

Review

Tang, Fang. *Literary Fantasy in Contemporary Chinese Diasporic Women's Literature: Imagining Home*. Lexington Books, 2019. 204 pp. \$95 Hardcover.

In Fang Tang's *Literary Fantasy in Contemporary Chinese Diasporic Women's Literature: Imagining Home*, the reimagined notions of home give a voice to the unheard. Using critical and theoretical approaches to the concepts of diaspora and fantasy, Tang explores the ways the perception of home offers a sense of empowerment for marginalized subjects, specifically Chinese diasporic women. Tang provides new cultural, social, and political insights that contribute to a much-needed discussion among an array of diaspora studies, cultural studies, and literary fields by carefully investigating the relationship between literary fantasy and the idea of home in Chinese diasporic literature. Through close examination of the works by Maxine Hong Kingston, Adeline Yen Mah, Ying Chen, and Larissa Lai, *Literary Fantasy in Contemporary Chinese Diasporic Women's Literature* cleverly sees that the use of fantasy, centered within the stories and lives of Chinese diasporic women, functions as a powerful, subversive tool that reexamines the construction of home in relation to issues concerning family, culture, and identity.

To demonstrate how literary fantasy can be theoretically applied when analyzing Chinese diasporic literature, Tang relies on Rosemary Jackson's definition of fantasy as a literary mode in order to revisit Chinese myths, legends, fairy tales, and ghost stories (3). The introduction therefore constructively streamlines Tang's connection with fantasy and Chinese diasporic people to the concept of home and unhomeliness by identifying key theoretical frameworks and definitions on the basis of race, genre, and gender. Tang incorporates an extensive look into the sociopolitical and cultural discourses in Chinese diaspora and fantasy literature to offer context and clarity to her argument that not only situates her readers within the ongoing conversations in these critical fields of study, but more so on her unique position that comes into play. *Literary Fantasy in Contemporary Chinese Diasporic Women's Literature* is comprised of four chapters focusing on fiction and nonfiction pieces written by diasporic Chinese women authors in North America, specifically in Canada and the United States set during the 1970s-90s amid a rise of Chinese female writing and "an awakening of ethnic consciousness" for Chinese-born writers in Western countries (2). Tang challenges the notion that the state of diaspora is "placed-based" (9) and instead uses the term "diasporic" to showcase within her selected texts that it is "a fluid process of negotiation of identity linked to social, political and historical contexts, as well as the diasporic subjects' inner understanding of histories, memories, and their struggles for a sense of belonging in the relationships with others" (9). Each chapter further draws upon the fantastical elements implemented in the narrative that detail the individual female experience who, "in-between" (9) Chinese and Western cultures, are essentially in search for home.

Tang evaluates four texts, two of which include memoirs, that study the intersection between the theories of literary fantasy, home, and patriarchal ideology. Chapter one, "The Articulation of Silences: Empowering Ghosts and Rewriting Myths in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*," delves into the uses of metaphorical representations of ghosts and Chinese myths and legends that enable Kingston to break free from silence by establishing her identity against patriarchal ideals in traditional Chinese culture. Through her explication of the figures of ghosts, Tang captures the essence of silence among the women in Kingston's stories as

well as Kingston herself whose voices have been suppressed or existences have been purposely erased or ignored by family (43). Referencing Walter J. Ong's theories on oral tradition and culture, Tang offers her own interpretation of Kingston's retelling of the Chinese legendary story of Mu Lan that "serves as an empowerment in the process of her Chinese American diasporic identity" (55), one that allows Kingston to cross between cultural boundaries and "to represent hybridity as something which is not fixed or completed" (56). The retelling of Mu Lan is also used as a narrative form in chapter two, "Homing Desire and the Use of Cinderella Tales in Adeline Yen Mah's *Falling Leaves Return to Their Roots*." In this chapter, Tang points out that the importance of rewriting of Mu Lan, together with the fairy tale Cinderella motif, "challenges Chinese patriarchal and traditional gender roles and raises complex questions about self-representation and cultural authenticity" (75). Tang's comprehensive background of the social, political, and historical events surrounding Mah's life as well as of Orientalism and Neo-Orientalism theories calls attention to the significance and complexity of Mah's homing desire throughout her memoir. While addressing the concerns of nationalism, Tang argues that Mah's homing desire to return to her roots does not necessarily trace back to her homeland of China but is rather transformed into the "fluidity of routes" (90), pertaining to Mah's longing for respect, acceptance, and belonging, where her continuous journey is unfixed and unfinished. Both autobiographical accounts observe that the use of literary fantasy exposes the author-narrators' perceptions of home and self-identities that push beyond the struggles of assimilation, conflicts between East and West, and Chinese traditional views.

Moving beyond the ethnographical restrictions (97) in chapters one and two, chapters three and four examine novels written by Canada-based authors who suggest compelling perspectives on tackling the challenges of identity and problematic ideas of home. Chapter three, "Fantasizing the Mother-Daughter Relationship, Cannibalism, and Posthumous Narratives in Ying Chen's *Ingratitude*, presents a new critical direction that involves psychoanalytical, fantasy, and posthumous narrative theories while drawing literary parallels from China's May Fourth literature and Chinese diasporic mother-daughter narratives. Using family at the forefront, Tang reflectively touches upon the forming of the narrator's individual identity by considering the nuances between the self and the other, the geographical and ethnographical limitations of home, and the complex attitude towards one's origin, kinship, roots, and cultural heritage (97). In doing so, the narrator's quest in understanding her identity "constantly becomes a process of becoming" (124). In chapter four, "Crossing Boundaries: The Reconstruction of Queering History and Folktales in Larissa Lai's *When Fox Is a Thousand*," the rewriting of Chinese folktales and retelling of histories create an imagined space of home for marginalized subjects to "discover a sense of belonging and find their visibility in history" (131). Tang thoroughly critiques the historical and fantastical representations of the folktale figure of the Fox and Lai's reinvented narrative of the poetess Yu Hsuan-Chi through a New Fantasy approach that give way for the "absent to be present" (151), where Asian queer women can express their sexualities without living in fear or oppression.

Literary Fantasy in Contemporary Chinese Diasporic Women's Literature elicits a thought-provoking and passionate response to the ways literary fantasy is illustrated in Chinese diasporic literature by paying careful consideration to the understanding of home and identity for marginalized subjects. Tang poignantly delivers the message throughout that in disavowing Orientalist stereotypes, the inclusion of literary fantasy ultimately provides alternative voices and realities for those silenced by retelling histories, myths, and legends and reconstructing stories

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and memories. In essence, Tang affirms the value of literary fantasy and its possibilities in Chinese diasporic literature and beyond.

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