

# [Sky lee’s the disappearing moon café essay sample](https://assignbuster.com/sky-lees-the-disappearing-moon-caf-essay-sample/)

[Art & Culture](https://assignbuster.com/essay-subjects/art-n-culture/)

Arguably, Sky Lee not only presents us with an alternative in narrating History, but more importantly, a method of self-discovery and self-awareness – a search for one’s self. Unfolding identity or distinct character profiles, however, is less of a straightforward task than simply collating character descriptions from the novel and piecing them together like a jigsaw puzzle in order to come up with a holistic perspective on each character. Readers have to take into account a number of additional factors.

First, being characters of pure fiction, the author’s views, dispositions and attitude towards the characters must be thrown into the analysis. The assumption here is that every word, action or thought expressed by each character hinge on who the author is. Put simply and concisely, character identities are symbiotically attached to the author’s identity. Appropriately, in my personal experience of Literature study in The Ateneo, professors would begin every discussion by first introducing the author so that students would comprehend the maxims behind the story’s plot, setting, style, theme and in this case, character profiles. A corollary to this assumption is that the author’s background (personal history) has an implicit yet profound influence on all aspects of the narrative. An illustration very close to our Filipino roots and sensibility are the works of Jose Rizal – Noli Me Tangere and El Filibusterismo. Through acquainting ourselves with Rizal, the maxim of nationalism comes to light, that given the identity of Dr. Jose Rizal, readers realize the implicit heroic propaganda embedded between the lines. They are able to further comprehend why characters were constructed the way they were. Donya Victorina, for instance, is profiled to be a model for colonial mentality in order to awaken the sensibilities of the elite in antagonizing their own native identity.

Notably, Sky Lee has some striking parallelisms to her characters, especially with Kae. She had first hand experience of being a Chinese immigrant in Vancouver, Canada. She moved to Canada in 1967 to study fine arts from the University of British Columbia and nursing from Douglas College. Furthermore, being a girl belonging to a displaced Chinese family, she could easily paint an accurate picture on what it is like to be a daughter in a conservative and old-fashioned Chinese family in Canada.

Secondly, the political, economic, and social milieus of the setting have to be considered. The assumption here is that characters are not isolated or internally stagnant. They are dynamic, meaning they are completely vulnerable to the institutions that encapsulate them. Furthermore, the people they interact with, society at large have an indirect influence on character behavior. The seminar group sufficed in determining each key character at face value by directly lifting from the text — nationality, educational background, familial ideals — however, identity is more than just a facade that can be assessed superficially. In studying the institutional milieus that dominate the characters and their setting, we are able to pierce through that facade and achieve a deeper understanding on who the character really is.

Sky Lee’s “ The Disappearing Moon Cafe” is set in Canada in the midst of the Chinese Immigration. Given that this social phenomenon occurred after the Holocaust of World War II, the Canadian government outlawed racial discrimination and sought to make it institutionally unacceptable, however this only persisted from an administrative point of view and did not perpetrate in all aspects of Canadian society — racism against the Chinese was still at large. With a thorough understanding of the Chinese Immigration in Canada as well as the Chinese Exclusion Act, which limited the number of Chinese immigrants entering the country, we are able to discern the inner workings, the mentality of the novel’s characters. We will be able to understand why the Janet Smith case merited such attention. More importantly however, we are able to define who Gwei Chang, the Patriarch, really is — his significance as a father, as a wealthy businessman and as a fellow Chinese immigrant.

Finally, a person’s nationality, which includes national culture, is always innately embedded and is concretized in a person’s actions, decisions, interests and beliefs. Thus, it is very pertinent to extend our knowledge from the characters as Chinese to unraveling what it really means to be Chinese. Clearly, the Chinese devotion to conservative familial tradition especially on the issue of matrimony is given strict emphasis in the novel. Moreover, the favoritism of male children by the Chinese is arguably the fulcrum that drives the story forward as Mui Lan demands a male grandson from Fong Mei to affirm the continuity of the Wong line (even if the problem lies in Choy Fuk’s sterility). These conservative practices persist because of the radical adherence of the Chinese in patriarchy, especially in the contexts of heading the family, and inheriting the family business. In taking into account nationality and national culture, we understand the underpinnings of character practices and decisions that take place throughout the entire story. In addition, we are able to experience how these cultural practices play out in a foreign country and in the midst of Diaspora.