 'way!' he bade his mother," in the story's final line (101). Only the story's title underscores the irony inherent in Little One's "detention" under the "roof-tree of this great Government." Lawyer

Clancy's duplicity serves as a reminder of the power of Washington, and instead of serving as "Protector," the "wing of the Eagle" becomes not the "Emblem of Liberty" in the land of the free, but rather the image of theft for the Chinese immigrant family, whose son, the story implies, has become stolen, "Americanized."

Several of the stories included in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* work out at the level of plot and theme the linguistic tensions evident in Sui Sin Far's avoidance of syntactic dominance and subordination, but the most interesting fictions are those that continue to demonstrate her self-reflexiveness concerning the use of English by Chinese immigrants. "The Wisdom of the New" particularly demonstrates Sui Sin Far's preference for coordination over subordination and for compound rather than complex syntactical constructions as a way of showing her American readers a new strategy for approaching and resolving conflict (*Writing out of Place* 193–94). At the beginning of this story, Wou Sankwei, at home in a "sleepy little south coast town" in China (*Mrs. Spring Fragrance* 42), listens to stories told by Li Wang the peddler, "who had lived in the land beyond the sea," that is to say, the United States. Here, as in "Mrs. Spring Fragrance," Sui Sin Far's use of metonymy also allows her to create linguistic effects that both simplify and appear to reduce the dominance of the United States over her Chinese characters. Sankwei wants to know why, if the peddler made so much money "beyond the sea," he has become in effect a beggar at home. Sui Sin Far writes, "So the old man would tell stories about the winning and the losing and the stories of the losing were even more fascinating than the stories of the winning." Understanding that such stories represent "life," Sankwei as a boy feels that the "land beyond the sea was calling to him" (42).

The syntax Sui Sin Far chooses in the sentence about the old man and his stories uses a compound sentence construction that presents the experiences of winning and losing as equally powerful for their listener. "The effect brings the American reader up against conventional expectations that 'losing' is always a subordinate experience to 'winning,' thereby inoculating the narrative against the implications of a 'complex' syntax and replacing it with an understanding that

opposites do not have to oppose each other, that each may become a part of the other" (*Writing out of Place* 194). At the same time, Sui Sin Far's Chinese characters recognize the dangers that may result from learning a language they associate with their own subordination.

While on one hand "The Wisdom of the New" has a fairly simple plot—after Wou Sankwei immigrates to the United States (as a successful merchant he has become one of the exceptions to the general population barred from immigration by the Chinese Exclusion laws) and has been in San Francisco seven years under the mentorship of two white American women, he sends money for his wife and son to join him.[15] The story traces the challenges that face his wife, Pau Lin, who does not speak English and who becomes suspicious and jealous of her husband's friendship with one of the white women, Adah Charlton. When Wou Sankwei insists on sending his son to the American school, his wife declares "that her little son should not go to an American school nor learn the American learning" (52). The night before the boy is to begin at the new school, Pau Lin poisons the child.

Pau Lin chooses a moment before dawn, "on the border land of night and day" (60), to kill her child. But more is at stake than a disagreement between husband and wife over the boy's schooling. The story identifies the conflict as intertwined with language itself. Pau Lin punishes her beloved son for speaking English: "I forbade him to speak the language of the white women, and he disobeyed me. He had words in that tongue with the white boy from the next street" (47–48). Wou Sankwei, who prides himself on his "careful English" (43), responds, "We are living in the white man's country. . . .The child will have to learn the white man's language." And Pau Lin answers, "Not my child" (48). Ironically, the struggle between Wou Sankwei and Pau Lin becomes one for dominance, and the child becomes the victim. Sui Sin Far represents this struggle in various ways in the story—as a struggle between the American women and the Chinese woman for influence over Wou Sankwei; as a struggle for the "girl from the seacoast village" to find a way to live in America even though Chinatown seems "a mad place to bring up a child" (49); and as a struggle to understand the meaning of Chinatown's Harvest Moon Festival, which the white

women in the story attend in order to find the "meaning" of Chinese culture, while "Chinese students from the University of California stood looking on with comprehending, half-scornful interest" (54).

When Wou Sankei pays a barber to remove his son's queue that has become for Americans the mark or stigma of the Chinese male, and after Pau Lin's second child dies at the age of two weeks after a visit by the white American Adah Charlton, whom the Chinese woman believes has cast a spell on the baby, Pau Lin utters her strongest protest against the Americanization of her son. Curiously, given Sui Sin Far's care to mostly construct a different English syntax for her Chinese speakers, Sui Sin Far translates Pau Lin's words as a left-branching complex sentence: "Sooner would I, O heart of my heart, that the light of thine eyes were also quenched, than that thou shouldst be contaminated with the wisdom of the new" (52). Pau Lin struggles to survive by syntactically overturning the ideological vectors of dominance represented by Americanization.

Americanization, as Pau Lin understands it, represents dominance over the Chinese by removing their identity—symbolized by cutting off the boy's queue. Indeed, after she has chastised her son earlier in the story because he has used "the language of the stranger," her neighbor, old Sien Tau, tells her she did the right thing; "Sien Tau's son had married a white woman, and his children passed their grandame on the street without recognition" (48). Yet ironically, Pau Lin's choice to kill her son rather than allow him to learn English and attend the American school represents her attempt to reverse the vector of dominance—as Sui Sin Far's representation of her feelings in the complex sentence quoted above reveals. Sui Sin Far's attempt to achieve a different relationship between the English language and her American readers' thoughts about the Chinese by writing a less-dominant English syntax cannot alter the perception of some of her Chinese immigrant characters concerning the fight they must wage to protect their own identities, and therefore she expresses Pau Lin's conflict over the "wisdom of the new" in a complex English syntax that her American readers would recognize very well. In the final lines of the story, Sankwei leaves a note for Adah Charlton: "I have lost my boy

through an accident. I am returning to China with my wife whose health requires a change" (61).

In a later story in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, "The Americanizing of Pau Tsu," Sui Sin Far creates a similar situation, in which the Chinese husband, Wan Lin Fo, reveals to his American friends, including another white woman named Adah Raymond, that he is betrothed to a young woman from China, Pau Tsu, and will ask his parents to send her to him. Adah asks him, "Can she speak English?" and Lin Fo replies that she cannot, but "when she comes I will have her learn to speak like you—and be like you" (85). Pau Tsu arrives and the couple marries and settles into an apartment initially "furnished in American style" until Pau Tsu opens the "great box" she has brought with her and, with "screens and fans, vases, panels, Chinese matting, artificial flowers and birds," transforms "the American flat into an Oriental bower" (86). Lin Fo accepts a social invitation from the "Misses Raymond" and believes that "the society of the American young ladies would benefit Pau Tsu in helping her to acquire the ways and language of the land in which he hoped to make a fortune" (86). But Pau Tsu refuses to take English lessons from the white women: "'It may be best for a man who goes out in the street,' she sobbed,' to learn the new language, but of what importance is it to a woman who lives only within the house and her husband's heart?'" (86).

Sui Sin Far characterizes Pau Tsu's entrance into a "new world" as one into a "new language" (87), and the conflict in this story concerns not a child but rather Pau Tsu's illness. She refuses to be seen by a male doctor, but although Adah Raymond tells Lin Fo that she knows of several female doctors, Lin Fo insists that his wife be examined by Adah Raymond's doctor—a man. Adah later tells her sister, "It was like preparing a lamb for slaughter . . . I honestly believe that the examination was worse than death to that little Chinese woman. The modesty of generations of maternal ancestors was crucified as I rolled down the neck of her silk tunic" (89). Although Pau Tsu apparently improves in physical health, her mental state deteriorates. She leaves home, decides to divorce her husband, and sends him a letter. Her letter begins, "Your unworthy Pau Tsu lacks the courage to face the

ordeal before her," and ends, "She has tried to obey your will and to be as an American woman; but now she is very weary, and the terror of what is before her has overcome" (90). In the moment in which Lin Fo, out looking for his wife, "as fate would have it" encounters Adah Raymond, Sui Sin Far also, in a syntactical representation of the struggle for dominance within him, represents Lin Fo's English speech as left-branching in the way he inverts the order of simple sentence construction to begin with the direct object. When Adah asks what is the matter, he replies, "The density of my difficulties you cannot understand" (90). It is as if Lin Fo is saying that there is no English translation possible for his feelings, that the immigrant experience cannot be spoken in English, and that any attempt to do so requires the Chinese speaker uncharacteristically to try to reverse the dominant order. Although Adah follows him, manages to elicit from him the source of his wife's terror—"She—is—afraid—of—the—doctor," and chastises him for wanting his wife "to be an American woman while you remained a Chinaman" (91), Sui Sin Far makes it clear from Lin Fo's syntax above that he already understands himself to be in a situation of conflict between a dominant Americanization and a subordinate Chinese identity even if it takes Adah Raymond to make this clear to her white readers. The story ends similarly to the "The Wisdom of the New," with Lin Fo having found his wife but nevertheless preparing to return to China. He rejects Adah Raymond's offer to enter the house with him where he has located Pau Tsu. He has expressed his intention: "If I find her . . . I will not care if she never speaks an American word, and I will take her for a trip to China, so that our son may be born in the country that Heaven loves" (92). The "land beyond the sea," as the narrator characterizes the United States in "The Wisdom of the New," is not "the country that Heaven loves," for Pau Tsu and Sui Sin Far's other Chinese immigrant wives.

In what may be her best story and the one that expresses her most explicit critique of American attitudes toward the Chinese, "'Its Wavering Image'" takes up the question of the cultural allegiance of the mixed-race American-born Pan. The story opens as follows: "Pan was a half white, half Chinese girl. Her mother was dead, and Pan lived

with her father who kept an Oriental Bazaar on Dupont Street. All her life Pan had lived in Chinatown, and if she were different in any sense from those around her, she gave little thought to it. It was only after the coming of Marc Carson that the mystery of her nature began to trouble her" (61). Carson is a young white reporter "sent to find a story" and he first meets Pan when he steps "across the threshold" of the Chinese merchant's office. In contrast to the "local color" depiction of the businessman Hop Sing in Bret Harte's "Wan Lee, the Pagan," Sui Sin Far describes Carson's encounter with Pan's father as follows: "His business was with the spectacled merchant, who, with a pointed brush, was making up accounts in brown paper books and rolling balls in an abacus box" (61). Her reader encounters this Chinese man as "spectacled"—metonymic for his wisdom—and engaged in writing and accounting, using a different but equivalently useful technology, the abacus box, and demonstrating that he is at least equal if not superior by virtue of his age to the young reporter. With this description the story sets up an explicit contrast between the "local color" approach to Chinatown that Marc Carson later chooses and Sui Sin Far's own approach—a regionalism that makes it possible for the reader to look with, rather than at, her Chinese and Chinese American characters.

Pan's hybridity in this story brings into Sui Sin Far's construction of this single character, who perhaps comes closest to representing her own experience as a mixed-race woman, the cultural conflicts experienced between American and Chinese cultures in those other stories about immigrants. Initially Pan does not speak to Carson. The narrator explains, "As to Pan, she always turned from whites. With her father's people she was natural and at home; but in the presence of her mother's she felt strange and constrained, shrinking from their curious scrutiny as she would from the sharp edge of a sword" (61). The phrase "curious scrutiny" characterizes white Americans, Pan's mother's people, as particularly susceptible to taking a "local color" perspective on the Chinese. As Carson continues to visit Chinatown, he becomes "Pan's first white friend" and convinces her to feel less "strange and constrained" but, alas, ends by confirming the wisdom of her habit of "shrinking" from whites. Through Pan, he becomes initiated "into the

simple mystery and history of many things" (62), things unknown outside of Chinatown. He gains Pan's trust, challenges her to "decide what you will be—Chinese or white" (63), sings to her about the moon's wavering image in an "irresistible voice," and asks her to kiss him. "Next morning Marc Carson began work on the special-feature article which he had been promising his paper for some weeks" (64).

Throughout the story to this point, Sui Sin Far's language structures follow the pattern I have been tracing in others collected in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*. With a couple of exceptions, even the sentences that describe Marc Carson and his motives follow the pattern the opening paragraph sets forward, perhaps allowing even the reader, like Pan, to view Carson as potentially sympathetic to the Chinese. The narrator tells the story using simple and compound sentence structures, adding the occasional right-branching subordinate clause but avoiding left-branching constructions. However, Pan's perception of Carson proves naive; he publishes an article about life in Chinatown that appears to rest on the premise that no residents of Chinatown would be able to read it, except possibly Pan who would quickly forget (65), and certainly that no Chinese subjects would have the political power to object to or contradict his portrait.

With the publication of Carson's feature article, which Pan's father "cast at his daughter's feet" while cursing Carson's ancestors, and in which Pan "read that which forever after was blotted upon her memory," Pan discovers that the white journalist has used his friendship with her to gain access to all of the distinguishing features of Chinese life in America that will entertain his white readers. Indeed, "Its Wavering Image" underscores the distinction between regionalism and "local color," for the journalist has used his position to reveal the secrets of Chinatown, all of its "simple mystery and history," thereby objectifying its inhabitants and confirming all of the stereotypes implied by the much-reprinted "Plain Language from Truthful James." What Pan reads leads her to respond, "Betrayed! Betrayed! Betrayed to be a betrayer!," and she finds herself in "agony unrelieved by words." In the evening she returns to the rooftop where she and Carson have spent some of their time and "tried to think it out. Someone had hurt her.

Who was it?" As she sees "its wavering image," the moon that appeared in the lyrics of the song Marc Carson has sung to her, "it helped her to lucidity" (64).

As she tries to "think it out," Pan—like Pau Lin and Lin Fo—expresses her conflict in the syntax Sui Sin Far chooses to reflect her thought. Pan manifests the lucidity she gains on Marc Carson's betrayal in the two most complexly constructed sentences in the story. Asking herself whether he had consciously dealt her "that cruel blow," she answers: "Ah, well did he know that the sword which pierced her through others, would carry with it to her own heart, the pain of all those others. None knew better than he that she, whom he had called 'a white girl, a white woman,' would rather that her own naked body and soul had been exposed, than that things, sacred and secret to those who loved her, should be cruelly unveiled and ruthlessly spread before the ridiculing and uncomprehending foreigner" (64–5). When Carson returns from a two months' absence and goes to visit Pan, he finds her much changed; she wears Chinese clothing, and when he asks her why she was not wearing "American dress," she replies, "Because I am a Chinese woman." When Carson recalls her kiss and implicit promise, she replies, "I would not be a white woman for all the world. *You* are a white man. And *what* is a promise to a white man!" (66).

In the complex construction Sui Sin Far uses to express Pan's lucidity—sentences that contain both embedded clauses and left-branching elements—she makes it clear that the syntax she customarily employs to represent her Chinese characters expresses their conscious choice to utter non-dominant speech, to create sentences that do not subordinate the equally valuable perspective of the Chinese. However, when Pan, Pau Lin, and Lin Fo mean to articulate their awareness of their own subordination and the violence of their betrayal by the white Americans among whom they live, they purposely choose the syntax of dominance and subordination. It is as if only such syntax can fully express the power relations that have suppressed their subjectivity, but they only choose it when they wish to express their awareness of their own disenfranchisement. Early in the story when Pan remains caught in the "wavering image" of the moon's

reflection and of her attraction to Marc Carson, she remains a "half white, half Chinese girl." After Carson's betrayal, however, she struggles through the "element of Fire" and is visited by a toddler who "pressed her head upon the sick girl's bosom." The mother of the toddler tells Pan that she, too, will bear a child some day. The story ends, "And Pan, being a Chinese woman, was comforted" (66). It is as if the syntax of dominance and subordination is best used to characterize "the element of Fire" for Sui Sin Far's Chinese characters, the most effective way to express their anger at their treatment at the hands of white Americans. For Pan, Carson's betrayal moves her away from her hybrid identity and she ends by abjuring being even "half white."

In the dual climate of anti-Chinese sentiment and a literary culture that legitimized the "local color" approach to difference, Sui Sin Far offered her white American readers a syntax that interrupted their habituation to linguistic expressions of othering, imperialism, and dominance. The grammatical English her Chinese characters speak, unlike Harte's "Ching a ring a ring chaw," could be easily parsed by native English speakers and therefore not viewed as particularly foreign. So where does Sui Sin Far belong, in any taxonomy of Chinese American writers? I would conclude that we do not have to choose, that she can be at the same time a translator into English without a native language that is Chinese; a Chinese American who yet writes significantly about Chinese immigrant experience; a fictionist who feels free to transform English syntax for her own purposes; and above all, a writer who cannot be confined to a single category—who is as much a regionalist and a "weird English" writer as an early creator of Chinese American literature. If the integrated Seattle neighborhood in which the Spring Fragrances live foreshadows social transformation (Ferens 101-02), *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* itself anticipates a resolution to the tension between categories of writing by Chinese Americans, assimilated Chinese, and Chinese immigrants that Te-hsing Shan and Xiao-huang Yin address.

Dialect writing allowed regionalist writers to share experiences and perspectives from within the regions; "weird English" also comes

to have a relationship to regionalism. Ch'ien writes about postcolonial Trinidadian writer Derek Walcott that he "writes in dialect but he doesn't live there" (32). Regionalist writers use dialect in order to construct the subjectivity of place—for subjects that are also, like immigrants, "out of place" with respect to the larger culture. Like Walcott, Sui Sin Far "writes in dialect but doesn't live there." Subjectivity has as much to do with how one speaks as where one lives. By offering multiple locations within the larger urban setting of her work—both Chinatown and Mrs. Spring Fragrance's integrated neighborhood—Sui Sin Far resists any simplistic categorization that would separate the Chinese-only speakers in her fiction from the assimilated Chinese or from the English-only Chinese American speakers (like Sui Sin Far herself), since all speak in dialect. As the regionalists realized, dialect can become its own linguistic region and retain the marker of place. An understanding of regions and regionalist writing more than a century ago can thus sharpen a reader's appreciation of the challenges contemporary immigrant writers also face.

As Ch'ien writes, "[i]mmigrant writers thus experience a linguistic exile from their original language, and in appropriating English they can engage in a reconstitution of identity that absorbs the mainstream conceptions of their marginalized culture" (28). I understand Ch'ien's point here to be that the immigrant appropriation of English may "absorb" mainstream conceptions but will transform those conceptions in the writing of "weird English," or at least create an alternate positionality for the reader that would make such transformation possible. Immigrant, ethnic, and regional writing all become inevitably marked, dialects in dialogue with the surrounding culture. The extent to which we understand regionalism's struggle for relation to the larger culture on its own terms—not as regionalized or marginalized—may allow us to understand the translational and transformational power of dialect. By demonstrating the plasticity of the English language to accommodate Chinese ideological perspectives on their American experience, Sui Sin Far's work allows us to tease out the connections between immigrant experience and regionalism that

may inform our reading practices of Chinese American literature—and of other "weird-English" writers.

## NOTES

[1] *Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Other Writings* 236. Unless otherwise indicated, all references to Sui Sin Far's work will be to *Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Other Writings*, ed. Amy Ling and White-Parks, and cited parenthetically in the text. The titles of sketches or stories included in the volume will also be identified in the text or cited parenthetically.

[2] Shan takes his categories here from Ya Hsuan, "The Ice-Breaking Journey—the Bilingual World of Chin Yang Lee's Writings," an introduction to Chin Yang Lee's first collection of short stories written in Chinese, *Ch'i-p'ao ku-niang*, translated into English as *Changsan Girl* (Taipei: Chiu-ke, 1996). Shan includes Chin Yang Lee and Yan Geling (author of the 1996 novel *Fu Sang*, translated into English as Geling Yan, *The Lost Daughter of Happiness*, trans. Cathy Silber [New York: Hyperion, 2001]) in the first group, and, following Ya Hsuan, cites writers of Chinese descent such as Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan in the second group. (Shan notes that Ya Hsuan also blurs the distinctions in this second category between Chinese immigrant writers who write in English and Chinese American writers, such as Kingston and Tan, who are American natives.)

[3] See "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian," first published in the *Independent* (21 January 1909); reprinted in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (218–30).

[4] Sui Sin Far's reference to the term "Chinese-Americans" appears in her journalistic sketch, "The Chinese in America" (*Mrs. Spring Fragrance* 233).

[5] Kate McCullough cites a November 1909 column from the periodical *The Westerner* in which the editor prints a letter from Sui Sin Far, who wrote: "There may be a certain literary prestige in having one's work accepted by the Eastern critics; but my stories and articles in 'The Westerner,' 'Out West,' and 'Post-Intelligencer' accomplish more the object of my life, which is not so much to put a Chinese name into American literature, as to break down prejudice, and to cause the American heart to soften and the American mind to broaden towards the Chinese people now living in America—the humble,

kindly, moral, unassuming Chinese people of America" (235).

[6] Judith Fetterley and I first discussed Sui Sin Far as a regionalist and included stories from *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* in *American Women Regionalists 1850–1910*.

[7] *American Women Regionalists 1850–1910*, 61. Further references to works included in this collection of regionalist sketches and short fiction will be cited parenthetically in the text, although references to the works of Sui Sin Far will primarily be to the more comprehensive Sui Sin Far, *Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Other Writings*.

[8] See *Writing out of Place* for discussions of all of these writers and their relationship to regionalism, as well as chapter 9 of that book, titled "Race, Class, and Questions of Region." *American Women Regionalists* includes several short sketches and fictions by Zitkala-Ša and Alice Dunbar-Nelson, as well as Sui Sin Far.

[9] See Chapter 5, "'Free to Say: Thematics," in *Writing out of Place* (135–68) for a further discussion of this concept.

[10] "This act suspended the immigration of Chinese laborers, both skilled and unskilled, for ten years. Teachers, students, merchants, and travelers were, however, exempted from exclusion. It formally prohibited the naturalization of Chinese in the United States. The act was extended an additional ten years by the Geary Act of May 5, 1892. On April 27, 1904, the exclusion of Chinese laborers from the United States was extended indefinitely" (Nee and Nee 409).

[11] Nee and Nee describe the political structure of San Francisco's Chinatown as "three-tiered." The lowest tier was made up of the clans or families; these were organized at the second level "into larger groups according to their districts of origin in Kwangtung Province." "At the pinnacle of the three-tiered structure . . . an arbitrating board . . . had been organized from representatives of six district associations within the first decade of Chinatown's history." Although the official title of this board was the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, at the turn of the century it was "popularly known, as it is now, as the Chinese Six Companies" (64–66). "A Chinese Ishmael" is not included in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Other Writings*.

[12] The autobiographical sketch was originally published in the *Independent* 66 (21 January 1909), 125–32.

[13]Ferens attributes this anonymous article, signed "By a Half Chinese," to Sui Sin Far/Edith Eaton "based on a combination of stylistic, thematic, and biographical details that link it with her 'Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian'" (98). The article is not included in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Other Writings*.

[14]Researchers on aging have determined, for example, that "certain sentence structures, such as this one in which there is an embedded clause, can be assumed to place greater demands on memory than simpler sentences without embedded clauses. Furthermore, right-branching sentences, which have 2 successive clauses, require less temporary storage of information than left-branching sentences, in which an embedded clause interrupts the main clause" (Salthouse 261). Although Sui Sin Far does not appear to be concerned with the aging process in her fiction, there may be a cognitive explanation based in requiring "less temporary storage of information" for the construction of a new conceptual space to construct the Chinese experience in America and ease of moving into that space for native English speakers. Martha J. Cutter also mentions the use of left-branching and right-branching syntax in the children's stories included in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, noting that "few left branching sentences . . . should be included" in children's literature (36).

[15]As Nee and Nee note, it was primarily the merchant class of Chinese immigrants who began to establish families in early twentieth-century Chinatowns. "Once they had registered as merchants, they and their wives could be exempted from the exclusion acts. Then these former laborers would return to China in their new status as owners of import-export firms, groceries, or hard goods stores, choose a woman for marriage, and bring her back on the long ocean journey" (148).

## WORKS CITED

Ch'ien, Evelyn Nien-Ming. *Weird English*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2004.

Chin, Frank. "Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake." *The Big AIIIEEEEE!* Ed. Jeffery Paul Chan, Frank Chin, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Wong. New York: Meridian, 1991. 1–92.

Culler, Jonathan. *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford UP, 1997.

Cutter, Martha. "Empire and the Mind of the Child: Sui Sin Far's 'Tales of Chinese Children,'" *MELUS* 27.2 (Summer 2002): 31–48.

Ferens, Dominika. *Edith & Winnifred Eaton: Chinatown Missions and Japanese Romances*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2002.

Fetterley, Judith and Marjorie Pryse. *American Women Regionalists 1850–1910: A Norton Anthology*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1992.

---. *Writing out of Place: Regionalism, Women, and American Literary Culture*. Champaign, IL: U of Illinois P, 2003.

Frankenberg, Ruth. *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993.

Harte, Bret. "Wan Lee, the Pagan." *Scribner's Monthly* 8.5 (Sept 1874): 552–59. 18 April 2007 <http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/cgi-bin/moa/moa-cgi?notisid=ABP7664-0008–94>.

---. "Plain Language from Truthful James." *Yale Book of American Verse*. Ed. Thomas Raynesford Lounsbury. New Haven: Yale UP, 1912. 18 April 2007 <http://www.bartleby.com/102/200.html>.

Ling, Amy. *Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry*. New York: Pergamon, 1990.

Lowe, Lisa. *Immigrant Acts*. Durham: Duke UP, 1996.

McCullough, Kate. *Regions of Identity: The Construction of America in Women's Fiction 1885–1914*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999.

Nee, Victor G. and Brett de Bary Nee. *Longtime Californ': A Documentary Study of an American Chinatown*. NY: Pantheon Books, 1972.

Salthouse, Timothy A. *Theoretical Perspectives on Cognitive Aging*. Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1991.

Scharnhorst, Gary. "'Ways That Are Dark': Appropriations of Bret Harte's 'Plain Language from Truthful James.'" *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 51.3 (Dec 1996): 377–99.

Shan, Te-hsing. "Redefining Chinese American Literature from a

LOWINUS Perspective: Two Recent Examples." *Multilingual America*. Ed. Werner Sollors. New York: New York UP, 1998. 112–23.

Solberg, S. E. "Sui Sin Far/Edith Eaton: First Chinese-American Fictionist." *MELUS* 8.1 (Spring 1981), 27–39.

Sui Sin Fah [Sui Sin Far]. "A Chinese Ishmael." *Overland Monthly* 34 (July 1899): 43–49.

Sui Sin Far. *Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Other Writings*. Ed. Amy Ling and Annette White-Parks. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1995.

[Sui Sin Far]. "The Persecution and Oppression of Me." *Independent* 71 (August 24, 1911).

White-Parks, Annette. "Introduction to Part 2: Other Writings." In Sui Sin Far, *Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Other Writings*, 169–77.

---. *Sui Sin Far / Edith Maude Eaton: A Literary Biography*. Champagne-Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1995.

Yin, Xiao-huang. "Worlds of Difference: Lin Yutang, Lao She, and the Significance of Chinese-Language Writing in America." *Multilingual America*. Ed. Werner Sollors. New York: New York UP, 1998. 176–87.

**Marjorie Pryse** serves as Dean of Graduate Studies at the University at Albany, State University of New York, and is also Professor in the Departments of English and Women's Studies. Her most recent book is *Writing out of Place: Regionalism, Women, and American Literary Culture* (Illinois, 2003).

Received: 29 April 2007 Accepted: 19 August 2007

# 語言地域主義及水仙花的《春香夫人》中的華裔美國文學的出現


## 摘 要

本文從一開始便主張水仙花/伊頓 (Sui Sin Far/Edith Maude Eaton) (1865–1914) 無法納入批評家在華裔美國文學裡所建立的現成的範疇，本文賦與她地域文學作家的地位，她的作品展現出她在抗拒十九世紀晚期美國出版界對中國人的主流再現，而且她透過在《春香夫人》中英文的使用獲致藝術形式及一種能幫助讀者達到不同看法的策略。了解水仙花對美國文學的貢獻其關鍵在於分析這本代表她生涯巔峰的著作裡英文的使用。使用費特麗 (Judith Fetterley) 與卜萊斯 (Marjorie Pryse) 所謂的「邊界語言」(“language on the border land”) 或是我在本文中所謂的「語言雙文化」(the linguistic bicultural)，水仙花在經過多年掙扎後，在英文本身的結構裡發現如何再現在美國的中國人經驗。她重新塑造英文，使其一方面能反映這種經驗，另一方面又展現她的移民人物能意識到英語這種語言將支配性予以符碼化的方式，而這種支配性正反應這個時期的美國政治。本文將水仙花的地域主義與哈特 (Bret Harte) 的書寫裡對中國人的「地方色彩」式的再現加以對比，並對《春香夫人》當中的數篇小說—「春香夫人」、「身分低下的女人」、「自由之土」、「新異的智慧」、「寶珠 (Pau Tsu) 的美國化」、「搖擺的意象」—提供語言學式的閱讀。


關鍵字：美國文學地域主義，中國移民經驗，亞裔美國文學