

[연구논문]

## Collective “We” and the Communal Consciousness of Diaspora Identity in Chang-rae Lee’s *On Such a Full Sea*

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Chang-rae Lee, the author of *On Such a Full Sea*, complicates a conventional understanding of Asian American literature as an ethnic category by incorporating his experience as an immigrant into stories about American society in general through his sophisticated experiment with genres. Though he started his career with two novels that feature Korean American first-person narrators, who tell stories of assimilation and alienation in American society, Lee tries to transcend the autobiographic conventions of ethnic literature by assuming a non-Asian narrative perspective and writing on diverse themes of alienation, trauma, etc.<sup>1)</sup> Lee’s most recent novel, *On Such a Full*

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1) Chang-rae Lee’s first novel, *Native Speaker* (1995) is widely accepted as an Asian-American version of *Invisible Man*. In his debut novel, Lee explores the question of alienation from and assimilation into American society. In her reading of *Native Speaker*, Park connects this issue of alienation to the image of diaspora identity, depicted as “criminal suspicion” in the novel (234). *A Gesture Life* (1999), with its intricate use of the narrative, is read in light of the frame

*Sea*, furthers the novelist's attempt to venture into a new territory, which allows a freestanding discussion of non-Asian specific issues such as climate change, future cities, dystopia, history and community. Since its publication in January, 2014, many reviews of *On Such a Full Sea* have discussed Lee's use of science fiction as well as its dystopian vision of human society.<sup>2)</sup>

However, in the discussion of details that constitute the novel's theme of dystopia, Lee's use of the collective narrative voice "we" figures prominently. It is worth noting that *The New Yorker* publishes both a book review and an interview under the title "we"—the book review is entitled "we" and the interview "The Chorus of 'We.'" Joanna Biggs in the *New Yorker* book review differentiates Lee's use of "we" from a Greek chorus by pointing out that the collective

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of historical trauma, memory, and loss. Motuz writes, "the fragmented and atemporal narrative creates a novel in which much of what is communicated remains unwritten, woven instead into a narrative structure that mirrors the symptoms of the traumatized psych and challenges readers to bear witness" (412). Similarly, Carroll claims that "trauma functions as an alternative form of memory and history" (595). Unlike those previous novels that feature Korean American first-person narrators, *Aloft* (2004) is written from a perspective of an Italian American, and it offers a chance to look into the similar issues of race, history, trauma, through a non-Asian perspective. Sohn offers a detailed reading of *Aloft* by exploring how the characters of Asian-American identity can be interpreted from a non-Asian, white perspective. *The Surrendered* (2010), however, touches upon more diverse themes not grounded in the issue of race. It still deals with history of Korean War (as does *A Gesture Life*), but critics try to associate the familiar topics of race and history to other themes. For example, Hsu discovers in *The Surrendered* an intersection between the ontology of race and the ontology of disability.

- 2) For a detailed description of how Lee's novel uses dystopian genre, see Cummins, Khakpour, and Song. Song discusses the novel's use of dystopian genre in the context of literary realism Lee has used in his previous novels: "The novel champions dystopian fiction as a vital mode of storytelling."

voice keeps a distance from the heroine. Biggs is interested in the way that the collective voice uses Fan to portray “the story of the B-Mors’ evolving attitude toward Fan.” Lee says in the interview that he was much interested in the multifaceted aspect of “we”: “‘We’ can be anything from a sort of chorus, omniscient and perhaps moralizing, to something more particular, even ‘individual’ in sensibility, with biases and desires, or can at times seem confused and unreliable, or else sustained by pure hope and conjecture.” Thus Lee is aware of the potentialities of the collective narrative voice in exploring diverse perspectives both inside and outside the narrative framework, limiting and liberating readers’ interpretation of the events. In addition, a few reviews focus on the role of Fan as a locus of the story. Biggs discusses how Fan is used to portray the community’s consciousness and development, change in their thinking and attitude. Noah Cruickshank writes that Fan as a “symbol” gears forward the story of B-Mors’ development.<sup>3)</sup>

In the context of this critical interest in the novel’s use of the collective narrator in articulating the communal consciousness through Fan, I want to examine the concept of diaspora, for the B-Mors can be construed as a diasporic group if we consider their immigration from New China to the United States in search of an unpolluted environment. According to Shirley Geok-lin Lim, diaspora refers to

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3) Cruickshank writes: “Fan is a symbol, a woman at the heart of a story that has grown far beyond her singular decision to leave. *On Such A Full Sea* is a triumph because it retreats from easy political posturing and instead shows how an entire town takes ownership of her story. And the novel’s final words, a hopeful plea from the residents to Fan, suggest that even in her tragedy, she has unintentionally moved her people forward.”

the fragmented state of mind caused by physical dislocation from one's homeland. It involves a set of cultural and historical disjunctions between one's birth place and identity. In this sense, diaspora describes a split awareness of one's identity caused by the material conditions of being physically separated from one's place of origin (Lim 296-97). Recently, critics have explored this split sense of identity as a positive potentiality, by connecting the discourse of diaspora to a discussion of the liberating vision of hybridity, heterogeneity, and creolization. The "hybrid forms of identity," which diaspora subjects experience, entail a critique of nation-bound binarism that caused discrimination and hierarchies in contemporary transnational societies (Braziel and Mannur 5).

In alignment with these potentialities of diaspora, I want to argue how the novel problematizes a communal consciousness of diasporic identity through a discussion of the novel's use of the Bildungsroman narrative. The novel's use of Fan as a locus for bringing a sense of community very much corresponds to the conventional Bildungsroman narrative, which hinges upon an individual hero's reconciliation with societal norms in order to conceptualize a communal consciousness which merges with history. The Bildungsroman genre features a hero who "emerges *along with the world*" (Bakhtin 23) and "[legitimizes] the social order in its fullest sense" (Moretti 72); in Bildungsroman, individual heroes struggle with norms of society and eventually affirm their connection with the society by reconciling themselves with communal values. Through this relationship between an individual and history, Bildungsroman suggests a sense of community that is attached to the progressive model of history. Since Lee's

novel is concerned about the question of how diasporic people are gradually developing a communal consciousness in relation to history, the slippage that arises in the application of the conventional Bildungsroman frame to the development of the diasporic group may provide interesting perspectives on this question.

In my reading of *On Such a Full Sea*, I will borrow Lim’s definition of diaspora as a fragmented sense of being caused by dislocation, in order to examine the diasporic identity manifested by an unlocatable narrative locus of “we.” I will also discuss how Lee imagines the relation of diasporic identity to history through a portrayal of communal consciousness disjointed from history and how he twists the conventions of the Bildungsroman narrative through figuration of Fan as a heroine who fails to fulfill the task of establishing the tie between community and history. Such an investigation will suggest that Lee complicates and undermines a conventional type of communal consciousness defined as a homogeneous entity, and endorses a fragmented, disjointed vision of the communal consciousness of diaspora as a liberating ground for autonomous development, not bound by a linear path of history.

## 1.

*On Such a Full Sea* tells a story of the distant future, where a group of immigrants from New China settle in B-Mor (originally Baltimore) and live by growing fish for the prestigious class of people in the Charter Village. Situated in a slightly better position

than those in open counties—the wild uncultivated countryside full of dangers, B-Mors are confined within the artificially designed environment, and they never dared to venture beyond the realm of their ordinary exploited life. When a B-Mor girl Fan embarks upon adventures outside B-Mor in order to find her missing boyfriend Reg, however, the collective perspective of B-Mors expands beyond the boundary of their residence.

The novel starts with an affirmation of “we” as the narrative locus and as diasporic subjects: “It is known where we come from, but no one much cares about things like that anymore. We think, Why bother? Except for a lucky few, everyone is from someplace, but that someplace, it turns out, is gone” (Lee 1). “We,” the B-Mors, are diasporic subjects, who are dislocated from the place of their origin, which no longer exists in the world. In the narrator’s world, “everyone is from someplace”—their entire community constituted by diasporic subjects. Also, it is suggested that the narrative locus hinges upon a collective consciousness of the first-person-pronoun, “we.” The narrator’s constant reference to “we”—as implied in the phrase, “We think”—points to the fact that the narrative locus in this novel is evolving under the rubric of the collective consciousness of community, or even a chorus.

This collective form of narrative consciousness, however, does not remain static, but moves in time in order to develop into maturity. The narrator’s comment after reviewing the B-Mor history suggests that the B-Mor community in the form of collective narrative consciousness moves along the linear path of history and gradually integrates itself into societal norms that define “our best selves.”

Yet to go back to that moment would be a sentimental journey. We have grown up now, generations deep, generations strong. And have we not lasted long enough to dare say all the hopes of our forebears have come true? Have we not done the job of becoming our best selves? (21)

The development of B-Mors occurs under the linear progressive model of history. “We have grown up now”: “we” are located in the present called “now,” and have come through the process of development in the temporal progression of history. As implied in the word, “generations,” in the narrator’s understanding of B-Mors’ development, big chunks of time divide history into several units and assign each generation to a certain kind of temporal position. This linear genealogy also explains that “we” are connected to “our forebears,” who have come before “we.” Also, it is worth noting that the idea of “becoming our best selves” presupposes that there exist a set of norms, which decide whether they have developed successfully or not. All of these suggest that the narrator in this novel expects, even among diasporic subjects, there should be a communal consciousness, which gradually merges with the progressive model of history in support of societal norms.

The narrator describes the development of this collective narrative consciousness through configuration of a heroine that can serve as a locus of collective gathering. The narrator chooses Fan for this task, and renders Fan into the locus of this communal consciousness on two levels: Fan as a person and Fan as a figure. First, the communal interest in Fan as a person helps B-Mors to create a sense of community through their shared memories of her in real history. While talking about what Fan meant when she said, “where you are”

in Joseph's funeral (31), B-Mors begin to form a community which shares interest in the person they all know. On the second level, the narrator uses Fan as a figure who, separated from the community's daily framework, helps "we" to generate a story. The narrator is conscious of the fact that "we think of her still as one of us, one of our number" (10), even though "She's now gone from here" (2). Fan in this sense is talked of not as a person who physically existed together with the B-Mors, but as an outside figure, who exists in the metaphorical form of membership.

As shown above, the narrator in *On Such a Full Sea* tries to establish the relationship between history and B-Mor people, who constitute the narrative consciousness, through figuration of a communal heroine, Fan. The narrator aims to place diasporic B-Mor people inside the static form of development that ultimately converges into history characterized as a linear flow. This stabilizing gesture, however, is undermined by complication of the narrative consciousness, which oscillates between different referents. It is also foiled by the narrative account that prioritizes Fan's unsettledness over the plot's necessity of settlement.

## 2.

The narrator's use of Fan as a locus of historical and communal consciousness is grounded in two hypotheses: first, "we," with whom the reader identifies, refers to real B-Mors inside the narrative frame; second, Fan, through her adventures, will associate herself with all

three communities—B-Mor, the Charter village, and open counties. After reviewing the producer-consumer relationship between Charters and B-Mors,<sup>4)</sup> the narrator says we need Fan in order to establish historical consciousness and communal ties with other communities:

The truth is that we could not [support our well-being without advanced technologies of the Charter Village]. As conceived, as constituted, we may in fact be of a design unsustainable. Which is why we needed Fan, in both idea and person. For within her was the one promise that could deliver us, the seed of all our futures, Charters’ and B-Mors’ and even of the shunned souls out in the counties, at the moment Quig’s foremost. (104)

Of special interest is “why we [B-Mors] needed Fan, in both idea and person.” The “we” is characterized as passive subjects whose constitution depends on the constant influx of commercial and practical services from the Charter village; they are “conceived,” “constituted,” and are “of a design unsustainable.” Fan as a person will “deliver us, the seed of all our futures” because she carries “the seed of all our futures,” a baby C-free—immune to the fatal disease. Fan, who has this potential for the positive future, will be an idea that connects all the three communities in their shared interest in the future delivery. Through Fan, the narrator hopes to establish a stable narrative consciousness that gradually moves toward a desirable future in which all these communities are bound by a sense of solidarity. In

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4) B-Mors provide fresh fish to Charters and depend on Charters for all kinds of urban technologies and infrastructures including housing, power plants, education systems and medical services: “We could perhaps feed ourselves but what of our housing, our power and water, our schools and training centers and most especially our clinics? How could we assure our communal well-being?” (104)

order for this vision to come true, “we”—including “you” who is reading the story—should be solidly located in the real people of B-Mor inside the narrative frame, and Fan’s adventures into the three villages should create an associative tie between Fan’s concerns and each community’s norms.

The use of the heroine as a locus of historical and communal consciousness, supported by incorporation of readers’ perspectives into the communal consciousness and associating the heroine’s reconciliation with communities, recalls the way that the Bildungsroman narrative creates a sense of community that is integrated into the progressive model of history. In the two conventional Bildungsroman novels—*Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* and *Pride and Prejudice*, which Franco Moretti discusses for a classical model of the Bildungsroman narrative in the first chapter of his book, *The Way of the World*, we find a sense of community emerging with the narrative description of the life of the individual hero and the heroine. The narrator in each novel constantly reminds readers of the communal bond they have with the protagonist by calling him /her “our hero”/“our heroine.” By following the adventures of the protagonist, who is constantly called “our” hero/heroine, readers are invited to locate themselves inside the community and feel the reconciliation which “our” hero/heroine achieves with society as their own.

Earlier in the novel, since “we” seem to refer to B-Mors and “you” are assumed to be part of “we,” the first hypothesis regarding the referent of “we” in relation to the referent of “you” seems to work well for the purpose of creating communal consciousness. In the first three chapters, the “we” that the narrator addresses refers to

the group of B-Mors, who share some communal memories of the past, which they experienced together with the narrator. A review of B-Mor history in the beginning of the novel establishes the identity of B-Mor as a diasporic group that moved from New China in order to escape from pollution. To be more specific, “we” are not just B-Mors, but those who are of the same generation with the narrator; these are the people who have actually seen Fan and remember Fan as a person; these are the people who have actually been to the funeral of Joseph, who died in the Last Flood, and share memories of him; these are the people who actually have gone through all the episodes the narrator is telling.

This gesture towards a stabilized relationship between the communal consciousness and history through configuration of “our” common interest in Fan, however, is disrupted as the referent of “we” becomes unclear. Once Fan leaves B-Mors, the narrator suddenly leaps out of the narrative frame in order to intrude into Fan’s mind and take the position of an omniscient narrator who can easily go inside the character’s consciousness. When Fan goes out into the open counties, the narrator describes what Fan sees in the landscape through Fan’s perspective (34) and what Fan is thinking inside her mind (38). At the same time, the narrator adheres to the position shared by the collective “we” in the B-Mors even during this omniscient intrusion into Fan’s mind, and in doing so, complicates the perspective of “we.” It is unclear whom he refers to when he addresses “we,” as it is almost impossible to imagine a position of “we” both inside and outside the narrative frame.

Since “we” assumes the position of an omniscient narrator, “you,”

the reader, is suddenly disjointed from the communal bond of “we.” In other words, as “we” is elevated to the status of manipulating the narrative together with the narrator from an omniscient point of view outside the narrative frame, “you,” which belonged to “we” the B-Mors inside the narrative frame, is suddenly dissociated from “we” that is on the meta-narrative level and is ultimately lost in narrative space. After describing Fan’s successful escape from the carnivorous Nickelmans in the open counties, the narrator reaffirms the transition from the on-site perspective within the narrative frame to the meta-level perspective outside the narrative frame, and in doing so, situates “you” outside the collective consciousness of B-Mors.

We have previously indicated that Fan had larger aims in leaving B-Mor, but perhaps this is not necessarily true. It may be more a matter of our own shifting perspective on that brief period, what we have come to overlay upon her journey as we revisit them over time than anything she herself was conceiving, planning, implementing. (156)

Here, “we” works on the meta-narrative level which manipulates a narrative perspective; “our own shifting perspective” creates different versions of the same story and might add another layer of interpretation that is not originally true, as it “is not necessarily true” whether “Fan had larger aims in leaving,” as the story created by “we” claims. As implied in the comment, “we revisit them over time,” “we” artificially goes back and forth in time in order to re-interpret and reconstruct a narrative.

This shift of referent from “we” inside the narrative to “we” outside the narrative entails another shift—that of “you.” “We have

previously indicated that Fan had larger aims in leaving B-Mor [. . .]: because the verb “indicate” presumes a group of readership who are separated from the speaker, “we,” the narrator complicates the status of the reader. The reader, in the form of “you” belonging to a group of B-Mors, originally identified himself with “we” the B-Mors inside the frame, but in this new model of “we,” who is talking *to* the reader above the narrative frame, “you” can no longer be inside B-Mor—“you” becomes the outsider to whom the story is told.

As the narrative locus floats around different “we”s, the reader loses track of the narrative perspective and experiences a split sense of identity which corresponds to that of diaspora. While the diaspora of B-Mors involved the physical dislocation from the place of their origins, the diaspora of the reader originates from the narrative dislocation from the position of his perspective inside B-Mors, as part of “we.” Thus, the diaspora identity of B-Mors inside the narrative is transferred to that of readers on the meta-narrative level, as the reader experiences the twofold sense of his position both as an insider and outsider of B-Mors. The movement of “we” between B-Mors experiencing and recollecting their memories inside the frame and B-Mors manipulating the narrative itself from above creates this *narrative* sense of split identity in the reader’s mind.

The narrative sense of split identity created in this way hinders the reader from developing a communal consciousness grounded in the B-Mor community. The identification required of the reader in order to obtain a communal perspective merged with history is obstructed by his sudden dissociation from B-Mors. As the story of Fan’s adventures in the Charter Villages unfolds, the collective narrative

voice of “we” interjects self-reflexive, retrospective commentaries into the otherwise-smooth narrative flow. When the reader is immersed into Fan’s encounter with the Charter elites—Mister Leo and Miss Cathy, the omniscient retrospective collective voice quickly separates the reader’s position as an observer of the story from “we”’s position as a storyteller, by assuming the tone of display. Similarly, the narrator shows that Fan floats around different places and does not fulfill the role as the locus of historical and communal consciousness. Fan moves from one place to another—she leaves B-Mor, goes to open counties, and moves to the Charter village. During her adventures in these different places, she remains unattached to any of these communities and is never incorporated into the history of any region. In the poverty-stricken counties, Fan meets Quig and Loreen, and though she develops a mutual friendship with kids in open counties, Quig and Loreen send her to an affluent household in the Charter village. Fan can neither reconcile her individuality with the role Miss Cathy assigns to her, nor can she fully merge herself into the group of pale Asian girls locked in Miss Cathy’s room. Even when she meets up with her brother Liwei, who left B-Mor after receiving a grade high enough to join the Charter life,<sup>5)</sup> she is not

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5) “Liwei, as we all know, was among the rare few from B-Mor who are promoted each year to join a Charter village, and if they succeed with their foster families and in school and of course, engage a sustaining career, they can live there as fully fledged citizens. The determination is made solely by the results of the Exames, which the Charters take a grade-specific version of each year but that those B-Mor (and like settlements’) children interested in promotion take only at the age of twelve. It’s preliminary a test of mathematical problem solving and logical reasoning, with multiple sections of number and word and spatial puzzles, all of it extremely difficult and not material that is fully covered in our schools” (Lee 157-58).

yet settled and ready to take adventure to look for Reg. Since Fan’s ongoing adventures foster uncertainties over the direction of her quest, the reader can barely feel the connection between Fan’s adventures and her original role as the locus of B-Mor’s collective sense of being. The basic question which Fan always faces in her journey is “whether to stay with them or go” (323)—it is never a matter of cumulative development, but of dispersion.

Since the narrator refuses to render Fan into the locus of historical and communal consciousness by making her float around different communities, the narrative fails to build a convergence point of development of the B-Mor community. Accordingly, the “we,” who were moving in time in hopes of gradual development as a community through configuration of Fan in societies, are disjointed from history. In order for the community to be located inside the progressive model of history, the heroine figure should reconcile her individuality with the communal norms and show an ideal model of reconciliation. As Moretti has suggested, Wilhelm Meister’s and Elizabeth Bennett’s reconciliation with societal norms makes the discrepancy between two different historical moments—that of aristocracy and that of bourgeoisie—disappear and let the middle-class ideals take place in the linear path of history (64). Yet the novel’s depiction of Fan defies such a possibility by severing Fan from any of the historical time of the Charter village and the counties she explores, and makes the historical time of B-Mor community configured in Fan’s character remain displaced.

### 3.

The sense of disjointedness manifested by the narrative sense of split identity and the heroine's displacement in society conceptualizes diaspora identity. Physically dislocated from the place of one's origin, diaspora subjects are disjointed from history and culture, lost in time and space. I want to argue, however, this sense of loss depicted by diaspora identity does not frustrate "we" but instead leads "we" the diaspora subjects—B-Mors—to another step of a better promise by liberating "we" from the chain of communal consciousness tied to history.

Braziel and Mannur have argued that "diasporic movements mark not a postmodern turn from history, but a nomadic turn in which *the very parameters of specific historical moments* are embodied and – as diaspora itself suggests – are scattered and regrouped into new points of becoming" (3, my emphasis). Diaspora identity explained in this way promotes deviations from norms and exploration of new possibilities not bound by nation or ethnicity. The sense of loss caused by the failure to follow the societal norms, then, offers "new points of becoming," a state of being in process for alternative ideals.

Considering this positive epistemological process of diaspora, I want to focus on how the sense of disjointedness, which is enacted by the narrative sense of loss and the heroine's unsettlement, enables "we" to redefine their communal values in defiance of hierarchical orders, which restricted them to the realm of producers for Charters. Near the end of the novel, when Fan's eldest sibling Liwei—now Oliver living in the Charter—asks her to stay with him and help him

to invite their B-Mor families after he builds “the old neighborhood [of a B-Mor street], right here in the Charter” (305), the collective narrative voice questions the basic criteria of their community’s identity.

so who are we now? Yes, we are figuring out our conduct—the demonstrations, the speeches, the murals, even the improvisational work slowdowns by the more daring teams—but none of that retrofits or instructs us on how to think about what we believe in and why. For what are we aiming for, in the end? To be more like Charters? (309)

The sense of disjointedness, which “we” experience after the failure to build a communal consciousness tied to history, leads “we” to set up a new direction of development. After the narrative quest in search of communal values and identity through configuration of Fan as a communal heroine, the B-Mors are asking what constitutes their communal values and what guides their development. The communal attempts to find who “we” are—such as “the demonstrations, the speeches, the murals [...]”—have not clarified what constitutes “we” and where “we” are going. Though “we”’s sense of being is still deeply rooted in the linear progressive model, as “we” still wants to set up a goal, by asking “what are we aiming for, *in the end?*” (my emphasis), the Charter values, which determined “we”’s ultimate goal of development, are challenged by questions that invalidate those models. “To be more like Charters” can no longer explain “we”’s communal attempt to define “we.” In light of this reversed model of development, the gradual progression into mature forms of community becomes not a matter of “evolving our corpus” but of “undermining

it” (309); it entails a set of alternative values that can replace the original Charter-oriented corpus and puts B-Mors in the ongoing process of becoming and redefining their identity.

As the chorus of “we” decides to depart from the Charter-bound progression model of history, it problematizes the very idea that a community should merge with historical consciousness. At the very end of the novel, we see Fan’s long-cherished dream to meet Reg—the original purpose of her journey—is shattered by Betty’s and Vik’s sudden intrusion into Liwei’s plan. Fan was expecting to go with Liwei to see Reg—who according to Liwei has been investigated by a pharmacorp for his C-free status, but once she is guided by Betty into a car she finds Vik instead and she is taken somewhere she does not know. Vik claims that they are helping Fan to escape from Liwei’s trap that was set to sell her to the pharmacorp, but the question of whether it is Vik/Betty or Liwei who betrays her remains unclear. Either way, the sudden change in this original plan thwarts the promise of the happy reunion, which could have retrospectively rationalized and reconciled her multifaceted adventures with the linear quest narrative in search of Reg. Accordingly, the collective narrative consciousness finally disjoins itself from Fan by saying:

Don’t hurry, Fan.  
 Stay put for now  
 We’ll find a way.  
 You need not come back for us. (352)

It is a statement that frees Fan and “we” from the task of establishing a stable connection with history. As a locus of historical

and communal consciousness, Fan has always been called back into the narrative for the purpose of configuring the sense of community and bridging B-Mor community with history. Yet “we” lets Fan go her own way, and in doing so, the chorus of “we” demonstrates that a communal consciousness of diaspora identity does not have to be grounded in the solid reconciliation between community and history. Instead, it consists of multiple heterogeneous autonomous entities; each being will find their own way.

This act of deviating from history and searching for an autonomous path of development not congruent with a pre-determined direction constitutes the communal consciousness of diaspora identity. The diaspora identity depicted in this way affirms the positive potentialities mentioned by Braziel and Mannur—it is a process of becoming, searching for possible futures on their own. It will enable each member to imagine their sense of being not bound by any boundary of hierarchical forms of community. By the end of the novel, “we”—diasporic subjects—can exist as a community independent of the communal task of creating homogeneous identity, which is supposed to integrate itself into history. Diasporic subjects exist on their own—deviated from history, identity, and communal values, if there are any.

In this paper, I have explored how the notion of diaspora identity is conceptualized in Lee’s *On Such a Full Sea*, by looking into the way that Lee complicates communal consciousness by twisting the conventions of the Bildungsroman narrative. The perspective created by the collective consciousness of “we” does not hinge upon a specific narrative perspective that readers could feel attached to, and

therefore creates among readers a sense of loss that corresponds to diaspora identity. The configuration of Fan as a heroine of community does not provide a stable ground for the development of narrative consciousness in relation to history, because the narrator makes Fan float around many different places without attaching her to any of the community for reconciliation. In this way, Lee imagines a communal consciousness of diaspora identity by problematizing the idea of homogeneous communal consciousness congruent with history, and celebrates the potentialities of diaspora—heterogeneous deviations from history.

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**Abstract**

**Collective “We” and the Communal Consciousness  
of Diaspora Identity in Chang-rae Lee’s  
*On Such a Full Sea***

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This paper examines how Chang-rae Lee’s *On Such a Full Sea* imagines a communal consciousness of diaspora identity through the use of a collective narrative voice that creates a narrative sense of split identity in readers’ minds. The novel’s use of heroine figure, Fan, as a locus of communal consciousness very much corresponds to the conventional framework of the Bildungsroman narrative, which builds a communal consciousness incorporated into a progressive history through a depiction of the individual hero’s or heroine’s reconciliation with social norms. The narrative consciousness grounded in this individual hero/heroine invites readers to experience the sense of community congruent with the linear development of history. Lee’s novel, however, complicates the narrative consciousness through a collective narrative voice “we,” by shifting the referent from “we” inside the narrative frame to “we” outside the narrative frame and by dislocating the main figure Fan from society. The sense of disjointedness manifested by the narrative sense of split identity and the heroine’s displacement in society conceptualizes diaspora identity. Diaspora identity configured in this way propounds a more liberating version of communal consciousness as it allows deviations from norms and exploration of new possibilities not bound by nation or ethnicity. The communal consciousness of diaspora identity depicted in Lee’s novel challenges the homogeneous sense of community merged with history and gestures toward heterogeneous deviations from history.

**Key Words**

diaspora, communal consciousness, collective narrative voice,  
narrative consciousness, Bildungsroman