9-14-2007

Sexual Politics in the Works of Chinese American Women Writers: Sui Sin Far, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Amy Tan

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SEXUAL POLITICS IN THE WORKS OF CHINESE AMERICAN WOMEN WRITERS: SUI SIN FAR, MAXINE HONG KINGSTON, AND AMY TAN

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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December 2007

Indiana University of Pennsylvania
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In my dissertation, I explore the issues of sexual politics in the works of three Chinese American women writers, Sui Sin Far, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Amy Tan. I demonstrate how these writers reconstruct Chinese American women's self-consciousness through their demand for freedom from the sexual oppressions of patriarchy of both American and Chinese cultures and their resistance against racial domination and their demand for power both as females and as Asian American women. I also explore how the issues of the mother-daughter relations are intertwined with those of gender, race, and class, how Kingston presents the history of "feminization" of Chinese American men and how she reconstructs their racial/gender identities, and how Far and Kingston problematize the definition of gender and race. I critique the practice of male-female oppositions and explore the possibility of gender/race deconstruction in Asian American literature.

I arrange my chapters by means of topic issues, and deal with them by examining four texts—Far's *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*, and Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*. I rely mainly on two theoretical frameworks—theories on gender and race. First, the racial/sexual theories of Asian American critics such as Lisa Lowe and David Eng are used to

demonstrate the necessity of intertwining gender with race in the studies of Asian American literature. The theories of Edward W. Said concerning Orientalism are also used to explore the issues of racial stereotypes of Chinese immigrants/Chinese Americans and their struggle against racial domination. Second, Western feminist theories of Simone de Beavoir and Kate Millett and Asian American feminist theories of King-Kok Cheung and Elaine Kim are used to deal with the issues of Chinese American women and their demand for freedom from sexual oppression and for their rights as both Asian Americans and as women. Third, Judith Butler's theory on gender is used to demonstrate the efforts that Asian American women writers such as Kingston and Far have made to problematize the gender definition and gender division in their works.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

By the time I received the information of being accepted into the program of Ph. D Literature and Criticism in English Department of IUP, I had been away from my wife and my son for a year and half, studying in America. The second time she came to the United States to join me, my wife had quitted her job in China, the job she loves so much! She could have stayed in China, waiting for me to go back after I graduate. But she decided to give up her job and her comfortable life in China so that the family can stay together.

Like Brave Orchid in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, my wife has been through a lot of hardships in America: new country, new language, new culture, new food, etc. The hardships she has experienced are beyond words! However, different from Brave Orchid, my wife has not turned into a superstitious, dominant, and bossy housewife and mother. Rather, she has overcome the hardships. Now she can communicate in English. She has a job and can do her job so well that she is very appreciated by her bosses. What I can see in her are her love, strength, intelligence, endurance, and persistence. I now dedicate this dissertation to my wife. Without her love and support, I could not have walked this far; I could not have climbed this high; and I could not have achieved this much.

I am also very grateful to Dr. Lingyan Yang—the director of my dissertation, Dr. Karen Dandurand and Dr. Ron Emerick—the committee members of my dissertation. Dr. Yang has been strict with, but also nice and helpful to, me. Dr. Emerick kindly agreed to take Dr. Martha Bower's place when Dr. Bower, who was

the committee member and to whom I am grateful, was retired. Dr. Dandurand, though always busy as the director of the graduate program in English Department, has never hesitated to support me when I need it. The comments, suggestions, and encouragements that Dr. Yang, Dr. Emerick, and Dr. Dandurand have written on the margins of my dissertation copies have proved their hard work.

I want to extend my gratitude to all the professors whose classes I have attended. These professors have helped me build the solid foundation upon which I have now built my mansion of dissertation. And I also want to extend my gratitude to all the other people such as those of Graduate School and of The Office of International Affairs, whose constant help guarantees the successful completion of my doctoral program in IUP.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this dissertation is to explore the issues of sexual politics in the works of three Chinese American women writers, Sui Sin Far[1], Maxine Hong Kingston, and Amy Tan. Their works include Far's *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (1912), Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (1976) and *China Men*[2] (1980), and Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989). In this dissertation I demonstrate how these writers reconstruct Chinese American women's self-consciousness through their demand for freedom from the sexual oppressions of patriarchy of both American and Chinese cultures, their resistance against racial domination, and their demand for power both as females and as Asian Americans. I examine the issue of the mother-daughter bond from the perspectives of balance between conflict and reconciliation in a contemporary Chinese American context. I explore how Chinese male immigrants were historically feminized and how they resisted racial castration and reconstructed their racial/gender identities in the context of dominant American society. I challenge the practice of strict male-female or masculinity-femininity binary oppositions by demonstrating the possibility and importance of gender deconstruction in Asian American literature.

I borrow the term "sexual politics" from Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1977). In her book, Millett explains,

> Sexual politics obtains consent through the "socialization" of both sexes to basic patriarchal polities with regard to temperament, role, and status. As to status, a pervasive assent to the prejudice of male superiority guarantees superior status in the male, inferior in the female. The first item, temperament, involves the formation of human personality along stereotyped lines of sex category ("masculine" and "feminine"), based on the needs and values of the dominant group . . . aggression, intelligence, force, and efficacy in the male; passivity, ignorance, docility, "virtue," and ineffectuality in the female. This is complemented by a second factor, sex role, which decrees a consonant and highly elaborate code of conduct, gesture and attitude for each sex. In terms of activity, sex role assigns domestic service and attendance upon infants to the female, the rest of human achievement, interest, and ambition to the male . . . . Those awarded higher status tend to adopt roles of mastery, largely because they are first encouraged to develop temperaments of dominance. (26)

Millett's definition of "sexual politics" is explained from a feminist point of view. It suggests that the "sexual politics" practiced in the society are patriarchal politics of dominant males, who have a stereotyped sex category for the purpose of sexual hierarchy. As a result, men enjoy the privileges guaranteed by these patriarchal politics, and, at the same time, deprive women of rights for equality with men by reinforcing the sex category, according to which women are expected to play their

social roles as submissive, silent, and domestic daughters, wives, and mothers. In this way men take women as their opposites or the Other. Millett's definition of "sexual politics" reveals women's low social status as women and explains patriarchal polities as the cause of the practice of sexual hierarchy. Millett's "sexual politics" will enable women to be aware of their situation both in the society and at home, to form their self-consciousness as women, to demand their equality with men, and to obtain their autonomy.

I use the term in my dissertation because the "sexual politics" that Millett defines is the target of the three Chinese American women writers in their works, in which we can easily notice the sufferings of women under the domination of patriarchy. However, my usage of the term "sexual politics" is not limited by Millett's definition. Rather, it not only goes beyond the binary opposition between the sexes defined by Millett, but also crosses the borderline between gender and race. I use "sexual politics" in my dissertation to include the issues of feminism in the context of Chinese America, the interrelatedness between gender and race in Asian American literature, the tension between Chinese American women and Chinese American men, and the relationship between women and men in general.

This dissertation focuses on the three Chinese American women writers and the four works I have mentioned above and deals with the issues of sexual politics in the context of Asian America. I chose these three particular Chinese American women writers and these four literary works not only because these writers have gained important positions in Asian American literature and their works have led to

critical debates, but also because they can best demonstrate the thesis I have mentioned above.

Sui Sin Far's work, according to Amy Ling and Annette White-Parks, is "the first expression of the Chinese experience in the United States and Canada and the first fiction in English by any Asian North American" (*Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Other Writings* 2). Her first short story on Chinese North American subjects, "The Gamblers," which appeared in the February 1896 issue of a journal called *Fly Leaf* ; according to Guy Beauregard, it "has become significant as a possible starting point for Asian American literature" (341). Her *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* tells the stories of Chinese immigrants in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries of the United States. This book, a collection of short stories, presents portraits of North American Chinatowns "not in the mode of the 'yellow peril' but with well-intentioned and sincere empathy" and "give[s] voice and protagonist roles to Chinese and Chinese North American women . . . thus breaking the stereotypes of silence, invisibility, and 'bachelor societies' that have ignored small but present female populations" (Ling and White-Parks, 6). Frank Chin et al., the editors of *Aiiieeeee!*, mention Sui Sin Far as "one of the first to speak for Asian American sensibility that was neither Asian nor white American" (xxi), though, unfortunately, they did not include any of her work in their anthology.

Maxine Hong Kingston, about seventy years after Sui Sin Far, has appeared as a significant Chinese American woman writer. The publication of Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* has been so successful that since its publication the "writing produced by Asian Americans [has] entered the mainstream of twentieth-century

American literature, achieving—with one book—both popular acclaim and a solid position in the canon of American literature" (Huntley, *Maxine Hong Kingston* 39). However, the publication of this book has provoked "a long and heated debate in the Asian ethnic community in the United States" (Ahokas, "Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*" 3). The debate has centered on what Pirjo Ahokas has called "questions of 'authentic' ethnic representation" ("Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*" 3) between Frank Chin and his supporters and Kingston's defenders. Frank Chin, Jeffrey Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Hsu Wong, for example, accuse Kingston, in their anthology *Aiiieeeee!*, of misrepresenting Chinese Americans and of her "betrayal" of her community by her resistance to and criticism of patriarchy in Asian cultures, which is used by American Orientalism to stereotype Asian Americans in general and by American feminism to critique Asian American males in particular. However, the debate over "authentic"/"non-authentic" representation of Asian Americans is not the concern of this dissertation. Rather, I am more interested in exploring this debate from the perspective of gender and race though the two issues are related. On the one hand, the Asian American nationalist writers/critics, to resist racial stereotypes of Asian American males, focus their writings/criticism on the reconstruction of masculinity by simply copying the Western masculine codes. They stress the importance of critique on racial domination and on Orientalist discourse of Asian America without giving any concern of their own domination over Asian American women. On the other hand, such Asian American women writers as Kingston not only resist racial domination but also critique Asian

American patriarchy. However, the efforts of these women writers are strongly accused by these Asian American male writers of helping create the stereotypes of Asian American men, and these men believe that they are racially discriminated due to these women writers' stereotyping them. To these men, the Asian American women writers are partly responsible for the emasculation of Asian men. For this reason, these Asian American male writers refuse to include these Asian American women writers in Asian American literature and place them in a difficult situation. They refuse to see the fact that these women writers are their allies when they fight against racial domination and Orietalist stereotyping.

About ten years after Kingston's success, Amy Tan became famous because, as Wendy Ho concludes, Tan, like Kingston, "captured the attention of not only a mainstream audience but also an Asian American female readership" (*In Her Mothe's House* 44). Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* was a great success, according to the information offered by Ho: it was the longest running hardcover on The New York Times bestseller list, totaling 34 weeks; it gained several awards (the Commonwealth Club Gold Award, the Bay Area Book Critics Circle award, *Los Angeles Times* book award, etc.). This novel "represents one aspect of feminism—that of the possibility of women's empowerment through the affirmation of a woman-to-woman bond" (Bow, "Cultural Conflict/Feminist Resolution" 236). Thus, the mother-daughter relationship becomes central in this novel. This subject matter, as Sau-ling Cynthia Wong claims in "'Sugar Sisterhood,'" places the novel "in a traditional matrilineal discourse that has, as a part of the feminist movement, been gathering momentum in the United States over the last ten to

fifteen years" (85). Taking the success of Tan's fiction as a testimony to the strength of the feminist movement, Wong argues, "Identifying a matrilineal Asian American tradition is important in terms of not only racial politics within feminism, but also gender politics within cultural nationalism" (85, 88).

I place the works of these three Chinese American women writers in the context of Asian American literature because the social context of Asian America can highlight those issues I explore. And thus it is necessary to have a brief review on Asian American literature concerning the issues of gender and race. In "Gender and Sexuality in Asian American Literature," Sau-ling C. Wong and Jeffrey J. Danta Ana divide Asian American literature into three periods: 1850s to 1950s, 1960s to 1980s, and late 1980s to the present. Though their division may not be necessarily the only correct way, it will facilitate us obtaining a general panorama of Asian American literature. In the first period, according to Wong and Danta Ana, Asian American gender and sexuality were understood by the dominant society as exotic or freakish (178). The U. S. immigration laws, they argue, "have been responsible for many of the stereotypes that distort the gender and sexuality of Asian American men" (178). Since Asian women were barred from immigrating into North America, early male immigrants, they believe, often sought relationships with white women, "even though they were legally barred from marrying whites" (179). Wong and Danta Ana maintain that the writings of early Asian immigrant men represent these relationships and their desire for white women because "white women often represent American ideals of 'freedom,' 'Western culture,' and 'civilization'" and "embody immigrant men's dreams of

assimilation to an American society" (179, 180). Wong and Danta Ana argue that these may "affect their representations of Asian masculinity and relations among Asian American males" (179), for example, Carlos Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart* (1946) and John Okada's *No-No Boy* (1957). Some male writers are affected by racial stereotypes of Asians, for example, Lin Yutang's *My Country and My People* (1937) and Chin-Yang Lee's *The Flower Drum Song* (1957).

In this period, according to Wong and Danta Ana, it was difficult for Asian American women to create literature owing to a number of factors: "patriarchal values in the Asian countries that militated against women's literacy and self-expression" and "the harsh lives of Asian American women as prostitutes, wives, mothers, and/or co-laborers with the men" that "made the time and energy needed to write a luxury" (184). Furthermore, the images of Asian American women, for Anglo-Americans, were "exotic, alluring sex objects, depraved prostitutes, or victims of Asian patriarchy in need of rescue" (185). This stereotyping became "not only a rationale for legislative discrimination but also a means of cultural management of otherness" (185). For this reason, Asian American women writers "had to battle both racism and patriarchy from the start" (178). Among these women writers is Sui Sin Far, a British-Chinese or "Eurasian" in Amy Ling's term, the "foremother of Asian American literature" (185). Another woman writer is Jade Snow Wong, who wrote *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1945).

The second period (1960s to 1980s), which began with the Civil Rights movement, the Asian American movement, and the feminist movement, was

dominated by a debate between Asian men and women (Wong and Danta Ana 189). Concerned with "overcoming emasculating distortions of Asian men's gender and sexuality" and "affected by white patriarchal norms and regulations," many male writers denounced "oppressive American practices that 'emasculate[d]' Asian men" and upheld "a system of racial gendering as a paradigm for claiming their own manhood" (Wong and Danta Ana 189-190). This view reinforced racist stereotypes that linked "violence and aggression with the sexuality and gender of other ethnic minority men" (Wong and Danta Ana 190). Their writing is mainly about "the quest for an authentic Asian American masculinity" (Wong and Danta Ana 191). Frank Chin's *Donald Duk* (1991) and Louis Chu's *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (1961) are good examples of this kind. On the other hand, women writers were engaged in a project, which protested against Eastern and Western patriarchy as well as racism (Wong and Danta Ana 193). Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976) "captures this spirit" (Wong and Danta Ana 194). Another important woman writer of this kind is Joy Kogawa, the author of *Obasan* (1981).

Asian American literature in the third period (late 1980s to the present), according to Wong and Danta Ana, is more varied in that it treats issues of gender and sexuality "in the context of poststructuralism-inflected treatments of subjectivities" and stresses "heterogeneity and diaspora" (197). Asian American writers, they maintain, "have been engaging in bold explorations of gender and sexuality:" gender and sexual transgressiveness, homosexuality, bisexuality, and incest (197, 198, 202, and 206). The representations of issues of gender and

sexuality in variety can be found in such writings as David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* (1986), Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) and *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991), Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1989), Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone* (1993), and Patricia Chao's *Monkey King* (1997).

My dissertation relies mainly on two theoretical frameworks—theories on gender and on race. First, the racial/sexual theories of Asian American critics such as Lisa Lowe are used to demonstrate the necessity of intertwining gender with race in the studies of Asian American literature, to deal with the issues of emasculation of Chinese American men, and to explore their demand for emancipation from racial oppression. Edward W. Said's criticism on Orientalism is also used to explore the issues of racial stereotypes of Chinese immigrants/Chinese Americans and their struggle against racial domination. Second, Western feminist theories of Kate Millett and Asian American feminist theories of King-Kok Cheung are used to deal with the issues of Chinese American women and their demand for freedom from sexual oppression and for their rights as both Asian Americans and as women. Relying on these feminist theories, I also explore mother-daughter relationship, a feminist issue that Chinese American women writers deal with. Judith Butler's theory on gender is used to study the efforts that Asian American women writers, such as Kingston and Far, have made to problematize the gender definition and gender division in their works.

I include theories on race in my research because it is intertwined with the sexual politics in Chinese American women's literature in the context of Asian

immigrants'/Asian Americans' experiences in the United States. In *Immigrant Acts*, Lisa Lowe defines racial and gender formations and the relation between the two. As for racial formation, Lowe claims:

> In the last century and a half, the American *citizen* has been defined over against the Asian *immigrant*, legally, economically, and culturally. These definitions have cast Asian immigrants both as persons and populations to be integrated into the national political sphere and as the contradictory, confusing, unintelligible elements to be marginalized and returned to their alien origins. (4)

Racial formation, thus, is defined by Lowe respectively in three fields: laws, economy, and culture. This racial formation, according to Lowe, is contradictory by nature: "on the one hand, Asian states have become prominent as external rivals in overseas imperial war and in the global economy, and on the other, Asian immigrants are still a necessary racialized labor force within the domestic national economy" (5). Owing to this contradictory racial formation, Asian immigrants in the United Sates, Lowe maintains, have still been considered as "foreign" or "Other" although they have played "absolutely crucial roles in the building and the sustaining of America" and have been "fundamental to the construction of the nation" (5). The racial formation for Asian Americans, according to Lowe, is defined "not primarily in terms of biological racialism but in terms of institutionalized, legal definitions of race and national origin" (10). As for the relation between racial and gender formations, Lowe concludes that the history of the two formations for Asian immigrants and Asian Americans has always

intersected: the racial formation of Chinese Americans “has likewise been a gendered formation” (14, 11) because immigration regulations and the restrictions on naturalization and citizenship have both racialized and gendered Asian Americans (12). For example, the 1943 enfranchisement of the Chinese American into citizenship “constituted the Chinese immigrant subject as male,” and the Chinese wives of U. S. citizens “were exempted from the permitted annual quota” for the purpose of “preventing the formation of families and generations among Chinese immigrants” (11). Furthermore, the 1924 Immigration Act claims that “Any Chinese man who married an American woman caused her to lose her citizenship” (*China Men* 156). As a result, “bachelor” communities became typical of Chinatowns in the United States before World War II.

Similarly, in *Racial Castration*, David Eng argues that it is impossible to think of racism and sexism “as separate discourses” (2). He claims that “the Asian American male is both materially and psychically feminized within the context of a larger U. S. cultural imaginary” (2), and thus the “conceptions of Asian American masculinity are historically and psychically bound by the particularities of race, ethnicity, national origin, sexuality, gender, class, and age” (4). He insists that “Asian American male identity is historically and increasingly characterized by critical intersections in which racial, gendered, and economic contradictions are inseparable” (17). From his deconstructing the photo of the “Golden Spike” ceremony taken on May 10, 1869 (37-39) we can conclude that Chinese immigrant laborers are not only sexually castrated as Lowe suggests but also racially castrated because the contributions of these Chinese immigrant laborers

to the building of transcontinental railroads have simply been “erased” by the photographer. They are “feminized” owing to their “historical absence” as Frank Chin et al., the *Aiiieeeee!* editors, claim that “America does not recognize Asian America as a presence, though Asian-Americans have been here for seven generations. For seven generations we have been aware of that refusal, and internalized it, with disastrous effects” (ix). This photo epitomizes the situation of Chinese immigrant males at the end of the nineteenth century: absence/invisibility, as Lowe points out: “U. S. national culture—the collectively forged images, histories, and narratives that place, displace, and replace individuals in relation to the national polity—powerfully shapes who the citizenry is, where they dwell, what they remember, and what they forget” (*Immigrant Acts* 2). Both Eng and Chin critique the U. S. nation-state’s historical erasure of Asian Americans.

Edward Said’s criticism of Orientalism is used in my dissertation because it can help explain how and why the racial stereotypes of Chinese immigrants/Chinese Americans were created in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries in the United States. Said briefly defines the meaning of Orientalism as

> a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and (most of time) “the Occident.” Thus a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions,

> and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, "mind," destiny, and so on . . . in short, Orientalism [can be discussed and analyzed] as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. (*Orientalism* 2-3)

"Oriental," according to what Said defines in *Orientalism*, means Western knowledge about the Orient and the knowledge of Orientals: their race, culture, history, traditions, and society (38). The identity of these Orientals, as Said believes, is not created by Orientals themselves, but by the West through "knowledgeable manipulations" (40). Said suggests that the West does not receive other cultures as they are, "but as, for the benefit of the receiver, they ought to be" (67). Said believes that Orientalism is a historically defined cultural and political fact (3, 13). It is "a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with 'our' world" (12). Thus, the relationship between West and East, if I summarize Said's ideas correctly, is a relationship of Western power/domination/superiority/writing over Eastern powerlessness/submission/inferiority/silence (5, 6, 12, 42, 45, and 94).

The U. S. nation-state once considered Asian countries as "exotic, barbaric, and alien," and Asian immigrants in the United States as "a 'yellow peril' threatening to displace white European immigrants" (Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* 4). And Asian Americans were defined by the U. S. cultural imaginary as alien non-citizen, racial enemy, and colonized national (Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* 8). The Asian males were seen as devious, timid, shrewd, and inscrutable while the Asian

females were thought to be mysterious, docile, submissive, and obedient, worthy of the label "model minority" (Cheung, *Articulate Silences* 2). The Asian men were coded as having no sexuality while the Asian women had nothing else (Kim "Such Opposite Creatures" 69). They were defined by the U. S. nation-state "as the contradictory, confusing, unintelligible elements to be marginalized and returned to their alien origins" (Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* 4). The history of Asian immigration to the United States since the mid-nineteenth century, as Lowe concludes, witnessed the laws of immigrant exclusion acts such as the exclusion of Chinese in 1882, of Asian Indians in 1917, of Koreans and Japanese in 1924, and of Philippine immigrants in 1943 and 1952 (*Immigrant Acts* 6-7). And "Asian populations in the United States were managed by exclusion acts, bars from citizenship, quotas, and internment, all of which made use of racialist constructions of Asian-origin groups as homogeneous" (*Immigrant Acts* 68). The exclusion laws of the U. S. nation-state were made partly because of these stereotypes of Asian Americans. It is these legal exclusions, antimiscegenation laws, detention, and naturalization that, in history, have constructed the Asian American male subjectivity as a particular racial and gender formation (*Immigrant Acts* 11-12). In other words, it is partially those exclusion laws that castrated Chinese immigrants' manhood (*Immigrant Acts* 12) and "feminized" them. Said reveals the situation of the Western domination versus the Eastern submission. And Lowe critiques the contradictory nature of the policies of the U. S. nation-state toward Asian immigrants that racialized and alienated Asian Americans.

Frank Chin et al. declare that the racial stereotype “is a low-maintenance engine of white supremacy,” which “conditions the mass society’s perceptions,” and expectations and a society “is conditioned to accept the given minority only within the bounds of the stereotype” (xxvii). They argue that the function of this racial stereotype is “to establish and preserve order between different elements of society, maintain the continuity and growth of Western civilization, and enforce white supremacy” (xxvi-xxvii). In this case, “the subject minority is conditioned to reciprocate by becoming the stereotype, live it, talk it, believe it, and measure group and individual worth in its terms” (xxvii). The racial stereotyping they protest against is, however, merely that of Asian American men. They complain, “The white stereotype of the acceptable and unacceptable Asian is utterly without manhood. Good or bad, the stereotypical Asian is nothing as a man” (xxx). Unfortunately, it never occurs to them that Asian American women as part of the minority are also the objects of racial stereotyping and their situation is even worse since these women are oppressed not only by racial domination but also by patriarchal domination of their own men.

Chinese American male identity is historically constructed under such a context. This historical emasculation of Chinese males is vividly narrated and protested in Maxine Hong Kingston’s *China Men*. Kingston represents this history by relating the stories of four generations of Chinese immigrants/Chinese Americans in the United States. However, Kingston’s *China Men* does not reconstruct the masculinity of Chinese American men though it protests against the emasculation of these men. Instead of having her male characters gain the

strength and power from the heroes in traditional Chinese culture as Frank Chin does in *Donald Duk*, Kingston deconstructs dominant ”racial formation” and “gender formation” by problematizing the definitions of race and gender. For example, the fable of Tang Ao relates the transformation of Tang Ao from a male to a female; the story of Lu Bu Sun demonstrates a combination of Eastern and Western cultures. Similarly, in *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston critiques the racial and gender stereotypes of Asian American women by creating new identities such as Mulan/Swordswoman and Brave Orchid. These characters are not types but varied and even sometimes contradictory. A good example is the contradiction between professional Brave Orchid as a New Woman in old China and superstitious and patriarchal Brave Orchid in America. The reason for Brave Orchid’s such transformation is that Kingston avoids creating new stereotypes when she deconstructs the old ones. Similarly, when she rewrites the history to resist the racial stereotypes of Asian American males and females, Kingston is careful to keep a balance between her efforts to resist racial discrimination and her efforts to critique sexual oppression. This is because, as Wendi Ho explains, “The internal world of family is oppressive to women, but the external world is often perceived as the greater common enemy to the family collective . . . . To survive as a distinct ethnic group and family, minority women are often caught in a double bind between their own needs and concerns as women and those of their Chinese American communities in America” (*In Her Mother's House* 226-27).

Feminist theories, I believe, can be a theoretical/critical guide in studying the issues of Asian American women. For example, Kate Millett claims in *Sexual*

Politics, “the situation between the sexes now, and through history, is . . . a relationship of dominance and subordinance” (24-25). However, Millett points out that male supremacy does not “reside in physical strength but in the acceptance of a value system which is not biological” (27). Millett argues:

> Because of our social circumstances, male and female are really two cultures and their life experiences are utterly different—and this is crucial. Implicit in all the gender identity development which takes place through childhood is the sum total of the parents’, the peers’, and the culture’s notions of what is appropriate to each gender by way of temperament, character, interests, status, worth, gesture, and expression. Every moment of the child’s life is a clue to how he or she must think and behave to attain or satisfy the demands which gender places upon one . . . . To take a simple example: expectations the culture cherishes about his gender identity encourage the young male to develop aggressive impulses, and the female to thwart her own or turn them inward. (*Sexual Politics* 31)

Thus, according to Millett, the sex category, “based on the needs and values of the dominant group,” has become stereotyped: “aggression, intelligence, force, and efficacy in the male” and “passivity, ignorance, docility, ‘virtue’ in the female” (*Sexual Politics* 26). In this sense, constructing stereotypes has become an important strategy for the male to subordinate the female. To resist males’ domination over females and the stereotypes created by males against females, women writers are supposed to write a literature of their own, as Elaine Showalter

asserts in *A Literature of Their Own* that women writers have the authority to describe women's own experiences (99) and that woman's literature "has always had to struggle against the cultural and historical forces that relegated women's experience to the second rank" (36).

Similar to Western feminists, Asian American feminists also critique the sexual policies of patriarchy and demand rights for women. "Asian American feminism" is defined by Lingyan Yang as "paying particularly attention to Asian American women's voices, texts, experiences, literature, arts, visual arts, histories, geography, theory, epistemology, pedagogy, sexuality, body and life" ("Theorizing Asian America" 141). Thus, having women's voice heard is an important strategy not only for Western feminists but also for Asian American women writers. King-Kok Cheung asserts in *Articulate Silences*, "Many women and members of racial minorities, growing up in an America where voice is tantamount to power and where they have been traditionally muzzled, have also forsworn silence in order to have a say in society" (2). As for silence, Cheung argues that it "can be a direct consequence of prohibition," being "imposed by the family in an attempt to maintain dignity or secrecy, by the ethnic community in adherence to cultural etiquette, or by the dominant culture in an effort to prevent any voicing of minority experiences" (3). Cheung's arguments on silence are complicated and I will further explore them when I introduce my chapters.

However, some Asian American men, who have been deprived of the rights of patriarchal legitimacy by an American patriarchy, according to Elaine Kim, have attempted to "reassert male authority over . . . women by subordinating feminism

to nationalist concerns" ("Such Opposite Creatures" 75). These Asian American men, as King-Kok Cheung argues, are often "blind to the biases [against Asian American women] resulting from their own acceptance of the patriarchal construct of masculinity" ("The Woman Warrior versus the Chinaman Pacific" 116). For this reason, Asian American women are not only racially silenced as Asian Americans but also sexually silenced as women by the patriarchy in their own culture. Thus, the task for Asian American feminist cultural criticism, according to Yang, is to turn "every political impossibility into theoretical articulations" ("Theorizing Asian America" 141). These theories of both Western and Asian American feminists declare that women must break free from the oppression of patriarchal society and culture. To free themselves from such oppression, women must analyze and challenge the established patriarchy that helps shape the images of female inferiority and oppression ingrained in this culture. These feminist theories can be used to analyze how Far, Kingston, and Tan explore the process of forming female consciousness by breaking silence and by articulating experiences of their own as women in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, *The Woman Warrior*, and *The Joy Luck Club*.

However, to some extent, Asian American feminists differentiate themselves from Western feminists by intertwining feminist issues with those of race and ethnicity. For example, Lisa Lowe concludes from a Marxist feminist point of view that Asian immigrant women "are formed through the intersecting processes of racial formation, labor exploration, and gender subordination" ("Work, Immigration, Gender" 272), and the "gendered international division of

labor makes use of third world and radicalized immigrant women as a more 'flexible,' 'casual,' 'docile' workforce" (*Immigrant Acts* 160). Furthermore, The U. S. exclusion laws, as Erika Lee declares, "reinforced the gender inequalities in both American and Chinese societies and explicitly positioned most Chinese female immigrants as dependents of their male husbands and fathers. This dependent status affected women's immigration opportunities and even their rights to remain in the United States after they were admitted" ("Exclusion Acts" 78). Similarly, King-Kok Cheung claims that "the problems of race and gender are closely intertwined" ("Woman Warrior versus Chinaman Pacific" 113) because the silencing of women and their voicelessness are "induced not only by gender but also by culture and race" (*Articulate Silences* 5). Elaine Kim declares that Asian American identities have been concerned not only with race but also with class, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, and so forth (Geok-lin and Ling, *Reading the Literatures of Asian America* xii). All these Asian American feminists indicate that not only the issues of gender but also the issues of race and class are involved in the study of the sexual politics in Asian American Literature.

The mother-daughter relationship in *The Woman Warrior* and *The Joy Luck Club* is a good example of intertwining feminist issues with those of race and ethnicity. Both Kingston and Tan situate their mothers and daughters in a domestic-familial site, which is complicated by the issues of race and ethnicity. The conflicts between mothers and daughters in these two books are based not only on the generation gaps but also on their differences of culture and class. Their stories offer the opportunities to analyze the ways Asian American mothers

and daughters—Chinese mothers and their American daughters—construct and reconstruct their understandings of the dual self in relation to multiple inequalities within hegemonic social, cultural, historical, and political understandings of the U. S. nation-state. Both *The Woman Warrior* and *The Joy Luck Club* focus on the struggles encountered by mothers and daughters in contemporary Chinese American contexts. Each examines the complex negotiations that Chinese immigrant mothers and their Americanized daughters perform daily in dealing with diverse, and often conflicting, interpretive systems and cultures.

Bonnie Braendlin argues in “Mother/Daughter Dialog(ic)s in, around and about Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*,” “Antagonisms between mothers and daughters in U. S. history and literature became particularly acute during and after the 1970s” (112). This is because, according to Braendlin, the women’s movement since the 1960s “defined subjectivity in masculinist terms that privileged independence, self-sufficiency, and autonomy at the expense of traditional ‘feminine’ relational values of nurturing and caring,” the values “embodied in an ideology of motherhood defined and dominated for years by patriarchal males” (112). Thus, Braendlin maintains, the “daughters of the liberation movement viewed them as outdated restrictions foisted upon them by their retrograde mothers,” and these daughters, “defining themselves in ways formerly allowed only to men, wanted to move out of the home and into the workplace, to climb the ladder of success” (112). On the other hand, there remains the possibility of mutual understanding owing to their same social status as women, as Braendlin argues that both mothers and daughters “are in conflict

over simultaneous desires to comply with and to resist society's demands and definitions of women. And although the mothers feel compelled to persuade their daughters to accept prescribed marital and maternal duties, they too resist total compliance with demands made by these roles" (115). Due to the similarities both mothers and daughters share, the final reconciliation becomes possible despite their conflicts.

If Braendlin deals with the mother-daughter relationship in general, Wendy Ho explores this issue in the context of Asian America. In "Mother/Daughter Writing and the Politics of Race and Sex in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*," Ho asserts, "Dual powerlessness as a woman/minority—the intersection of sex/race—burdens the relationship [between mothers and daughters]" because this relationship "is intimately intertwined with the history of an immigrant race in America" (226), and there exists a gap between mothers and daughters of "different and often conflicting cultures, generations, languages, and gender roles" (225). Chinese mothers, as Ho argues, attempt to instill in their daughters "the virtues and habits that are considered ideally feminine in traditional Chinese culture," in which women "are valued according to their obedience, passivity, and maintenance of the traditional ways" (227). Thus, one important factor in the mother-daughter relationship, as Ho understands it, is that the talk-story that articulates an authentic self-identity for women is based upon issues of gender and race (225-26). For this reason, Tan offers a chance for both mothers and daughters to tell their own stories.

Closely connected with feminism, both Western and Asian American, is the relationship between women and men or feminism and masculinity studies. This relationship, as Judith K. Gardiner argues in the introduction to *Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory*, is "asymmetrical, interactive, and changing" (2). For example, in the United States, the radical feminism of the 1960s and the 1970s, as Gardiner observes, "did charge men as a group with being the enemies and oppressors of women and saw men's masculinity as both an instrument and a sign of their power" (2-3). These feminists, according to Gardiner, "wanted women to have parity with men's power, prestige, and position" (3). On the other hand, most men's initial reactions to feminism, as Gardiner concludes, were negative: they "ridiculed feminist analyses of women's disadvantage" and "claimed men as victims" (4). In contrast to radical feminist theories, many cultural feminist theories, Gardiner maintains, "tend to portray masculinity and femininity as complementary, with both containing good as well as bad traits" ("Men, Masculinities, and Feminist Theory" 41). According to Gardiner, cultural feminist theories refuse to polarize masculinity and femininity. While "radical feminist theories sharply divide masculine power from feminine powerlessness," cultural feminist theories "focus especially on psychological differences between men and women" ("Men, Masculinities, and Feminist Theory" 43). Similarly, Gardiner asserts, men disagree: while "masculinist men's movements saw feminism as a powerful enemy," some profeminist men "agreed with feminists that the two traditional genders distorted both sexes" and "sought gender equality by changing men, reeducating the abusive, and seeking to dismantle the male

privileges enjoyed by dominant men" (*Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory* 4). They support feminism because, as they argue, "most are harmed by idealizing the characteristics of socially powerful men and by defining the masculine in opposition to women" (*Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory* 5). Thus, Gardiner concludes that "men and masculinity play a curial role in feminist theory," while "feminist thinking has been fundamental to the formation of contemporary men's and masculinity studies as intellectual endeavors, academic subjects, and social movements" ("Men, Masculinities, and Feminist Theory" 36). Gardiner states clearly the relationship between feminism and masculinity studies. Gardiner's argument deconstructs the binary opposition between men and women.

The male-female relationship for Asian Americans is more complicated as Gardiner asserts that feminists of color "emphasize the inter-connectedness of gender with other social hierarchies, including nationality, ethnicity, social class, racialized identities and sexuality" ("Men, Masculinities, and Feminist Theory" 42). Thus, Asian American women are faced with a dilemma concerning the choice between feminism and the Asian American male's heroism/masculinity. In "The Woman Warrior versus the Chinese Pacific," King-Kok Cheung raises a question: "Must a Chinese American critic choose between feminism and heroism?" (113) Elaine Kim calls Asian American men and women "such opposite creatures" in her article, "'Such Opposite Creatures': Men and Women in Asian American Literature" (68). The conflict between Asian American men and women (critics), as I understand it, focuses on their different understanding of sexual politics,

especially when these sexual politics are intertwined with the issues of race. Thus, the relationship between (Chinese American) men and women is not and should not be one of binary oppositions. Rather, they should be two halves of a whole/completeness. Furthermore, masculinity is not only the nature of men just as femininity is not merely the nature of women. And Chinese American women writers such as Far and Kingston have tried hard to dismantle this binary opposition and even to problematize the definition of gender itself in their works.

I believe that Judith Butler's theories of "gender performance" can help deconstruct the binary opposition and the definition of gender (*Gender Trouble* 6, 139-40). In *Gender Trouble*, Butler, the poststructuralist feminist, suggests that gender is an "act" that is performative (139). Butler defines "performative" as "a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning" (139). She argues that this "action" is a public action and "the performance is effected with the strategic aim of maintaining gender within its binary frame" (140). Thus, "the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all" (140). Gender acts, according to Butler, are performed by people for the purpose of cultural survival, without which people would be vulnerable to "punitive consequences" (139). Butler argues that gender "ought not to be constructed as a stable identity" (141). Rather, it is "a free-floating artifice" (6). What Butler suggests here is that "man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one" (6). According to Butler's theory, the gender roles become problematic. Butler's "gender performance" theory breaks the hegemonic

discourse on masculinity and femininity. Butler's questioning the dominant discourse on masculinity and femininity, as Sofie Van Bauwel claims, "creates a space for cultural change with regard to the duality of gender roles," hoping to "break the dichotomy of these gender roles" and consequently making them "more flexible and multiple" ("Representing Gender Benders" 17). These theories on gender, I argue, can help explore how Sui Sin Far and Kingston blur the boundary of gender in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*. Some critics have already paid attention to this issue. Take Kingston's works for an example. Marlene Goldman notices that Kingston "does not map out a polarized position . . . in the form of a solid identity" and refuses to portray the identity of female characters as "unified" ("Naming the Unspeakable" 223, 225). Leslie W. Rabine observes in "No Lost Paradise" that "Kingston's writing violates the law of opposition, making gender dichotomies proliferate into unresolvable gender differences" and displacing "the absolute difference between masculine and feminine so as to reveal multiple differences within each sex" (87). Rabine's argument destabilizes the distinction between men and women. In *The Woman Warrior*, for example, Kingston "subvert[s] monolithic ideas of the Chinese and Chinese-American gender norms" (Ahokas, "Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*" 7). In "Sui Sin Far and the Chinese American Canon," Wenxin Li argues that the contribution that Sui Sin Far has made to Asian American literature lies not only in her effort to move beyond the gender wars but also in "her construction of a more fluid gender dynamics in sharp contrast to the rigid gender opposition in contemporary Asian American discourse" (122, 128). Thus, both

Kingston and Far deconstruct gender definition, which is significant in the scholarship of Asian American Literature.

Arranging the issues I have just mentioned above by topics, I divide my dissertation into five chapters including the introduction as Chapter One. Based on feminist theories, Chapter Two, "'What Do Women Want?' Women's Consciousness in Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*," focuses on how Kingston reconstructs Chinese American women's self-consciousness through their demand for freedom from the sexual oppressions of patriarchy of both American and Chinese cultures and their resistance against racial domination and their demand for power both as females and as Asian Americans. I mainly focus on *The Woman Warrior* for the analysis because this work deals with Chinese American women's life and their struggles to obtain their (ethnic) identities as women.

In Chapter Two, I first deal with the issue of gender. The most urgent task for Asian American women to develop their self-consciousness is, according to feminism, to break the silence that patriarchy both in America and in their "original" countries has demanded them to keep. By analyzing *The Woman Warrior*, I explore Kingston's demonstration that silencing is a means of domination, and control of language is a constant/powerful tool in the acts of domination. To break this silence, Kingston puts Maxine in a place as a narrator of women's experiences in the Chinese community in the United States. In this way, Maxine reveals her transformation from a girl of silence into a woman of articulation.

Among the critics who study the issue of silence, King-Kok Cheung is the best-known. Cheung's argument on silence in Asian American literature is the most complex, rigorous, and multi-layered. In *Articulate Silences*, Cheung, on the one hand, states the importance of articulation. She argues, "The silencing of women . . . takes on peculiar resonance when we look at characters whose voicelessness is induced not only by gender but also by culture and race" (5). To Cheung, women of color are doubly oppressed by sexism and racism. In order to resist this double oppression, according to Cheung, women of color should "dispel stereotypes by repudiating silence entirely" (7). On the other hand, Cheung articulates the function of silence as well. In *Articulate Silences*, she introduces three kinds of silence: "provocative silence," "rhetorical silence," and "attentive silence." "Provocative silence" means, according to Cheung, the paradox "whereby parental and historical silence spurs creativity" (24). For example, the family's secrecy about her aunt's story spurs Maxine to create the story of her own about her aunt. In this way, silence is turned into articulation. "Rhetorical silence" is defined by Cheung as "variations on the models of double-voicing advanced by feminist critics" (25). For example, Maxine's silence results from double oppression. However, as Cheung argues, "the hidden injuries to race are even harder to bring to the surface than female repression" (25). In this regard, the reader needs to find between the lines what is hidden under the surface of the narrator's silence. Thus, the character/narrator's transformation from silence into articulation is completed with the help of the reader. "Attentive silence" is referred to the silence deliberately kept for the purpose of protecting others from being hurt.

For example, in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981) Aunt Emily keeps silent about the injustices done to Japanese immigrants in Canada during World War II by the dominant racial government not only out of her philosophy of forgetting and forgiving but for the purpose of protecting Naomi from being mentally hurt.

In Chapter Two, I intertwine the issues of gender with those of race. This is because, as I have shown above, Asian American women's gender identities are entangled with their racial identities. As Malini J. Schueller asserts, "Third world feminists have in fact challenged the presupposition of feminists who speak in the name of a singular womanhood and whose own analyses are blind to racial difference" ("Questioning Race and Gender Definitions" 52). In order to tackle this complicated issue, I combine the theories of feminism, critique of Orientalism, and critical race studies. With these theories, I demonstrate how Kingston uses feminist strategies not only against sexism but also against racism in *The Woman Warrior*. For example, Kingston rewrites the Fa Mu Lan legend not only to voice women's consciousness and their heroism but also to critique the Orientalist discourse that stereotypes Asian American women as "powerless," "submissive," "inferior," and "unintelligible," who have nothing else but sex (Kim "Such Opposite Creatures" 69). The stereotyping of Asian American women worsens their situation and lowers their social status and makes their life miserable in America.

Similar to Kingston, Sui Sin Far also critiques Chinese and white males as cultural/racial dominants that cause women's suffering by imposing their views on women who are supposed to be "less powerful." In this chapter, I also intend to prove Far's assumption that gender, as well as culture, separates men from

women, just as cultural differences separate white Americans from Chinese Americans. In her stories, Far seems to suggest that neither culture is free from racism and patriarchy. For example, the stories such as “The Wisdom of the New,” “The Price China Baby,” and “The Americanizing of Pau Tsu” portray women as victims of patriarchy in Chinese culture; “The Story of One White Woman Who Married a Chinese” and “Her Chinese Husband,” in contrast, explore the issue of women as victims of patriarchy in American culture. Far’s stories demonstrate that both Chinese and American women remain vulnerable to males’ oppression and abuse. In this respect, “Chinese males and white Americans are connected as members of a dominant culture who unconsciously cause suffering by imposing their views on members of less powerful groups” (Dupree, 85). To this extent, Far is a writer of biculturalism.

In Chapter Three, “‘Can They Stop Fighting?’ Mother-Daughter Relations in Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club*,” I argue that the mother-daughter relationship in Asian American literature is not only a matter of women but also of their ethnicity. This is because the cultural conflicts are the major problems they have to deal with. For this purpose, I mainly focus on *The Joy Luck Club* for my analysis because the work reveals the struggles encountered by mothers and daughters in contemporary Chinese American contexts. The novel examines the complex negotiations that Chinese immigrant mothers and their Americanized daughters perform daily in dealing with diverse, and often conflicting, interpretive systems and cultures. It shows the experiences of mothers, who still hold on to Chinese culture, are bewildered by their “banana” daughters while the daughters are

bewildered by the conflict between their American identity and their mothers' Chinese tradition.

In this chapter, I demonstrate that in *The Joy Luck Club* the mothers try to instill in their daughters remnants of their Chinese heritage while the daughters struggle for their autonomy and independence, typical of American culture. The mothers try hard to control their daughters for fear of losing them while the daughters, on the other hand, fight against their mothers' possessive dominance. The mothers are more concerned about their expectations for their daughters, but the daughters are more concerned with self-definition and individual acceptance in American society. The mothers are strong-willed, persistent, hard to please, and overly critical while the daughters are disobedient and more sensitive to their racial and cultural identity than their mothers. However, the two generations finally build a bridge between them once the daughters understand why their mothers brought them up in a way they were at first strongly against.

Wendy Ho, one of the most important critics who focus on the issue of the mother-daughter relationship, concludes that what the mothers have hoped for is "a daughter with a Chinese mind/character like theirs but in new circumstances" (*In Her Mother's House* 156). They "want to teach their daughters how to read situations clearly and how to stand up and fight for themselves; hard lessons learned in their lives". And they want their daughters to be "bolder, more self-assured women; who are independent form their husbands; who will have good jobs, status, and voice; who feel their own merit" (*In Her Mother's House* 155). These are the mothers' best wishes for their daughters. However, this is

“a rather difficult positioning for American-bred Chinese daughters to negotiate gracefully or seamlessly” (*In Her Mother’s House* 156). Furthermore, the mothers, caught up in their mothers’ “words and actions” and their “own world of private frustrations and patriarchal stereotypes,” are unable to understand their daughters (Ho, “Mother/Daughter Writing and the Politics of Race and Sex” 228).

Like Ho, Leslie Bow also states Joy Luck mothers’ expectations for their daughters. In “Cultural Conflict/Feminist Resolution in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*,” Bow argues, “the conflict between the generations arises ironically because the mothers do not perceive the daughters to be American enough. In spite of their rise into the middle class through education or marriage, the daughters have failed to live up to models of strong, independent womanhood which appear to the mothers as their birthright as American citizens” (243). In other words, Chinese mothers, according to Bow, expect their daughters to achieve more” not only because “they believe America offers more opportunities” but also because they believe “they have sacrificed themselves in order for their daughters to have these opportunities” (244). Both Ho and Bow deal with the Joy Luck mothers’ expectations for their daughters. However, Ho thinks that the mothers stick more to the Chinese mind/character while Bow believes that the mothers’ expectations explain the impact of American culture upon them. I believe we should not polarize mothers as traditionally-minded Chinese and daughters as Westernized Americans. The mothers’ expectations for their daughters are out of both Chinese and American cultures as well as their own bitter experiences in old China.

Based on Feminism, postcolonial theory, and critical race studies, Chapter Four, "'Are They Men?' Emasculation of Chinese American Men and Reconstruction of Their Masculinity in Kingston's *China Men*," demonstrates Chinese Americans' resistance against the stereotypes of gender identities as Asian immigrants and their struggles for freedom from racial discrimination. I assume that it is impossible, or at least incomplete, to deal with sexual politics in Chinese American literature without dealing with the issue of "feminization" of Chinese American men just as it is impossible/incomplete without exploring "sexualization" of Asian American women. I mainly focus on *China Men*, which is typical of the issue I explore in this chapter. In this book, Kingston represents the history of restrictive/exclusionary laws in the United States in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century instituted by the dominant white culture against the Chinese, which "had emasculated these immigrant men, forcing them into 'feminine' subject positions of powerlessness and silence, into 'bachelor' Chinatowns devoid of women" (Goellnicht, "Tang Ao in America" 192). However, Kingston does not reverse the emasculated Chinese male immigrants into masculinity based upon American culture. Rather, Kingston transforms these Chinese male immigrants from absence into presence by rewriting the part of U. S. history and critiques the U. S. nation-state for its emasculation and feminization of her forefathers.

In Chapter Four, I also analyze some stories from Sui Sin Far's *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, such as "One White Woman Who Married a Chinese" and "Her Chinese Husband," to demonstrate the efforts Far has made to protest against

racial/sexual stereotypes of Chinese male immigrants. These immigrants are contrary to the stereotypes that Asian men are believed to be effeminate like Charlie Chan and devious, shrewd, and inscrutable like Fu Manchu. For example, Liu Kanghi saves a white woman's life, takes good care of her, gives her a job to become independent, and finally marries her when she has devoiced her abusive husband. Through this story, Sui Sin Far, as Ellen Dupree argues, critiques "the American assumption that white American males treat their wives better than do Chinese husbands" ("Sui Sin Far's Argument for Biculturalism" 88). The story also portrays a Chinese man who is in contrast to the racial/gender stereotypes created by American Orientalism.

Chapter Five, "'Are They Opposite Creatures?' Gender/Racial Deconstructions in Asian American Women's Writings," focuses on gender relationships and gender deconstruction/reconstruction. I challenge the practice of strict male-female/masculinity-femininity oppositions by demonstrating the possibility and importance of gender deconstruction in Asian American literature. In "Feminism, Men, and the Study of Masculinity" Matthew Shepherd argues that "thinking of men and women as polar opposites seemed not only far too simplistic but also obstructive to an understanding of gender" (176). Shepherd claims to be "doubtful of the existence of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' as objects of sex/gender" (176). Shepherd announces, "The challenge of feminism is to break away from strict male-female and masculinity-femininity dichotomies and move toward a progressive politics of change that puts into practice a feminist theory that recognizes differences but unites people under a common cause—to end sexist

oppression" (176). The deconstruction of binary opposition between women and men, thus, enables feminists to find alliance from men, fighting against sexism.

The situation for Asian Americans, however, is more complicated because the issue of gender is intertwined with race in the context of Asian America. For example, Chinese American women, according to King-Kok Cheung, are faced with dual allegiance: one the one hand, they wish to dismantle Chinese patriarchy; on the other hand, they redress the invisibility of Asian American men ("Of Men and Men" 174). I assume that the goal for both Asian American males and females should be to struggle in order to end sexist/racial oppression and to build a society where everyone, male or female, white or nonwhite, has the opportunity to live fair and equal lives. Thus, what is important is not a "battle of the sexes," but a battle for equality. Men and women should not fight over the conflicting understanding of masculinity/femininity but fight against the exercise of power based on sexual/racial inequalities. This is also the goal for some Asian American women writers. Through *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*, Kingston bridges the gap between Asian American women and men. While critiquing the patriarchy of Asian American men, Kingston expresses great empathy for the racial discrimination that these forefathers suffered in the United States.

In this chapter, I demonstrate how Kingston refuses to map out a polarized position in the form of a solid gender identity. Her writing breaks through the law of opposition, changing gender oppositions into gender differences, and her attempts to blur the boundary between males and females. From this

perspective, we can say cross-dressing is a strategy Kingston uses in her works to deconstruct gender boundaries and binary opposition of gender categories. In "No Lost Paradise," Rabine also mentions the possibility of "this instability of male and female" (87). Rabine notices that in each of Kingston's two books, *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*, "the starring legend concerns a character who crosses over the boundary into the other gender" (88). For example, both the swordswoman and Tang Ao experience gender transformation. Thus, as Rabine concludes, "Kingston's writing make[s] permeable this boundary between the apparently mutually exclusive experiences of men and women" (92). This crossing of gender boundary is possible because, as Judith Butler argues in *Gender Trouble*, "[a]s a shifting and contextual phenomenon, gender does not denote a substantive being, but a relative point of convergence among culturally and historically specific sets of relations" (10). The reason why Kingston is determined to problematize/deconstruct the gender boundary is to critique the gender hierarchy created by men. For this purpose Kingston avoids creating simplified and one-dimensional characters of both Asian American women and men. Thus, Kingston's writing is a contribution to the feminist agenda. Kingston's writing proves Butler's argument:

> If a stable notion of gender no longer proves to be the foundational premise of feminist politics, perhaps a new sort of feminist politics is now desirable to contest the very reifications of gender and identity, one that will take the variable construction of identity as both a methodological and normative prerequisite, if not a political goal. (5)

Butler’s argument, on the other hand, supports Kingston’s feminist agenda that undermines the stability of gender formation and enriches feminist politics.

In this chapter, I also demonstrate how Sui Sin Far symbolically suggests, through telling such stories as “The Smuggling of Tie Co,” “A Chinese Boy-Girl,” and “Tian Shan’s Kindred Spirit,” an attempt at racial/gender crossing (Ouyang, “Rewriting the Butterfly Story” 211): crossing from “Chinese” bodies to “American” borders and crossing from female to male in the context that the body remains the easiest and safest basis for racist/sexist ideologies (Cutter, “Smuggling across the Borders of Race, Gender, and Sexuality” 148). “Smuggling” then represents a process whereby a hidden, forbidden knowledge moves its way into a binary opposition, for example, white/black, American/Asian, or male/female, and in doing so, begins to dismantle it, or cross out of it, or at least blur the borderlines. Thus, Far’s story demonstrates that racial/gender formation is constructed by language/culture/politics rather than body. This crossing, however, may not be safe, as Tie Co's final death suggests.

Notes

1. “Sui Sin Far” is her pen name, which means “daffodil” in Chinese. Her real name is Edith Maude Eaton.
2. Kingston separates the word “Chinamen” to “China Men,” which she uses as the title of her book, to deconstruct the racialization of the U. S. nation-state. "Chinamen" has been historically racialized with implication of racial contempt.

CHAPTER TWO

"WHAT DO WOMEN WANT?" WOMEN'S CONSCIOUSNESS IN KINGSTON'S *THE WOMAN WARRIOR*

"What do women want?" I ask this question as a man, but explore it from a feminist point of view. I do not expect that women's answers to this question will be the same. Rather, their responses to this question will be quite different due to their different nationality, race, class, age, personality, experience, and so on. However, they sometimes do come together when fighting for specific shared goals as women. The same is true of feminism. Though feminists, in general, critique traditional social as well as political thought upon which patriarchy is based, they disagree on many issues due to their different perspectives of the issues. Some feminists, such as Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett, and Naomi Wolf, believe that women are equal with men since they are the same as men with men's potential and are capable of doing what men can do. These feminists want to be admitted into men's world by demanding what men have: power, privilege, freedom, social activities, equal rights, and so on, as Naomi Wolf declares in *Fire with Fire: the New Female Power and How to Use It*: "My call is for every woman . . . to demand the full scope of authority she can . . . claiming power as she needs it and as she defines it" (xx). Feminism, as Wolf defines it, "should mean . . . nothing more complicated than women's willingness to act politically to get what they determine that they need" because "political equality . . . is within women's grasp, if they choose to seize it" (59, xv). Wolf believes there is not much difference between men and women and thus women should have what men

have. She argues, “Every item on the roster of ‘patriarchal’ attributes—aggression, competitiveness, territoriality, logic, libido, the desire for signature, and the will to shape the environment—inheres in the very core of female consciousness from the cradle on, only to be redirected” (273-74). Thus what these feminists want is to obtain equality with men; to do whatever men can do; to claim whatever rights or privileges men enjoy; and thus to assimilate themselves into men’s world. Some other feminists, such as Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous, in contrast, separate themselves from men and severely attack the traditional patriarchal ideology that takes females as inferior, complementary, or secondary male. They focus on women’s difference and celebrate female sexuality. What these feminists want is to challenge patriarchal ideology and to demonstrate women’s differences from, rather than similarities with, men. My argument is that the theory of feminism should not be limited within the binary opposition of either stressing assimilation with or focusing on difference from men. To me, sameness and difference coexist and they are mixing and floating. They are not limited within the relation between men and women; they also exist in some other relations such as the relation between women themselves, which goes beyond the gender boundary. Furthermore, feminism not only focuses on gender and sexuality but is also intertwined with race, class, and so on. What women want, in general, is their equality with men, their freedom from patriarchal domination, and their safety from violence, from sexism, and, for women of color, from racism.

In this chapter, using feminist theories and Lisa Lowe's theory of racial and gender formations, I explore several feminist issues of Asian American women: the contradictions/ambiguities of the portrayal of Asian (American) women in Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*; their experience of patriarchal domination in both Asian and American cultures; the efforts they have made to break silence; their resistance to patriarchy in both cultures; their deconstruction of Orientalist discourse; and the formation of their consciousness not only as women/Asian Americans but also as individuals. To this end, I demonstrate how Kingston reconstructs Chinese American women's self-consciousness concerning their demand for freedom from the sexual oppressions of patriarchy in both American and Chinese cultures, their resistance to racial domination and racial stereotypes, and their demand for power as females, as Asian Americans, and as individuals. To distinguish the author from the narrator of *The Woman Warrior*, I use "Kingston" to define the former and "Maxine," to the latter in my analysis. I also explore how Sui Sin Far reveals the sexual oppressions of patriarchy on Asian (American) women in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*.

Contradictions/Ambiguities and Kingston's Feminist Agenda/Dilemma

It is obvious that there are contradictions and ambiguities about Maxine Hong Kingston's portrayal of Chinese (American) women in *The Woman Warrior*. It may be argued that some of these contradictions/ambiguities are deliberately created by Kingston for the purpose of her feminist agenda: to critique patriarchal discourse, to dismantle homogenous female identity by portraying complex,

varied, multi-dimensional, and even contradictory women characters, and to create individuals rather than gender and racial stereotypes. Diversity, multiplicity, and complexity are the strategies that Kingston uses in her work as a feminist of color. But some of her contradictions/ambiguities are the result of the dilemma that Kingston is in both as a woman writer and as an Asian American writer. As a woman writer, she is expected to critique patriarchy in both American and Chinese cultures; as an Asian American writer, she is supposed to critique racism, to deconstruct American Orientalism. Thus, she has to keep a balance between cultural nationalism and (Western) feminism. For example, Brave Orchid sets an example of a strong, powerful and successful woman as a doctor in old China and breaks silence by telling her daughter the family secret of No Name Woman in America. However, she becomes the guardian of patriarchy in the Chinese community when she makes an effort to install the patriarchal ideas of the roles that Chinese females are supposed to play in her daughters. On the one hand, Chinese girls are said to be “maggots” in the rice and Chinese women are slaves and wives; on the other hand, No Name Woman as a Chinese girl “may have been unusually beloved, the precious only daughter, spoiled and mirror gazing because of the affection the family lavished on her” (10). The instance of the spoiled girl goes against that of girls taken as “maggots”. Similarly, the instance that men in the Chinese community shake their heads when they see Maxine and her sister and laugh at the family since the family has only girls and no sons is contrary to the instance that Maxine’s grandfather trades one of his sons for a baby girl.

As for Kingston's contradictions and ambiguities in her structuring female identities, there has been a debate within feminist criticism. Those critics who strongly support Kingston conclude these contradictions and ambiguities as the strategies of her feminist agenda. For example, in "Questioning Race and Gender Definitions," Malini J. Schueller insists that Kingston is determined "not to create singular definitions of ethnic identity in order to combat the impoverishing stereotypes to which Chinese Americans are subject, not to postulate the foundations of a new hierarchy" (53). By "articulating herself through a language in which opposed and diverse voices constantly coexist," Schueller insists, "Kingston questions the values of the autonomous self and definitions of racial and sexual identity, and simultaneously presents dialogic intersubjectivity and community as the realm of hope and possibility" (54-55). As for the "contradiction" of Mulan/Swordswman's fighting bravely for her people and her return to the village as a daughter, wife, and mother, Schueller explains that Kingston "problematizes and subverts racial definitions in order to reveal the dangers of maintaining them," and "presents Chinese culture as a conglomeration of diverse, multiple, often contradictory values that she does not attempt to unify into an easy explanation" (60). It is significant that Schueller stresses the importance of diversity in respect of Asian American women's identity. This is a strategy of feminism of color to critique both patriarchal discourse and Orientalism that stereotype women as a homogenous group. What Schueller argues, however, is only one side of the picture. The other side of the picture is the dilemma Kingston has to face as I claimed above.

Feng Lan explains from this perspective, “While severely undermining the patriarchal assumptions historically imposed upon the legend, Kingston’s revision also captures the dilemma of the Chinese female caught in the contradiction between individual pursuit and communal commitment under specific historical circumstances—a dilemma that sheds light on the shared identity of Kingston’s Mulan and the canonized ‘Confucian’ Mulan, both of whom end up serving as the tool for the grand scheme of national salvation” (230-31). I agree with Lan about her supposition of Kingston’s dilemma, because some of the contradictions/ambiguities result from Kingston’s dilemma both as a woman writer and as an Asian American writer. By the time Kingston wrote the book, the contradiction between feminism and cultural nationalism was sharp. It was beyond Kingston at the time to “make both ends meet.” But Lan confuses Confucian Mulan with Kingston’s Mulan. As I understand it, Confucian Mulan is not and should not be seen as Kingston’s Mulan. Mulan in the Chinese Ballad does her heroic deeds for her father who is too old to fight; she is not married and has no children. Thus no sex, pregnancy, or childbirth is involved in this ballad. Kingston’s Mulan is quite different. She fights for her community; she fights to prove that women can do what men can do. Though Kingston remains ambivalent toward Mulan’s return home, it is not fair to conclude that Kingston’s Mulan functions as a tool of patriarchy. Being feminine should not be considered as women’s weakness. I will explore this issue more fully in Chapter Five.

Some other critics, however, problematize Kingston’s portrayal of Chinese women in the book. For example, Diane Simmons argues that the legend of Fa

Mu Lan, to some extent, “does not suggest any change or desire for change in the traditional status of the girl; rather, the transformation from submissive girl to heroic defender of empire takes place only because—and only as long as—it is necessary to save the patriarchy. Once the emergency is over the girl wants only to return to her former state” (*Maxine Hong Kingston* 60-61). Similarly, in “Transcendence through Violence,” Deborah L. Madsen claims that Kingston’s story of Mulan/Swordswoman can merely prove a woman’s “perfect filiality,” which might be interpreted “as perfect obedience and passivity, reasserted in place of the aggression she has demonstrated throughout her military career” (167). Thus, “Kingston’s woman warrior . . . performs and transgresses masculine codes, not the codes of femininity” (177). Madsen argues, “In this story, women cannot be assertive both publicly and privately; public achievement must be compensated for with private humility and passivity” (167). The arguments of Simmons and Madsen, I believe, are still based on gender binary oppositions. According to their understanding, women are either feminists or patriarch’s slaves, which is, however, not true in reality. The role of a professional woman does not necessarily go against the role of a woman as daughter/wife/mother. In other words, a professional woman can also be a good daughter/wife/mother though it is not easy to keep a balance between the two, especially before the 1960s in America.

Some critics even attack Kingston’s portrayal of Chinese (American) women. For example, in “The Mother as Other,” Sheryl A. Mylan argues,

> Maxine's inability to combat racism stems, in part, from orientalizing her Chinese culture, which leaves her with no inner resources upon which to draw. By regarding her Chinese heritage as Other, she has effectively silenced her own voice . . . . Maxine values the orderly, rational world represented by science since, through the lens of Orientalism, she sees nothing but irrationality in Chinese culture (138, 142).

Some of Mylan's arguments are significant because Maxine, born and brought up in America, at first accepts American culture on the one hand, but refuses Chinese culture as the Other. It is not surprising that American Orientalism has an impact upon her. And this impact partially leads to Maxine's silence. However, Mylan overlooks the fact that Maxine, after years of struggle, finally realizes that, as a Chinese American woman, she cannot and should not refuse Chinese culture. Before the book ends, Maxine finally identifies with Ts'ai Yen, a traditional Chinese intellectual. Maxine finds not only her voice but her "weapon"—the pen. Thus, Maxine, as an Asian American woman writer, fights against both sexism and racism with her pen.

The criticism of some scholars, however, is contradictory and problematic by itself. For example, in "Naming the Unspeakable," Marlene Goldman, on the one hand, claims, "Kingston refuses to portray her identity as unified. She refuses to dismiss the complexities generated by the clash between cultures. Instead, she weaves these contradictions into her text to arrive at a more expansive, although precarious, inscription of identity" (223). On the other hand, Goldman declares that the ending of the story goes against a feminist agenda because Mulan,

though successfully acting as a powerful heroine, did it as a man serving patriarchy. To this extent, Mulan merely "conforms to the role of wife and slave" (228). I agree with Goldman that Kingston's portrayal of Chinese (American) women is varied and complicated instead of one-dimensional or unified. However, the ending of the story does not go against a feminist agenda. As I argued above, Mulan's returning home does not necessarily suggest that the portrayal of Mulan serves patriarchy as Goldman argues. Rather, it reveals the other side of women who are different from men—the strength rather than weakness of women. Femininity is defined by patriarchal discourse as weakness, submissiveness, and passivity. However, feminists should not share this patriarchal discourse. Being a wife/mother will not necessarily make a woman weak, submissive, or passive. Rather, it is the patriarchal hierarchy that makes women that way. After they obtain equality with men, women become not only scholars, leaders, businesswomen, etc., outside the home, but also daughters, wives, mothers within the home. Women, like men, can play different roles. These roles are no longer in opposition.

How do we understand these contradictions/ambiguities expressed in the book? In what ways do these contradictions/ambiguities demonstrate Kingston's feminist agenda or her dilemma as an Asian American woman writer? I believe that these contradictions/ambiguities are closely connected with Kingston's portrayal of Chinese (American) women. And women's models should be individuals rather than (stereo)types, and thus it is impossible as well as incorrect to portray all women in the same way that will surely lead to stereotyping women as

a homogeneous category. This is because women are brought up in different backgrounds and have different experiences and thus do not think and behave in the same way. It is impossible for all women to share a singular identity. And the situation for women will be more complicated if we put women's race, nationality, class, education, etc., into consideration. There are, as I understand it, two major causes for the contradictions/ambiguities in Kingston's book: Kingston's feminist agenda and her dilemma as a woman writer as well as an Asian American writer.

It is true that the stories of Mulan/Swordswoman do inspire Asian American women and strengthen their power because these women warriors "cross over into masculine territory, potentially to challenge patriarchal gender boundaries. This transgression can be figured as empowering of women" (Madsen 164). However, questions arise when Mulan/Swordswoman returns home after the war: Is Mulan/Swordswoman changed from a heroine into a slave as suggested by some critics, cited above? Does this suggest that Mulan/Swordswoman is too masculinized for women to follow as a woman model if she does not go home? As I understand it, Mulan/Swordswoman's return home explains the situation that women are both the same as and different from men. They are the same in the way that women can be as strong and powerful as men so that women should not be deprived of the rights and power that man have; women are different from men in the way that they are also capable of pregnancy and childbirth, and this capability is considered by some women, including Kingston herself, as power that men do not have. Returning home to be a wife and/or a mother does not mean

that a woman becomes a slave. Rather, it proves a woman's strength as a woman, apart from the strength she can prove as a warrior. To this extent, Mulan/Swordswoman's returning home not only deconstructs the binality of gender oppositions, but also enriches the possibilities of women's identity. In other words, women are not either-or but both-and.

As a woman writer, Kingston is determined to dismantle patriarchal bias against women. However, her way to end the Mulan/Swordswoman story is seen by some critics as being anti-feminist. To defend herself, Kingston claims in an interview with Donna Perry in 1991 that Mulan, different from Rambo, "is not brutalized by war" when she comes back home from war. Instead, "she becomes a soft human being again" (Perry 180). Kingston even regrets that she did not put enough emphasis on the femininity of her women characters in this book. Kingston admits in an interview with Paul Skenazy in 1989 that she intended to write a different ending to the Woman Warrior myth, in which Mulan, when returning home, takes her armor off, puts on a beautiful gown, does up her hair and puts flowers in it so she is very beautiful and feminine, and then reveals to the army that she is a woman. To Kingston, femininity should be celebrated instead of being repressed. This is where Kingston's Mulan is different from the Chinese original "Mulan Ballard."

The Chinese original "Mulan Ballard" merely tells a story about a woman who takes her father's place, joining the army due to her father's old age. This is considered as filiality in the Chinese traditional culture. For this reason, Mulan disguises herself and fights as a man and then goes back home as a woman. In

this original Ballard, there is no husband, no sexuality, no pregnancy, and no childbirth. It is obvious that Kingston's Mulan reveals the other side of women: pregnancy, childbirth, and nurturing are considered the strength of women. Furthermore, Kingston's Mulan deconstructs gender binary oppositions: she is a combination of males and females, an individual human being like the combination of old man and woman she meets in the mountain.

However, Kingston believes she should have revealed MuLan as a woman in public by the end of the story. She argues, "If the soldiers never knew that she was a woman, then it would be just another example of a great masculine military hero. So of course the right thing to do was to take her out of her disguise so that we women can get credit for everything that she did" (Skenazy and Martin 132). The reason she did not write the Mulan myth in this way is, as she claims, that she "wasn't ready for a mythic heroine who was so feminine" (Skenazy and Martin 131). I think many feminists at the time were not ready, either. Instead, when writing this book, Kingston admits that she "was still searching for an inspirational figure, an archetype of a woman who had masculine powers" because, as Kingston claims, she at the time "was very troubled by feminine powers—they seemed like weaknesses" (Skenazy and Martin 131). This shows that femininity is considered as weakness not only by traditional patriarchs, but also by many feminists. And these feminists take femininity as weakness because patriarchs have defined "femininity" as "weakness" and force women to play the role of domesticity—the only role that women could play. This definition of femininity has brutally suppressed women's talent and robbed their rights of public

achievements and professional success. It is unfortunate that some women have internalized this patriarchal definition of femininity. Living in such a patriarchal society, Maxine does not want to speak loudly because the dominant culture takes it as unfeminine.

However, Kingston, like many feminists, is faced with a problem: on the one hand, Kingston takes pains to dismantle patriarchal ideology. On the other, she remains ambivalent toward such a New Woman Model as Mulan/Swordswoman. This is because Kingston does not want to fall into the trap of building another gender hierarchy/boundary/category/identity. However, after dismantling patriarchal bias against women as weak, powerless, and complementary to men, and after deconstructing the patriarchal category by doing so, questions arise: What can women reconstruct? Do they want to repeat what men do? The problem Kingston has is that women get credit through the practice of violence as a patriarchal power, which is strongly rejected by Kingston herself. In this sense, Kingston's portrayal of Mulan/Swordswoman is problematic. Aware of this problem, Kingston explains in an interview with Kay Bonetti in 1986, "I don't know that I ever really identify myself completely with the woman warrior . . . . I don't feel that she's me" (Skenazy and Martin36). It seems that Kingston is troubled by this woman character she has created. She realizes that something is missing in this character—femininity, which she took as a woman's weakness. Kingston believes that too much violence is involved in the portrayal of this woman character. She claims,

> I think that calling that book *The Woman Warrior* emphasizes 'warrior' . . . . One of the things that I wish that I had said about Fa Mu Lan, the Woman Warrior, was that she was a weaver. . . . It's important to know that the Woman Warrior did women's work; she wasn't just a military hero . . . . So far the world thinks of power as violence, that power comes from a gun. We must create a new kind of drama in which there *is* drama, but it's nonviolent . . . . I'm saying that women especially have a duty to work in this direction. (Skenazy and Martin 48, 131, 159)

What lies between the lines here is that fighting with a pen is better than fighting through violence. The model of Mulan/Swordswoman becomes problematic not only in the light of Kingston's feminist agenda but also in the postmodern world, in which violence becomes a serious social problem.

Another reason for the occurrence of contradictions/ambiguities in *The Woman Worrior* is Kingston's situation as an Asian American woman writer. Kingston is determined to dismantle Orientalist stereotyping of Asian American women as a homogenous group with a single identity. Kingston portrays her women characters, to borrow Lisa Lowe's terms, with the strategies of "heterogeneity," "hybridity," and "multiplicity" rather than "unity," "similarity," and "homogeneity." In *Immigrant Acts*, Lowe defines "heterogeneity" as "the existence of differences and differential relationships within a bounded category—that is, among Asian Americans, there are differences of Asian national origin, of generational relation to immigrant exclusion laws, of class backgrounds in Asia and economic conditions within the United States, and of gender" (67);

Lowe defines “hybridity” as “the formation of cultural objects and practices that are produced by the histories of uneven and unsynthetic power relations,” which “marks the history of survival within relationships of unequal power and domination” (67); Lowe defines “multiplicity” as “designating the ways in which subjects located within social relations are determined by several different axes of power [and] are multiply determined by the contradictions of capitalism, patriarchy, and race relations” (67). The ultimate aims of these strategies, according to Lowe, are “to disrupt the current hegemonic relationship between ‘dominant’ and ‘minority’ positions” (67), “to destabilize the dominant discursive construction and determination of Asian Americans as a homogeneous group” (67-68), “to contribute to a dialogue within Asian American discourse, [and] to point to the limitations inherent in a politics based on cultural, racial, or ethnic identity” (68). Lowe argues that taking Asian American culture as homogeneity “fixes Asian American identity and suppresses differences—of national origin, generation, gender, sexuality, class,” because “not only does it underestimate the differences and hybridities among Asians, but it may also inadvertently support the racist discourse that constructs Asians as a homogeneous group, that implies Asians are ‘all alike’ and conform to ‘types’” (71). Lowe’s arguments highlight Kingston’s feminist agenda that portrays Asian American women as heterogeneous, hybrid, and multiple, instead of homogeneous, unified, and identical.

To this end, Kingston avoids creating her women characters with homogeneity. Instead, these women characters are various and sometimes even contradictory. For example, Moon Orchid is in opposition to Brave Orchid;

Mulan/Swordswoman is in contrast to No Name Woman; Mulan/Swordswoman is both the same as and different from Ts'ai Yen; Brave Orchid in China is different from Brave Orchid in America. The Maxine who identifies with Mulan/Swordswoman and fights for her community is in contrast to the Maxine who bullies another Chinese girl, who is smaller, younger, and weaker. To make the situation more complicated for feminist theories, we notice that some women may become oppressors to other women, as Kingston admits to Skenazy in the interview that "women took part in the village raid on the family of no name woman," and this "reminds me that the people who did the foot binding of the little girls were women. Women did it to other women" (Skenazy and Martin 121).

This contradictory and ambiguous portrayal of women characters, however, is not merely to "destabilize the dominant discursive construction and determination of Asian Americans as a homogeneous group" (Lowe, *Immigrant Act* 67-68); it is also "to disrupt the current hegemonic relationship between 'dominant' and 'minority' positions" (Lowe, *Immigrant Act* 67). This relationship of the U. S. nation-state and Asian Americans is interpreted by Orietalist discourse as "Western superiority and Oriental inferiority; . . . the strength of the West and the Orient's weakness" (Said *Orientalism* 42, 45). One aim of Kingston's book is to deconstruct this Orientalist discourse. Though different, most of Kingston's women characters are far from weak as the Orientalist discourse suggests. To the contrary, the strong, powerful, and intellectual Brave Orchid in China is transformed into the less strong, less powerful, and less intellectual Brave Orchid in America; a professional woman as a doctor in China is changed into a

patriarchal, dominant, and superstitious woman in America. Brave Orchid's change in social status suggests that the situation for Asian women in America may not be necessarily better as American Orientalism suggests. It could be worse due to racial discrimination, the language barrier, cultural difference, etc., apart from sexual oppression. Similarly, Kingston's creation of the contradictory images of Chinese women as wives and mothers on the one hand and as woman warriors and intellectuals on the other deconstructs the Orientalist assumption that women in China have a rather low status. This intentional contradiction becomes Kingston's strategy to deconstruct Orientalism.

Kingston's dilemma as a woman writer and as an Asian American writer partly results in the contradictions/ambiguities in *The Woman Warrior*. Kingston must be very careful to keep a balance between her relations with Chinese American cultural nationalism when she dismantles Chinese patriarchy and with American feminism that focuses on "sisterhood" among women regardless of their race when she tries to deconstruct American Orientalist discourse. For example, when she severely attacks Chinese patriarchal bias that treats girls as maggots and slaves, Kingston must be careful not to fall into the trap of Orientalist discourse that believes women in the East are weak and thus need to be "rescued" by the West. In fact, Kingston has been accused by some Asian American cultural nationalists, such as Frank Chin, of "selling out." To escape from this embarrassing situation, Kingston has to set up some different examples of the images of Chinese women to compensate for the "negative" images she has made. In *The Woman Warrior*, for example, No Name Woman becomes the

favored and spoiled daughter in her family and Maxine's grandfather trades a son for a girl. However, this favored and spoiled daughter is later forced to commit suicide; Maxine's grandfather is scolded and considered "mad" and is forced to trade the son back by his wife. I will further explore Kingston's dilemma in Chapter Five.

Maxine's Formation of Self-consciousness

Structurally the five chapters of *The Woman Warrior* demonstrate the whole process of Maxine's development of her self-consciousness. Maxine's formation of her self-consciousness begins with the story of "No Name Woman" in Chapter One as the first step to make women such as Maxine aware of the harm that patriarchal domination has done to them, which is the beginning of oppressed women's self-consciousness. The second chapter, "White Tigers," functions as an inspiration of Maxine by a woman model: Mulan/swordswoman. This woman model encourages her to start her quest for her gender and racial identity as well as autonomy. The third chapter, "Shaman," tells the story of Brave Orchid as a Mother Model in old China that once highlights Maxine's life. In Chapter Four, "At the Western Palace," however, Maxine becomes somewhat disappointed with the Mother Model since Brave Orchid is transformed, to some extent, from an intellectual in China into a superstitious housewife in America. Finally, Maxine breaks her silence she has kept for years, and identifies herself with a Chinese woman poet, Ts'ai Yen, in the last chapter, "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe." Eventually Maxine gets to know what she wants: a woman artist. She retells her

mother's stories and tells her own stories as well that articulate her desire, as an Asian American woman, to challenge patriarchal domination in both Chinese and American cultures and racial discrimination in American society.

The mother's stories help Maxine form her consciousness as a woman. "When we Chinese girls listened to the adults talk-story, we learned that we failed if we grew up to be but wives or slaves. We could be heroines, swordswomen" (19). One of the adults' stories Maxine hears as a small girl is a story about her aunt: "In China your father had a sister who killed herself. She jumped into the family well. We say that your father has all brothers because it is as if she had never been born" (3). It remains untold who makes Maxine's aunt pregnant in a village of old China. In fact, this is not what villagers care about. What makes them so mad is not who is the father of the child but the fact that a wife, after her husband's absence for years, could become pregnant. They take it as a rebellious act against patriarchy and thus as a "disgrace" or "humiliation" that she has brought to them and to her family. They don't care what pains she might suffer from the rape she has experienced. What No Name Woman has suffered is, in fact, universal. For example, Thomas Hardy's *Tess of d'Urbervilles* (1891) and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) tell similar stories about women's sufferings of this kind.

Why do women suffer like this? Simone De Beauvoir claims in *The Second Sex*, "Now, woman has always been man's dependent, if not his slave; the two sexes have never shared the world in equality" (xx). She believes, "Woman can be defined by her consciousness of her own femininity no more satisfactorily than

by saying that she is female, for she acquires this consciousness under circumstances dependent upon the society of which she is a member" (49). She complains, "This has always been a man's world" (61), and "to be a woman would mean to be the object, the Other" (51). She clearly indicates the inferior position for women in such a world in which men have created "a feminine domain . . . only in order to lock up women therein" (65). Under such circumstances, she argues, "passivity" becomes "the essential characteristic of the 'feminine' woman," "a trait that develops in her from the earliest years" (280). For this reason, a woman is faced from the beginning with "a conflict between her autonomous existence and her objective self, her 'being-the-other'"(280). According to De Beauvoir, a woman is discouraged from developing her autonomy and thus "is refused liberty"; instead, she is taught to please others and to "make herself object . . . like a doll" (280). It is this patriarchal practice that has led to women's sufferings.

Through the story of No Name Woman, Maxine begins to realize that women are vulnerable to the domination and discrimination of patriarchy, and those women who dare to trespass the taboo area will be erased from existence, as the villagers do to No Name Woman: to erase her from existence in her village and her family through violence as a punishment. The intention of Brave Orchid's telling this story is also patriarchal: to warn her daughter about her "womanhood" so that she will not do the same to "disgrace" her family as her aunt did years ago and to teach Maxine her gender identity, that is, "the culture's notions of what is appropriate to each gender by way of temperament, character, interests, status,

worth, gesture, and expression" (Millett, *Sexual Politics* 31). To this extent, Brave Orchid becomes an ally with patriarchy.

As a young Chinese American girl, Maxine is angered by such patriarchal ideologies in Chinese culture: "Girls are maggots in the rice" (43), and "Marry a rooster, follow a rooster" (193). When the "emigrant villagers shook their heads at my sister and me" (46), and when her great-uncle refuses to take any girls out with him (47), Maxine becomes aware of the fact that boys are favored to girls—the patriarchal bias against women, according to which, the relationship between males and females, as Kate Millett concludes, is "a relationship of dominance and subordinance" and, supported by such patriarchal polities, "male superiority guarantees superior status in the male, inferior in the female" (*Sexual Politics* 24-25, 26). As a girl, Maxine is silenced by this patriarchal domination and her voice is like a "crippled animal running on broken legs" (152). Furthermore, she is silenced also because she has to act in an "American feminine" manner in order to separate herself from the race/gender stereotypes of Chinese women who are believed to speak in loud, "strong and bossy" voices and "called their friendships out" from one field to another (11, 172, 11). Thus, Maxine is silenced by both sexism and racism.

Ironically, the first person who silences her is her mother: "You must not tell anyone . . . what I am about to tell you" (3). Silence has been considered by patriarchy "as unquestioned a virtue for women as chastity" (Garner "Breaking Silence" 117-18). Kingston claims in an interview with Paul Skenazy in 1989, "The silence is all that's not human. I'm working against the silence of people

who try to forget huge chunks of history" (Skenazy and Martin 119). In another interview by Paul Skenazy in 1989, Kingston protests, "I think that is a very terrible thing to do to a human being, to punish her by saying that we will act as if she never existed, strike her name from the book of life . . . . It's a most terrible kind of murder—to take her out of memory" (Skenazy and Martin 119). The most urgent task for women to develop their self-consciousness, according to feminism, is to break the silence that patriarchy has demanded them to keep. To free themselves from such oppression, women must challenge this patriarchy that has been trying to place women in a position of inferiority. And having their voice heard is the first step, as Lingyan Yang claims that Asian American feminism should pay "particular attention to Asian American women's voices, texts, experiences, literature, arts, visual arts, histories, geography, theory, epistemology, pedagogy, sexuality, body and life" ("Theorizing Asian America" 141). Thus, the task for Asian American feminist cultural criticism, according to Yang, is to turn "every political impossibility into theoretical articulations" ("Theorizing Asian America" 141). Breaking silence then is an important strategy to resist males' domination over females: it is "a means to demonstrate [women's] subjectivity, strength, and a personality" (Duncan, "The Uses of Silence" 36); it is an act of "breaking through the gender and race barriers that suppress voicing from the margins" (Schueller, "Questioning Race and Gender Definitions" 53); it is a step "toward self-actualization and identity" that can help achieve "their goal of freedom and recognition" (Begum 145). To free themselves from such oppression, women must analyze and challenge the established patriarchy that

helps shape the images of female inferiority, objectivity, and gender stereotypes ingrained in this culture.

The importance of speech lies in its ability "to express oneself to others in a common language" so as to assert "one's subject-position" (Begum, "Confirming the Place of 'The Other'" 147). Against her mother's will, Maxine breaks silence by retelling her mother's story about her aunt, a significant step for creating women's consciousness. We can interpret this as an action of transforming women from non-existence to existence, from objectivity to subjectivity, and from subordination to equality. The significance of the book as a feminist writing is that women's voices are heard so that we can understand how women feel about themselves and about the world they live in.

If some critics, such as Yang and Schueller whom I have mentioned above, stress the importance of breaking silence as a strategy of feminism, some other critics argue that silence can also be considered a strategy for resistance to patriarchy. For example, King-Kok Cheung argues in *Articulate Silences* that silences "can speak many tongues, varying from culture to culture" (1), and thus silences "can also be articulate" (4). Similarly, in "The Uses of Silence," Patti L. Duncan suggests, "[A]n exploration of the uses of silence offers new insights into the ways in which silence operates as a form of discourse and as a means of resistance to hegemonic power" (22). To Duncan, silence "is not simply the absence of speech." Rather, silence "functions as a way of saying (and of unsaying)" (30). Duncan concludes, "[S]ilence can be and has been, chosen as an expression and strategy of resistance" (39). However, I argue that silence

becomes an option only when articulation is out of the question, especially in the United States where an individual is supposed to speak out. The discourse of silence is meaningful only when this discourse can be articulated or interpreted by others. Silence as resistance may be meaningful in one culture but not in another. For example, No Name Woman lives in a society/culture in which patriarchy suppresses her voice and it is out of the question for her to articulate how she is raped and how she suffers from the consequence. Her choice of death—drowning her newly-born baby and herself in the family well might be the only possible option to express her resistance to patriarchal domination. However, this silence as resistance is more meaningful in the old Chinese cultural context than in an American cultural environment, in which this option may be problematic. Many American students in the classes I attended could not understand why No Name Woman should contaminate the family well by drowning herself and her baby in it.

My argument is that No Name Woman's silence is not "a will to unsay" but an impossibility to say, and thus her silence as resistance does not make much sense until Maxine retells her story, through which readers realize why her aunt is unable to articulate. And the inability of her articulation has finally led to her death. Moon Orchid does not break her silence either. It is, however, not that she has a will to unsay but that she is at a loss as to what she would say to her Americanized husband. She is so scared to say what she wants to say and thus becomes insane when Brave Orchid forces her to articulate. Maxine has a list in her mind to say to her parents and to her Chinese community, but it takes years before she

can finally speak out. It is not that she decides not to say, but she cannot find enough courage to do so. Being unable to articulate her resistance to patriarchy, Maxine does it by means of actions: “I would thrash on the floor and scream” (46) to protest against patriarchal bias against women; “I refused to cook. When I had to wash dishes, I would crack one or two” to indicate that she does not want to be a submissive housewife (47); “I found my walking stick and limped across the floor” (194) to express her resistance to the arranged marriage. Maxine uses action when articulation becomes impossible. However, Maxine’s actions are misunderstood even by her parents as the behavior of a “Bad girl!”: “‘What’s the matter with her?’ ‘I don’t know. Bad, I guess. You know how girls are’” (46).

If the story of “No Name Woman” makes Maxine aware of the situation for a Chinese woman, of patriarchal domination, and of women’s experiences as victims, that marks the beginning of her awakening as a woman, “White Tiger” starts her journey for her quest as a Chinese American woman. Maxine first seeks inspiration from the legend of Mulan, the story her mother has told her, and then transforms this legend into a fantasy, imagining herself to be a swordswoman to encourage herself in her real life. Mulan/Swordswoman is strong and powerful as her woman model that is so different from No Name Woman. This woman model avenges her community through fighting against her enemies. Her life becomes significant and meaningful due to the heroic deeds she has done. Identifying herself with Mulan/Swordswoman, Maxine, a Chinese American woman, resists patriarchy in the Chinese community in the United States in which girls are taken merely as “maggots” or “slaves.” Maxine has to struggle for years

before she can finally find her own voice. To some extent, such female figures as Mulan/Swordswoman and Brave Orchid inspire Maxine as a woman to obtain strength and power, which is important in her life, and to perform heroic deeds on behalf of her community. These female models in a way can be considered a challenge to masculine bias that excludes, marginalizes, and trivializes women. These models also demonstrate that women can be as powerful and capable as men.

Maxine struggles to find her identity as a Chinese American woman. Enraged by patriarchal ideologies in the Chinese community that place women in rather low status, Maxine refuses to play the role that patriarchy sets for her as a woman. Maxine obtains strength and power from the Mulan story and from her fantasies as a swordswoman. As a child, the first way she can find to resist her fate as a girl is to become a boy. She notices that Mulan/Swordswoman is a woman disguised as a man. She deliberately behaves badly because she once believes “a bad girl [is] almost a boy” (48). She wants to become a “lumberjack in Oregon” like a man when she grows up (47). And “I would like to bring myself back [from Berkeley] as a boy” (47). Maxine, however, becomes dissatisfied not only with herself but also with these women’s models. She blames herself for doing “nothing useful” except that “I only made up gun and knife fantasies” when “urban renewal tore down my parents’ laundry and paved over our slum for a parking lot” (48); except that she protests in a “small-person’s voice that makes no impact” when her boss at an art supply house calls Asian Americans “nigger yellow” (48); and except that she murmurs some sort of protest which is

"unreliable" to her racist boss (49). Though she believes "The swordswoman and I are not so dissimilar" (53), Maxine notices, "My American life has been such a disappointment" (45). Hoping to transform herself into a man, Maxine finds she is unable to fight bravely and powerfully as her woman model Mulan/Swordswoman does. She is too weak to fight against the patriarchal domination in the Chinese community, too powerless to avenge her family on racial discrimination, and too voiceless to protest against "the stupid racists" (49).

Why cannot Maxine obtain strength and power as she wishes to fight with sexism as well as racism? How do we explain the function of the female model Mulan/Swordswoman? Above all, how do we understand women's demand for "equality with men"? Some feminists such as De Beauvoir, Millett, and Wolf declare that women have been unfairly excluded from political, economic, and social positions, activities, and knowledge that have been occupied or controlled by men.[1] And the term "female" imprisons women in their sex (De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 3). Women, according to these feminists, should struggle to obtain equal rights with men since they are more similar to than different from men. And thus women should be equal with rather than inferior to men since they are "capable of doing what men do [and] of being 'men' and are expected to enter the world of men" (Beasley, *What Is Feminism?* 15).

This is what Mulan/Swordswoman does. In order to demonstrate her capability of being able to do what men can do, in order to demand equality with men, in order to change women's social status from women as "complimentary" or "secondary" men into women with "equal" rights or "equal" opportunities that are

otherwise associated only with men, and in order to challenge the patriarchal world, Mulan/Swordswoman walks out of her home and fights as a woman warrior. It is significant for Maxine to be aware of the unfairness that men have done to women. And Maxine is justified in demanding rights as a woman by identifying herself with Mulan/Swordswoman. Living in a society of patriarchy, Mulan/Swordswoman has to disguise herself as a man and to use violence to accomplish her "heroic deeds" as men do. "Disguising as a man" can be understood as a feminist strategy—the first step for women to get into men's world so as to acquire equality with men. However, this strategy is not a satisfactory one because "[to] achieve an equality between the sexes, women's specific needs and interests—what distinguishes them from men—must be minimized" (Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion* 52). In other words, this strategy overlooks or belittles the importance of women's difference from men.

Probably aware of this problem, Kingston/Maxine revises or transforms her model from the Mu Lan ballad in traditional Chinese culture into Swordswoman in an American context by celebrating female sexuality and woman's body. Swordswoman can feel her strength and power that come out of her body which is carved by her parents with the words: "I saw my back covered entirely with words in red and black files, like an army, like my army" (35). Women's capacity of reproduction—pregnancy and childbirth—is also celebrated in the book as female's specific identity. When Swordswoman becomes pregnant, she "looked like a powerful, big man" (39); when she is naked, she is "a strange human being indeed—words carved on my back and the baby large in front" (39-40). By

stressing woman's pregnancy and childbirth, Kingston demonstrates that both pregnancy and childbirth—the specific identity for woman—can make a woman strong and powerful. This demonstration of pregnancy and childbirth as the strength of women is shared by those feminists, such as Irigaray and Cixous, who critique and reject patriarchal ideologies by celebrating woman's sexual difference.[2]

These feminists "adhere to the notion of women as distinct, different from men" and challenge "mainstream Western social and political thought" for "its inclination to universalize experiences associated with men, that is, to represent men's experiences as describing that which is common to all human beings" (Beasley, *What is Feminist?* 16, 8). These feminists, as Beasley concludes, keep "a positive value to womanhood rather than supporting a notion of assimilating women into arenas of activity associated with men" (*What is Feminist?* 54). They stress the importance of the feminine body "as a source for creativity and spirituality, and the meaning of an embodied self (feminine subjectivity and identity)" (Beasley, *What is Feminist?* 58). Women thus are encouraged to gain control over their own bodies. These feminists focus on sexual difference and celebrate female sexuality and/or body. The significance of this feminist agenda is that they question women's oppression as women and reject male dominance and patriarchal ideologies by celebrating women's body that is distinguished from men's. Celebration of female sexuality can help women remove their lack of self-confidence as women in a patriarchal society. By celebrating the female body, they create a new subject position for women: women are the subjects of

their own bodies instead of the objects of men's minds; women are to redefine themselves from their own perspectives. For this reason, Maxine not only romanticizes the story of No Name Woman, stressing the significance of her aunt's sexual experience, but also transforms Mulan from the original Chinese legend in which female sexuality and body are not at all involved into Swordswoman celebrating female sexuality: to get strength from woman's pregnancy and childbirth. However, Maxine becomes dissatisfied with Mulan/Swordswoman as her model because Maxine later realizes that violence is not what she wants: "The reporting is the vengeance—not the beheading, not the gutting, but the words" (53). What Maxine wants is to become an artist rather than a woman warrior.

If Mulan/Swordswoman is not sufficient to fully inspire Maxine to obtain her autonomy, the same is true of Brave Orchid as a Mother Model. Maxine is confused and puzzled by her two different Mother Models. In "Shaman," Brave Orchid is at first a medical school student and then a country doctor. She is an intellectual and a New Woman in old China, where she has her profession and autonomy in spite of severe patriarchal domination. In Maxine's eye, Brave Orchid is greatly changed when she comes to the United States. Brave Orchid is not only deprived of the chance to practice medicine in this country, she also becomes a superstitious, dominant, and patriarchal housewife. There are several factors that have changed Brave Orchid. First, her desire to a professional woman in America is suppressed by the dominant racial society. As a result, she has lost her identity as a professional woman. The hope for her

future in this new country wanes in her heart. Without a profession, she has lost her autonomy and become a dependent woman instead.

Maxine can not find her voice or speak out what she wants and how she feels as a woman until the last chapter, “A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe,” in which she announces one day her own “Declaration of Independence” to her parents:

> I can win scholarships. I’m smart. I can do all kinds of things. I know how to get A’s, and they [school teachers] say I could be a scientist or a mathematician if I want. I can make a living and take care of myself . . . . I am not going to be a slave or a wife . . . . I’m going to college . . . . Ha! You can’t stop me from talking. You tried to cut off my tongue, but it didn’t work. (201-02)

For the first time in her life, Maxine speaks so many words in one breath. She finds no obstacles that can prevent her from articulating the lists that have been stored and hidden in the back of her mind. I believe Kingston combines the two stories of Maxine’s struggles in her early life, trying to find her voice and that of Ts’ai Yen, a woman poet and an intellectual in A. D. 175 in the final chapter. Kingston first focuses on Maxine’s transformation from being silent into being articulate. Maxine has “a terrible time talking” at first (165). She hates herself for her silence and her “broken voice” (165).

Maxine’s transition takes a long time. The reason for this is that she is at first confused as a young girl. On the one hand, she is not encouraged to talk at home by her mother at all. Rather, she believes her mother has cut her tongue

loose to prevent her from talking. She is not allowed to talk not only because she is a Chinese girl, and to her family that means she is supposed to be silent, but also because she is an immigrant family's daughter and her family is scared of deportation that may result from her revelation of a "family secret" through talking. Furthermore, she also notices that "girls had to whisper to make ourselves American-feminine . . . . Apparently we whispered even more softly than the Americans" (172). The problem Maxine has here is that she believes if she wants to be assimilated in this country, she has to act more like an American than Americans themselves. On the other hand, Maxine is taught at an American school to speak up as an individual. The education she has received makes her believe that she should articulate for her own benefit.

It is beyond the little Maxine to handle this complicated situation—the combination of gender and racial issues—for Asian American women. As a result, Maxine is at loss about how to break her silence and is scared by the thought that she is not certain who she is. Is she like her aunt? A woman without a name, a voice, and an identity? She has been tortured by her uncertainty about how she can find her voice. And then she finds out a childish but abusive way: to torture another schoolgirl whom she takes as herself in the mirror. This torture episode reveals that Maxine is tortured by the contradiction between what she experiences as a Chinese American girl who is expected to keep silent and submissive and what she is taught at school, and that one is supposed to speak up as an individual. She is at first not sure what to do. Half of herself accepts the patriarchal and dominant racial codes for Asian American women. She does this for survival. The other

half resists these codes because she desires to obtain autonomy. However, she is at first not strong and courageous enough to challenge these codes. What she finds she can do is to make herself talk by forcing another girl to talk and to unload her own burden, depression, or anger, upon another one who is similar to her. On the one hand, it is understandable for Maxine to see herself in this little silent girl. By forcing that little girl to talk, Maxine intends to get rid of her own self-denial and to transform herself into a girl with identity and autonomy. When she talks to the little girl, Maxine imagines she is talking to herself: "If you don't talk, you can't have a personality" (180). Maxine takes her articulation seriously: "I thought talking and not talking made the difference between sanity and insanity . . . . I did not want to be our crazy one" (186, 190). On the other hand, it is cruel and abusive for Maxine to bully another girl who is even smaller and weaker. She ignores the feelings of the little girl who is faced with the same problem she has.

In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston has a concern about the problem of some women's oppression over other women who are usually even less powerful. As an Asian American girl, Maxine internalizes the social hierarchy, which divides people into different groups based upon gender, race, class, etc. Similar to Brave Orchid, Maxine is not a perfect woman character, either. However, Maxine is learning lessons from her experiences as well as from her no name aunt and from Moon Orchid. Maxine becomes mature as a woman when she finally identifies herself with Ts'ai Yen. Like Ts'ai Yen who "brought her songs back from the savage lands," Maxine tells many stories about Chinese women. While one of Ts'ai Yen's songs is "Eighteen Stanzas for a Barbarian Reed Pipe" (209), Maxine's as well as

Kingston's stories turn into the book, *The Woman Warrior*. Both of them are Chinese immigrant women writers who act as peacemakers and resist war and violence and who are also translators and negotiators of two cultures.

Maxine follows some women as her models to inspire her in her life: first Mulan/Swordswoman, then her mother, and finally Ts'ai Yen. Maxine finds that she is not Mulan/Swordswoman not only because she is unable to disguise herself as a man in her life to fight against sexism and racism but also because she does not want to use violence as Mulan/Swordswoman does. Maxine does not want to be her mother either because her mother, to her, is not only superstitious but also patriarchal and dominant after she comes to America. Maxine is willing to identify herself with Ts'ai Yen because she finds in Ts'ai Yen what she needs: the pen rather than violence. Like Ts'ai Yen, Maxine has found her autonomy and her voice as a Chinese American individual and is determined to use words as her weapon to target sexism as well as racism. For example, to rebel against her family's denial of her aunt's existence, Maxine gives her aunt, the victim of patriarchy, a name, "No Name Woman," to transform her from the absence/erasure by patriarchy into the presence by means of retelling her story with imagination.

Resistance to Gender/Racial Stereotyping

Asian American women are not only sexualized like Western women, but also racialized. Their identities are more limited in comparison with Western women. Asian women were once thought by Western males and females to be merely

prostitutes, sex slaves who are eager to please men (especially white men) by sacrificing themselves (Kim, “Asian Americans and American Popular Culture” 100, 108). The stereotypes of Asian women can be found in American media.[3] Though the images of Asian women are quite limited, they are in most cases negative. For example, the images of Asian prostitutes can be found in such movies as *The Sand Peddles* (1966)[4] and *The Deer Hunter* (1978).[5] The stereotypes of Asian women as sex slaves can be found in such movies as *Sayonara* (1957)[6] and *The World of Suzie Wong* (1960)[7]. We can also find an exotic, sexual, villainous dragon lady in *The Thief of Baghdad* (1924) and in *Daughter of the Dragon* (1931). Furthermore, the choice of actresses became racialized, too. For example, the role of Chinese heroine in *The Good Earth* (1937) was not played by an Asian actress but by Louise Rainer, an Austrian. Similarly, in *The Thief of Baghdad*, the role of the evil Mongolian slave girl was acted by Ann May Wong, a Chinese American actress, while the role of Baghdad princess was played by a white actress. These examples reveal the Orientalist discourse of Western superiority versus Eastern inferiority; Western morality versus Eastern immorality, Western rationality versus Eastern irrationality, etc. These stereotypes worsen Asian women’s lives and their social status in America. They are oppressed by both sexism and racism. The stereotyping, on the other hand, “justifies” immigration exclusion laws on Asian women that have resulted in serious social problems such as Chinatown bachelor communities. I will deal with this issue in Chapter Four.

Asian American women are defined not only by the patriarchal structure of their own ethnic social community but also by the dominant culture. To this extent, Asian American feminists differentiate themselves from Western feminists by intertwining feminist issues with those of race and ethnicity. For example, Lisa Lowe concludes from a Marxist feminist point of view that Asian immigrant women "are formed through the intersecting processes of racial formation, labor exploration, and gender subordination" ("Work, Immigration, Gender" 272), and the "gendered international division of labor makes use of third world and racialized immigrant women as a more 'flexible,' 'casual,' 'docile' workforce" (*Immigrant Acts* 160). Erika Lee declares in "Exclusion Acts," "The U. S. exclusion laws reinforced the gender inequalities in both American and Chinese societies and explicitly positioned most Chinese female immigrants as dependents of their male husbands and fathers" (78). This dependent status, according to Lee, "affected women's immigration opportunities and even their rights to remain in the United States after they were admitted" (78). Thus, Asian American women are doubly oppressed by both sexism and racism.

A good example is Brave Orchid who—once an independent and professional woman as a village doctor in old China—has lost her autonomy as a woman and become dependent on her husband in America. She is at most a helper in her husband's laundry. Similarly, King-Kok Cheung claims that "the problems of race and gender are closely intertwined" ("Woman Warrior versus Chinaman Pacific" 113), because the silencing of women "is induced not only by gender but also by culture and race" (*Articulate Silences* 5). For example, Maxine is silenced as a

woman not only by patriarchy at home as well as in the Chinese community, unable to articulate her desire and anger, but also by racism in the United States when she is fired by her racist boss. Moon Orchid is silenced by her Americanized husband and erased from his American life. To this extent, Asian American identities have been concerned not only with gender but also with race.

Gender/racial stereotyping is a means for domination because it "is one of dominant ideology in which relations of power and representation are formed to give some more than others the authority and privilege to create and define particular patterns of racial identity" (Ong 59). Gender/racial stereotyping is powerful also because it can "influence social relationships in ways that create the illusion of reality" and "cause people to confirm stereotyped expectations" (Snyder 512-13). Gender/racial stereotyping is based upon the assumption that all people of a certain race or gender are identical, and thus any particular and individual act is explained as the habitual behavior of the whole gender or race.

Due to the gender/racial stereotyping of Asian (American) women, Maxine is not only considered as "Other" in Chinese and American patriarchal cultures but also as a member of an ethnic minority in the United States. Her parents take her as a "bad girl" since she is not sweet and subservient as she is supposed to be as a Chinese girl; her boss fires her because she is not silent and submissive as she is supposed to be as a minority as well as a woman in the United States. Maxine thus is not only sexually silenced by Chinese and American patriarchy but also racially silenced by American cultural domination. Unable to speak English, Maxine is accorded a "zero IQ"—the act of cultural bias against her. Too weak to

fight the power of the American dominant culture as a girl, she shifts the blame to her family and ethnic origin for her "failure." In "Confirming the Place of 'The Other,'" Khani Begum argues that the conflict that Maxine faces is "between her Chinese sense of female identity, which requires women to be shy and voiceless, and her American identity which insists that without a voice you have no personality" (147). However, I argue that Maxine, as a member of a minority and as a woman in America, is discouraged from speaking even though American identity requires a voice. This is because American patriarchal society practices a "double-standard" about articulation. In theory, everybody is equal and thus has an opportunity to articulate; in reality, women, white or non-white, are usually deprived of such a right. The chance for women of color is, of course, even less because they are minorities, foreigners, or the racial other. And thus they are "doubly marginalized as inferiors and outsiders in American culture" (Simmons, *Maxine Hong Kingston* 92). This doubly marginalizing of Asian American women partly results from the dominant culture's gender/racial stereotyping of these women.

To resist gender/racial stereotyping, Kingston reconstructs Asian American women's identities by creating or retelling the stories of complicated, varied, and even contradictory female figures such as Mulan/Swordswoman in fantasy, Brave Orchid in real life, and Ts'ai Yen in Chinese history. Kingston tries hard to avoid the temptation of setting up simplified and standardized models for Asian American women in this book. By doing so, Kingston problematizes and demystifies the stereotyping of Asian American women: on the one hand, Asian

American women can be as powerful as Mulan/Swordswoman, as intellectual as Brave Orchid and Ts'ai Yen; on the other hand, they can be as ordinary as Maxine. Kingston begins her book with the story of No Name Woman but ends her book by telling the story of Ts'ai Yen. Though a rape victim like No Name Woman, Ts'ai Yen, as a woman poet and a scholar, is reclaimed and welcomed by her people in China, which problematizes the Orientalist assumption that a girl in China is supposed to have rather a low status. If Mulan/Swordswoman is a female model who acts heroism like a man, Ts'ai Yen does it as a woman. By (re)telling the stories of No Name Woman, Mulan/Swordswoman, Brave Orchid, Moon Orchid, and Ts'ai Yen, Kingston portrays Chinese (American) women as individuals and in diversity rather than stereotypes. Furthermore, through the portrayal of Mulan/Swordswoman, Brave Orchid, and Ts'ai Yen, Kingston demonstrates that women even in old China were not always in low status, as Kingston concludes in an interview with Jean W. Ross in 1983: "So I think that women's liberation was already a tradition in China, too, you see. It's not as if they didn't have that idea on their own." Thus in *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston not only critiques patriarchy in both Chinese and American cultures, but also deconstructs the stereotyping of Chinese American women in American Orientalism.

The issue of gender/racial stereotyping of Asian (American) women can also be found in Sui Sin Far's *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*. Some of Far's stories in this book focus on the double bindery of Chinese women in America by both patriarchy and racial assimilation. For example, Chinese men in "The Wisdom of the New" remain dominant at home though subordinate in society. Women, on the other

hand, have a much lower status. Paul Lin, Sankwei's wife, even after she comes to the United States, "kept up the Chinese custom of taking her meals after her husband or at a separate table, and observed faithfully the rule laid down for her by her late mother-in-law: to keep a quite tongue in the presence of her man" (46). Patriarchy in Chinese culture was a serious problem by the time Far wrote her stories around the turn of the twentieth century. Though he treats his wife nicely, Sankwei never takes her as his equal. He has no intention to consult with his wife about their son's receiving an American education because he believes that "[a] woman does not understand such things" (47). In other words, he turns deaf to his wife's voice because he thinks his wife, as a woman, is not at all intelligent and thus can never be his equal. Furthermore, only one voice is allowed to be heard in the house—his voice as the master of the house, not his wife's. Obviously, he places his own views over his wife's. His insistence on his son's receiving an American education frightens his wife who poisons their son to prevent her husband from doing so. Similar to "The Wisdom of the New," "The Americanizing of Pau Tsu" is another example of victimizing Chinese wives by their husbands. Like Sankwei, Wan Lin Fo believes, "What is best for men is also best for women in this country [America]" (86), and the "wife should follow the husband in all things" (88). Pau Tsu, Lin Fo's submissive wife, like Paul Lin, seldom "protested against the wishes of Lin Fo" and "tried to obey" her husband's will (86, 90). The cruelty of the husband lies in his attempts to Americanize his wife without considering her own desires and feelings. To the husband, the wife's desires and feelings are not important because women are at best merely complementary to

men and at worst are lacking, absent, or invisible. As for a woman, “she must think and behave to attain or satisfy the demands which gender places upon [her]”, and she thus is encouraged to repress or hide her own desires (Millett 31). And thus the formation of female gender, “based on the needs and values of the dominant group,” has become stereotyped: “passivity, ignorance, docility, ‘virtue,’ and ineffectuality” (Millett 26). And women are expected to act these social roles created by patriarchy.

Both stories demonstrate that women are vulnerable to the domination of patriarchy, and they may fall victims to gender stereotypes in which women are brainwashed to be submissive to men and take it for granted as their fate. These stories also demonstrate that women, instead of being the victims of patriarchy, should rise up to fight for their equality with men, to articulate their rights they deserve as women, to liberate themselves from male domination, and to establish a society in which women can enjoy their autonomy: the same opportunities for public achievements, professional success, and political rights that men have. Only then can women totally avoid the tragedies that Far tells of in her stories.

Far’s stories involve not only gender issues but racial issues as well. Asian American men, who have been deprived of the rights of patriarchal legitimacy by an American patriarchy, have attempted to reassert male authority over Asian American women (Kim, “Such Opposite Creatures” 75). These Asian American men are often “blind to the biases [against Asian American women] resulting from their own acceptance of the patriarchal construct of masculinity” (Cheung, “The Woman Warrior versus the Chinaman Pacific” 116). Thus, Asian American

women are sexually silenced as women by the patriarchy not only in American culture, but also in their own culture. In other words, the oppression and exploitation the Asian men receive in American society make them more patriarchal to their wives at home, because they need to find some people, usually women or children, who are weaker to unload their own depression and anger. I believe that even though they are oppressed and exploited by the American dominant racial society, these Asian American men have no right to do the same to women. On the contrary, they, having experienced oppression and exploitation themselves, should understand how women feel about the oppression they have forced upon them. Instead of oppressing women, they should unite with women to fight against racial domination/discrimination.

The wives in both stories have accepted Chinese patriarchal domination practiced by their husbands as matter of fact. They get used to it since they were brought up in old China that way—to be submissive to their husbands. But they refuse to accept American culture that is supposed to be much better than Chinese culture according to Orientalism. The pressure of Americanization from their Chinese husbands turns out to be the last straw to them. They finally break down: one wife poisons her own son to prevent him from being Americanized, and the other refuses her husband's further temptation of Americanizing her by simply leaving him. How could such a thing happen? Having been in America for many years, husbands in both stories are assimilating gradually and sometimes unconsciously. However, their temptations to force their newly-arrived wives to accept a new culture within a short period of time turn out to be quite problematic

as the tragic endings of these two stories indicate. Apart from the cultural gap, the husbands' urgent temptations of assimilation will easily lead to their wives' self-denial or self-contempt, especially when a third party, for example, a white woman, is involved. Pau Tsu feels this way in comparison with Adah Raymond, a white woman. Her husband so willingly wants his wife to "follow in her [the white woman's] footsteps" (90). The husband makes her believe that the white woman is "so much your Pau Tsu's superior" (90).

If these two stories portray Chinese women as victims of patriarchy in Chinese culture as well as American policies of assimilation, "The Story of One White Woman Who Married a Chinese" and "Her Chinese Husband," in contrast, explore the issue of women as victims of patriarchy in American culture. To counterbalance the Chinese patriarchal husbands that she creates in the previous two stories, Far tells a story of a Chinese man who saves the life of a white woman, takes good care of her, and finally marries her after she divorces her white husband. The story reveals a contrast between a good Chinese husband and a bad white husband. It is ironic that we can still see patriarchy in this Chinese husband who has a big say at home and see democracy in the white husband who supports woman's suffrage. Despite this, the Chinese husband takes good care of her and treats her nicely while the white husband verbally abuses her and treats her with contempt. These two stories deconstruct the racial binary oppositions between West and East, as Ellen Dupree concludes in "Sui Sin Far's Argument for Biculturalism in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*" that these stories refute "the American assumption that white American males treat their wives better than do Chinese

husbands"; instead, both Chinese and American women remain vulnerable to males' oppression and abuse, and "even those white liberal males who claim to support the ideas of the Women's Movement are capable of abusing their wives" (88). This story reverses the Orientalist butterfly story that tells of a romance between a white male and a non-white female. Usually either the white male rescues the non-white female or the non-white female sacrifices her life for her love. In this way, Far deconstructs American Orientalist discourse that stereotypes Asian American women.

Notes

1. I have briefly explained their arguments on Page 1 in this chapter.
2. See their arguments on Page 2 in this chapter.
3. The list of movies I use in this chapter for my analysis is obtained from Chapter Six of Timothy P. Fong, *The Contemporary Asian American Experience: Beyond the Model Minority*.
4. In *The Sand Peddles*, an American Navy serviceman stationed in China attempts to rescue a Chinese prostitute out of China. The origin of the Asian stereotype of Asian women (especially Chinese women) as prostitutes comes from Christian missionaries since the nineteenth century who took as one of their tasks “rescuing” Asian/Chinese women from prostitution.
5. In *The Deer Hunter*, an American army man stationed in Vietnam refuses the temptation from a Vietnamese prostitute.
6. *Sayonara* tells a story of a Japanese woman who falls in love with an American serviceman stationed in Japan after World War II. This Asian woman is so devoted to her love that she commits suicide when she gets to know that she is not permitted to marry and comes to America with this man. Her suicide proves her loyalty to her American lover.
7. *The World of Suzie Wong* is about a Hong Kong prostitute who falls in love with an American artist, and is willing to sacrifice herself for the man she loves without expecting anything in return.

CHAPTER THREE

"CAN THEY STOP FIGHTING?" MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONS IN TAN'S *THE JOY LUCK CLUB*

If the issues of sexual politics I dealt with in Chapter Two focus on Asian American women's resistance to patriarchal oppression and racial domination—the struggles against (white) male's sexism or racism, those in Chapter Three are concerned with the conflicts, tensions, bond, interrelatedness, reconciliation, and balance within women, especially between mothers and daughters, complicated by the issues of gender, race, ethnicity, and class. To this extent, Chapter Three is the continuation of the scholarship of feminist issues I dealt with in Chapter Two. Mother-daughter relations thus compose a matrilineal discourse, which underscores a feminist agenda. The scholarship of mother-daughter relations is a great contribution to feminist theory because it is a testimony to the strength of feminism, as Sau-ling Cynthia Wong argues: "Identifying a matrilineal Asian American tradition is important in terms of not only racial politics within feminism, but also gender politics within cultural nationalism" ("Sugar Sisterhood" 88). As a feminist strategy, the study of mother-daughter relations also explores the experiences of diasporic women concerning feminist issues such as motherhood, the mother-daughter bond, or "sugar sisterhood" in Wong's term. Both mothers and daughters share their desires to obtain autonomy and a quest for identities as women of color. This study offers opportunities to analyze the ways in which Asian American mothers and

daughters construct and reconstruct their understandings of the dual self in relation to multiple inequalities within hegemonic social, cultural, historical, racial, and political understanding of the U. S. nation-state.

In this chapter, I deal with mother-daughter relations concerning cultural, racial, and class conflicts; the problems the two generations have due to the different languages they speak; the efforts that both mothers and daughters have made to understand each other through storytelling; and the final reconciliation between mothers and daughters after they find the similarities they share. They are both Chinese American women as allies to fight against sexism in both Chinese and American cultures and racism in dominant American society. The conflicts between mothers and daughters are multi-dimensional, including generation gaps, cultural conflicts, racial conflicts, class conflicts, and even gender conflicts though mothers and daughters are of the same gender.

The portrayal of mothers and daughters in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* deconstructs American Oriental discourse that defines and stereotypes Asian women as an identical group. The Chinese American women characters created by Tan are diverse, multi-dimensional, and varied. For example, Lindo Jong and Suyuan Woo are more strong-willed and somewhat dominant while An-mei Hsu and Ying-ying St. Clair are relatively mild; Lindo's daughter Waverly Jong and Suyuan's daughter Jing-mei Woo are more strong-headed and more resistant, while An-mei's daughter Rose Hsu Jordan and Ying-ying's daughter Lena St. Clair are more obedient and soft. In this respect they are individuals rather than racial and gender stereotypes. Furthermore, it is problematic for the Americanized

daughters to orientalize their mothers as the Other and to distance themselves from their mothers by showing their own superior social status as middle-class women. The mother-daughter relations are closely connected with feminist sexual politics when they deal with the problems of women as allies with patriarchy. I use "gender" because some of their conflicts arise out of patriarchal codes imbedded in the mothers. In other words, some aspects of their relations can be perceived as conflicts between the mothers' control/domination and the daughters' oppression/resistance. However, I have no intention to polarize the mother-daughter fights as merely cultural conflicts. Rather, while analyzing the distance between mothers and daughters due to cultural differences, I also pay attention to the duality/biculturalism in both mothers and daughters. In other words, we can find both Chineseness and Americanness in both mothers and daughters. In fact, these mothers and daughters have an impact upon each other and both have somewhat changed, made some concession, and thus moved closer to each other after they have made a necessary adjustment or have had a better understanding of each other. After they reconcile, they see the images of each in the other.

My arguments and analysis in this chapter are mainly based upon feminism, cultural studies, racial studies, and Chinese yin-yang philosophy. This whole trajectory of mother-daughter bond development is in accordance with the narratives of the novel: Tan's unique strategy of balancing sixteen monologues told by four mothers and four daughters. And through the analysis of the narration, we can see the hopes that Tan has cherished in her novel. Tan's

contribution to Asian American literature and Asian American women's studies lies in her representation in the novel of the mother-daughter relations through mother-daughter stories in the context of racial and gender paradigms "that have historically devaluated and alienated" women's experiences, especially as mothers and daughters (Ho, *In Her Mother's House* 24). Tan's novel also constructs a balance in the mother-daughter relations, which can be explored from the perspective of Chinese yin-yang philosophy.

Mother-Daughter Conflicts

At the beginning of *The Joy Luck Club*, Amy Tan presents a Chinese woman coming from old China to America with a swan: "This bird . . . was once a duck that stretched its neck in hopes of becoming a goose" (3). She tells the bird on the trip to America,

> In America I will have a daughter just like me. But over there nobody will say her worth is measured by the loudness of her husband's belch. Over there nobody will look down on her, because I will make her speak only perfect American English. And over there she will always be too full to swallow any sorrow!" (3)

However, as soon as "she arrived in the new country, the immigration officials pulled her swan away form her, leaving the woman fluttering her arms and with only one swan feather for a memory" (3). When she has a daughter who grows up in this new country and when her daughter can speak perfect American English, she finds she does not have a chance to tell her daughter this feather

“that may look worthless” in fact has carried all the mother’s hope for the daughter in this new country either because her English is too poor or because her daughter is too busy drinking Coca-Cola (3).

The conflicts between mothers and daughters in *The Joy Luck Club* are mainly the results of cultural, racial, and class differences as well as different life experiences and the language barrier. Their conflicts are concerned, first of all, with their differences due to their dissimilar cultural or historical backgrounds: the mothers, immigrating from old China, possess strong traces of Chinese cultural heritage, such as self-control, sacrifice for one’s family, or obedience to parents, while the daughters, growing up in America and educated at American schools, act more in American ways, for example, desire for self-fulfillment, quest for individualism, and enjoyment of material comfort. Second, their conflicts are also the results of the daughters’ orientalizing their mothers and taking their mothers as the Other to keep the safety of Americanness as their own racial identity. Being the racial Other themselves in the white dominant society, the daughters marginalize their own mothers. Third, their conflicts are created by class distinctions between mothers and daughters: the daughters distance themselves from their mothers, showing their arrogance due to their better life offered by the middle-class they are in.

Among the conflicts between mothers and daughters, the most obvious one is that of the mothers’ dominance over their daughters due to the impact of patriarchal ideology upon the mothers and the daughters’ severe resistance to it. The Chinese mothers attempt to instill in their daughters “the virtues and habits

that are considered ideally feminine in traditional Chinese culture," in which women "are valued according to their obedience, passivity, and maintenance of the traditional ways" (Ho, "Mother/Daughter Writing" 227). It is problematic and tragic that the mothers, once the victims of patriarchal culture themselves, become the allies with this patriarchy. This is especially true in the mother-daughter bond between the Joy Luck mothers and their mothers in old China, which is simpler than the mother-daughter bond in America: daughters obey their mothers, which is called "s*hou*" (respect and obedience).

Except for Suyuan's mother, who is totally absent in the novel, all the other mothers in old China teach patriarchal ideology to their daughters. Ying-ying's mother teaches her the patriarchal code: "A boy can run and chase dragonflies, because that is his nature . . . . But a girl should stand still" (70). Her Amah (wet nurse) also tells her that, as a girl, "it is wrong to think of your own need" and "[a] girl can never ask, only listen" (68). From her mother and Amah, Ying-ying has learned how to play her gender role as a girl and a woman. She is forced to obey the patriarchal code, learning to swallow her bitterness and tears since she is, unfortunately, born a girl. As a daughter of a wealthy family, she is spoiled; but as a female, she is restricted and controlled by the patriarchal society. Her marriage is arranged by her parents and she obediently accepts it without any question. Once married, she learns to love and obey her husband. Though abandoned by her husband, she still waits for his return.

Similarly, like No Name Woman in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976), An-mei's mother is not only a no name woman but a "ghost" as

well. Being raped, she is driven out of her home by Popo, An-mei's maternal grandmother. Popo forbids her to mention her mother's name because "my grandmother told me my mother was a ghost" (33). This is the typical example of hierarchy in family structure and women's alliance with patriarchy. The tragedy of No Name Woman in *The Woman Warrior* repeats in *The Joy Luck Club* again. Both raped women are considered impure and thus deserving of punishment. Kingston's No Name Woman is forced to commit suicide while Tan's no name woman is driven out of the house by her own mother. Despite all her mother has done to her, An-mei's mother cuts her own flesh and puts it into a soup of herbs and medicines, a "magic in the ancient tradition to try to cure her mother" (41), when Popo, her mother, is dying. "This is how a daughter honors her mother. It is *shou* so deep it is in your bones" (41). Unfortunately the ideology of this *shou* is really inhumane and cruel.

If Popo, among these mother figures, is the strongest protector and preserver of patriarchy as a woman, Huang Taitai, Lindo's mother-in-law, is surly the most dominant and cruelest woman. She treats her daughter-in-law "like a servant" (49). She becomes "someone I should follow and obey without question" (51). This patriarchal hierarchy within family structure is obviously problematic. These two mother figures raise questions about women's complicity with patriarchy though they may be victims themselves. Lindo's own mother seems to have the least impact upon her except that the mother makes the daughter promise "to be an obedient wife" and never to disgrace her family (57, 48). This might be

because the family leaves her to Huang Taitai, her future mother-in-law, when she is merely twelve years old.

These Chinese daughters' bitter experiences in old China definitely affect the ways they raise their own daughters in America. Consciously and subconsciously the mothers expect their daughters to be obedient as a way of showing respect and *shou*. It remains a problem that some women become the preservers of patriarchal ideology. For example, Suyuan's family rule is, "Only one kind of daughter can live in this house, obedient daughter" (153). An-mei has tried to make her daughter listen to her for "[m]ore than thirty years" (208). She argues, "You only have to listen to me" because "mother is best" (208, 210). And Lindo believes the Chinese character includes "How to obey parents and listen to your mother's mind. How not to show your own thoughts, to put your feelings behind your face" (289). The Joy Luck mothers are influenced by their mothers in old China on the one hand, they are also different from their mothers on the other. The Joy Luck mothers try to dominant their own daughters not merely for patriarchy's sake. Rather, they want to bring their daughters under control because they are afraid of losing their daughters in America, where they have already been alienated by the dominant racial society. To these mothers, life in both China and America is survival; to the Americanized daughters, however, life is to enjoy comfort though they may also have troubles of their own.

As a result, the daughters are usually embarrassed and bewildered by their mothers' dominance and hierarchical power. For example, Waverly is baffled by her mother's sneakiness at her playing chess—a demonstration of mother's

control over daughter even though the mother knows nothing about playing chess. Waverly is embarrassed by her mother's bragging over her chess championship on the street on the one hand and the mother misunderstands that her daughter is ashamed of her as her mother on the other. Jing-mei is depressed and frustrated when her mother drags her by force toward the piano, to buy which it takes a long while for the family to save money, and thus the angry mother misunderstands her daughter as ungrateful. The mother believes that she has sacrificed so much for her daughter that her daughter should be obedient and grateful instead of showing resistance and challenge to the mother's power. The mothers' "weird Chinese ways" further distance them from their daughters. Annoyed and discouraged by these "weird Chinese ways," the daughters marginalize their mothers by resisting Chinese values and customs that become their mothers' cultural heritage in the new country and the linkage to their mothers' past they have lost in old China.

Racial identity and class distinction are also factors that lead to the conflicts between mothers and daughters. In "Cultural Conflict/Feminist Resolution in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*," Leslie Bow argues that Tan tries to avoid the issues of race in her work by focusing on cultural conflicts: "By containing a racial discourse within a feminist one, Tan's novel allows her characters to reach identity resolution without confronting their racial difference. Instead, the novel mystifies racial subject formation by portraying it as a matter of blood ties" (246). However, I argue that Chinese American women's racial identity is one of Tan's concerns in her novel. To Tan, the daughters' distancing themselves from their mothers and

taking them as the racial Other is a more serious problem that is worse than the misunderstanding or inability to understand each other between mothers and daughters. The American daughters laugh at their Chinese mothers who wear "funny Chinese dresses" that "were too fancy for real Chinese people" (16). These daughters distance themselves from their mothers partly because in their mothers they see something unfamiliar, strange, and weird. Furthermore, by devaluating what their mothers stand for as alien, they think they can keep the safety of Americanness as their own racial identity. Being the racial Other themselves in the white dominant society, the daughters marginalize their own mothers.

One typical example is the conflict between Lindo and her daughter Waverly at a beauty parlor. Lindo notices that her daughter is "ashamed of my looks. What will her husband's parents and his important lawyer friends think of this backward old Chinese woman?" (290) Waverly is especially annoyed by her hairdresser's remarks: "It's uncanny how much you two look alike!" (291). At his words, "She is frowning at herself in the mirror" (291), probably because the mirror reminds her of her Chinese side, her Chinese identity that she has tried to forget. She may despise her looks, her Chinese face that resembles so much her mother's; she may wish that she were one-hundred-percent white since she has been born in America and brought up drinking Coca-Cola. As a result, Waverly consciously or subconsciously keeps a distance from her mother, ignoring her existence: "Then my daughter criticizes me as if I were not there" (290); she has

"no ears for my words" (304). Waverly, like Maxine in *The Woman Warrior*, orientalizes her mother for the purpose of creating her own racial identity.

This beauty parlor scene demonstrates not only Waverly's racial sensitivity but also her pride as a middle-class professional woman—the class distinctions between mother and daughter. Waverly not only acts as an interpreter through the conversation with the hairdresser as if her mother could not understand any English, but also criticizes her mother's hair: "She's never had anything professionally done" (290). Waverly puts on an air of a white middle-class professional woman who can afford a beauty parlor and has the ability to speak perfect American English—a symbol of Americanness—in front of her mother to marginalize her even further. Waverly's showing-off reveals her enjoyment of assimilation and the privilege of middle-class material comfort. This time, Lindo, as a working-class woman and mother, is unable to show off as she did years ago when she bragged about her daughter's chess championship on the street. Instead, she says, "I am becoming ashamed . . . . Because she is my daughter and I am proud of her, and I am her mother and she is not proud of me" (291). Her mother is not the only victim of her daughter's racial prejudice and class arrogance. Thinking of herself as a middle-class professional woman, Waverly openly shows her contempt to her friend Jing-mei. Talking about their hairdressers, Waverly brags, "You should go see my guy . . . . He does fabulous work, although he probably charges more than you're used to" (229). Does Waverly's racial prejudice and class arrogance have something to do with her

own personality or with her experience in America as a minority woman or with both?

Another conflict between mothers and daughters is caused by their cultural differences. The mothers expect their daughters to have *shou*, which is defined by Tan as "respect for ancestors or family" (35). But as I understand it, *shou* as a code of traditional Chinese morality lies in parents' expectation for their children to show not only respect but also obedience to their ancestors or parents. *Shou* also requests that children take the responsibility for taking good care of their parents/ancestors when their parents/ancestors grow old or pass away. To some extent, this morality of *shou* stresses the importance of family in traditional Chinese culture. Family in traditional Chinese culture is the basic unit upon which society and culture are based. [1] On the one hand, parents are expected not only to shoulder the responsibility for protecting and taking care of their children, but to make sacrifices for this purpose. On the other hand, children are expected to do the same when they grow up. Family supplies safety and offers a sense of belonging. In return, the family members are expected to sacrifice for the benefit of the family. The positive part of this culture is love, care, and responsibility for family; the negative part is the existence of a hierarchy within this family structure: children's obedience to their parents.

A good example is the Joy Luck mothers, who leave their motherland and come to a new country for the benefit of their daughters; what they expect from their daughters in return is their respect and obedience. For example, Suyuan Wu takes pains to save money to buy a piano and clean the house of a retired

piano teacher so that her daughter can take piano lessons for free. In return, the mother believes she has the right or power to make her daughter practice piano against her own will. This is the way the Joy Luck mothers were brought up and taught by their mothers in old China—to sacrifice their autonomy, individuality, and independence for their family and to desire nothing for themselves as daughters or mothers. We can notice the trace of this patriarchal code in them. They are not aware that they, once the victims of this hierarchical family structure, should not victimize their daughters anymore. It is not surprising that their daughters, who have been brought up and educated in America, no longer hold on to this cultural code and fight against this patriarchal family hierarchy. Probably for this reason, Waverly complains that her mother refuses to visit her "unless I issue an official invitation" because "one day I suggested she should call ahead of time" instead of dropping by "unannounced" (185). The mother takes her daughter's American way of privacy as disrespect and even humiliation judged by Chinese values concerning *shou* and hospitality. And the Joy Luck mothers, in general, take their daughters' resistance as *bushou* (disrespect and ungratefulness).

Apart from this misunderstanding owing to cultural differences between mothers and daughters, inability to communicate between the two generations due to the language barrier is another problem that the mothers and the daughters have to deal with, as Jing-mei complains: "My mother and I never really understood each other . . . . I talked to her in English, she answered back in Chinese" (27, 23). The two generations simply "spoke two different

languages" (23). This language barrier makes translation and communication between the mothers and the daughters difficult if not impossible. What the mothers do not expect is the problem of communication and interpretation of the two different languages they and their daughters speak, after the mothers' wish comes true that they will have daughters in America who can speak perfect American English. As Rocio G. Davis concludes: "Ironically and tragically, the achievement of the mother's dreams for her daughter results in the alternation of mother and daughter" ("Wisdom (Un)Heeded" 91). This language barrier helps build a wall between the mothers and the daughters.

The difficulties and sometimes impossibilities of communication and interpretation between two different language speakers in turn widen generation gaps and to some extent weaken the mother-daughter bond. Jing-mei once admits: "What can I tell them about my mother? I don't know anything" (31). Unable to speak good English, the mothers find out that they are incapable of instructing their daughters in the way their mothers once taught them. And this really frightens the mothers, as Jing-mei realizes after her mother's death: "In me, they see their own daughters, just as ignorant, just as unmindful of all the truths and hopes they have brought to America. They see daughters who grow impatient when their mothers talk in Chinese, who think they are stupid when they explain things in fractured English" (31). The mothers believe that they are drifting farther away from their daughters: "They see that joy and luck do not mean the same to their daughters, that to these closed American-born minds 'joy luck' is not a word, it does not exist. They see daughters who will bear

grandchildren born without any connecting hope passed from generation to generation" (31). These Chinese mothers are not only alienated in American society but also at home. To survive in the new country, they create a small "society" at home: the *ma jong* party at which the Joy Luck mothers can tell stories in Chinese that remind them of their life in old China.

Another conflict is caused by the mothers' great expectations for their daughters and the daughters' frustration and resistance to their mothers' unthinkable expectations. For example, Jing-mei complains that her mother expects too much from her and she can never please her mother: "My mother believed you could be anything you wanted to be in America" (141). The poor mother has tried every means possible to make her daughter a prodigy: a Chinese Shirley Temple or Chinese Peter Pan, inspired by the "stories of amazing children she had read in *Ripley's Believe It or Not*, or *Good Housekeeping*, *Reader's Digest*" (143). The mother sets up goals for her daughter without paying any attention to her daughter's own interests. What is in the mother's mind is that her daughter should be perfect. She can not understand her daughter's embarrassment and annoyance. Instead, the mother complains: "Not the best. Because you not trying" (146). The daughter is tortured by her mother's criticism and her mother's "disappointed face, [and] . . . something inside of me began to die" (144). The daughter finally protests: "'There's a school of thought . . . that parents shouldn't criticize children. They should encourage instead. You know, people rise to other people's expectations. And when you criticize, it just means you're expecting failure'"

(20). Born, brought up, and educated in America, the daughter gets used to encouragement, compliment, and applause rather than criticism, finding faults, and discouragement. But her mother does not think so: "'That's the trouble . . . . You never rise. Lazy to get up. Lazy to rise to expectations'" (20).

The problem with the mothers is that, on the one hand, they believe they have sacrificed for their daughters in the United States, on the other hand, due to cultural differences and the language barrier, they do not see any chance to achieve their goals in this new country. And they shift their goals that they can never fulfill themselves onto their daughters—to become successful professional women in this new country. As these Chinese mothers understand it, the combination of Chinese mind/character and American environment or condition can make their daughters successful. In other words, what the mothers want from their daughters is their daughters' transition from a goose/duck into a swan, from a life of misery, war, disaster, famine, etc., in old China into a life of comfort, security, opportunities, etc., in America; what the mothers want is to see the "American Dream" come true for their daughters; as one Joy Luck mother Suyuan told her daughter: "You can be best anything" (141). As a matter of fact, the experiences that all the mothers had in old China—pain, humiliation, and tragedy—have made them determined to give their daughters a better life in America as the feather symbolizes: the hope of their daughters' transformation from a goose into a swan in this new country.

At the same time, the mothers may also be inspired by American culture in the new country. For example, Suyuan finds prodigy models from American

media or magazines. Lindo encourages her daughter to pursue material success in the United States. An-mei persuades her daughter to request what she deserves when she breaks up with her husband. What is in the mothers' heads is not merely Chinese heritage. We can see the impact of American culture upon the mothers. However, to these mothers' disappointment, their daughters are not good enough, and the daughters have failed them in many different ways. To these mothers, their daughters have failed in inheriting their Chinese mind/character and in living up to "models of strong, independent womanhood which appear to the mothers as their birthright as American citizens" (Bow "Cultural Conflict/Feminist Resolution" 243). In other words, Chinese mothers expect their daughters to achieve more not only because they believe America offers more opportunities but also because they take it for granted that their daughters should succeed in this country with so many opportunities for which they have sacrificed themselves. On the other hand, the daughters, born in America and knowing so little about China and Chinese culture, are frustrated and depressed by their mothers' expectations.

However, the mothers' expectations are not all out of this Chinese cultural tradition. For example, the mothers' expectations for daughters to obtain material success and comfort are more out of the American middle-class standard than from Chinese cultural tradition. In fact, this American middle-class code for success is contrary to the traditional Chinese culture. According to Confucianism, morality and good manners are the priority for judging people rather than material success.[2] The long history of Chinese

feudalism witnessed the impact of rulers' priority of agriculture over business upon common people. Endless policies were issued restricting business activities between the Qin Dynasty and the 1900s in China.[3] Thus, to many Chinese people, morality was more important than material success. As a whole, what the Joy Luck mothers expect from their daughters are not only their daughters' respect and obedience but also the daughters' success of material comfort that are a mixture of Chinese and American cultures. To this extent, the two cultures do not always conflict so far as the mothers are concerned. This is a good example to show the impact of both cultures upon the mothers—their biculturalism/duality. No wonder Lindo once asks, "How do you know what is Chinese, what is not Chinese?" (228)

Mother-Daughter Bond

On the one hand, the mothers and their daughters in *The Joy Luck Club* fight due to many different reasons; on the other hand, they are also closely related to each other for certain connections apart from blood ties. Thus, it is not true or will be misleading to restrict the mother-daughter relations within the realm of binary oppositions. In fact, we need to deconstruct this binarism of Chinese immigrant mothers and their American daughters. If we simply polarize the mother-daughter relationships as conflicts between Chinese mothers and American daughters, it will be problematic because this will be in accordance with Orientalism. While working on mother-daughter conflicts, which to some extent reveals the cultural clash between Chinese immigrant mothers and their

American-born daughters, Tan also portrays the mother-daughter bond that goes beyond the blood ties. In other words, this mother-daughter bond is based upon the mutual understanding and interdependence as women, and their sharing similar experiences as women makes them feel closer to each other. Furthermore, the alliance of mother and daughter may empower them to fight against patriarchy in both Chinese and American cultures/societies. To this extent, the mother-daughter bond becomes a woman-to-woman bond.

After we deconstruct the binary opposition of Chinese mother and American daughter as a cultural and racial paradigm, we may notice that the mother may not necessarily be a defender/believer of Chinese culture, and the daughter, a defender/believer of American culture. In Tan's novel, not all Chinese mothers try to teach their American daughters the Chinese ways they were taught by their mothers in old China. For example, An-mei says, "I was raised the Chinese way: I was taught to desire nothing, to swallow other people's misery, to eat my own bitterness" (241). Having such miserable experiences in old China, An-mei is determined to teach her daughter in the American way. She encourages her daughter to speak out for what she wants and to get what she desires. She believes that America has an environment that supplies possibilities that were not offered in old China. The result, however, disappoints the mother: "And even though I taught my daughter the opposite, still she came out the same way!" (241)

Why does the daughter come out the same way as her mother? Is this because, as the mother claims, "she was born to me and she was born a girl" (241)? Does the mother suggest that this is their "fate" as women in old China

and in America as well when she says, “I was born to my mother and I was born a girl, all of us like stairs, one step after another, going up and down, but all going the same way” (241)? Or does she intend to tell her daughter they need to fight this sexism of both Chinese and American cultures? Is the mother aware that she as well as her daughter is exposed not only to sexism but also to racism in this country? Does the mother realize that both mothers and daughters should be allies facing sexism and racism? From these perspectives, we may find connections in the mother-daughter bond that are based on something they share as Chinese American women. One similarity they share is their experience of facing and fighting against their “fate” as women. Fatalism can be traced in the Chinese cultural tradition. Zhuagzi (about 369-286 BC), an ancient Chinese philosopher, advocates that whatever happens, take it as it is. Those who can discard fame, title, deed, flesh, and desire can obtain complete freedom and happiness that Zhuangzi calls “*dao*,” a belief of daoism.[4] Zhuangzi’s philosophy or religious belief of discarding any desire and Zou Dunyi’s (1017-1073) morality of desirelessness, self-control, selflessness, nobility and elegancy were popular among some Chinese scholars.[5]

However, different from those traditional scholars, ordinary people in old China used to explain the instances, especially something bad or unfortunate, that were beyond their understanding and explanation as “fate” to reduce their pains. Their attitude toward this “fate” is contradictory but practical. On the one hand, they tried to resist or at least to avoid their “fate” or “bad luck,” in the Joy Luck

mothers' words, if they could; on the other hand, when they found out it was beyond their control, they would stop resisting and finally accepted it.[6]

The Chinese mothers deal with their "fate" in somewhat different ways. Suyuan never gives up her hope of finding her lost daughters in China. She has even lost her life, owing to her determination to find her daughters and to her fighting against her "fate," as Jing-mei's father says: "She had a new idea inside her head . . . . But before it could come out of her mouth, the thought grew too big and burst" (5). Different from Suyuan, An-mei's mother at first takes it as her "fate" to become Wu Tsing's concubine after she is raped by this evil man. Nobody believes her story including her own family and she is simply driven out of the house by her own mother. Furthermore, in old China the only thing the raped widow could do was to commit suicide. This no name woman takes it as her "fate" because her mother tells her the story of the turtle, teaching her to "swallow your own tears" (244). However, this no name woman finally kills herself as a resistance against patriarchy: "she would rather kill her own weak spirit so she could give me a stronger one" (271). "And on that day, I learned to shout" (272). The mother kills herself for her daughter to rise up; the mother transfers her resistance against patriarchy to her daughter in the only way she can think of; the mother challenges the men's world by sacrificing her own life for a hope that her daughter can live a better life. Similar to An-mei's mother, Lindo does not marry for love, but to keep her promise to her family. However, like An-mei's mother, she also refuses to take it as her "fate." While keeping a promise to her parents, she tells herself, "I promised not to forget myself" (63). She finally gets rid of an

unhappy marriage without breaking her promise to her parents. She avoids her "bad luck" with the help of her smart ideas. Among the Joy Luck mothers, Ying-ying is the only person who gives in to her "fate." Like Lindo's, her marriage is also decided by her parents; but unlike Lindo, she starts learning to love her husband after marriage though she knows he is a bad man who later abandons her. After her husband's death, she marries a white man without love. She takes everything passively, and even though she can foretell that something bad will happen to her, she never does anything to prevent it. She has lost her son in the first marriage and her identity in the second one. She has lost her articulation in both countries. She has finally become a mad woman in the attic.

It is ironic that the "weapon" both An-mei's mother and Lindo have used to fight patriarchy is superstition, which was also part of the Chinese cultural tradition, the bad part though. An-mei's mother chooses to die two days before the lunar year because she knows her husband, Wu Tsing, is superstitious and will be scared to death by the thought that people who die on this day will become haunting ghosts. "[A]nd because it is the new year, all debts must be paid, or disaster and misfortune will follow" (271). Out of this fear, Wu Tsing "promises to revere her as if she had been First Wife, his only wife" (271). The suicide thus becomes woman's "weapon" for revenge. She makes use of superstition to achieve her own purpose. Similarly, Lindo also uses superstition to get rid of the marriage she has promised to her parents without causing "disgrace". She tells her superstitious mother-in-law that the ancestor of the family instructs her to leave her "happy" marriage since the marriage is a bad luck to the family, and

that if the marriage did not break up, a disaster will fall upon the family. The mother-in-law, out of the fear that this disaster would happen, agrees to let her out of the marriage and gives her money to seal her mouth, enough for her to travel to America. Both stories suggest that Chinese women in old China did not have many ways to protect themselves. Rather, they would use every means possible to avoid their bad luck or to protect their family.

In this novel, Tan also portrays the intermarriages of one mother and three daughters. How are intermarriage, mixed race identity, and biculturalism represented in Tan's portrayal of mother-daughter relations? I argue that the exploration of mixed-race subjectivity can help us understand the multiplicity and complexity of Tan's mother-daughter relations. This analysis of interracial marriage may develop a framework for the multiple identities and the historical development of these identities in a sociological and psychological extent and may help explore the Chinese side of the American daughters—the side they may not be aware of or refuse to see and thus place the mother-daughter bond in the context of Chinese American women who as mothers/wives share their experiences of marriage. The Chinese side of the American daughters becomes obvious in comparison with their white husbands. One of the concerns of mixed race studies is the possibility of the crossing or merging of the imagined physical boundary between Asian and white cultures. One possibility, as some Chicago sociologists suggest, is intermarriage, where the physical separation between the two cultures is supposed to be erased through this intermarriage.[7] However, Tan seems to prove otherwise in *The Joy Luck Club*. This novel explores the

problems as a result of this intermarriage and the issues of identities for the mixed-race peoples.

A good example is Tan's portrayal of Ying-ying's intermarriage. The problem Ying-ying has, first of all, is the language barrier. Her white husband St. Clair insists that she speak English which is almost out of the question for her. What she can do is to remain silent or let her husband speak for her: "So with him, she spoke in moods and gestures, looks and silences . . . . Words cannot come out. So my father would put words in her mouth" (108). Amy Tan, through the portrayal of this interracial marriage, also critiques Western Orientalism. This interracial marriage has not only robbed Ying-ying of her right of articulation but of her racial identity when her husband crosses off her Chinese name and creates her new English name and changes her birth date. St. Clair once tells his daughter, "he saved her [Ying-ying] from a terrible life there, some tragedy she could not speak about" (107). It is ironic that what Ying-ying does not tell her daughter about her father is that "Saint had to wait patiently for four years like a dog in front of a butcher shop" (285), waiting for her permission to marry him. What Ying-ying does not tell her husband is that when he "bought me cheap gifts," he "acted as if . . . he were a rich man treating a poor country girl to things we had never seen in China" (248). However, he does not know that "such things were nothing to me, that I was raised with riches he could not even imagine" (284); he does not notice that his wife "looks displaced" on a photo by the way he dresses her (107), the photo taken after she is released from Angel Island Immigration Station. On this photo, Lena, Ying-ying's daughter, notices:

> She is clutching a large clam-shaped bag, as though someone might steal this from her as well if she is less watchful. She has on an ankle-length Chinese dress with modest vents at the side. And on top she is wearing a Westernized suit jacket, awkwardly stylish on my mother's small body, with its padded shoulders, wide lapels, and oversize cloth buttons. This was my mother's wedding dress, a gift from my father. (107)

She does not tell him that he not only makes her lose her name, but her identity as well; she does not tell him she becomes a "ghost" in this country partially due to this interracial marriage as the photo reveals. There is no doubt that Tan writes a parody of the Butter Fly Story.[8]

As the daughter of a "ghost" and a woman of mixed-blood, Lena's quest for selfhood—a Eurasian identity—is sometimes problematic. She is aware that she is different from either Chinese girls or Caucasian girls at her school: "I was half Chinese" with "big bones" "like my father" and the eyes "my mother gave me" (106). We can see in Lena the stereotype of the Eurasian as the subject of conflicting racial identity, which may result in self-hatred. Lena's interracial marriage is as problematic as her mother's, in a different way though. On the one hand, Lena and her white husband are absolutely equals as Lena at first believes: "Of course, Harold and I are equals, in many respects" (170). For this "equality," Lena has to pay half of the bills at home, including for the ice cream she never touches and the stuff to get rid of fleas on the cat that her husband gives her as birthday present. Lena tries to overlook the fact that "Harold's already spent over a hundred dollars more, so I'll owe him around fifty from my checking account"

(175). However, as partner of their own firm Livotny & Associates, Harold is the boss and “I [Lena] work under the interior designer, because, as Harold explains, it would not seem fair to the other employees if he promoted me just because we are now married” (173). We can hear sarcasm in Lena’s voice when she says, “So really, we’re equals, except that Harold makes about seven times more than what I make” (173).

If Lena’s interracial marriage is an example of the combination of sexism and class exploration, Rose’s interracial marriage then is the demonstration of the mixture of patriarchal domination and Orientalism. Rose’s husband enjoys playing the role of hero who rescues a beautiful lady out of danger as St. Clair does. Rose confesses, “I was victim to his hero. I was always in danger and he was always rescuing me” (125). After marriage, Ted always has a big say at home and he makes every decision until one day one patient of his sues him for a failed surgery he did on her. What Rose shares with Lena is their subconscious self-denial as Chinese American women. Rose blames the Chinese cultural heritage that her mother has passed to her and her ethnicity for the failure of her marriage. She once tells Lena, “those kinds of thoughts are commonplace in women like us” (169). Like Rose, Lena always possesses a “feeling of fear” that she is not good enough as wife to her white husband because “I was raised with all this Chinese humility” (170). Out of this fear, Lena “worried that Harold would someday . . . say, ‘Why, gosh, you aren’t the girl I thought you were, are you?” (169) Similar to Lena and Rose, Waverly tries to keep hidden her feeling of “self-loathing” as a Chinese American woman (191). As for Waverly’s interracial

marriage, Tan leaves it ambiguous: Waverly and Rich, her future-husband, plan to spend their honeymoon in China, which suggests the possibility of building a bridge between Chinese and American cultures, after Tan humorously dramatizes cultural differences that Rich demonstrates at Lindo's home. Ignorant of Lindo's tricks of showing off her skills of cooking by being modest, Rich ruins Lindo's dishes.

Furthermore, Tan also reveals in the novel people's bias against intermarriage. A good example is the objections from both Waverly's mother and Ted's mother. Lindo constantly reminds her daughter that the man she is to marry is an American, a foreigner. Ted's mother reveals her prejudices against Asians and her implied objection to their marriage. Tan may imply through portraying interracial marriages that the society is not ready yet for interracial marriages. Apart from people's biases against mixed-race marriages, it is difficult and troublesome to distinguish those who do not fit in with the either/or identity in the context of "hegemonic" American culture. At least partially because of, and in order to avoid, this dilemma, the U. S. nation-state has passed laws prohibiting interracial sex and marriage for most of its history, from the 1600s to the 1960s.

Narrative, Balance, and Reconciliation

Tan's narrative in *The Joy Luck Club* forcefully demonstrates the theme of mother-daughter relations: the trajectory of conflicts, interrelatedness, reconciliation, and balance, which can be analyzed by yin-yang philosophy, a part of traditional Chinese culture. Though the scholarship on the theme of

mother-daughter relations is abundant, few critics examine this theme from the perspective of yin-yang philosophy. In contrast with the narrative in *The Woman Warrior*, the narrative in *The Joy Luck Club* grants rights for both mothers and daughters to tell their own stories and to speak their minds instead of the monologue narration of one opinionated daughter. As Wendy Ho claims, "Through these writers' various narratives of a self-in-process, the Chinese American mothers and daughters learn to name and to compassionately understand their differences as well as similarities as women" (*In Her Mother's House* 23). Once in an interview, Amy Tan said that she intended to write *The Joy Luck Club* as a collection of stories instead of a novel. Probably for this reason, the narrative may look fragmented and unrelated as some critics comment. For example, Stephen Souris calls this narrative structure "decentered, multi-perspectival form" and "discontinuous texts" (60). However, I believe that Tan does organize her stories coherently by connecting segments of her stories in her own way for the purpose of keeping a balance which is significant in this book. The novel consists of four sections and sixteen chapters/stories which are interwoven by eight women of two generations: four mothers and four daughters of four families. Of the four daughters, Jing-mei has a special position in the novel. She acts as both mother and daughter as she says, "I am to replace my mother" (19). She tells her mother's stories, takes her mother's place at the mah jong table, and sets off to China to see the long-lost twin daughters both as mother and for her mother's wish.

In this novel, Section I is made up of the four stories told by four mothers; Section II and Section III are told by four daughters; and Section IV turns back to mothers. Jing-mei is the first narrator as well as the last one. And the last story is the continuation of the first one by the same narrator. Jing-mei is the central character/narrator in the novel, as Ben Xu concludes, "Just as the mah jong table is a link between the past and present for the Club Aunties, Jing-mei Woo taking her mother's seat at the table, becomes the frame narrator linking the two generations of American-Chinese, who are separated by age and cultural gaps and yet bound together by family ties and a continuity of ethnic heritage" ("Memory and the Ethnic Self" 273). Tan tells her stories in a unique way with first-person multiple monologue narratives. The sixteen stories show the conflicts as well as the connections and reconciliation between mothers and daughters. This structurally balanced narrative demonstrates the importance of balance in yin-yang philosophy.

Yin-yang philosophy has a long history in traditional Chinese culture. Robin R. Wang defines yin-yang as "coherent fabric of nature and mind, exhibited in all existence," "interaction between the waxing and waning of the cosmic and human realms," and "a process of harmonization ensuring a constant, dynamic balance of all things." Yin-yang, according to Wang, "is emblematic of valuational equality rooted in the unified, dynamic, and harmonized structure of the cosmos".[9] However, theories of yin-yang philosophy in Chinese history may not be coherent. Some philosophers agree that yin-yang is a pair of two different forces in objects. "Yang" stands for hard

and strong nature of objects while “yin” for soft and tender nature of objects. The intercourse of yin and yang will set objects in motion and each force will move toward the other. Some philosophers claim human beings like other objects are also composed of yin and yang; yin is flesh and yang, spirit.[10] When the two forces of yin and yang move in balance, harmony is reached concerning the relations between the two forces. Unfortunately, some philosophers hierarchicalize yin-yang philosophy and define “yang” as superior and “yin” as inferior. Thus, this philosophy is put into the practice of political, social, and familial relationships between monarch and court official, between father and son, between husband and wife, etc.; the former is “yang” and the latter is “yin”.[11] This patriarchal definition of yin-yang relationship that Tan intends to attack in *The Joy Luck Club* happens to be the worst of yin-yang theories: “‘For woman is yin,’ she [Moon Lady] cried sadly, ‘the darkness within, where untempered passions lie. And man is yang, bright truth lightening our minds’” (82). This engendered theory of yin-yang philosophy—an ally with patriarchy—is of course not what I intend to use in this chapter.

Chinese yin-yang philosophy is concerned with a balance of the opposing forces of objects including human nature symbolized as a circle divided by an S-shape into two *equal* halves, one white and one black:[12]

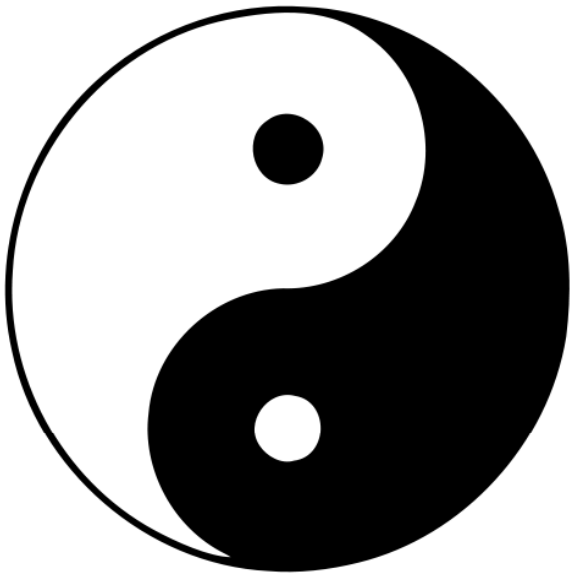

Fig. 1. Yin-yang S-shaped sign.

The two halves float toward one another; they constantly rotate, interacting and mixing with each other until a balance is reached: one exists in the other. It seems, according to yin-yang philosophy, that everything in the world has an opposite polarity, for example, day/night, solid/liquid, south/north, and so on. Life moves in circles between these polarities. The extremes by themselves have no power. The power is in between the polarities—moving towards balance, completion, and wholeness. Yin-yang philosophy advocates that everything is dual; everything has poles; everything has pairs of opposites that are identical by nature but different in degree; the intercourse of yin and yang will create life that moves not only in cycles, but in spirals as well. Harmony is achieved in life when the opposites move into a position of balance. Since yin-yang philosophy is very complicated, I have no intention to detail this philosophy but just to borrow the ideas of the balance between the opposing forces.

The opposing forces revealed in Tan's novel at first are the conflicts between the Chinese mothers and their American daughters. Due to the differences of their life experience, cultural heritage, and education, the clashes between the two generations are severe at first. They even create "strategies" to fight with each other. One typical example is the conflicts between Lindo and her daughter Waverly. When the daughter, after the fight over the mother's showing-off on the street, announces she will stop playing chess and believes that her mother will beg her to play chess again, her mother, to her great disappointment, simply remains silent. The mother acts "as if I was invisible" (188). When the daughter announces that she decides to play chess again, anxious to see her mother's excitement at the news, her mother's reply once again disappoints her: "You think it is so easy. One day quit, next day play. Everything for you is this way . . . . It is not so easy anymore" (189). The mother simply refuses to "bite" the "bait" thrown by her daughter. It seems that the mother wins, but I don't think so. In reality, both sides get hurt: the mother is shocked by the idea that her daughter is ashamed of her as mother when she tells people the little chess champion is her daughter. She cannot understand that her daughter is just embarrassed by what she has done to her. Another instance of this mother-daughter clash is the daughter's attempt to tell her mother about her second marriage with Rich, a white man. In order to "bribe" her mother, the daughter invites the mother to have dinner at a restaurant. Whenever she mentions the name of her future husband, the mother cleverly changes the topic. If their first conflict is out of cultural differences, the second

one is somewhat different. In the first one, Lindo acts in a Chinese way to express her pride as mother for her daughter's success; Waverly as a child reacts in an American way by openly showing her anger at her mother's taking the credit: "If you want to show off, then why don't you learn to play chess?" (101). In the second one, however, both mother and daughter try not to hurt the other. The daughter tries to "coax" her mother into "permitting" her marriage with Rich. She believes her mother has bias against him. She is aware that her mother's opinion about her marriage affects her a lot. In fact, her mother's words become so powerful that she does not know how to handle them. She becomes scared and timid inside though confident, proud, and even arrogant in appearance. At the same time, the mother has no confidence for her daughter's interracial marriage. Besides, her daughter's first marriage has failed already. She worries about her daughter, but she is not sure how to tell her. In order not to hurt her daughter's feelings, she avoids the subject from the very beginning. The similarity between the mother and the daughter lies in their same character: strong-willed, smart, proud, and arrogant.

According to yin-yang philosophy, the extremes by themselves have no power. For example, steel is hard but easy to break; water is not easy to break but too soft. The power is in between the polarities—moving towards balance. So power remains in between mothers and daughters who form the duality; they are the pairs of opposites, but identical in nature though different in degree; they have shifted from the weak into the powerful when they are finally reconciled. When they finally discover the "secret" of the other—their worries and fears—it is

easy for them to get rid of their “weakness”: “I found her sleeping soundly on the sofa . . . . With her smooth face, she looked like a young girl, frail, guileless, and innocent . . . . All her strength was gone. She had no weapons, no demons surrounding her. She looked powerless. Defeated” (200).

Being the pairs of opposites but identical in nature, the opposing forces of mothers and daughters are finally merged into a balanced whole, after the mutual understanding is reached, of course. Lindo once says to Jing-mei about playing mah jong, “How can we play with just three people? Like a table with three legs, no balance” (33). To Lindo, four can keep balance. There is a Chinese four-word idiom that expresses this meaning: “ ” (“Four makes balance and eight steadiness”). Probably for this reason, the novel has four sections; each section has four stories; four mothers tell stories to four daughters; four daughters tell stories about their life in America. In this four-pattern structure, Tan keeps a balance between mothers and daughters.

The daughters finally get to know that their mothers are so strong to endure all pains and to transform their good intentions to their daughters in whatever ways occur to them. In fact, the mothers only know the ways they learned in old China from their own mothers, the ways to show their love, the ways that their daughters could not at first understand. The only way the mothers believe that their daughters can understand them is to tell them the stories about their past life in China and what circumstances they are in and why they try hard to hold onto their Chinese roots. “Once the daughters are aware of their mother’s vulnerability, their weaknesses, then all danger is past and the mother may be

invited in" (Davis, "Wisdom (Un)Heeded" 99). And the daughters become reconciled with their mothers.

Though the daughters struggle for autonomy and independence from their mothers and the mothers insist on bringing their daughters under control, the reconciliation between them is eventually reached after one understands how the other feels. In this regard, *The Joy Luck Club* is not merely a novel about confrontation but about reconciliation between mothers and daughters. Thus, Tan uses this unique structure in her novel to connect the fragments of her stories and makes them a meaningful balance. As Gloria Shen concludes,

> The sharing of cultural experiences between mothers and daughters through the device of storytelling transforms structurally isolated monologues into meaningful dialogues between mother and mother, daughter and daughter, and, more important, mother and daughter and coalesces the sixteen monologues into a coherent whole. ("Born of a Stranger" 236)

Once the daughters understand why their mothers brought them up in the way they were at first strongly against, they begin to accept their mothers. For example, Jing-mei symbolically accepts a necklace with a jade pendant from her mother. By accepting their mothers, the daughters begin to accept China. And finally they begin to see what sort of battle has been fought between their mothers and themselves:

> And really, I did understand finally. Not what she had just said. But what had been true all along. I saw what I had been fighting for: It was

> for me, a scared child, who had run away a long time ago to what I had imagined was a safer place. And hiding in this place, behind my invisible barriers, I knew what lay on the other side: Her side attacks. Her secret weapons. Her uncanny ability to find my weakest spots. But in the brief instant that I had peered over the barriers I could finally see what was there: an old woman, a wok for her armor, a knitting needle for her sword, getting a little crabby as she waited for her daughter to invite her in. (203-04)

In *The Joy Luck Club*, Tan shows us a good example of the possibility for a balanced and connected Chinese American self. In the daughters' stories, as Shelley Reid claims, "we see the extensive process of finding a balance between an individual 'American' self and a connected 'Chinese' self", and "their narratives are more fundamentally about their hopes for connection and balance" ("Our Two Faces" 32). Similarly, in the mothers' stories, the balance is also reached when they teach their daughters in both Chinese and American ways.

The yin-yang philosophy, as I mentioned above, believes that life not only moves in cycles, but also in spirals. These two forces are complementary opposites that interplay and finally reach into harmony. In *The Joy Luck Club*, the sixteen stories, though sometimes looking fragmented and unrelated, focus on the trajectory of clash, integration, and balance of American and Chinese cultures. These stories form a circle of the life of Chinese American immigrants who have finally achieved the balance in duality. Tan strategically starts and ends her novel with Jing-mei as a narrator. The process toward the balance

starts when she begins to take her mother's place at the mah jong table, "Without having anyone tell me, I know her corner on the table was the East. The East is where things begin" (22). She begins to understand her mother as she sits in her mother's place at mah jong table. As she finally reunites with her family—her twin half-sisters—she completes her mother's story, which begins in China, and she also integrates her own. Above all, she understands what it means to be Chinese: “The minute our train leaves the Hong Kong border and enters Shenzhen, China, I feel different. I can feel the skin on my forehead tingling, my blood rushing through a new course, my bones aching with a familiar old pain. And I think, my mother was right. I am becoming Chinese” (306). The ending of the novel suggests that the daughters finally accept their Chinese half, their ethnic identity they at first tried hard to deny.

Furthermore, when her father tells her during the trip to China that her mother cherished all her hopes on her, including the expectations for the two lost daughters, she begins to understand why her mother once pushed her so much: “I think about this. My mother’s long-cherished wish. Me, the young sister who was supposed to be the essence of the others. I feel myself with old grief, wondering how disappointed my mother must have been” (281). Thus the reconciliation between mother and daughter is completed. Jing-mei’s trip to China completes the circle to the place where her mother’s story began, and her meeting with her half-sisters, as Marina Heung suggests, “sets into motion a circulation of mirrored relationships blurring identities, generations, and languages” (“Daughter-Text/Mother-Text” 640). This circle contains beliefs,

conflicts, cultures, misunderstandings, tragedies, and undoubtedly reconciliation and balance, which are identical with yin-yang philosophy.

Within this cyclical nature of Jing-mei's experience, there is also the notion of change. Her story shows her metaphysical journey as a journey of balance and acceptance of her Chinese American self. In youth, she wished only to be American when her mother told her, "you could be anything you wanted to be in America" (133). She hoped that one day she could become her mother's perfect image. But her mother's stories and the reality in America have changed her. She feels the problems of race, identity, and some other things, as Davis concludes: "The most important part of the daughters' problems is adjusting to the situation of being a Chinese American, eating different food, and speaking a different language" ("Identity in Community in Ethnic Short Story Cycles" 12). She is trying to seek a balance, a harmony between her mother's expectations and her own ability. According to yin-yang philosophy, opposites blend into, and counterbalance, each other. They give rise to each other and are inseparable. An idea is challenged by an opposing idea, which gradually gains strength, replaces the old idea, and then is itself challenged by a revival of the old idea.

Throughout the novel, the mothers often use storytelling to heal "past experiences of loss and separation; it is also a medium for rewriting stories of oppression and victimization into parables of self-affirmation and individual empowerment" (Heung 607). The storytelling will emphasize the mothers' strength in China where they were rendered invisible, powerless and voiceless. They tell their stories to their daughters not only to illustrate their history but also

to emphasize the differences in America. However, they notice that their voices are once again silenced in America because their English is not good enough. For example, Suyuan cannot tell her daughter anything in “perfect American English.” And Jing-mei is aware that she can neither swallow her mother’s sorrow, nor achieve her mother’s dreams. She also cannot retain, as her mother suggests, the good of Chinese customs and take the advantages of American life at the same time. According to yin-yang philosophy, it is impossible to piece together an identity only choosing the best qualities. Therefore, the daughters must find a balance between the Chinese and American cultures. As Reid suggests, we may trace

> Tan’s careful descriptions of the separate components of a multifaceted identity through a reading of the mothers’ stories, and then work with the daughters’ stories to find the links that bind opposing forces into a balanced whole. [And the] mother characters provide an opportunity to view the important elements of Chinese American identity one or two at a time, to investigate the implications of the “ancestral culture” and to see the first reactions to the new American culture. (“Our Two Faces” 23)

The structure of the narratives in *The Joy Luck Club* successfully demonstrates not only the individual tragedies of those mothers caught up in the history of Chinese immigration to America but also the difficulties of a culture undergoing transformation.

However, I have no intention to imply that all the problems that mothers and daughters are facing have been settled. What I want to demonstrate is that balance and reconciliation are what Tan intends to reach in her novel despite the conflicts and generation gaps. In reality, some problems are still there. Though the four mothers are eager to stuff the Chinese culture into their daughters' heads, they, on the other hand, don't totally reject American culture. Their attempts to combine the two different cultures don't seem to be successful, as Lindo admits: "It is my fault she is this way. I wanted my children to have the best combination: American circumstances and Chinese character. How could I know these two things do not mix?" (289) She overlooks the fact that the commitment to family of Chinese culture sometimes goes against the individualism of American culture. Despite remaining problems, the mothers' storytelling awakens the daughters' sensibility of racial identity. By paying attention to the mothers' stories and by accepting their mothers, the daughters reveal their willingness to accept Chinese culture as their ethnic identity.

Patricia P. Chu argues in *Assimilating Asians: Gendered Strategies of Authorship in Asian America*, "The text constructs its implied reader as occupying the American pole of Chinese-American binarism, so that we readers share the American daughters' search for the essences of their respective Chinese mothers" (147-48). However, I think that Chu's argument is not convincing. In contrast with Kingston in *The Woman Warrior*, Tan gives a "fair" chance for both mothers and daughters to tell their own stories except for one mother who is already dead as the book starts. These stories examine the complex

negotiations that mothers and daughters perform daily in dealing with diverse, and often conflicting, interpretive systems and cultures. The possibilities of these negotiations lie in both mothers' and daughters' mutual understanding of their same social status as women/minority that suggests "dual powerlessness".[13] Both mothers and daughters have to face this social problem, and they realize that they must strengthen their bond as Asian American women to resist both sexism and racism.

Tan's theme of mother-daughter relations demonstrates a feminist agenda, complicated by such issues as gender, race, ethnicity, and class. Tan's dealing with this project is harmonious though multi-dimensional. Through the sixteen stories narrated by mothers and daughters, Tan represents, mainly from a feminist perspective, mother-daughter relations that follow the trajectory or circle of conflicts $\rightarrow$ interaction $\rightarrow$ adjustment $\rightarrow$ reconciliation $\rightarrow$ balance that is in accordance with Chinese traditional yin-yang philosophy in my interpretation. At first, the Chinese mothers and their American daughters clash for a variety of reasons due to their differences on culture, experience, education, personality, etc. Due to these differences, the clashes between mothers and daughters at first are severe and result in their constant conflicts. However, fighting—verbal fighting, of course—is not always negative. Though hurting, it, at the same time, offers the opportunities for the opposites to know what the other is thinking. Verbal fighting is also a way of communication or interaction, though an unusual one. Through fighting as well as storytelling, mothers and daughters get to know each other better.

Another balance in the mother-daughter relations lies in the fact that we can see the American side in Chinese mothers and the Chinese side in American daughters as the result of their being together. Chinese mothers read American magazines and watch American movies while American daughters eat Chinese food. This togetherness is important in the communication of not only mothers and daughters but also all human beings, men and women, white and non-white, Americans and non-Americans. Owing to this togetherness, the mothers and their daughters begin to revise their own ways of thinking and doing things. Out of mutual understanding and love, they adjust themselves to improve their relations by improving themselves or by making necessary concessions if possible. Lindo accepts Rich as her son-in-law while Waverly accepts her Chinese side and plans to spend her honeymoon in China. The concession, self-improvement, and adjustment—the efforts made by both mothers and daughters—bring about their reconciliation. They begin to see the similarities they share as women, daughters, wives, mothers, American, Chinese, and American Chinese; they discover their new relations as allies against both sexism and racism. Finally, balance is reached thanks to the similarities mothers and daughters share. However, not all problems are settled in this balance. Instead, the circle will repeat and in the new circle the ending becomes the beginning though it is different from the previous beginning. In this regard, the circle of mother-daughter relations is characteristic of floating and changing in a paradigm of a spiral. The unsettled problems as well as new problems will lead to new conflicts, which start a new circle. However, owing to the movement

of this circle and spiral, human beings are making themselves better, or at least this is what they are trying to do, as the Joy Luck mothers and their daughters are trying to do.

Notes

1. As for the idea of the relation between family and society in Chinese history, see Zhen Lu's *State of Mind in Chinese Traditional Society* (104).
2. The information about Confucianism is obtained from *The History of Chinese Ideology* (25) by Qizhi Zhang.
3. Qin Dynasty (221 BC): the first time in Chinese history all the states were united under the control of Qin Shihuang, the first emperor.
4. The information about Zhuangzi's "*dao*" is obtained from Zhang's *The History of Chinese Ideology* (54).
5. For example, the poet Zhu Ziqing (1898-1948).
6. The information about Chinese people's ideas of "fate" is obtained from Lu's *State of Mind in Chinese Traditional Society* (38-39).
7. As for Chicago sociologists' suggestion on mixed race issue, see Henry Yu's *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America*.
8. I analyzed the issue of Butter Fly Story in Chapter Two.
9. The definition of yin-yang philosophy offered by Robin R. Wang is quoted from the Website: http://www.iep.utm.edu/y/yinyang.htm#top
10. For example, Wang Cong (27—about 100). See Zhang's *The History of Chinese Ideology*. See Page 68, 69,142. (See Note 2.)
11. For example, Dong Zhongshu (179—104BC). See Zhang's *The History of Chinese Ideology* (123).

12. This yin-yang S-shaped sign is obtained from the Website http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Yin_yang.svg#file
13. I borrow the term from Wendy Ho. See her article: “Mother/Daughter Writing and the Politics of Race and Sex in Maxine Hong Kingston’s The Woman Warrior” (226).

CHAPTER FOUR

"ARE THEY MEN?" EMASCULATION OF CHINESE AMERICAN MEN AND RECONSTRUCTION OF THEIR MASCULINITY IN KINGSTON'S *CHINA MEN*

My research on sexual politics in Chinese American women's literature in this chapter focuses on the issues of masculinity/femininity and/or emasculation in the context of Asian immigrant men in the United States. I assume that it is impossible, or at least incomplete, to deal with sexual politics in Chinese American literature without dealing with the issues of emasculation, castration, or feminization of Chinese American men just as it is impossible or incomplete without exploring sexualization of Asian American women. I notice the similarities between feminism concerning women of color and masculinity studies regarding Asian American men. Both of them attack racial domination, gender oppression, and class exploitation. Both of them fight against American Orientalist discourse that stereotypes Asian (American) women/men and against conceptions of Asian (American) women/men as a homogeneous group and reconstruct historical, social, and psychological forms of diversity among Asian (American) women/men. And the binary opposition of "masculinity" versus "femininity" has been blurred in the context of American immigrant exclusion laws. In other words, the paradigm of "masculinity" versus "femininity" is not applicable to define the relationship between Asian (American) men and Asian (American)

women. They are no longer in opposition; instead, they are both viewed under the Western gaze as weak, passive, submissive, docile, absent, feminine, etc.

In this chapter, I demonstrate how Kingston reveals the history of the nation-state's emasculation of Chinese men through making immigrant exclusion laws and through creating stereotypes of Asian immigrant/Asian American males; how Kingston has made efforts to rewrite the history for the purpose of claiming America: the contributions that Chinese immigrant men have made to the country; and what problems Kinston faces when she reconstructs the masculinity of Asian American men. I argue that Kingston's ambivalence toward the portrayal of Chinese men is out of her dilemma as a minority woman writer rather than out of her "double-edged" strategy as some critics, such as Pin-chia Feng and Shui-mei Shih, claim. I also deal with such questions as why and how Chinese men were politically, psychologically, and even physically castrated and feminized by the U. S. nation-state in American history. The legal exclusions, antimiscegenation laws, detention, and naturalization in U. S. history constructed the Asian American male subjectivity as a particular racial and gender formation. And the American Orientalist discourse racialized as well as stereotyped Asian Americans and resulted in the castration, emasculation, and feminization of Asian immigrant/Asian American males (*Immigrant Acts* 11-12). I question Cheung's alternative models of Chinese males as "*shushing*" ("poet-scholar") and Kam Louie's Chinese male model as "*wen-wu*" ("literary-martial") because I assume that the goal of Asian American masculinity studies is not to create alternative masculinity models but to deconstruct this gender standardization itself. I

analyze the parallel structure of *China Men* to explore Kingston's strategies of reconstructing the identities of Chinese men. I observe that Kingston makes use of fables, myths, and historical documents to highlight the themes in the book and to empower her portrayal of Chinese men. And I critique the temptations of some critics such as Cheung and Shu-mei Shih that define laundries, restaurants, etc. as professions only for women.

First of all, it is necessary to define the terms "masculinity," "emasculation," "femininity," and "feminization." This is because the use of these terms, to some extent, is provocative among critics. For example, Jinqi Ling points out,

> Used as a metaphorical expression of outrage over the humiliations historically suffered by Asian men in America, the term nevertheless evokes a scenario in which being a woman necessarily implies an inferior social existence, to be both feared and repudiated. The phallocentrism inherent in using the term to describe Asian American men's plight has been pointed out by critics who are rightly concerned about the usage's complicity with patriarchal, prejudices and its further marginalization of women. ("Identity Crisis and Gender Politics" 313)

I agree with Ling that the term "emasculation" or "feminization" is to some extent problematic just as when we use the term "masculinity" or "femininity." First of all, these terms were originally created and first used by patriarchy for the purpose of domination over women. And these terms are surely engendered. "Masculinity" reminds us of social privileges while "femininity" of marginalization. Thus, these

terms are sure to imply the concept of patriarchy and domination in “masculinity” or passivity and submissiveness in “femininity.”

However, I argue that it is sometimes impossible to avoid using patriarchal terms before we can find better ones to take their place. As I understand it, the reason why we use these terms is more important than the usage of these terms themselves and we are entitled to use these terms if our intention is to dismantle domination of gender and/or race. My purpose in using these terms is neither to have complicity with patriarchal prejudices nor to marginalize women any more. Instead, I intend to show the efforts Kingston has made to demonstrate how Chinese immigrant males were sexually and racially discriminated against in the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries in the United States in a way that was similar to what women—white or non-white—experienced and are still experiencing. We can see many parallels between the issues of men and of women. And we need to see the experiences of inequality, unfairness, marginality, and otherness that these Asian (American) men shared with Asian (American) women. The racism in the United States deprived Chinese male sojourners of their rights as men for the purpose of domination as patriarchy did to women, either white or non-white. I insist that no people—male or female, white or non-white, lower-class or higher-class—should be treated unfairly, despised, or marginalized. In this sense, Kingston’s efforts to reconstruct Chinese men’s masculinity is a project concerning not only gender but also race and class since these Chinese male laborers were considered by the U. S. nation-state as weak, powerless, and passive “aliens.” And my focus on masculinity of Asian

(American) men is closely connected with rather than a reaction against feminist theories. To some extent, these Asian men shared experiences with women: they were placed in a subordinate social position and were expected to play their social roles as the weak, passive, submissive, silent, absent, lacking, etc. When I argue that Chinese men were historically feminized, being treated as women, I have no intention to say that Chinese men deserve more than women do. Instead, men and women should work together to undermine any sort of domination, as Kingston and some other writers do.

Kingston's efforts to deconstruct Chinese immigrant men's emasculation and to reconstruct their masculinity—similar to her deconstruction of patriarchy and reconstruction of Chinese American women—are not only complicated, ambiguous, and contradictory but also debatable, controversial, and provocative. Like her feminist strategies in *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston's project in *China Men* is intertwined with race, gender, and class from humanist as well as feminist perspectives. In other words, Kingston's project in this book, an outgrowth of her feminist agenda, focuses on heterogeneous masculinities. Kingston creates as many different images of Chinese immigrant men as she can for this purpose, though they sometimes may be contradictory. This proves that "feminist analyses of masculinities are necessary to adequately theorized gender studies" (Gardiner, Introduction to *Masculinity Studies & Feminist Theory* 1), and thus the relationship between masculinity studies and feminist theories is "asymmetrical, interactive, and changing" (Gardiner 2). I will further discuss this relationship in Chapter Five.

Reconstruction of Asian (American) Men

Kingston is, to me, the most important writer who has reconstructed Asian immigrant and Asian American males. The strategies Kingston has used in *China Men* are, first of all, to transform Chinese immigrant men from the status of absence into presence by rewriting the history of Chinese male immigrants, demonstrating the four generations of Chinese immigrant men who work on the plantations of Hawaii in the mid-nineteenth century like Bak Goong, on the construction of the transcontinental railroads in the late-nineteenth century like Ah Goong, in laundries and restaurants in the early twentieth century like BaBa, and in the Vietnam War in the 1960s and the 1970s like Brother. From grandfather to brother, Kingston demonstrates these people's contributions, survival, hardships, endangerment in the building of and sustaining of America, which is Kingston's understanding of the heroism of her forefathers who have survived racial discrimination, social degradation and class oppression. Kingston's definition of heroism is, of course, different from both Chinese traditional masculinity that stresses masculine authority and Western manhood that claims physical prowess as male identity. Kingston's heroism or manhood is imbedded in the spirit of persistence, endurance, and hard work as the devices for survival.

For example, Bak Goong undergoes the contractor's silencing the laborers for the purpose of domination and control. Bak Goong is aware that the way to resist dominance is to break the silence and let one's voice be heard. Since articulation/speech is prohibited, Bak Goong resists the contractor's domination and control by singing and even cursing under the cover of coughing: "When the

demons howled to work faster, faster, he coughed in reply . . . . He let out scolds disguised as coughs" (104). His singing, cursing, and coughing become his "weapons" or his "working-class discourse" created under unusual circumstances to fight racial discrimination as well as class exploitation. Similarly, Ah Goong, together with other Chinese railroad workers, "decided to go on strike and demanded forty-five dollars a month and the eight-hour shift" when the employers "invent games for working faster" without raising their salary (140, 139). Ah Goong faces the danger of being blown up during the construction of the railroads and his team of Chinese immigrant men has won the competition of digging the tunnel. However, when the railroads are completed, those Chinese immigrant men are dispersed before a photograph is taken for the purpose of memory. Unable to be recognized as a contributor or even as a man, Ah Goong ejaculates into the air—"fucking the world." By doing so, Ah Goong lets out his anger and frustration as a castrated man. He seems to prove to the world as well as to himself that he is still a man with heterosexual desire—a demonstration of his masculinity. He also reveals his strong desire of mastering his own body not only as an Asian immigrant male but also as a working-class laborer, expressing his as well as Kingston's resistance to both racial discrimination and class exploitation, and to racial and sexual stereotyping of Asian American males.

The heroism of Baba is somewhat different from Bak Goong and Ah Goong. Instead of having a strong character like his forefathers, Baba looks thin and timid as his wife complains, "You're so skinny. You're not supposed to be so skinny in this country. You have to be tough" (248). However, Baba's "heroic epic" lies in

his determination to have his wife educated in China where it was not common at that time, to send for her to come to America, and to raise children though life is hard for him. He has experienced all kinds of failure as a sojourner, a laundryman, a gambler, a husband, a father, etc. However, he survives these hardships, racial discrimination, and betrayals by his "friends." Brother is also heroic to the extent that he, unlike Rambo in the movies, is determined not to shoot a human being and not to "press the last button that dropped the bomb" (285). Though he goes through nightmares, he has finally survived the Vietnam War without killing anyone and without being killed.

However, Kingston's portrayal of Chinese immigrant men remains controversial and ambiguous. It is very difficult to sort her male characters into typical models of masculinity or manhood. In other words, she has not created any standards for model Chinese immigrant men though she does protest against the emasculation of these people in American history. She remains ambivalent toward Ah Goong's "fucking the world," as Donald C. Goellnicht concludes, "Having been ground down themselves by white men, having been forced into 'feminine' subject positions, Chinese American men often see to reassert their lost patriarchal power by denigrating a group they perceive as weaker than themselves: Chinese American women" ("Tang Ao in America" 200). On the one hand, she expresses her empathy for what her forefathers went through in America that emasculated them; on the other hand, she disapproves that these forefathers converted their anger, powerlessness, and frustration into violence against women.

Rather than telling her readers what masculinity is like or should be like, Kingston focuses on rewriting the history that has erased the presence of Chinese immigrant males by demonstrating their contributions to the country, their survival, their hardships, and so on. Rather than rebuilding her forefathers' manhood, Kingston relates her forefathers' stories in order to restore Chinese immigrant men's place in American history not only as men but as Asian Americans. And rather than having her male characters gain the strength and power from the heroes in traditional Chinese culture as Frank Chin does in *Donald Duk*, Kingston deconstructs dominant "racial formation" and "gender formation" by problematizing the definitions of race and gender. Kingston does this not only in *China Men* but also in *The Woman Warrior*, in which she critiques the racial stereotypes of Asian American men/women as a homogenous group by creating diverse identities such as Bak Goong, Ah Goong, Baba, and Brother in *China Men* and Mulan/Swordswoman and Brave Orchid in *The Woman Warrior*. The characters in both books are not types but varied and even sometimes contradictory. This is partly because Kingston avoids creating new stereotypes when she deconstructs the old ones.

When Kingston rewrites history in order to resist these racial stereotypes of Asian American males and females, however, she is faced with a dilemma: as a Chinese American woman writer, she keeps a balance between her efforts to resist racial discrimination and her efforts to critique sexual oppression. Regarding this dilemma, Wendy Ho explains:

> The internal world of family is oppressive to women, but the external world is often perceived as the greater common enemy to the family collective . . . . To survive as a distinct ethnic group and family, minority women are often caught in a double bind between their own needs and concerns as women and those of their Chinese American communities in America. (*In Her Mother's House* 226-27)

However, some critics interpret Kingston's dilemma as her strategy of "double-edged" critique on both Chinese sexism and American racism. For example, Pin-chia Feng argues that the story of Tang Ao "encodes a double-edged criticism of Chinese sexism and American racism" (*The Female Bildungsroman* 144). Shu-mei Shih also names Kingston's strategy "double-edged criticism:" Kingston condemns "the dominant society's racism and sexism," sympathizing with "the emasculation of China Men," but at the same time Kingston "protests against their oppression of Chinese women" ("Exile and Intertextuality"68). Goellnicht also concludes that Kingston on the one hand critiques "the racist mainstream for its treatment of her forefathers" but on the other hand avenges herself "on those very forefathers, the malestream, for their sexist treatment of Chinese women" ("Tang Ao in America" 203).

I assume that Kingston's main concern in *China Men* is her critique on racism though she is also angered by patriarchy in the Chinese community. However, Kinston avoids depicting all her forefathers as patriarchal. A good example is the instance of Ah Goong's trading his son for a girl with his neighbor, which suggests boys are not always favored over girls. Kingston is aware of her situation as an

ethnic woman writer though she once complained in an interview with Arturo Islas and Marilyn Yalom in 1980, "There is a very difficult problem because there is an expectation among readers and critics that I should represent the race" (Skenazy, *Conversations with Maxine Hong Kingston* 21). This embarrasses Kingston and she keeps a balance or ambivalence concerning the connection between racism and sexism, between feminism and nationalism, between gender and ethnicity. Kingston is not the only writer who is faced with this situation or, as I call it, dilemma. Rather, almost all women writers of color have to confront it, for example, Tony Morrison.

I argue that the term “double-edged” strategy is too simplistic to define this dilemma. Take the fable of “Tang Ao” as an example. With this “double-edged” strategy in mind, Tang Ao serves different purposes. First of all, as a Chinese sojourner, he is a man coming from a country of patriarchal culture, in which women are dominated by men: they are slaves; their feet are bound; their social status is so low that they are too weak to fight against patriarchy. In this case, he becomes the target of feminism. Chinese (American) women hope that some people who are more powerful than they are may force Chinese (American) males to experience what they have suffered as women. This happens when Tang Ao enters America, the Land of Women. Tang Ao has suffered all the tortures of being converted into a woman—the experiences that Chinese women have suffered. I am sure Tang Ao would never want to be a woman if he had a choice. And then Chinese (American) women can say to themselves: “Now, this Chinese man has learned a lesson—with the help of American patriarchy and racism, of

course." Thus, these women have their "revenge on the father" as Goellnicht suggests. After that, they change their tone: "Hey, Wait a minute! How dare you white men treat our men like women?" "How dare you allow them to live here only as bachelors?" "How dare you erase the contributions Chinese immigrant men have made for this country out of American history?" Finally, this Chinese man becomes the victim of racial discrimination. Is this what the fable or the whole book about? The "double-edged" strategy? I doubt it. This is either simplistic or misleading.

As a minority writer, Kingston shares with Frank Chin in the portrayal of Chinese immigrant men: both of them, in their writings, challenge and rework dominant historical narratives that exclude and emasculate Chinese American men by U. S. exclusion and miscegenation laws. By giving voice to and narratives of generations of unrecognized Chinese American laborers, both of them critique the contradiction between the U. S. nation-state's economic need to recruit cheap and exploitable Chinese immigrant laborers and its political refusal to enfranchise these racialized laborers as citizens. However, Kingston, as a minority woman writer, differs from Chin to the extent that she avoids prescribing a new heterosexual content to replace the old. Thus, she leaves open the question of what the new Asian American masculinity should be.

Misreading Kingston's works, Chin accuses her of pandering to a mainstream white readership by reinforcing injurious stereotypes of Chinese immigrant men as publicly passive and effeminate yet privately abusive and patriarchal.[1] To me, the question is not what a man should be like but what rights a man should have not

only as a man but also as a human being. Personally, I do doubt Chin's efforts in his *Donald Duk* to transform Donald's self-hatred into self-acceptance by means of reconstructing the manhood of Asian American males on their sexual desire and on the success of heterosexuality. Furthermore, what Chin does is only an attempt to reverse the feminization process to which Asian American men have been subjected. Above all, Chin has no objection to the formation of masculinity itself. In other words, Chin has a stereotype of masculinity himself, which resembles European and American masculinity.

Different from both Kingston and Chin, King-Kok Cheung suggests the possibility of reconstructing alternative Chinese male identities. She argues, "Overcoming stereotypes generated by this long history of 'emasculation' and redefining Asian American manhood have been major concerns since the inception of Asian American literary studies" ("Art, Spirituality, and the Ethnic of Care" 263). Cheung claims that she can understand the efforts Frank Chin et al. have made to redefine Asian manhood but she disapproves of their "attempt to refashion Asian American masculinity by espousing an 'Asian heroic tradition,' by glorifying the martial heroes featured in classical Chinese and Japanese epics, and by implicitly presenting these heroes for contemporary Asians to emulate" ("Art, Spirituality, and the Ethnic of Care" 263). Because, Cheung argues, "much of the refashioning is . . . mired in patriarchal notions of manliness, whether of Asian or American origins" ("Art, Spirituality, and the Ethnic of Care" 264). In other words, what they intend to do is simply to "clone Western heroes" ("Art, Spirituality, and the Ethnic of Care" 264). Furthermore, "they are often blind to

the biases resulting from their own acceptance of the patriarchal construct of masculinity" ("Woman Warrior versus Chinaman Pacific" 116). Cheung is greatly concerned about the definition of masculinity when she raises such questions as "What do Asian American men mean and want when they try to reclaim their masculinity?" "Do they seek to (re)occupy positions of dominance or do they envision a world free of domination?" "What is inalienably masculine and what are merely the trappings of manhood?" ("Art, Spirituality, and the Ethnic of Care" 276).

Of the Asian American critics who focus on Asian American masculinity studies, Cheung, to me, is the most important one. She has made great contributions to Asian American masculinity studies. The questions Cheung has raised deserve serious concern and research. To resist Orientalist discourse about Asian American males who are assumed to be hegemonic, Cheung presents alternative masculinities: one is "*shusheng*/poet-scholar" that Cheung defines as "one of the most irresistible Chinese male images" ("Of Men and Men" 191). This model can be found in traditional Chinese romance and opera such as *Xi xiang ji* (*The Western Chamber*), *Liang Shanbo yu Zhu Yingtai* (*Butterfly Lovers*), *Tang Bohu dian Qiuxiang* (*The Flirting Scholar*), etc. Regarding this male model, Cheung comments:

> The poet-scholar, far from either brutish or asexual, is seductive because of his gentle demeanor, his wit, and his refined sensibility. He prides himself on being indifferent to wealth and political power and seeks women and men who are his equals in intelligence and integrity . . . .

> What comes to mind when I think of the poet-scholar is . . . the attributes associated with him: attentiveness, courtesy, humor, personal integrity, indifference to material and political interest, and aversion to violence. ("Of Men and Men" 190-191)

Cheung prefers this poet-scholar to the martial hero, which is also popular in the media in China as well as in America: "I may thus be presenting Asian American men with a double bind in criticizing the martial hero while advocating the poet-scholar model" ("Of Men and Men" 191). In "Art, Spirituality, and the Ethnic of Care," Cheung repeats her preference for the "poet-scholar model" and at the same time proposes another model: the men who "are nurturing or who are attentive to another's need" (264). The purpose of Cheung's representation of alternative masculinities in Asian American males is to prove her argument: "Masculinity, like femininity, is multiple" ("Of Men and Men"). Similar to Cheung, Kam Louie proposes another alternative of masculinity for Chinese men: a model of "*wen*-*wu*" ("literary-martial") that "encompasses the dichotomy between cultural and martial accomplishments, mental and physical attainments" ("Chinese, Japanese and Global masculine Identities" 4).

I do understand the efforts that the critics such as Cheung and Louie have made. The models they advocate, in fact, have been the images of Chinese males in Chinese culture and literature. It might be a compliment to say: "He is a man with traits of both *wen* and *wu* or he is a *shusheng*" in certain part of China or at certain period of time in Chinese history. Their arguments, to some extent, undermine Orientalist discourse that takes it for granted that Asians are all alike.

However, the alternative masculinities they advocate are somewhat problematic. First, what Cheung and Louie propose about the alternative masculinities for Asian American males is off the point. What is typical of masculinity? Is it aggressiveness, strength, power, violence? Is it intelligence, wit? Is it gentleness, sensitivity, attentiveness? Or is it a combination of some features mentioned above? I have no answers to these questions, but I argue that the key to Asian American masculinity studies is not to offer some alternative masculinity models but to dismantle Orientalist discourse that preserves a hierarchy based on race and to deconstruct any political, social, and cultural discourse that provides a certain group of people—male or female alike—with privileges merely owing to their gender or class. Second, their alternative masculinities are also problematic if we take class into consideration. For example, those who cannot afford enough education and/or cannot have chances to become an educated, gentleman-like middle-class, successful man will be frustrated or depressed if they cannot live up to the models of "*shusheng*" ("poet-scholar") or "*wen-wu*" ("literary-martial"), which strongly suggests gender and class hierarchy. Thirdly, the models they offer are so limited that many males such as Kingston's Chinese immigrant men will be excluded. However, can we deny that they are heroes?

Parallel Structure and Chinese Men's Identities

Kingston redefines the identities of Chinese men by her two different genre stories. Structurally, *China Men* consists of two parts: the sections of biographies and the sections of fables, myths, or historical documents that are inserted

between biographies. Through careful reading, we may notice the interrelations or parallels between the two genres. In some respects, the fables, myths, and historical documents both highlight and footnote the experiences of Chinese immigrants in the United States. Kingston's portrayal of these men in her fables, myths, and documents deserves our attention. The identity of Tang Ao in "On Discovery" foretells and epitomizes the emasculation or feminization of Chinese male sojourners in the United States. Tang Ao is feminized in the Land of Women that reminds readers of America with the "Statue of Liberty" as the symbol of the country, which is also engendered. Tang Ao's adventure epitomizes Chinese immigrant men's experience of being castrated and feminized in the United States. The fable of Tang Ao is placed at the beginning of the book to highlight all the other stories about Chinese immigrant men in the book. Another example of gender crossing is in "On Mortality," in which Tu Tzu-chun is transgendered from a man into a mute woman. When it is paralleled with "The Great Grandfather of the Sandalwood Mountains," the story about Bak Goong, the fable in "On Mortality" epitomizes Bak Goong's experience in a Hawaiian sugar plant. This great grandfather is not only castrated, feminized, or transgendered on this land since no Chinese woman was allowed to enter the country at that time to be his wife, but also muted by his employers because any talk during the work would result in whipping as a punishment.

As a consequence, Chinese fathers are faced with identity problems as is suggested in "On Fathers:" "'No, that wasn't your father. He did look like Baba, though, didn't he?'" (7). Even the children are unable to recognize their father.

What has caused fathers to alter their identities? How are these fathers feminized? The answers to these questions can be found in “The Laws” that documents the history of discrimination and exclusion of Chinese immigrant men: in 1868, “40,000 miners of Chinese ancestry were Driven Out” (152); in 1882, “the U. S. Congress passed the first Chinese Exclusion Act, [which] . . . banned the entrance of Chinese laborers, both skilled and unskilled for ten years” (154); in 1904, “[t]he Chinese Exclusion Acts were extended indefinitely” (156); in 1924, an Immigration Act was passed by Congress, according to which “[a]ny American who married a Chinese woman lost his citizenship; any Chinese man who married an American caused her to lose her citizenship” (156), to name just a few.

Though Kingston makes no comments on these immigration acts, what these laws mean to Chinese immigrant men can never be misunderstood. This is a history of segregation and discrimination, in which Chinese men were banned from becoming citizens of the United States and barred from marrying American (white) women. At the same time, Chinese women were barred from entering America. In this way, Chinese immigrant men were symbolically castrated and emasculated. They were deprived of the right of being men. Due to these immigration acts, those Chinese forefathers on this land were not only “aliens” but also “bachelors” as is suggested in “Ghostmate,” in which the young man, like the Chinese sojourners in the United States, is a “traveler” (74) and a “stranger” (75). He “walks along a mountain road” (74) in a strange land. A beautiful woman shelters him when a storm comes. In contrast to those women Tang Ao meets, this lady welcomes him, feeds him, and comforts him. She promises to bring him

whatever he wants: “I can give you your wishes” (77). Though he wants to return home with what he has got, he stays: “Days go by, Nights” (79). Before the fable ends, the man realizes that the lady he met is merely a ghost and the wonderful life he thought he had is only a fantasy, a dream that he can never fulfill. This is what those forefathers have experienced on this land—the disillusionment of the “American Dream.”

In contrast to the fable of Tang Ao borrowed from *Ching-hua-yuan* (*Flower in the Mirror*), a famous Chinese novel written by Li Ju-chen/Li Ruzhen between 1810 and 1820, is the story of Lo Bun Sun borrowed from *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719) written by Daniel Defoe. If the former converts gender identity, the latter deconstructs the boundary of race—the West versus the East. The English story about an Anglo-Saxon hero is transformed by Kingston into a Chinese story about a Chinese hero: “We had a book from China about a sailor named Lo Bun Sun” (224). Though Kingston defines Lo Bun Sun as “a mule and toiling man, naked and toiling body, alone, son and grandson, himself all the generations” (226), we can trace the spirit that Lo Bun Sun stands for: endurance, patience, hard work, self-reliance, self-sufficiency, independence—the spirit of both East and West, the spirit we can find from both Taoism[2] and Benjamin Franklin.

In “The Li Sao: An Elegy,” Kingston retells the story of Chu Yuan, a Chinese poet and once a high official in an ancient Chinese court. He is banished by the king because he advises the King not to fight a losing war. He wanders in exile and finally commits suicide by drowning himself in a river. He is now regarded as

a hero in Chinese culture and every year Chinese people make *zongzi* (rice wrapped with leaves) on the anniversary of his death for memory and honor. In some respects, Chinese immigrant males in this book are depicted by Kingston also as "heroes in exile." Like Chu Yuan, these Chinese immigrant men wandered in a strange land thinking about their families in China as is shown in "The Hundred-Year-Old Man," in which Kingston portrays a man who "had sent half of his pay to his family in China" (305), which celebrates Chinese men's strong sense of responsibility to their families that is considered a traditional Chinese virtue called "filiality."

Emasculation of Asian (American) Men

In American history, Chinese immigrant males have been sexually emasculated and racially castrated. When he enters the Land of Women, Tang Ao is captured, his earlobes jabbed through with needles, his hair on the face plucked, his face powdered white, his cheeks and lips painted red; he is totally converted into a "pretty woman." When he tries to voice his anger for racial and class exploitation, Bak Goong is whipped as a punishment for not keeping quiet and/or not being submissive. When he comes to Gold Mountain from China with an "American Dream," Ah Goong, whose "sexual desire clutched him so hard" (133), habitually masturbates "whenever he was lowered in the basket" (133) since his wife is not permitted to enter America. When he has lost his laundry, BaBa stays at home either cursing or remaining silent which is "[w]orse than the swearing and the nightly screams" (14). When he has nightmares of killing or

being killed in the Vietnam War, Brother is repeatedly tortured by a “personal racial harassment” question by his commander: “Where you from?” (286) and thus the color of his skin defines permanently that he can never become an American but an “alien” from Asia though he was born in America and has never been to Asia before he is recruited in the American Navy.

Such questions then arise: Why and how were these Chinese immigrant men castrated or feminized in American history? The situation for Chinese men in American history is complicated, intertwined with racial, gender, and class issues in the context of American immigration exclusion laws against Chinese immigrants. I wonder if these Asian immigrants and/or Asian Americans were still considered or treated as men. I wonder how they could survive all these hardship, racial discrimination, and class exploitation. And I wonder how they felt in heart when they were cruelly emasculated and when their contributions in constructing the country as Americans were historically erased.

Why were Chinese men castrated or emasculated in U. S. history? The emasculation of these men is closely connected with “racial formation,” “gender formation,” and “class formation,” in Lisa Lowe’s term, defined by the U. S. nation-state. This is because these Asian immigrant males are, first of all, defined as well as restricted by the definition of American citizenship, according to which, Asian immigrants are defined “both as persons and populations to be integrated into the national political sphere and as the contradictory, confusing, unintelligible elements to be marginalized and returned to their alien origins” (Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* 4). This racial formation is contradictory by nature: “on the

one hand, Asian states have become prominent as external rivals in overseas imperial war and in the global economy, and on the other, Asian immigrants are still a necessary racialized labor force within the domestic national economy" (*Immigrant Acts* 5).

Owing to this contradictory racial formation, Asian immigrants in the United Sates were still considered as "alien" or "Other" although they made great contributions in planting sugar cane like Bak Goong, in building transcontinental railroads like Ah Goong, in running laundry and restaurant businesses like Baba, and in fighting for the country during the Vietnam War like Brother. Their contributions in building and sustaining the country were simply erased from American history. This contradictory racial formation highlights the unavoidable results of the emasculation of Asian (American) men in U. S. history. Though cheap laborers are the bottom line for obtaining profits for capitalism that pays little attention to the source of these laborers as long as they are cheap, the participation of these cheap Asian immigrant laborers in the U. S. labor market made some people alarmed including white working-class men. They took Asian immigrant laborers as a threat to the security of their own jobs. The anti-Chinese league of Unionvill, Nevada in 1869 and the Anti-Chinese Riot in Milwaukee in 1889 are two examples of many as the "reaction" to this "threat." As a result, 153 Chinese died of anti-Chinese violence and 10,525 Chinese were displaced from their homes and business between the 1850s and 1903.[3]

Another question I want to explore is: How were Chinese men castrated or emasculated in American history? The first way to achieve this purpose is to

Orientalize Asian countries as well as their peoples. The U. S. nation-state in history considered Asian countries as "exotic," "weak," "backward," "barbaric," "alien," and "Other," and Asian immigrants in the United States as a "yellow peril" that threatened white European immigrants and as a "Model Minority" that expected Asian immigrants to play the roles of submission, hard work, and silence. Asian Americans were defined by the U. S. cultural imaginary as alien non-citizen, racial enemy, and colonized national (*Immigrant Acts* 8). Owing to this definition of Asian immigrants and Asian Americans, the history of Asian immigration to the United States since the mid-nineteenth century has witnessed the laws of immigration exclusion acts such as the exclusion of Chinese in 1882, of Asian Indians in 1917, of Koreans and Japanese in 1924, and of Philippine immigrants in 1943 and 1952.[4] Thus, "Asian populations in the United States were managed by exclusion acts, bars from citizenship, quotas, and internment, all of which made use of racialist constructions of Asian-origin groups as homogeneous" (*Immigrant Acts* 68). In other words, this racial formation defined Asian immigrants and Asian Americans not as individuals but as homogeneous aliens.

For this reason, these Asian (American) males became invisible or absent, their existence being historically and intentionally erased. For example, the Asian immigrant male laborers were not *there* on the photo of the "Golden Spike" ceremony taken on May 10, 1869. They were dispersed after the completion of the transcontinental railroads as the dominant race's "refusal to see what is obviously there to be seen" (Eng, *Racial Castration* 47). This suggests that "the

dominant visual images created and manufactured in the United States are culturally targeted to white consumers" (*Racial Castration* 46). In this country, the Asian immigrant males were needed merely as cheap laborers but not as American citizens and thus they were treated as the invisible in the public.

The images of Chinese men as the contributors of the transcontinental railroads were deliberately "cut off" in the process of cultural sanctions. The producer of this photograph as a visual documentation has the political power to decide what viewers or the public are supposed to see or as the "given-to-be-seen" in Jacques Lacan's term.[5] In this respect, "our perception of 'reality' not only depends on our racial backgrounds but on a deliberate material racism that underpins the visual domain itself" (*Racial Castration* 47). Furthermore, the racial formation of Asian immigrants has also been a gender formation, because immigration regulations and the restrictions on naturalization and citizenship have both racialized and gendered Asian Americans (*Immigrant Acts* 12). For example, the 1943 enfranchisement of the Chinese American into citizenship "constituted the Chinese immigrant subject as male," and the Chinese wives of U. S. citizens "were exempted from the permitted annual quota" for the purpose of "preventing the formation of families and generations among Chinese immigrants" (*Immigrant Acts* 11). And the 1924 Immigration Act claims, "Any Chinese man who married an American woman caused her to lose her citizenship" (*China Men* 156). As a result, bachelor communities became typical of Chinatowns in the United States before World War II. And these Chinese men without women around were not men at all, and thus the Asian American male

identities have been historically, politically, and psychologically castrated or emasculated.

Under such circumstances, these Chinese men have been totally erased from American history. In Frank Chin et al.'s words, "America does not recognize Asian America as a presence, though Asian-Americans have been here for seven generations. For seven generations we have been aware of that refusal, and internalized it, with disastrous effects" (*Aiiieeeee!* ix). The U. S. nation-state deliberately placed Asian immigrant males in such a position that they were believed to be weak, passive, submissive, dependent, evil, invisible, absent, etc.—the position that women were/are assumed to be in. In this case, Asian American males were not only feminized but also orientalized. According to Orientalism that is defined by Said as "a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture" (*Orientalism* 12), the East is weak, backward, powerless, and feminine while the West strong, progressive, powerful, and masculine.

Racial stereotypes of Asian immigrant males created in the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries by the U. S. nation-state have proved to be an "effective strategy" for the West to dominate the East. Thus, the relationship between West and East, according to Orientalism, is a relationship of Western power, domination, superiority, and articulation over Eastern powerlessness, submission, inferiority, and silence (*Orientalism* 5, 6, 12, 42, 45, and 94). This Orientalist discourse is created and defined only by the West. In this case, the conception of "Oriental" is merely defined by Western knowledge about the

Eastern countries: their race, culture, history, traditions, and society and, as a result, the identities of the Easterners are not created by the East but by the West through “knowledgeable manipulations” (*Orientalism* 38, 40). In other words, the West does not receive other cultures as they are, “but as, for the benefit of the receiver, they ought to be” (*Orientalism* 67). According to this Orientalist discourse, these Asian immigrant males should not be considered as men based on Western masculinity codes. Since they are not “qualified” as either men or whites, these Asian males cannot claim the privileges that white men have enjoyed. Since they are assumed to be weak, powerless, and silent, they are expected to play the submissive roles of Other. And since they are believed to be “alien,” “unassimilative,” and “threatening,” they should be brought under control. Said’s theory on Orietalism explains why and how Asian immigrant males are not only sexually emasculated but also racially marginalized.

The stereotyping of Asian American men is, to some extent, the result of the practice of American Orietalism that has led to the U. S. nation-state’s enforcement of immigration exclusion laws and similar anti-immigration policies. The prevalence of “Yellow Peril” demonstrates the fear of the U. S. nation-state that “Asian and other non-white immigrants threaten the American way of life, taking away ‘American’ jobs and lowering the standard of living” (Kim, “Asian Americans and American Popular Culture” 101). The consequence of this stereotyping forced Chinese men to see from the mirrors of society the values of white supremacy. And it is a tragedy that these Chinese men internalized the belief that an esthetically similar image with the white is a necessary condition for

their acceptance in this society. They were also annoyed when they realized that they were no longer taken as men in this new country and were placed in a low social status like women.

The historical emasculation of Chinese males can be clearly traced in Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men*. Kingston represents the history of emasculation of Asian immigrant men by relating the stories of four generations of Chinese immigrants in the United States in the context of the history of restrictive/exclusionary laws in the United States in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century instituted by the dominant white culture against the Chinese. By telling the fable of Tang Ao who has been converted into a woman and has lost his identity in the Land of Women, Kingston reveals the history in which these Chinese men were metaphorically castrated in America. Kingston successfully uncovers a deliberately-forgotten history and describes the Chinese male's experience of emasculation: Chinese laborers could neither create families nor articulate thoughts. "Both restrictions serve capitalism: the code of silence prevents organized uprisings while sexual prohibitions not only increase work efficiency but also prevent the possibility of American-born population who might claim their 'native' rights" (Lee, "Claiming Land, Claiming Voice, Claiming Canon" 149-50). Thus, these Chinese immigrant men were not only historically and politically emasculated and erased but also economically exploited as laborers in the United States.

This collective absence of Chinese immigrant males in U. S. history is the result of the practice of U. S. national culture that "powerfully shapes who the

citizenry is, where they dwell, what they remember, and what they forget" (Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* 2). These Chinese immigrant males are physically present as cheap laborers but metaphorically, socially, and politically absent as part of the national population. This "class formation," intersecting with the various practices of racial and gender exclusions, according to Lisa Lowe, reveals that when the state addressed the economic contradiction between capital and labor, economic class was articulated through race in the context of the exploitation of the gendered Asian workers under U. S. capitalism.[6] Chinese immigrant laborers experienced the paradox of America: the "American Dream" of freedom, democracy, and equality versus a nation with some people suffering from racial exclusion and discrimination and class exploitation. While being discriminated and exploited, these Chinese immigrant laborers were forced at the same time into silence by their oppressors: "Bak Goong had been fined for talking" (102). The contractors have deprived them of the right of speech not only to keep these "aliens" in a passive and subordinate position as if they were women for the purpose of domination or control but also to exploit them by extracting benefits from these working-class laborers. Under such circumstances, Chinese men like Bak Goong dig holes in the earth and talk whatever they feel the need to articulate into the earth. They metaphorically plant their words in the earth, waiting for their stories to grow and harvest some day in the future.

Deconstruction of Racial/Gender Formations

In general, Kingston's project in *China Men* is to deconstruct both racial stereotyping of Chinese (American) men and the binary opposition of gender formation, especially the opposition between Asian American men and Asian American women. Like Asian American women, Asian American men also face a dilemma. On the one hand, the orientalist stereotyping marginalizes Asian (American) men as the "Other." In such a social and historical context of racialization, the outlet of this marginalization, according to nation-state politics, is to assimilate these Asian (American) men and to convert them into a "Model Minority." However, the assimilation of these Asian (American) men into main stream American society might result in the ethnic self-denial, an instance of marginalizing themselves from their "original" culture. On the other hand, if they refuse to be Americanized, they will be excluded and marginalized as the "Other." Whatever they do, they will be finally marginalized. Is there a way to get out of this binary opposition or contradiction for Asian American men as well as women? Can they blend East and West? The act of blending East and West, according to David Leiwei Li, is problematic because it divides an Asian American into two incompatible segments: the foreigner whose status is dependent on his ability to be accepted by the mainstream culture and the person who is taught that identification with his foreignness is the only way to "justify" his difference in skin color. The former thus is the access to Americanness and the latter results in marginalization (*Imagining the Nation* 10).

However, I think Li's argument still remains in the paradigm of binary oppositions. I argue that the study of Asian American identity should walk out of the shadow of these binary oppositions. Ethnic identity has been based on the cultural practices that are partially inherited from their "origin," partially modified to adjust to the new social environment, and partially invented by their individual experiences. In other words, ethnic identity is unique, different from the culture in the new country and from the culture of "origin;" on the other hand, ethnic identity is related to both; furthermore, ethnic identity is multicultural, heterogeneous, and fluxing rather than one-dimensional, homogeneous, and fixed. Complete Americanization or nativisim/cultural maintenance is not only impossible but also unacceptable.

My suggestion is that we set the project of reconstruction of Asian American identity on the trajectory of resisting homogeneous ethnic identity that identifies orientalist discourse about Asians and Asian Americans, critiquing the simple subversion of this homogeneous ethnic identity, redefining ethnic identity focusing on heterogeneity, and finally sustaining individuality that deconstructs the definition and boundary of ethnic identity. It is politically wrong for American Orientalism to stereotype Asians and Asian Americans such as Fu Manchu and Charlie Chen; it is also inappropriate or at least unnecessary for Asian Americans or Asians in America to stereotype themselves for the purpose of "ethnic difference" as in the instance of Chinese female students at some American universities who always dress *qipao* on the occasion of celebrating Chinese New Year to appear as "typical Chinese" under the gaze of non-Chinese Americans.

While some Asian American women writers such as Kingston attempt to deconstruct the boundary between masculinity and femininity, some critics, to my surprise, are still imbedded in this binary opposition. Through research, I notice that some critics mention the jobs that Asian immigrant males did as "women's work." For example, King-Kok Cheung states, "Because of unequal employment opportunities, these men were forced to be cooks, waiters, laundry workers, and domestics—jobs traditionally considered 'women's work'" ("Of Men and Men"175). The meaning of "traditionally considered" is indistinct here. Cheung draws a similar conclusion in another article: "After the gold rush in California and the completion of the transcontinental railroad, job discrimination meant that these men were employed mostly as restaurant cooks, laundry workers, waiters, or houseboys—jobs traditionally considered 'feminine'" ("Art, Spirituality, and the Ethnic of Care" 262).

Like Cheung, Shu-mei Shih also states, "Denied the right to marriage and the legal status of residency, they [Chinese immigrant men] were relegated to 'womanly' professions such as laundry and restaurant work" ("Exile and Intertextuality" 68). Shih points out that these Chinese men were forced to do womanly work, due to the social, economic, and legal circumstances that they were placed in, and thus "they were looked down upon even more because of this involuntary femininity" ("Exile and Intertextuality" 68). Does Shih suggest that the femininity of Chinese men lies in the jobs they were doing? Similarly, Pirjo Ahokas claims, "As a result of their social and legal circumstances Chinese immigrant men were forced to take jobs traditionally regarded as 'women's work'"

(“Two Brothers” 563). And the fact that these Chinese immigrant men’s willingness to do “women’s work” “that no self-respecting white man would perform,” as Henry Yu suggests, “served to feminize the portrayal of Oriental men” (*Thinking Orientals* 131). And Alfred S. Wang even calls these jobs that Chinese men did “the despised ‘feminine’ jobs” (20).

The arguments of Cheung and Shih, to me, are both ambiguous and problematic. It is ambiguous because it is hard to tell from whose perspectives the conclusions are made, from patriarchal ideology or from their own. Do their arguments suggest that they share this patriarchal ideology or resist against it? Do they agree that professions should be engendered? It is problematic because this ambiguity weakens their arguments since we don’t know which boat they are in or where they stand, concerning gender not race of course. We are not sure where they are trying to lead us. If they intend to demonstrate that these Asian immigrant males or Asian American men were emasculated simply because they did those jobs mentioned above, it is problematic and misleading. Probably, when they focus on race issues, they overlook gender issues.

I argue that Asian immigrant males or Asian American men were emasculated and castrated in the sense that their wives were legislatively barred from entering the United States to live with them or that they had no women available to marry, but not because of these jobs they were doing. Even if they did feel depressed, degraded, or feminized due to the jobs they were doing, it might indicate that patriarchal ideology existed either in American culture or in the Chinese American community or in both. In other words, they were despised

when they did these jobs because the society was patriarchal and they were under the pressure of being treated like women to the Western patriarchal gaze. However, we cannot conclude that Asian immigrant males or Asian American men were emasculated merely because they did such jobs. If we did, we would be in the same boat with patriarchy in either American culture or in the Chinese American community or in both. Thus, what these critics are trying to argue is just in contrary to what Asian American women writers such as Kingston demonstrate in their writings: the determination to dismantle or deconstruct not only racial formation but gender boundary between Asian American men and Asian American women, including gender as well as class bias against those jobs.

Identities of Chinese Men in Chinese American Women's Writings

Some Asian American critics are disappointed by the fact that the stereotypical representation of Asian (American) men exists in Asian American literature. For example, King-Kok Cheung concludes:

> [T]he most popular books and films by Asian Americans have one element in common: the marginalization of Asian American men . . . Asian American writers should no doubt continue to expose and combat Asian sexism, but they must also guard against internalizing and reproducing racial stereotypes, thereby reinforcing the deep-seated biases of the American reading and viewing pubic. ("Of Men and Men" 176)

Cheung here pinpoints the issues of the relationship between sexism and racism, between feminism and racial studies, or between feminist critique and sense of

ethnicity. The two, as I understand it, are both exclusive and relative rather than, as Julia Lisella claims,[7] merely dependent upon each other. They are excusive because a feminist critique on sexism is based on gender while the critique on racism is based on race; gender divides people into men and women while race distinguishes people according to their ethnicity. Different divisions put people into different social groups. In this case, people between different social groups may exclude from each other due to their different interests. On the other hand, the two issues are also closely connected because the two are sometimes overlapping. Under certain circumstances, some people of one social group may share a same or similar goal with some people in another social group; they may at the same time feel exclusive from some other people of the same social group. Sometimes people shuttle between or among different groups.

This is particularly true with women of color. As a woman, she demands autonomy and equality with a man by gathering together with other women including women of other races to resist patriarchy practiced by men including her own husband; as an Asian American, she, however, feels responsible to fight side by side with her husband against racism. Sometimes, it is very difficult for women of color to keep their ethnic loyalty and to critique sexism practiced by men of color at the same time. To put this in a broader sense, the different roles one plays requested by society—for example, woman, mother, wife, Asian American, member of working-class, etc.—are contradictory or excusive themselves. Thus, Asian American women, as both women and Asian Americans, like other women of color, are exposed to both sexism and racism. On the one hand, they are

determined to fight against either gender or racial domination as women of color; on the other hand, they feel divided by their sense of ethnicity and their desire for autonomy as women. As a matter of fact, almost all women writers of color are faced with this embarrassing division, which I prefer to call a “dilemma.”

Probably out of this dilemma, the identities of Chinese (American) males created by Chinese American women writers are complicated, varied, changing, and even contradictory. What Cheung has concluded about Chinese American women writers, to some extent, may be true, but we need to take their dilemma into consideration. And we can still notice the efforts that some Chinese American women writers have made to create as many different masculinities as they can to dismantle or at least to weaken the stereotyping of Chinese men in the United States by Orietalism though sometimes they do portray stereotypes in their writings themselves.

As for the instances of their stereotyping Chinese men in the United States, we can easily find evil Chinese husband characters such as Wu Tsing who first rapes and then marries An- Mei Hsu’s mother as concubine and Ying-Ying St. Clair’s first husband in China who abandons her for an opera singer in *The Joy Luck Club*; the unknown man who makes No Name Woman pregnant but refuses to take any responsibility for what he does in *The Woman Warrior*; patriarchal father stereotypes such as some grandfathers who openly show their dislike for girls and Baba who yells at and beats her daughters at home—family violence—in *China Men*, Daddy who calls his wife “inferior woman” (46) and whips his daughter, giving instructions that “one did not dispute one’s father if one were a

dutiful little girl taught to act with propriety" (3) in *Fifth Chinese Daughter*; patriarchal as well as Americanized husband figures such as Lin Fo who foolishly Americanizes his newly arrived Chinese wife in "the Americanizing Pau Tsu" from Far's *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*; and Moon Orchid's Americanized husband who marries another woman, refusing to take responsibility as husband for his Chinese wife in *The Woman Warrior*. Similarly, the images of the older generations of Chinese immigrant males in Chinatown are negative under the gaze of Leila, a Chinese American woman of the younger generation in Chinatown and the narrator of *Bone*, a novel written by Fae Myenne Ng. In Leila's eye, these old Chinese men, bachelors and the victims of immigration exclusion laws to those more empathetic readers, "look like scraps of dark remnant fabric" (8); they are "Chinatown drift-abouts," "Spitters," "Sitters," (13) "talkers, wanderers, [and] time wasters" (142). She includes Leon, her stepfather, as one of them with contempt: being a "paper son," he only talks about his invention but "never finishes anything" (13). Born, brought up, and educated in America, Leila evaluates these Chinese men by middle class standards and masculine codes. To some extent, the negative portrayal of Chinese men by these Chinese American women writers helps American Orientalism further stereotype Asian Americans as a whole including Asian American women themselves since they are in the same boat with these Asian American men in respects of race or ethnicity.

The collective image and racial/cultural identities of these Chinese men created by these writings suggests that these sojourners or immigrants come from conservative, patriarchal, and backward China. Patriarchal ideology seems

deeply imbedded in their mind. To these peasant males, sons are more important than daughters because, as peasants, sons are the major source of the family labor who can keep the family prosperous; when sons get married they stay with the family that grows larger—parents, sons and daughters-in-law, and grandchildren; above all, only sons carry their family names. In this patriarchal society, men are the center of families and if a man after marriage cannot have sons he fails his ancestors and is considered as "*buxiao*" (disrespect to ancestors), which is a shame not only to himself but to the whole family.

One such example is those neighbors in the Chinese community who laugh at Kingston's father when he at first has no sons but only daughters. Another example is Maxine's great-uncle in *The Woman Warrior* who yells: "Where are my grandsons? I want grandsons! Give me grandsons!" (191). Similarly, Fae Myenne Ng, at the beginning of *Bone*, tells her readers: "We were a family of three girls. By Chinese standards, that wasn't lucky. In Chinatown, everyone knew our story. Outsiders jerked their chins, looked at us, shook their heads," and people in Chinatown called them "[a] failed family" (1). As for this patriarchy in traditional Chinese peasantry, Daddy in *Fifth Chinese Daughter* concludes:

> "Many Chinese were very short-sighted. They felt that since their daughters would marry into a family of another name, they would not belong permanently in their own family clan. Therefore, they argued that it was not worthwhile to invent in their daughters' book education. But my answer was that since sons and their education are of primary

> importance, we must have intelligent mothers. If nobody educates his daughters, how can we have intelligent mothers for our sons?". (14-15)

It is ironic that Daddy is not aware he is not less patriarchal than his fellow villagers. He cares for his daughter's education merely for the sake of his grandsons if he has any in the future. It is understandable that Kingston is greatly annoyed by those patriarchal "idioms" in *The Woman Warrior* such as "Girls are maggots in the rice. It is more profitable to raise geese than daughters" (43); "Marry a rooster, follow a rooster. Marry a dog, follow a dog" (193). However, the images of Chinese men as patriarchal oppressors and of Chinese women as victims of Chinese patriarchal domination created by Chinese American women writers, to some extent, reinforce racial stereotypes of Chinese men as backward and primitive and America as the best place for women in contrast to China that Orientalist discourse strongly advocates.

On the other hand, some of, if not all of, Asian American women writers take pains to reduce, if impossible to remove, the negative images of men of color. One example is that Kingston, while critiquing patriarchy in Chinese community, reveals the other side of Baba in *China Men* who sends money to his wife in China, supporting her study at a medical school. In contrast, Baba's wife, Brave Orchid, to some extent, is more "masculine," "aggressive," and "authoritative" than Baba. She scolds her husband to find a new job when he has lost the present one: "You piece of liver. You poet. You scholar. What's the use of a poet and a scholar on the Gold Mountain?" (248). In this way, Kingston deconstructs the paradigm of men being equal to masculinity while women to femininity. Similarly, the

narrator in this book tells her readers that “the Revolution (the Liberation) [in old China] was against girl slavery and girl infanticide” (190-91) to suggest exceptions of patriarchal China.

In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston suggests that the oppressors of women may not necessarily be only men. A good example is her description of the villagers’ attack on No Name Woman before her childbirth: Kingston mostly uses neutral words such as “people,” “villagers,” “they,” “some of faces,” “men and women,” etc.; she never uses “men” by itself throughout the description on the attack but mentions “woman” or “women” three times. Another instance is Moon Orchid’s madness. Kingston implies that Brave Orchid is partly responsible for this due to her strong-mindedness, her manipulation, and her control over Moon Orchid.

Similarly, Sui Sin Far, when creating some patriarchal Chinese men in her works, has also portrayed a caring Chinese husband for the purpose of variation. For example, in “One White Woman Who Married a Chinese” and “Her Chinese Husband,” Far tells the stories about Liu Kanghi who saves a white woman’s life, takes good care of her, gives her a job to become independent, and finally marries her when she devoices her abusive white husband. Through this story, Sui Sin Far intends to critique “the American assumption that white American males treat their wives better than do Chinese husbands” (Dupree 88). Through these stories Far expresses her protest against racial/sexual stereotypes that Asian (American) men are believed to be devious, shrewd, and inscrutable like Fu Manchu.

Notes

1. Frank Chin's prejudices against Chinese American women writers can be traced in his "Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake" collected in the book *The Big Aiiieeeee!: an Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature* (1991) edited by Jeffery Paul Chan.
2. Taoism (*Dao* in Chinese) refers to a religious and philosophical belief system in traditional Chinese culture originated by Laozi, the Chinese philosopher in the 5th century B. C. To define it simply, Taoism stresses the importance of harmony with nature and simplicity in life. See details at: http://www.religiousworlds.com/taoism/index.html.
3. The information is based on Victor Jew's "Exploring New Frontiers in Chinese American History: The Anti-Chinese Riot in Milwaukee, 1889" from *The Chinese in America: A History from Gold Mountain to the New Millennium* (2002) edited by Susie Lan Cassel.
4. The information is based on Lisa Lowe's *Immigrant Acts*.
5. For Jacques Lacan's theory on "the Symbolic Order," see *Ecrits: A Selection*.
6. For Lisa Lowe's theory on "class formation," see her work *Immigrant Acts*.
7. Julia Lisella claims, "Kingston is trying to construct a space in which these two issues of ethnic loyalty and of feminist critique are not mutually exclusive, but rather, mutually dependent" (59). See "Class, Ethnicity and Gender in Kingston's *China Men*."

CHAPTER FIVE

"ARE THEY OPPOSITE CREATURES?" GENDER/RACIAL DECONSTRUCTIONS IN ASIAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S WRITINGS

There has been a long debate between Asian American feminism and Asian American nationalism or nativism concerning the issues of race and gender and of relations between Asian American men and women. No wonder King-Kok Cheung raises such a question: "Must a Chinese American critic choose between feminism and heroism?" ("The Woman Warrior versus the Chinese Pacific") and Elaine Kim calls Asian American men and women "such opposite creatures" ("'Such Opposite Creatures': Men and Women in Asian American Literature"). The conflict between Asian American men and women writers as well as critics focuses on their different understanding of sexual politics, especially when these sexual politics are intertwined with the issues of race. Critics such as Frank Chin focus on racial issues of Asian American men, overlooking and excluding Asian American women (writers); Asian American women writers such as Maxine Hong Kingston, Sui Sin Far, and Amy Tan, on the other hand, focus on gender issues of Asian American women though racial issues are also their concern.

It may be argued that the debates are based either upon binary oppositions of the two sexes and of masculinity and femininity (gender formation) or upon binary oppositions of East/West and Chineseness/Americanness (racial formation). Thus, the way to settle these debates is to deconstruct both gender and racial categories/hierarchies and to reconstruct a new relation between men and

women, between East and West. It is my contention that the relationship between (Chinese American) men and women is not and should not fall into the trap of binary oppositions. Rather, they could be allies instead of enemies; they could be two halves of a whole/completeness as human beings. Since the scholarship on these debates is already abundant, I have no intention to repeat it here. My concern about these issues is that it is high time we deconstruct dominant gender formation and reconsider sexual politics from some different perspectives.

First of all, what we need to do is to move out of the trap of the binary oppositional thinking that polarizes the two sexes because "thinking of men and women as polar opposites seemed not only far too simplistic but also obstructive to an understanding of gender" (Shepherd, "Feminism, Men, and the Study of Masculinity" 176). Furthermore, it is harmful and problematic to polarize opposition between men and women. This is because, first of all, if we restrict the relation between men and women within binary opposition, the only thing we can do is to simply reverse the positions between the two; second, to polarize men and women as opposites and even "enemies" means to drive those males out of the battlefield who are willing to join women/feminists fighting against patriarchy; third, we may overlook the possibility that men may be "harmed by this 'hegemonic masculinity,'" "because it narrowed their options, forced them into confining roles, dampened their emotions . . . and doomed them to continual and humiliating fear of failure to live up to the masculinity mark" (Gardiner, *Masculinity Studies & Feminist Theory* 6-7).

We should not polarize people(s) due to their differences of nationality, gender, race, class, etc. In fact, differences coexist with similarities. For example, within feminism, some feminists, such as Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett, and Naomi Wolf, stress the importance of similarity with men—with men's potential—and thus claim equality with them. Some other feminists, such as Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous, in contrast, highlight women's difference from men and thus advocate separating themselves from men. Some Asian American feminist critics, such as King-Kok Cheung, critique Asian and white patriarchy on the one hand, and declare their differences from Eurocentric feminism on the other. They claim that white liberal feminism critiques patriarchy "at the expense of 'third world' cultures" (Cheung, "Re-Viewing Asian American Literature Studies" 12). This is because, they argue, white liberal feminists "speak in the name of a singular womanhood" and their own analyses "are blind to racial difference" (Schueller, "Questioning Race and Gender Definitions" 52). As I argued in Chapter Four, it is natural for people to remain different, and thus their differences should not lead to the polarization of these people based upon their gender or race. And the task for feminists (of color) is to work out a way to end sexist and racial oppressions and to build a society where everyone, male or female, white or nonwhite, has the opportunity to live a fair and equal life. Thus, what is important is not a battle of the sexes or of races, but a battle for equality and a fight against the exercises of power based on sexual and/or racial oppressions.

We need not only to challenge the practice of strict male-female or masculinity-femininity oppositions, but to deconstruct and then to reconstruct the

definitions of “masculinity” and “femininity” so as to redefine gender relations in the context of Asian America. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler, the poststructuralist feminist, suggests that gender is an “act” that is performative—“a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning” (139) because this “action” is a public action and “the performance is effected with the strategic aim of maintaining gender within its binary frame” (140). People perform gender acts, according to Butler, for the purpose of cultural survival, without which people would be vulnerable to “punitive consequences” (139).

Butler’s “gender performance” theory problematizes the hegemonic discourse on masculinity and femininity. “Because there is neither an ‘essence’ that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all” (139). Similarly, Matthew Shepherd claims that, instead of understanding “masculinity” as an identity of men, it “can be employed by either sex” (177), and it is an analysis that is focused neither solely on men nor solely on women, but on gender relations, on power relations” (“Feminism, Men, and the Study of Masculinity” 177, 178). Both Butler and Shepherd deconstruct the boundary between men and women, between masculinity and femininity. However, neither of them deconstructs the terms “masculinity” or “femininity.” For example, Shepherd still defines “masculinity” as “an exercise of power that creates, reinforces, and maintains sexual inequalities and sexist oppression” (“Feminism, Men, and the Study of Masculinity” 177). What I intend to do is to deconstruct these terms by removing some of the

connotation out of the terms—the connotation that “masculinity” contains power, patriarchy, privileges, etc. while “femininity” implies powerlessness, subordination, submissiveness, oppression, silence, etc. By doing so, we may “purify” the terms before we use them. This is not merely a feminist agenda, but a humanist, political, and social project.

Personally I define “masculinities” as the tendencies in either sex toward aggressiveness, prowess, activity, competitiveness, etc. and “femininities” as the tendencies of either sex toward tenderness, nurturing, empathy, etc. I prefer the usage of “masculinities” and “femininities” to “masculinity” and “femininity” for the purpose of either avoiding the old terms or stressing the importance of multiplicities, heterogeneities, and diversities. My definition is neither sex-oriented nor hierarchy-oriented. Rather, it is about tendencies and/or potentials of individuals. In other words, “masculinities” is not restricted in defining men while “femininities” in defining women. Instead, there are similarities as well as differences between men and women, between men and men, between women and women. In this regard, both terms are referred to as the description of behavior tendencies rather than sexual orientations and neither is superior to the other. Furthermore, something exists in between the two. So we need to invent new terms for this purpose. For example, we may name this “something-in-between” with new terms such as “femini-masculinities,” “masculi-femininities.” Any man or woman may have tendencies of any one of them that become typical at a certain period of time, at a certain age, in a certain mood, or under certain circumstances. These tendencies are floating, fluxing, or

changing rather than static or fixed. To illustrate my point more clearly, I invent the following diagram inspired by the theories of Butler and Shepherd:

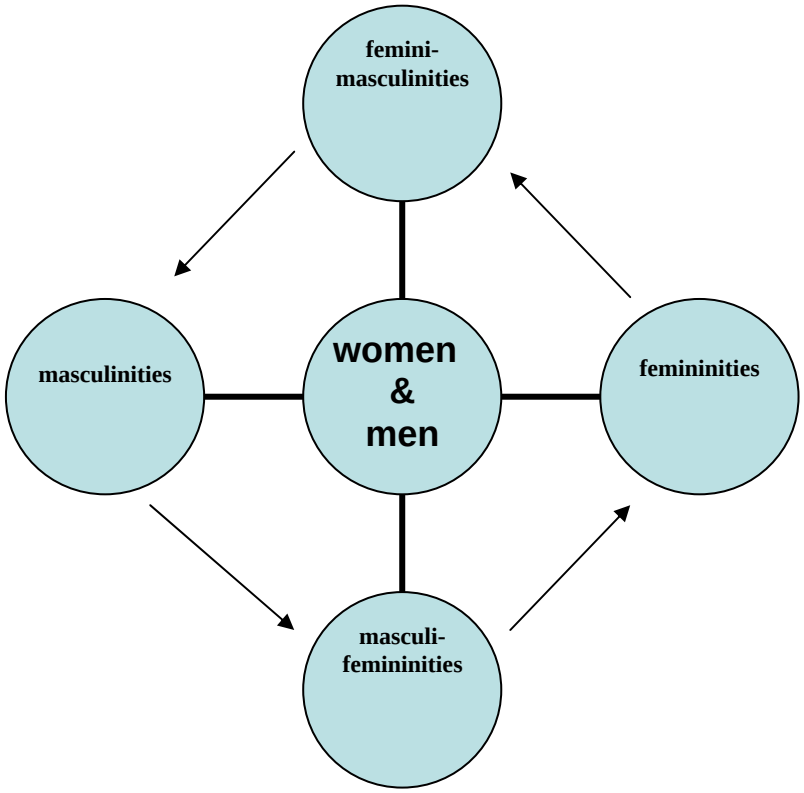

Fig. 2. Tendencies of masculinities/femininities.

Men and women are and should be politically, socially, financially equal and there should be no privileges for anybody, that we should remove patriarchy and gender bias out of such terms as “masculinities” and “femininities” that define physical and psychological tendencies of human beings rather than gender division, and that tendencies of “masculinities” and “femininities” exist in both males and females who are individuals possessing those tendencies in different degrees. For example, Brave Orchid can be a woman of “femini-masculinities,” a character who is more masculine than feminine. She is adventurous to sleep in the ghost-haunted room in old China; her voice is strong and bossy at her

American home—much louder than her husband's; she is impatient and curses her husband when he has lost his job. On the other hand, she becomes patient and nurturing when her daughter gets sick. She turns into a nice and tender mother making Chinese herbs and cooking for her daughter. It is impossible to define her by either "masculinity" or "femininity." Rather, she is in-between and her tendencies toward masculinities are, in general, more obvious than those toward femininities though at a certain period of time her tendencies toward femininities do occur to her. For this reason, she is not a stereotype to serve the purpose of a gender category. Furthermore, she has no intention to play the roles as a woman that she is expected to play by the patriarchal society. Instead, she is what she is, and acts as an individual. She forbids her daughter to tell the story of No Name Woman to others, but she tells it first. She curses her husband and her daughters, but she shoulders the responsibility of bringing up five children. She is professional and intelligent in a Chinese village, but dominant and superstitious at an American home. She is not perfect, but deserves respect. Above all, she is a woman, but goes beyond gender boundary.

As a matter of fact, all three women writers—Kingston, Far, and Tan—deal with the issue of gender-crossing in their writings. The device they mostly use is a woman disguised as a man, for example, Mulan/Swordswoman in *The Woman Warrior*, Tie Co in "The Smuggling of Tie Co," Ku Yum in "A Chinese Boy-Girl," and Fin Fan in "Tian Shan's Kindred Spirit." We can also notice the instances of a man disguised as a woman. For example, the Moon Lady turns out to be a man who merely plays the role of a woman in *The Joy Luck Club*; a man is transformed

into a woman like Tang Ao in *China Men*; a boy is disguised as a girl like Ku Yum in "A Chinese Boy-Girl." Through their writings, the three women writers deconstruct gender boundaries and binary opposition of gender categories. This crossing of gender boundary is possible because, as Judith Butler argues in *Gender Trouble*, "[a]s a shifting and contextual phenomenon, gender does not denote a substantive being, but a relative point of convergence among culturally and historically specific sets of relations" (10). The reason why these women writers determine to problematize and/or deconstruct the gender boundary is to critique the gender hierarchy created by men. For this purpose they not only avoid creating simplified and one-dimensional characters of both Asian American women and men, but also blur the gender borderline by constantly crossing it. Thus, their writings, as a great contribution to the feminist agenda, prove Butler's argument:

> If a stable notion of gender no longer proves to be the foundational premise of feminist politics, perhaps a new sort of feminist politics is now desirable to contest the very reifications of gender and identity, one that will take the variable construction of identity as both a methodological and normative prerequisite, if not a political goal. (*Gender Trouble* 5)

It is not enough merely to deconstruct dominant gender formation. We need to deconstruct dominant racial formation as well. In *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s*, Michael Omi and Howard Winant claim that the definition of race, as "a matter of both social structure and cultural representation" (56), is "unstable" and "decentered" (55). And people are

expected “to act out their apparent racial identities” (59). In this regard, “race is not a biologically given but rather a socially constructed way of differentiating human beings" (65). In other words, like that of gender, race is also performative. For example, both “Yellow Peril” and “Model Minority” have been the collective identities created by the dominant society for Asian Americans at different periods of time in the United States. Since race is performative, racial category/hierarchy is also arbitrary and thus can be dismantled.

Asian American women writers such as Far, Kingston, and Tan have not only made their contribution to gender deconstruction, but also a racial one in their writings. The device they mostly use in their writings is to dismantle the boundary between Chineseness and Americanness. In *The Joy Luck Club* we can find both Chineseness and Americanness in mothers and daughters. Lindo once asked, “How do you know what is Chinese, what is not Chinese?” (228) Lindo questions the possibility of racial identity. Is Chineseness/Americanness biological or geographical or both or neither? There is no easy answer to this question. However, racial categories based upon either biology or geography or both are inadequate, superficial, and untrustworthy. This is because these racial categories based upon biology/geography “reveal themselves, upon serious examination, to be at best imprecise, and at worst completely arbitrary” (Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation* 55). This arbitrary racial borderline is crossed in “The Smuggling of Tie Co,” in which Far deals with the issue of both racial and gender crossing. Fabian, the white smuggler, identifies Tie Co as a “Chinaman”: “’There’s no accounting for a Chinaman,’ muttered Fabian” (106). When Tie Co

dies, the truth that this “Chinaman” is neither Chinese nor a man puzzles the white smuggler. Instead, she is a woman and a Chinese Canadian. This misidentification itself undermines both racial and gender formations that are not trustworthy. In other words, these racial and gender borderlines are arbitrary. The contribution that Sui Sin Far has made to Asian American literature in this respect lies not only in her effort to move beyond the gender boundary but also in her deconstruction of racial definition.

Since the 1960s efforts have been made by people of different walks of life to settle racial problems, to reduce racial distinction or to dismantle racial boundary. These efforts include assimilation, interracial marriage, biculturalism/multiculturalism, etc. However, not all efforts turn out to be beneficial or helpful in handling these racial problems. The reasons for the occurrence of these problems are complicated. The problem with assimilation is that, based upon unequal relations between the East and the West, assimilation requires those who are willing to be accepted into the American mainstream to abandon their own original culture. This will lead to their social and psychological self-denial. For example, some of Far’s stories in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* deal with this problem caused by assimilation. In such stories as “The Wisdom of the New” and “The Americanizing of Pau Tsu,” the Chinese husbands force their Chinese wives to be Americanized without considering their wives’ own desires and feelings, as I analyzed in Chapter Two. The husbands’ attempts to have their wives assimilated are far from successful. Rather, it turns out to be tragic: one wife poisons her own son to prevent him from being Americanized and the other

leaves her husband to prevent his further temptation of Americanizing her. Far's stories reveal that this assimilation easily leads to the wives' self-denial or self-contempt.

The most "successful" example of assimilation in Asian American literature seems to be Jasmine in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*. However, even Jasmine has a problem with her identity. She has different names during various periods of her life when she meets different men who mysteriously help her assimilate into the American mainstream. As a price she has to pay for this assimilation, Jasmine's "origin" or past is totally erased from her life and her memory. On the other hand, this novel not only reduces the complexities of immigration, but also erases the history and ethnic identity of the immigrant woman and ignores the realities of racial distinctions in American society. An unskilled immigrant woman, especially an illegal alien like Jasmine, is usually powerless and marginalized in America. Furthermore, the novel, to some extent, resembles Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900). If Carrie, with her beauty, changes her class identity by moving from country to city, from lower class into middle class through her changing relationships with different men, Jasmine, with her beauty, changes her racial as well as class identity by moving from her own country into America, from lower class into middle class through her changing names given by different men she has relationship with. In this sense, Jasmine's journey of assimilation is completed in the context of her moral decay: violence and betrayal. Jasmine is involved with the murder of a man she hates and the betrayal of the "friendship" with, and of "love" for, the men she has relationship with.

Like assimilation, interracial marriage may not solve racial problems either. Rather, it will cause more problems instead. As I argued in Chapter Three, interracial marriage may be damaging to identity formation because the conflicts of dual racial membership may undermine the individual's self-esteem. The development of healthy self-esteem and a sense of self are more complicated for the biracial person. This is because races tend to be mutually exclusive: each person is either/or according to "hegemonic" American culture. It is difficult and troublesome to distinguish those who do not fit in with this either/or identity. For example, intermarriage in Sui Sin Far's time was considered as a taboo though such intermarriage was not impossible. Asian men, defined as "Yellow Peril" by early Orientalism, were believed to be preying upon helpless white women, like Fu Manchu, and Asian women were thought to be prostitutes and sex slaves. These Orientalist stereotypes of the East made intermarriage more difficult. For example, in Far's "The Story of One White Woman Who Married a Chinese," and "Her Chinese Husband," the interracial marriage between Liu Kanghi and his white wife turns out to be a tragedy. The fact that the Chinese husband is shot dead by his own countrymen proves that not only the laws of the whites prohibits it, but also Chinese people in America, by the time Far wrote these stories, were not ready for it either.

Another example is Diana Chang's *The Frontiers of Love*, a novel about a quest for a Eurasian identity, which was problematic for the mixed race. Mimi Lambert, a daughter of an Anglo-Chinese, performs the discourse of American femininity for her racial identity; Silvia Chen, a daughter of a white mother and a

Chinese father, is at first not certain who she is and feels guilty about it. We can see in Mimi the stereotype of the Eurasian as the subject of a conflicting racial identity, resulting in self-hatred. Mimi is a “tragic mulatto” figure not only because she is of mixed blood, but she has wholeheartedly adopted a Westernized construction of femininity that Sylvia resists. Silvia has, to some extent, internalized her mother's racist attitude toward un-Westernized Chinese, but at the same time she is unable to accept her mother's racism and paranoia. The racial ambiguity that Mimi and Sylvia have to wrestle with is dramatized in the scene during which the Japanese soldiers try to identify them. The confusion caused by this attempt signifies the impediment they are forced into.

Different from interracial marriage, biculturalism focuses on equal communication of different cultures. As a Eurasian woman writer, Sui Sin Far refuses to pass as a white even though she could; on the other hand, she does not identify herself only with the Chinese. Rather, Far stresses the importance of biculturalism. In *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, Far reveals the sufferings of those who find themselves racially, ethnically or culturally in between. Those in-betweens can hardly be accepted by society because the dominant racial formation is based upon binary oppositions and categorical purity. Far does not see superiority of either culture over the other. Instead, she makes it clear in her stories that both cultures are equally capable of oppressing those of inferior status. In other words, both Chinese males and white American males are capable of imposing their views on women who are supposed to be less powerful. Far deals with the issue of biculturalism in the stories "Mrs. Spring Fragrance," "The Inferior Woman"

and "Its Wavering Image," in which Far demonstrates that suffering may occur both when one is unable to adapt to the new culture and when one is too eager to adapt. Far reveals that neither culture is free of racism and patriarchy, and that there is misunderstanding between the peoples of two cultures. Though biculturalism in Far's instance keeps a balance between the two cultures, it is not sufficient by itself to remove racial domination. Culture is only a part of political structure that governs a nation. The bottom line is everybody should be equal regardless of his/her nationality, race, gender, class, culture, etc. It is far from enough merely to celebrate diversity concerning culture differences.

In this respect, it becomes significant to dismantle the dominant racial formation as well as the dominant gender formation. Only when this goal is achieved can people become equal in a true sense. Only until then can the debates between feminism and nationalism be settled. This is because when people(s) are no longer divided by gender and/or race, their relations will no longer be in binary opposition as "enemies." Rather, they—male and female, white and non-white—will come together to find solutions to social problems such as sexism and racism.

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