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Recommended Citation

Chang, Stewart, "Flexible Citizenship" in Wena Poon's Short Stories: Writing at the Interstices of Asia and America" (2011). *Scholarly Works*. 1111.

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'Flexible Citizenship' in Wena Poon's Short Stories: Writing at the Interstices of Asia and America

Stewart Chang

In her study of diasporic Chinese subjects of the twenty-first century, Aihwa Ong coined the term "flexible citizenship" to describe:

the cultural logistics of capitalist accumulation, travel and displacement that induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions. In their quest to accumulate capital and social prestige in the global arena, subjects emphasize and are regulated by practices favoring flexibility, mobility, and repositioning in relation to markets, governments, and cultural regimes. (Ong 6)

Scholars of Asian American literature have recognized accordingly, the trend of writing that reflects the:

increasing presence of transnational Asian communities to whom U.S. residency may be simply one of a number of possible choices – a temporary and provisional matter or permanent condition – the growing complex dynamics of postcolonial flows and globalisation in which the United States as economic, cultural, and media player may be present in non-U.S. territory and Asian presence marked in U.S. borders. (Lim 3)

United States-based Singaporean author Wena Poon writes to the multi-layered complexities of transient transnational identity. Her short stories, produced within the interstices of her professional work as a multi-national corporate attorney, reveal a sensitivity towards the transient and mobile subject that, beyond Neel Chowdhury's assessment that they "lapse...into the clichés that bedevil stories of Asian deracination," speaks to multi-nationals whose lives are characterized by constant movement and flux between countries. In the endnotes to her collection *The Proper Care of Foxes*, Poon relates how "[t]his book was written at airports, on airplanes, on commuter buses and on the BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) trains during a point in my life when I tried to live in three cities all at the same time (the California Bay Area, Austin, and Hong Kong). I hope it provides hours of similar pleasure to readers, wherever they happen to be reading it" (Poon, *Foxes* 225). On the surface, Poon bills her work as literature by a transnational author for

transnational readers, yet nested within many of her short stories are considerations about the larger consequences of Western globalisation and accelerated capital growth in Asia that have led to "flexible citizenship," particularly for Singaporeans away from their homeland living in the larger Chinese diaspora in America and across the globe.

The title character of "Kenny's Big Break" posits an assessment of diasporic identity, that "[b]eing Singaporean is something larger than simply living in Singapore" (Poon, *Lions* 94). As Singapore became a major international economic player during the late twentieth century, its citizens gained increasing international mobility as students, professionals, and entrepreneurs, and these are the people that Poon primarily writes about in her short stories. Through her characters, she investigates dilemmas of diasporic and multi-national Singaporean subjects. Like Poon, many of these individuals eventually move to the United States, although their psychological ties to their homeland remain strong, as suggested by Kenny's assertion that Singaporean national identity is not simply about location. The ending of the story, however, renders this sentiment ambiguous as Kenny tells his friend Chee Beng how he stole his sister's wedding money to finance his studies in the United States, thus creating his "big break". Chee Beng remarks, "You have got the balls" and the story reveals how "he was free to say it as loud as he liked, because nobody would report them" (Poon, *Lions* 106). Previously, when in a similar situation in Singapore, the two friends were mindful of their speech in public because "[n]o doubt the next day a responsible member of the public would write the principal of their highly-esteemed boys' school, complaining of the two boys using the word 'bitch' on public transportation" (Poon, *Lions* 96), a distinctly local phenomenon which would be familiar with most Singaporeans reading the story. Yet at the end, this peculiarly Singaporean element is purposely absent, which then begs the question whether being Singaporean really is larger than simply living in Singapore, or whether Singaporean identity remains inexorably tied to geography.

Some of Poon's other stories similarly investigate the place of Singapore, as a space both of geographic location and of cultural memory, in the larger Chinese global diaspora. The narrator of "Dog Hot Pot" who, like Kenny, has come to America as an international university student, is confronted by his friend's daughter about the complex layers of his multi-national identity. Upon his temporary return to Singapore, she says to him, "Mummy says you're American. So how can you be Chinese and Singaporean and American at the same time?" (Poon, *Lions* 21). As a Singaporean citizen living in America, Poon represents an intersection of all three identities, as well as the multiple layers of migration and displacement: first the diaspora of her Chinese ancestors to Singapore, and then the diaspora of her own immediate family from Singapore to North America. The question from the little girl in "Dog Hot Pot" highlights a growing quandary for Singaporean national identity in the midst of continued pan-Chinese economic expansion. In an

interview with Aihwa Ong, for instance, a member of the Singapore Chamber of Commerce related:

Globalisation requires going beyond just national identity in enlarging our scope and permutations of what we're trying to do. Although investments are directed by our government's regionalisation policy, most important linkages are made through company level, and again at the local level through human relations. (Ong 144)

As Singapore grows as an international actor, national identity runs the danger of becoming increasingly diluted.

Ong further notes that in recent history:

The key role of ethnic Chinese in flexible accumulation across the region and in China has stimulated new visions of a far-flung Chinese world. [Former Singaporean Prime Minister] Lee Kuan Yew has anointed 'the glow of Chinese fraternity.' This symbol of the new Chinese transnationalism retains a racial and masculinist bias and echoes images of 'Chinese brothers' plying the oceans in earlier diasporas. (Ong 65)

Citing the closing remarks of a conference on the transnational Chinese investments which assert how "[o]verseas Chinese have the same language and same ancestral stock (*tongwen tongzhu*) as we do; they are like the married-out daughter (*jia chuqu de nuer*) who still has feelings (*ganjing*) for home and are the same kind of people (*tongzhong*)," Ong comments that "[w]hile the diminutive feminine signifier is a mainland image of overseas Chinese, the focus is on the blood and sentimental ties that can develop even with 'married-out daughter' communities" (Ong 65). Although in several of her stories Poon challenges patriarchal sexual stereotypes regarding diasporic Chinese women, as for instance in "New Order" and "The Proper Care of Foxes," her work nevertheless explores the themes of pan-ethnic bonding and nostalgia for home suggested by Ong. In the preface to *Lions in Winter*, Poon writes:

During my travels, I began writing a series of love letters – masquerading as short stories – to Singapore...Although written for my compatriots, these stories have appealed to people of different nationalities and ethnicities. If you are not living in the small town or even the country of your birth – and especially if you display philopatric tendencies – I hope you enjoy this volume. Leaving, after all, is never really goodbye. (Poon, *Lions xi*)

Leaving home is the central theme of "The Move,"¹ where Poon captures a day in the life of a Singaporean matriarch as she moves out of her HDB (Housing

Development Board) estate into a condominium that her son has purchased. Although the move is not overseas and occurs completely within the confines of the Singaporean nation-state, the story nevertheless evokes feelings of displacement associated with the rapid movement and progress caused by neoliberal economic expansion that is associated with the West. Indeed, Madame Teo's family is a model of Singaporean progress and transnational mobility as flexible citizens. Once a seamstress, she now has one granddaughter who travels the world as a stewardess, and another who has settled in America as a lawyer. Her son has purchased a new condominium for her to move into, thereby acquiring one of the 5 Cs (Cash, Credit Card, Car, Condominium, Country Club membership) of Singaporean accomplishment modeled after the Western capitalist dream. However, when her granddaughter asks her if she is sad about moving, Madame Teo reminisces:

Sadness was war, was famine. Sadness was seeing your father-in-law in China lose all his rice fields when the Communists took over. Sadness was watching your father crawl after being bayoneted by Japanese troops in 1942. Sadness was watching your pregnant mother contract malarial fever in occupied Singapore, not having any drugs to allay her fever (Poon, *Lions* 86).

In recollecting her own personal history, Madame Teo references the history of Singapore as a site of displacement and exile in the pan-Chinese diaspora. In contrast, the move from her old HDB apartment to a private condo demonstrates the social mobility and economic progress of her family since that time, which mirrors the progress that Singapore experienced from being a poor nation following World War II to the major international economic player it is today.

Madame Teo states, "that she was proud to move with the times" (Poon, *Lions* 86). She thinks:

[i]n some ways she was not sorry to leave her old housing estate. The wet market had been scaled back. They'd stopped selling live chickens on the premises—the Government said it was unsanitary. And Ah Goh of the famous beef ball *kway teow* soup had retired. His stall had been rented out to a young, churlish hawker whose *rojak* was quite rubbery. Thrown together like fast food, the chilli from a supermarket-bought squeeze bottle, not home-made. He didn't know the real stuff. Madame Teo did. Her father had been a street hawker. (Poon, *Lions* 85)

The change in the quality of the hawker food downstairs becomes a metaphor for the moving of the times. However, Madame Teo's specific attention to the chilli implies a commentary on the dilution of Singaporean national identity in the face of modernisation and globalisation. In a book review of Thomas Kitching's *Life and Death in Changi*, Poon connects cuisine with national pride, suggesting that:

[p]atriotism, like ethnic pride, is a primordial concept, something that springs from the soul. The love of food, too, is a primordial passion, something that is passed down blood lines. That's why you have the *char kway teow* patriot: the countless Singaporeans abroad who say that it's the local food that would make them return to Singapore. Snub not the *char kway teow* patriot: he is on to something. (Poon, *Familiar*)

Chua Beng Huat sheds further light on the specific significance of chilli in his discussion of Singaporean cuisine:

The range of chilli preparations and their consumption embodies a store of local knowledge which a Singaporean acquires through time and gustatory practice. In fact, Singaporeans often judge the food they consume by the quality of the chilli. This complex taste for chilli may be said to be a marker which distinguishes Singaporean Chinese from others in the Chinese diaspora. (Chua 104)

In the story, Singaporean distinctiveness is slowly eroded away as a result of globalisation, as represented by the bottled chilli that is likely to be mass manufactured and possibly imported.

The "fast food" quality of the *rojak*, as a dish signifying the multi-ethnic nature of Singaporean culture in the twentieth century, more largely represents a shift on the national level away from manual labor in favor of mass manufactured consumer items spurred on by capitalism. Prior to her assessment of the hawker stall beneath her flat, Madame Teo recalls how her sons, perhaps representative of the new generation of Singaporeans, subscribe to the phenomenon of mass-marketed consumption: "All they, and their wives and kids, ate these days was food out of cans and boxes. They even drank out of boxes. Like astronauts" (Poon, *Lions* 85). The sensibility of the new "fast food" generation in Singapore, perhaps best embodied in the "young, churlish" hawker, syntactically operates in tandem with the governmental sanitation reforms that displace the chicken sellers in the wet market. As Chua Beng Huat notes about the evolution of fast food in his analysis of McDonald's marketing strategy in Singapore:

Fast food is a common phenomenon in Singapore, *avant la lettre*. Until recently, with extremely few exceptions, all food consumed outside Singaporean homes was 'hawker' food, purchased in a number of locations and modes...These various locations and modes were 'rationalised' by the government in its drive for orderliness and efficiency. (Chua 132)

The similar streamlining of "hawker" food into "fast food" portrayed in "The Move" parallels the movement of the entire nation from an underdeveloped

country into a cosmopolitan metropolis. Chua also notices how “given the relative short history of Singapore as a nation, and the fact that its national ‘identity’ and ‘culture’ remain a matter of active state promotion, McDonald’s advertisements seek actively to partake in this constitution of a national identity and culture” (Chua 133). McDonalds and fast food coincide well with Singapore’s renewed image of itself as clean, well-packaged, and efficient, and also act as emblems of modernisation and Westernisation, much in the same vein as the bottled chilli in the story.

As Chua Beng Huat argues more broadly in *Life Is Not Complete Without Shopping*, consumerism has become deeply imbedded in Singaporean national identity for the younger generation over the last several decades. It is this same consumerist mentality, influenced by Western capitalist accumulation, that spurs Madame Teo’s son Tommy to buy the new condominium, which in turn leads to her move, a displacement that she is not necessarily sad about, but a displacement never the less. Madame Teo’s observations about the moving of the times and her nostalgia for the hawker food of the past suggest a nervous ambivalence concerning the role Western capitalisation and consumerism has played in Singapore’s development, especially in relation to an eroding sense of national identity. In the same book review where Poon compares love of country with love of food, she observes, “[t]hese days the only Singaporeans who dwell on the horrors of Japanese Occupation are the uncool ... our grandparents, who constantly tell us we are ungrateful for what we have today because all they had to eat during the Occupation were sweet potatoes” (Poon, *Familiar*). In some ways, “The Move” is Poon’s commentary on what is forgotten.² Although the sadness of her parent’s displacement by war and famine is well behind Madame Teo, those experiences reflect the complexity and flavour of her identity as a Singaporean in much the same way as authentic chilli, whereas she approaches her current move to her new condo, a product of the changing times, with the same ambivalence and detachment that she has for corporate, mass-produced chilli.

In “Dog Hot Pot,” when the narrator suggests *roti prada* as something uniquely Singaporean that he is not able to get in America, his friend Peter answers, “Rubbish, you can get that in America now. You can get that in London” (Poon, *Lions* 22). The narrator responds by noting that “Yeah, *roti prada* doesn’t taste good unless you eat it in the surly morning tropical heat in a noisy coffee shop and while you’re eating you see the Indian cook making the next one in front of you” (Poon, *Lions* 22). The narrator, indeed, represents the *kway teow* patriot that Poon admires in her review of *Life and Death in Changi*. Yet the narrator’s friend Peter responds with “this look that suggested that he would prefer to have easy access to 300 cable channels any day than the privilege of consuming an Indian fried pancake at a corner stand” (Poon, *Lions* 22). Peter’s initial comment about the mass availability of *roti prada* demonstrates how the local has become increasingly global, and how the

global diaspora has proliferated ethnic cuisine internationally and cross-culturally. Yet at the same time, Peter's own attitude towards *roti prata* also represents how the local is gradually disappearing as a result of globalisation. As a transnational subject, Peter no longer exhibits a distinctly Singaporean identity, but one that intermingles qualities he picked up while abroad. As the narrator notes, "[h]e was one of the few people in Singapore I knew who carried photographs of his cats in his wallet (a habit he acquired when studying in the United Kingdom)" (Poon, *Lions* 21). The same acquired global sensibility that makes him stand out from other Singaporeans also causes him to see little value in local peculiarities such as enjoying *roti prata* in the distinctly local setting of "the surly morning tropical heat in a noisy coffee shop" (Poon, *Lions* 22).

In "The Man Who Was Afraid of ATMs," Poon depicts a retired schoolteacher Chang, who wrestles with his new diasporic identity as a grandfather living with his son's family in Canada. As the story progresses, Chang realizes multiple losses in his self-identity: as a respected professional, as the patriarch of his family, and finally as a Singaporean subject. He recalls, "In Singapore, you knew who you were, and people knew who you were" (Poon, *Lions* 40). However, while struggling with the ATM machine at the end of the story, he notes "[i]n the vast landscape of Canada nobody had time to take a closer look at what type of Chinese you were. You tumbled headlong into the same racial trench as the other immigrants with yellow skin" (Poon, *Lions* 40). Outside of Singapore, he is simply racialised generically as one of "these people," which he admits to having pejoratively used before "to refer to the Indian immigrant workers who lined the streets of Little India on weekends [and] the Filipina maids crowding the front of a shopping mall in Orchard Road" (Poon, *Lions* 40). Chang's new sense of pan-Chinese, or possibly even pan-Asian, identity, however, is not simply one that is ascriptively assigned to him by foreigners who cannot distinguish between the cultural peculiarities of different Asian cultures, but one that he finally retreats to amidst the isolation of his own diaspora. Because Singaporeans are such a minority in Canada and North America, Chang finds comfort in broader Chinese diasporic communities that he had formerly eschewed while in Singapore. During a conversation with his daughter-in-law he realizes the consequences of displacement when Annette "once asked him why he liked Toronto's Chinatown. 'You never seemed to go to the Chinatown in Singapore,' she said curiously. He explained that it was different being in a foreign place. He felt more comfortable being surrounded by Chinese faces, buying from Chinese stores" (Poon, *Lions* 37). His emigration to Canada leads to a sense of displacement and loss of self as a Singaporean; yet he eventually finds solace and comfort in the shared ethnic identity of the larger Chinese diaspora.

Poon presents another image of cultural dilution for overseas Singaporeans in her title story "Lions in Winter", as the Chinese community of Flushing similarly becomes a site where formerly local distinctions among diasporic Chinese dissolve.

When asked by Mrs. Ong about her husband's friends, the main character Freddie responds, "Well, I met the boss of the restaurant. A Cantonese man, very nice. There were two other people at dinner—a Taiwanese woman and this guy, I really don't know where he is from, he was very quiet" (Poon, *Lions* 52). Like Chang in "The Man Who Was Afraid of ATMs", Singaporeans living abroad find community among other diasporic Chinese, including the Cantonese and Taiwanese. The dining table becomes a site which allows diasporic Chinese from different national locales to come together and share a sense of ethnic kinship. Despite the anonymous national identity of this third man, he is never the less a part of their community because he is ethnically Chinese. The sense of kinship at the table is perhaps best represented by the red envelope that the boss gives to Freddie who, upon returning from his visit, "remembered the red packet, and opened it. In it was a crisp twenty-dollar bill from a stranger whose face I had already forgotten. It was a random act of kindness, and filled me with an unexpected warmth" (Poon, *Lions* 47). Freddie, however, misjudges the red packet as "a random act of kindness"; rather it was an intentional act rooted in a sense of home and kinship amidst displacement.

The emotional warmth that Freddie experiences at the end of his Flushing trip is matched immediately in the next section of the story with the physical warmth that he experiences upon his return to Singapore. Freddie notices how:

the heat engulfed me like a blast from giant bellows. It seeped deep into clothing, causing skin to prick and scalp to tingle. The leaden air sat heavy on my chest and I breathed deeply a couple of times. I could hear Singaporeans around me chattering away in their anxious, accented English, and the slap-slap of slippered feet on pavement. Yeah, I was definitely home. (Lions, 48)

Significantly, throughout the story, the dominant metaphor Freddie uses for his national self-identity is temperature—hot for Singapore, and cold for the United States. As Eddie Tay observes in his reading of Poon's collection, temperature takes on "a figurative resonance: on the one hand, the tropical climate of Singapore, popularly known as the 'Lion City', is felt by the characters peopling the stories to be uncomfortably warm; on the other hand, to live anywhere else, for example in cooler climes, is to inhabit a foreign environment".

In contrast to Kenny's assertion in "Kenny's Big Break" that "[b]eing Singaporean is something larger than simply living in Singapore" (Poon, *Lions* 94), Freddie's view of Singaporean identity is inevitably tied to geography. In visually surveying Changi Airport upon his return, Freddie contemplates:

I couldn't be anywhere else in the world. And the smell. A warm, seeping, slightly musty smell of earth, tinged with the faintest hint of diesel, which announced that you were in that unique configuration of city and jungle. Savor

it, because after twenty minutes your nose gets accustomed to it, and you no longer notice the smell of Singapore, until the next time you return. (Poon, *Lions* 48)

Freddie assumes a Singaporean identity primarily in relation to his locale, as he consciously adjusts his speech from English to Singlish, the local patois, once he returns to his homeland. When his sister asks him if he thinks she has gained weight, Freddie pauses and thinks to himself:

'Of course not.' At least, that is what I wanted to say, but since I was back in Singapore, I lapsed into our beautiful patois. English seemed too officious, too cold, for our tropical clime. I was among bougainvilleas. In Singapore, if a woman ask you if she looks fat, you say, with a re-assuring drawl, 'No laaah, where got?'. (Poon, *Lions* 49)

Nonetheless "Lions in Winter" closes with a sense of sadness, loss, and displacement, as Freddie confesses:

I could never get used to spending the Lunar New Year in snowstorms, to the luxury of red packets in American dollars. And yet I could not fit into the Singapore of Francesca, of Chong and his marina club membership, and Mrs. Ong with her heartbreaking sadness in her Tweety Bird T-shirt. I wondered if Jimmy would ever return, and I wondered about my own plans after graduation. (Poon, *Lions* 54)

Through her narrator Freddie, Poon expresses perhaps her own burden as a diasporic Singaporean in America whose sense of home and belonging are disjointed and incomplete on both sides of her identity. Poon's bleakest representation of diasporic loss occurs in "Those Who Serve; Those Who Do Not," which contains one of her few depictions of heartlanders. In the story, she juxtaposes one Singaporean family that moves to Australia to spare their son Eddie from National Service with their local heartlander relatives who do not have the luxury of mobility. The drawback, however, for the transnational family is their second-generation son's complete cultural loss: his sister Joanne reveals that "Eddie is quite happy. He doesn't remember Singapore much. He's quite Australian these days; got it from his boarding school. He plays rugby now" (Poon, *Lions* 111). The tone of the sister's assessment touches on the tragic, which may reveal the author's personal sentiment on the loss of patriotism in Singapore, as she recollects in her book review of *Life and Death in Changi*, "[e]ver since I was very little I have heard Singaporeans saying that they will flee at the drop of a hat if our country was ever threatened: 'We're such a small island, what's the point of fighting? One bomb die already!', 'If anything happens I'll just wave my Australian passport!' and so on" (Poon, *Familiar*).

More pointedly, however, Poon demonstrates that transnational mobility is itself a marker of class privilege that has largely depended on Western capitalism. With regard to the debate about Singapore's mandatory military service, Poon is satirical: "Still others, like Joanne's parents, could pontificate loudly on Singapore's 'unjust' National Service policy during rounds of golf with their friends at the country club (they especially disliked posting the bond – why, you could get a lesser club membership for that money!)" (Poon, *Lions* 112). The same people who are influenced by the Western capitalist dream to acquire country club membership (one of the 5 Cs) are also more capable of mobility abroad. Perhaps veiling a slight sense of regret over her own status as a younger-generation diasporic Singaporean who left her homeland for America at age seventeen, Poon concludes the story with the image and thought:

[Joanne] looked at the thousands of HDB homes that fanned out from either side of Sam's tiny flat. Did each of these modest little homes contain people like Sam? Or was he a dying breed?...Thousands and thousands of nameless, faceless, sun-darkened, sinewy men like Sam and his son Peter and their friends, who smoked, played soccer, and reported dutifully every year for their reservist training, simply because that was what was on the cards for them. They could not afford arrogance or fancy arguments. (Poon, *Lions* 113)

"They" are a dying breed because, "they" comprise a subjectivity that so many Singaporeans reject and are moving away from in favor of mobility under the Western model, even among the heartlanders that currently make up the "they". For example, at a conference at the University of Pennsylvania on liberal politics in Singapore, Colin Goh and Yen Yen Woo recount how one international student from Singapore spoke to his own experiences that "the heartlanders did not really care about a more open society, but for the bigger flat and bigger car" (Goh and Woo 98).

Poon's commentary, not only in "Those Who Serve; Those Who Do Not" but in many of her stories, is perhaps that this type of Singaporean distinctiveness exhibited by the heartlanders is declining in the face of continued international economic developments in the region that destabilize local identity in favor of more flexible, transnational subjectivity motivated by economic attainment, as Aihwa Ong has suggested. Poon's stories suggest that cultural loss may necessarily be the cost of transnational subjectivity. However, the nostalgic longings of the characters in her stories for distinctly local identities left behind and almost forgotten, are analogous to those of the "married out daughters" mentioned by Ong. Poon's own life experiences, having left Singapore at seventeen, completing her undergraduate and law degrees at Harvard, and now practicing as an attorney who shares her time between Asia and America, gives her insight into the sensibilities of her younger characters Kenny, Freddie, and Eddie. Yet through the voices of her elderly

characters Madame Teo and Chang, Poon expresses anxieties of displaced subjects who worry that their homeland is becoming foreign with the changing of the times. Poon similarly comments on the loss of national memory and self-esteem in her book review of *Life and Death in Changi*:

Do we not remember because it is a very Singaporean trait to look down on anything Singaporean (which we belittlingly refer to as "local", as in "who does she think she is, she's just a local")? Do we not remember because, on the political front, it would be embarrassing for Singapore as a nation to dwell on the past misdeeds of a very wealthy and important trade partner?" (Poon, *Familiar*).

In response to the above, Poon remarks, "yet *Life and Death in Changi* has done something important for me as a Singaporean, and as a writer. It has reminded me again that the familiar may become exotic, that the banal and despised may become strange and lovely, and that, in many respects, our country and our environment is only as much as we make it" (Poon, *Familiar*). In that respect, Poon has endeavoured to capture her country in the environment that she and many like herself are in. Overall, Poon's stories function like elegies of characters caught between two worlds, or in Freddie's words, "Too hot, too cold" (Poon, *Lions* 54). Yet Poon also ends her title story with the hope of something more—in essence, she may write in an attempt to "make" the most of the environment that she is in. As a diasporic subject, she sees the world no longer as either hot or cold, but as a mixture that potentially can create "a world that was just right" (Poon, *Lions* 54).

Notes

¹ "The Move" is Poon's first published short story and initially appeared in the 2002 edited collection of short stories *The Merlion and the Hibiscus: Contemporary Short Stories from Singapore and Malaysia*.

² Poon describes *Life and Death in Changi* as "remind[ing] us what exactly it is that we have forgotten" (Poon, *Familiar*). She goes on in the review to talk about how memories of the Japanese Occupation can challenge Singaporeans to re-evaluate their national pride.

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