

Jade peony

[Countries](#), [Canada](#)



Belonging When someone is said to be Canadian, it does not just mean being one who lives on this land, or has lived on this land long enough to obtain this citizenship, it means living the Canadian life, it means waking up in the morning wearing a ton of layers and going outside in the freezing cold to do whatever a person needs to do during the day, to be Canadian it also means to belong. Canada is known for the diversity of culture, religion, color, and beliefs, as well as our ability to be able to create a status acceptable to everyone, making Canada, despite our individual diversity and differences, to be united as one.

However, what we don't realize is that Canada has not always been this way; this is the perspective that Wayson Choy expresses through his novel "The Jade Peony". His text and word play emphasizes on a world so unknown, yet so important to not only our history, but to our understanding of what our ancestors of our various ethnic origins fought through every day of their lives to create the world in which every day we take for granted.

Where he lays his emphasis on our history is not from the point of view of the adult, but through the eyes of the children who, today, are our fathers and grandfathers. Divided into three major chapters, Wayson Choy begins the narration of his history through the eyes of Jook-Laing, a five year old beautiful girl of Chinese origin born in Canada after her family immigrated to Canada. Isolation is slowly starting to become a major theme in the novel, not only created by the Canadian Government, but by her very own family.

The Canadian Government in the 1940's, the time period the novel takes place, created harsh laws against immigrants, making it near impossible to

live happily: one was never to leave the household, as immigrants must live within the same household even when one becomes married, as well as harsh laws on illness, where, if one were to become sick with any illness- even as innocent as a cold- if the government found out, " The VancouverHealthInspection Board... posted on our front door, a sign boldly visible from the street: condemned" (p. 32).

However, Jook-Laing's family's old heritage and Chinese beliefs create the deepest isolation as they shun the idea of traditional Canadian society, where Poh-Poh, elder and Jook-Laing's Grandmother, describes this life as " poison to young China girl-child" (p. 17). Jook-Laing's young and highly dream-filled spirit inspires her to dream of the perfect world- a perfect world she never gives up on as play and her " movie-star daydreams" (p. 37) have caused her heart to grow and know that, deep, inside, Canada is a better place than China, no matter what Poh-Poh says to her about her heritage.

However, despite her strong instinct, conflict arises as person versus person/society is introduced when her powerful instinct and her Grandmother's words " You not Canada. You never Canada. You China. Always war in China" (p. 37) make her isolated from becoming her own person and trapping her in a world she knows is not true to her heart. As a major authority figure of the household, Poh-Poh is never corrected or disagreed with, causing Jook-Laing to feel alone in her internal battle between what she is told and her faith in Canada.

Further, Jook-Laing, along with her other two step-brothers, are strongly looked down upon by their strict, old heritage grandmother, who constantly

reminds them of her feelings towards them: " This useless only-granddaughter wants to be Shirlee Tem-po-lah; the useless Second Grandson wants to be cow-boy-lah. The First Grandson wants to be Charlie Chan. All stupid foolish! " (p. 40). With Poh-Poh's interrogance towards her grandchildren's play, it creates further isolation from the norm of society and themselves, along with isolation from their desire to be a child.

Despite her Grandmother beginning to shape the role of the antagonist of the story, Jook-Laing makes a deep connection with an old family friend, Mau-lauh Bak, who not only understands the importance of play, but embraces and cherishes Jook-Laing for her ability to be free in a world so sour towards them. that connects Jook-Laing to the theme of belonging. The second part of the story speaks about Jung-Sum, the kid who was adopted due to the fact that his parents have died from a young age " I TAKE CARE OF MY SELF' (p. 2). Jung also starts off in the novel isolation for as he doesn't want his new family to take care of him. But Jung started to box and that is where he found a sense of belonging. Sek- Lung also fell into the same isolation theme from Canada and as well from his family, he was in belief that Poh-Poh was still coming to visit after she had died, and the whole family did not believe the fact, that's when Sekky fell into the same pattern of isolation.

But it was Sekky that had the most sense of belonging to Canada towards the end of the book, because Canada is a multicultural community there is all kinds of races that live in this great country, and Sekky was a big hater of the Japanese " I have to remember they are the enemy" (p. 189) but when

he meets Meiying, and she introduces him to Kaz her Japanese boyfriend, he gets to like him. This shows that the world revolves around hate but once you get to know people, a person's perspective might change. Sekky finally found his belonging in Canada.