

Politics of Representation and Its Discontent in Contemporary Chinese American Women's Writings

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Introduction

Woman, Ethnicity and Nation

In an article entitled “The Female Frontier” that appeared in the British newspaper *The Guardian*, the renowned literary critic Elaine Showalter, dissatisfied with the candidates nominated by many critics in their discussion over the possible successor of the American novelist John Updike, named eight contemporary American women writers who should have a place in the American literary history but are overlooked by the critics and the general public.

Showalter’s exclusively female list is a response to the critics’ overwhelming nomination of male authors in the discussion, which occurred in the aftermath of the passing away of John Updike. In the article, Elaine Showalter observes that even nowadays the works by women writers still fare badly in contending with those by male authors for the candidacy of “the Great American Novel”, i.e., novels that are considered to represent the image of the United States as a nation. The definition of the Great American Novel still has a visible gender bias, according to Showalter, although it experienced multiple changes over the century. Such biased standard further leads to women author’s plight in their literary career. Reflecting upon the words of Joyce Carol Oates, Showalter laments,

being free to write doesn't mean that American women are equal in a literary marketplace still dominated by male precedents, male literary juries and male standards of greatness. As Joyce Carol Oates has ruefully noted, “the woman who writes is a writer by her own definition, but a woman writer by others’ definitions”. She cannot transcend readers’ assumptions about her gender “unless she writes under a male pseudonym and keeps her identity secret” (Showalter).

Accordingly, although literary works can be produced regardless of the author’s gender, in terms of the reception and evaluation of the work, women authors, unlike their male peers, are prejudiced against because of their gender. They do not have an equal footing in contending with the male authors in their profession. Their disadvantaged position is also reflected in the phenomenon that women authors are much less present in both national and world literary history. In the field of American literature, feminist critics have long been working on redefining the history of

literature and questioning the male centered definition of the literary canon.¹ In this regard, Showalter's article shares a similar aim as it intends to bring attention to the less known women novelists in the postwar American literary landscape.

However, a blind spot is more or less felt in Showalter's article, since among the eight women writers she shortlists, only one of them, Gish Jen, is nonwhite. Showalter does mention several other nonwhite minority writers in her article, among which there is the Nobel laureate Tony Morrison. However, Showalter does not discuss Morrison's work in detail because she is "so well known [that] she does not need to be included". Showalter's dismissal of Morrison in her article is problematic. As a woman and ethnic writer, Morrison does manage to transcend her gender and ethnicity and achieve universal recognition. Without providing a persuasive explanation for Morrison's success, it renders Showalter's argument vulnerable to the criticism that other women and ethnic writers are not included in the masters of American letters because they are not as good as Morrison. The inclusion of only one nonwhite author further invites doubt on whether or not Jen is picked to play the role of a "token minority", whose inclusion is not so much because of her merit, but because it is "politically correct" to give quota to nonwhite minorities.

The purpose of citing Showalter's article to begin my discussion on ethnic women writers' works is not to antagonize white feminist critics. It would be unjust to criticize white feminist scholars for overlooking ethnic issues since in women's studies in recent years, much attention has been paid to the inner division of the category of women. Intersectionality as a methodology has also been much researched on and to a certain extent became a "buzzword" in feminist research.² Yet Showalter's list nevertheless indicates the fact that when gender is stressed in a certain discussion, other axes of differentiation such as race and ethnicity could often be unintentionally overlooked.

Just like women writers, non-white, ethnic minority writers are not adequately represented in literary history and the literary canon. The absence of both groups is because, as John Guillory points out, "the process of canonical selection is always

¹ For the feminists' attempt to redefine the American literary canon, see Lauter 1983, Ruoff 1990, Porter 1994.

² See Kathy Davies, (2008). "Intersectionality as Buzzword. Sociology of Science Perspective on What Makes a Feminist Theory Successful".

also a process of social exclusion, specifically the exclusion of female, black, ethnic, or working-class authors from the literary canon” (7). Based on this observation, Guillory goes on to discuss the relation between the formation of the literary canon and the representation of social groups. He points out that the minority authors whose works are included in the canon are thought to be representative of particular social groups, yet in reality they are only hypothesized to be representative. It therefore follows that the formation of the canon is related to the establishment of an aesthetic and political order and that it can be perceived as “a kind of mirror in which social groups either see themselves, or do not see themselves, reflected” (Guillory 7). A similar observation has also been made by the Chinese American cultural critic Rey Chow. Building on the Freudian model of individual narcissism as a self love essential for self-sustenance which the individual have to give up, she proposes in her groundbreaking work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* the notion of collective narcissism and argues that the mainstream representation of a certain ethnic group mediates the narcissism of the ethnic group. However, as such representation is frequently absent in the social symbolic, the necessary narcissism could not be developed and the wounded narcissism is felt by the whole group (Chow 2002, 141). While the two critics approach ethnic representation from two different perspectives, what is clear from their arguments is that the way in which a certain social group is represented in the media is constructive of the self perception of that group. The conflation of the actual social groups, the literary representations of the social groups and the representation of certain authors from these social groups in the canon conceal the fact that canon formation is a constructive process. What is represented in and regarded as canon can be used to construct, transform and regulate the group identity for political ends.

Guillory’s observation readily applies to the nonwhite ethnic groups, and this thesis argues with Guillory that the group image does not have a one to one correspondence to the social group in question. Yet, on the other hand, whether or not a certain author is recognized by the society at large, and whether or not a certain work is included in the literary canon are also issues related to the representation of a nation and the construction of national identity. This point can be made clear by a comparison between what is considered as American literary canon today and what it was in previous centuries. A conspicuous difference between the two is that more works by women and minority authors are now included. This shift also accompanies

and reflects the transition of the American society to a more liberal and multicultural one, which was fiercely fought for by women and minorities in the successive civil right movements. Therefore, the inclusion and exclusion of women's and minority literature in the literary canon is neither merely a matter of social injustice or discrimination, nor is it merely a matter of unevenly distributed literary production as Guillory points out (18). It is in addition a matter of constructing, transforming and regulating the national identity.

When discussing ethnic literature by non-white minorities, a divergence has to be made to clarify a certain nuance in the use of ethnicity. This is because in the North American context, as well as in many other multicultural societies, the boundary between race and ethnicity has been deliberately blurred. Ethnicity is often used in the place of race in order to emphasize the cultural and social aspects of race and to downplay biological dimension of race. It is also used to emphasize racial and cultural equality, and to avoid the potential racist connotation that the word "race" may bring about. As a result, ethnicity is more likely to be used in the contemporary society as a general term, like gender and blood type, which *everyone* has, and not as an attribute belonging to the members of certain minority groups alone. However, in many social practices as well as in literature, ethnic in reality does not refer to everyone, but is specifically used to refer to ethnic/racial minorities, in particular the nonwhite minorities. This paradoxical use of ethnicity has also been discussed by Rey Chow in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. According to her, the conceptualizations of the notion of ethnicity in North America are "blatantly contradictory". Although it is believed that the use of the term in contemporary society intends to eliminate the boundary between the inside and outside of a given society and that white persons can be as ethnic as nonwhites, the recurrent ethnic antagonism throughout the world and the continual use of ethnicity in America to refer to nonwhite groups nevertheless suggest that ethnicity is "resorted to time and again as a boundary marker". Such ambiguity of ethnicity as both universal and specific, "enables politicians to manipulate populations by appealing to one version of ethnicity or another, depending on the political agenda at hand", as Chow points out acutely (28).

Tracing the etymological origin of "ethnicity" back to its Greek root, Chow points out that the word is used as a boundary marker to delineate the "gentile" and

“heathen”. This dimension of ethnicity as a boundary marker is retained in many social practices in contemporary Western society, which, according to Chow, include “the continuing exclusion and debasement felt by peoples of color in predominantly white nations such as the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Australia, and Canada” (26). Though she does not make this point explicitly, it can be derived from her argument that the shifted conceptualization of ethnicity reveals two breaches. First, there exists a breach between the ideal of equality and the impossibility of realizing the very ideal. Secondly, there is a breach between the idealistic political discourse and realistic political and social practice. Therefore, the conflation of the dual sense of “ethnicity” further serves to obscure the inequality and asymmetrical power relation between white and nonwhite groups embedded in multiculturalist policies and practices. Such inequality is also observed by Chow herself. As she states,

the dividing line between an inside and an outside is never just that; it always simultaneously carries meanings of hierarchy, of what is superior and what is inferior. Despite its proclaimed universalist intent, ethnicity as it is actually used in modern and contemporary Western, especially North American, society also carries pejorative connotations of a limit and limitation of the group marked “ethnic,” a limit and limitation that confines that group to an earlier (temporally arcane) condition of humanity, in which the ethnics are, as it were, still held captive (28).

In the field of literature, the ethnicization of works produced by nonwhite and migrant authors also implies a hierarchy, which usually restricts these works to a specific condition and to a specific group so that they cannot be representational of their nation, or they cannot speak to the general public. This may in turn suggest that they either are of less quality, or are insufficient in writing the American experience and addressing the issues in the American society in general. However, the standards for being “American” and being American literary canon are themselves issues that can be debated from the perspectives of both ethnicity and gender. From the previous analysis, it is clear that feminists and ethnic minorities do not form a natural ally, although such an ally is possible and much called for in challenging the patriarchal and racist hegemony both present in literature and in the American society at large. Moreover, as race and gender are not unrelated categories, the intersection of these

two categories further causes a frequently overlooked issue in the composition of literary history and the literary canon, i.e., the under representation of nonwhite women writers.

The above analysis outlines three issues this thesis is interested in when discussing ethnic and women's literature, namely, the intersection of ethnicity and gender in American literature; the relationship between the representation of ethnic women in literature and the construction, transformation and regulation of the ethnic group; as well as the representation of ethnic women and its relation with the construction of nation. In the following part, these issues will be approached through a close reading of the works by three Chinese American women writers. Through an analysis along both the axes of ethnicity and gender, the thesis intends to explore how ethnic women are represented in these selected literary works and how these works stand out from other Chinese American writings. Based on the intersectional analysis, the thesis further intends to foreground the aesthetic value and the political implication of these works. It asks how ethnic women's literature affects the image of the ethnic group and nation, as well as how ethnic women's literature could move beyond fixed ethnic and national identities. Finally, the thesis argues that it is of significance to include these works in the national canon.

Structure and Corpus

As it has been emphasized in the previous section, intersectionality will be a key methodology in the research. Both gender and ethnicity will be taken into consideration when reading the selected works, so that the thesis could bring to the foreground how gender and ethnic differences are represented and how they could be represented differently. By focusing on difference, rather than on an authentic representation of ethnic minorities and women, the thesis tries to avoid setting up an authentic/fake binary. Moreover, the research will be based on the reflection on relevant critical theories, which include feminist theories, postcolonial theories, cultural theories, philosophy of difference, as well as the close reading of the selected literary texts. Although an interdisciplinary approach will be used in carrying out the research, the perspective is essentially feminist and postcolonial.

The previous section also makes it clear that the representation of the ethnic group and nation will be key focuses in analyzing the selected works by these Chinese American women authors. This thesis argues that by representing racial and gender

differences, the selected works contribute to reconstruct and change the image of the ethnic group and nation. In the research, the politics of representation will be a main concept to be developed throughout the thesis. The politics of representation refers to the way in which gender and ethnicity are regulated and expected to be represented in certain cultural artifacts in a given national and cultural context. More specifically, in the thesis the politics of representation refers to the way in which the identities of Chinese American women are regulated and represented in Chinese American literary works published in North America. The use of “politics” in formulating the concept is to stress the dimension that the representation of gender and ethnicity is a contestation of power. It demonstrates that Chinese American women are not merely passive subjects to be defined by their ethnic community and their nation, they can also actively negotiate and redefine their identities and write about gender and ethnic differences. In doing so, they can make a difference in the social and cultural symbolic. As a result, the politics of representation is a two dimensional concept. On the one hand, it involves a top-down process through which the identities of Chinese American women are delimited and regulated. Through my close reading, I try to make the point that the selected works are not free from this top-down process. On the other hand, it also involves a bottom-up process of questioning and challenging the grand narratives of ethnicity and nation by bringing out ethnic and gender differences.

To illustrate and substantiate the arguments, the thesis will be organized into four chapters. The first chapter will be devoted to elaborate the above outlined politics of representation in Chinese American literature. It intends to show that for ethnic women authors, writing is not a ‘free’ process in which they can simply exercise their artistic capacity. Thus, in this chapter the focus will fall on the top-down dimension in the politics of representation. By discussing the selected literary texts, the chapter will demonstrate how Chinese American women writers and their works are delimited by their ethnic and gender identity. It observes that the identity of Chinese American women is often pre-defined: either by the mainstream American society through ethnic stereotyping, or by their own ethnic group, and especially by the male members. This will be made clear by outlining the debates during the 80s and 90s among the Chinese American writers and critics, as well as among some Asian American critics, on the authenticity of ethnic representation. In this debate, women writers, including Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan were subjected to severe criticism. Clearly, women writers are not at liberty in defining their own identities.

Moreover, asymmetrical power relationships also exist in the definition of canon, as Chinese American women's works are often restricted to the category of ethnic or women's literature. Such categorization restricts these works to a limited readership and it is not uncommon that the Chinese American narratives published in the North American market take up the strategies of exoticizing ethnic experiences and selling out their ethnicity in order to appeal to mainstream publishers and audiences. It is also due to these reasons that the representations of Chinese American women and Chinese American community often appear to be stereotypical. Based on these observations, the thesis tries to foreground the dominant politics of representing the Chinese Americans from both political and commercial dimensions, and it argues that the politics of representation leads to the ethnicization of the literary works.

Building upon the theoretical framework outlined in the first chapter, the second to fourth chapters of the thesis will give concrete textual evidence on how the selected literary texts conform to and challenge the politics of representation. The thesis argues that the politics of representation is at work in the selected texts. Textual, thematic and narrative elements will be put to the fore in these chapters to support this argument. More importantly, rather than seeing the politics of representation and the stereotypes in Chinese American literature as an oppressive regulation on Chinese American identity alone, my thesis argues that the politics of representation is nonetheless enabling. It provides the ground from which the Chinese American women can become different. The politics of representation, as well as the corporeal/material difference of Asian American women are both important conditions of becoming different precisely because identity is not constructed through assembling floating signifiers; rather, it is constructed through the temporal fixation and materialization of certain identifications and from such fixation and materialization new possibilities could emerge.

Chapter Two to Four will thus elaborate on the Chinese American women writers' confirmation and contestation to the hegemonic gender and racial politics of representation. Each of the chapters will center on one aspect of the contestation and each accordingly will provide a close reading of one particular literary work. The second chapter, entitled "Contesting Ethnicity", will demonstrate how ethnic identity is redefined in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among the Ghosts* (1975). *The Woman Warrior* is discussed in this chapter because it

presents a unique way of negotiating the Chinese American identity, which is remembering – rewriting memories. Remembering and rewriting can be seen as a gesture of conforming to and moving beyond the fixed gender, ethnic and national identity. As such, the work is pertinent to the discussion on the politics of representation and the possibility to move beyond it. Also, as the book lies at the center of the so called “authenticity debate” referred to above, it enables the research to look into the question of how women’s writings could unsettle the regulation of ethnic and gender identities, which are conventionally defined by men. However, the chapter will also offer a critique towards *The Woman Warrior*, since it falls into a binary trap in its representation of the Chinese American community and in this binary representation, it privileges the American identification. Consequently, the work marginalizes and stigmatizes the Chinese Americans who do not share the same American identification. This critique further enables the thesis to go on to its next chapter, which focuses on the national identification in Chinese American women’s literature.

Chapter Three, examines how ethnic women writers contest their nationality. It begins with a discussion of the basic inclusion and exclusion at work in the American discourse of multiculturalism – the assimilated (Chinese American) vs. the unassimilable (Chinese). The inclusion and exclusion helps to construct a national image, which further differentiates the United States from China (the West and the rest). In this chapter, a close reading will be given to Nieh Hualing’s *Mulberry and Peach: Two Women of China* (1981). *Mulberry and Peach* is originally composed in the Chinese language, though it is written and completed in the United States, after the author, Hualing Nieh, migrates from Mainland China via Taiwan. It first appeared in the early 70s in a newspaper serialization in Taiwan, and is subsequently translated into English and published in the United States in 1981.³ For various reasons, including the use of language and plot, the book is often categorized as modern Chinese literature, rather than American immigrant literature. Critics also comment that Nieh is obsessed with China in her work (Wong 1998, 135, Feng 2010, 214),

³ In Taiwan, the novel is banned in mid-serialization due to the fact that the third chapter is seen as a political satire alluding to the Nationalist, the then ruling party of the island (Wong 219). The book is first published in its entirety in the Chinese language in Hong Kong in 1976 (Wong 225).

despite the fact that immigrant experience is narrated throughout the work. The complicated publishing history and the ambiguous categorization of the book are interesting to the research as it cofounds the national boundary and the novel itself is a migrating one caught in a complex historical and geographical context. Through close reading, the chapter shows that *Mulberry and Peach* challenges the basic inclusion and exclusion that is needed to construct the American national identity by questioning the naturalness of assimilation, the one-sided national identification in the immigrant community, as well as the hidden Chinese identification among the Chinese Americans. Furthermore, the chapter argues that the work can be seen as a Chinese American novel and as such it challenges the linguistic hegemony in the definition of the Chinese American canon, which is dominated by works written in English. Finally, as the novel narrates the important national events in the twentieth century across the Pacific Ocean through the voice of a woman, the project argues that the novel demonstrates that the national history is also lived and inscribed on the female body. Women are as capable of embodying their nation as their male counterparts, although the latter is often assigned to the role.

The final chapter offers a close reading of Gish Jen's *Mona in the Promised Land* (1997). The work distinguishes itself from other Chinese American literature as it probes into an unexplored aspect of Chinese American identity. Rather than choosing between being either Chinese or American, or attempting to negotiate the incompatibility between the Chinese identity and the American one, Jen's protagonist refuses being either Chinese or American, and opts instead to become Jewish. Such a plot makes the novel both innovative and provocative. It addresses the changes in the Chinese American community and outlines the new possibility for being Chinese American. In this chapter, the concept of "becoming-other" will be elaborated. Mona's "self-creation" is noteworthy because although the story may appear to be a postmodern celebration of hybridity and floating signifier, her transformation precisely reveals that becoming is an embodied process and the ethnic body also matters in the process of becoming. Similar to *Mulberry and Peach*, the female body also features prominently in presenting the transgression of fixed identities. By focusing on the difficulties in Mona's transformation, the project tries to demonstrate how corporeal reality matters in the construction of gender and ethnicity and how gender and ethnicity are both embodied. The close reading of the work will also

provide textual evidence on how ethnicity and gender are contested and reconstructed by women.

Through these analyses, the thesis tries to wind up the research by trying to foreground new territories in the writing of gender and ethnicity. The thesis argues that the texts studied in the thesis can be seen as lines of flight that unsettle the sedimentation of gender, ethnic and national identity. In this regard, ethnic women's literature has a minoritarian tendency and can be seen as what the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari refer to as "minor literature". Further, by focusing on the intersection of ethnic and women's literature, the thesis will make the point that although the texts all provide narratives on ethnic life, they move beyond the boundary of ethnicity and should not be seen as representative of the ethnic group or reproductive of the fixed identities. Finally, they address more pertinently the postmodern, multicultural condition in North America where encountering with multiple differences is inevitable. As a result, they also challenge the existing institution of literature.

Positioning the Research

In her seminal article "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective", Donna Haraway critiques the claim of objective scientific knowledge and gives the uncountable noun "knowledge" a plural form to demonstrate that there is more than one form of scientific knowledge and that multiple locations exist in the production of knowledge. Not only are all knowledges situated, Haraway goes on to argue that the situated, partial form of knowledge is also a privileged form of knowledge. She states,

The standpoints of the subjugated are not "innocent" positions. On the contrary, they are preferred because in principle they are least likely to allow denial of the critical and interpretive core of all knowledge. They are knowledgeable of modes of denial through repression, forgetting, and disappearing acts – ways of being nowhere while claiming to see comprehensively. "Subjugated" standpoints are preferred because they seem to promise more adequate, sustained, objective, transforming accounts of the world (Haraway 584).

Haraway's critical stance towards a universally valid knowledge is very much shared by the writer of this thesis. The thesis is aware of its own position and the partiality of

the knowledge it produces thereafter. The project's interest in Chinese American literature is not coincidental, as it is originated from a course on American immigrant writers in the English department of Leiden University. My education gave me the opportunity to read and appreciate these works. My experience as a Chinese student living in the Netherlands also enables me to identify myself with some of the characters depicted in these works.

Whereas my experience enables me to establish an intimate relationship with these works, my training as a feminist researcher also allows me to keep a critical distance from them. The critical texts by feminist and postcolonial scholars that I came across during my studies inspired me and helped me to develop a critical consciousness to various issues relating to gender and ethnicity. I bring such consciousness with me when reading Chinese American women's literature and therefore I am sensitive to the gender and ethnic issues embedded in these narratives.

More importantly, this position also enables me to select which works are meaningful to be researched on in the project. As it has been pointed out previously, the construction of the literary canon is a process of inclusion and exclusion. It is hence a political act and it is of consequences. The same can also be said to a research focusing on particular literary texts. By choosing which texts are worthy of academic interests, the project is consciously including and excluding certain texts in support of its arguments. The choice is by no means innocent. The project is aware of the intricacy involved in making the choice and the position it takes. Yet, although the project does not claim to produce objective knowledge, it nevertheless argues that what is produced in the research is urgent and important, as it offers a rethinking of American literature and brings attention to the taken-for-granted yet problematic understanding of ethnic literature. By being accountable for its position, the project tries to render visible what is at stake in the arguments developed here and to make space for further debates from different perspectives. Meanwhile, the project does not assume a relativist view that all perspectives are equally valid. It is precisely the specific location taken by the thesis that it can see better the asymmetrical power relationship hidden in American literature. It hopes to join the feminist, postcolonial and ethnic scholars to argue for the recognition of women's and ethnic literature as well as to challenge the patriarchal and racial hegemony existing in American literature.

A final remark before concluding the introduction is that it is not a separate set of standards for ethnic women writers that the project calls for. It is not productive to insist on a statistical equality in the recognition of ethnic and women writers, although the project is convinced that more ethnic women writers need to be recognized and included in the national canon. Yet, a mere insistence on the equality in number fails to fully address the existing hierarchy in literary institution. Instead, it is the debate on the status of ethnic literature in North America, and also the debate on what is ethnic and gender difference that the research intends to provoke and participate in. This attitude is very well summarized by Elaine Showalter in her latest book *A Jury of Her Peers*,

I believe that American women writers no longer need specially constituted juries, softened judgments, unspoken arguments, or suppression of evidence in order to stand alongside the greatest artists in our literary heritage. Indeed, we need the vigorous public debate of a critical trial, with witnesses for the prosecution as well as the defense, to ensure that American women writers take their place in our literary heritage. What keeps literature alive, meaningful to read, and exciting to teach isn't unstinting approval or unanimous admiration, but rousing argument and robust dispute (Showalter xii).

Similarly, by working on the selected works and foregrounding their value, I also try to participate in, but not to bring a closure to, the debate. If what is included and excluded in the literary canon was based on a consensus of what is literature, and the history of American literature is written on the basis of a unified vision of the America, then now it is the high time that such consensus was broken down so that multiple differences would be more comfortably accommodated in American literature. It is believed that by contending with other voices in the debate, a better vision of American literature could be produced.

Chapter 1 The Politics of Representation

Why must I “represent” anyone beside myself? Why should I be denied an individual artistic vision? And I do not think I wrote a “negative” book, as the Chinese American reviewer said; but suppose I had? Suppose I had been so wonderfully talented that I wrote a tragedy? Are we Chinese Americans to deny ourselves tragedy? If we give up tragedy in order to make a good impression on Caucasians, we have lost a battle ... I’m certain that some day when a great body of Chinese American writing becomes published and known, then readers will no longer have to put such a burden on each book that comes out. Readers can see the variety of ways for Chinese Americans to be.

“Cultural Mis-readings by American Reviewers”, 63

The years between 1970s and 1980s have witnessed a success of Chinese American literature. Authors like Frank Chin, Maxine Hong Kingston, David Henry Hwang and Amy Tan one by one published their works and established their reputation in the literary world. Their success, apart from their individual talent and endeavor, also owes to the emergence of multiculturalism as well as various political and academic movements that have generated interests in ethnic life writings, subaltern voices, cultural differences, etc.. Among this generation of Chinese American writers the two women novelists, Kingston and Tan, with their intersectional identity of woman and second generation Chinese immigrant, have gained popularity both in the academia and in the publishing market. They use Chinese myths and stories extensively in their writings and often structure their novels in a “talk story” way.⁴ Both of their debut works, *The Woman Warrior: Memories of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* and *The Joy*

⁴ This is a word for word translation of jianggushi (meaning storytelling in Chinese) in English. Kingston uses this term in *The Woman Warrior* to refer to the Chinese folk stories and life experiences the mother tells, or makes up for her daughter. Usually these talk stories convey implicit messages about old wisdoms and traditions, which are expected to be grasped by the listener. In Kingston’s novel, the talking story is a way for women to construct narratives about their lives and break silence.

Luck Club share these characters. In both works, the Chinese women are given the chance to relate their experiences in both their homeland and adopted land; they construct their sites of difference and deconstruct certain stereotypical and stigmatic representations of women of color in their separate narratives. As the works are written by women writers with Chinese ancestry, it is believed among the general readers that these representations of China and Chinese women are authentic and unmediated. They present a unique experience that is unknown and thought to be exotic to the general Western readers.

The experiences of the Third World women gaining autonomy and react against the patriarchy and Westerner's Orientalist imagination also fit into the feminist and postcolonial discourse. When explaining the popularity of Amy Tan and her fellow Asian American writes, Tamara Silvia Wagner notes,

It was particularly the nineties, with its growing interest in "politics of identity" and hybridity as a newly appreciated "identity kit" for an age of globalization, that provided a fostering environment for the growth of ethnic American fiction. At the same time, the growth of Third World feminism created new interest in subaltern women. Consumers of mainstream fiction in the nineties looked for ethnic and/or feminist stories. The centrality of women in Chinese diasporic writing satisfied both demands (160-161).

Both Kingston's and Tan's works are published in a right time and hit squarely the catchwords of the academy. To a certain extent, this is because of the works' focus on the hyphenated identity of Asian American and their efforts in bringing the marginal group to the center that it gains the double recognition from both the academy and the public. This in turn adds to the credibility of the works as an honest and authentic representation of China and Chinese women. However, as the novel presents the Chinese women's difference, the exotic orientalist stories and the cultural shocks in multi-ethnic families, one may suspect that the novel satisfies very much the voyeuristic desire of the Western readers. Though Kingston and Tan present Chinese men and Chinese women differently from the powerful Kongfu fighters and the submissive, beautiful Asian women, their representation may as well be "fake". Indeed, the exotic elements in the works lead to vehement criticism. Wagner, for instance, in her article on *The Joy Luck Club* points out in her essay that Tan is criticized for feeding on the exotic past of the earlier immigrant generation and using

the exoticized stories as selling points of her novels. She also points out that the “Asian American neo-orientalism has become a prevailing approach in recent criticism” (164). In fact, some of myths and customs depicted in Kingston’s and Tan’s works are perhaps more astonishing to readers and scholars from the east side of the Pacific than to those who are from the west. Such experience is testified by Mimi Chan. She deplores, “[m]any Hong Kong Chinese I have talked to, or even recent immigrants to the United States – all “Westernised” Chinese – tend to see Kingston as exploiting her Chineseness, selling out her country and her people” (qtd. in Wagner 163).

Partly due to their extensive reworking of the traditional Chinese material, partially due to their success in the North American market and academy and being praised for their authenticity, these two authors’ representation are not only being questioned, but are also severely criticized by some critics, in particular the critics who are familiar with the Chinese culture and the immigrant community. One of the most radical critics of these two authors is Frank Chin, a Chinese American writer and literary critic. In his article entitled “Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake”, he attacks three well established, arguably also the most well-known, Chinese American authors for faking the Chinese culture. He writes,

Kingston, Hwang, and Tan are the first writers of any race, and certainly the first writers of Asian ancestry, to so boldly fake the best-known works from the most universally known body of Asian literature and lore in history. And, to legitimize their faking, they have to fake all of Asian American history and literature, and argue that the immigrants who settled and established Chinese America lost touch with Chinese culture, and that a faulty memory combined with new experience produced new versions of these traditional stories. This version of history is their contribution to the stereotype (135).

According to Chin, the Chinese American authors internalize the western stereotypes about China. Their works distort Chinese culture and reinforce racist, sexist and Orientalist stereotypes of China produced by the West. Thus, their distorted representation of the Chinese and the Chinese American community is not merely an unrealistic and exoticized one, but an even worse form of racism, a racism directed by members of the community towards the community itself.

Frustrated by the criticism from the Chinese American critics, the Chinese American author Maxine Hong Kingston complains in her article “Cultural Misreadings by American Reviewers” that the need to “represent” the ethnic group is a burden to her literary creation. Kingston’s complaint captures very well the essence of this debate on authenticity. The feelings of being denied an individual artistic vision and of being denied tragedy as an ethnic community acutely felt by Maxine Hong Kingston reveal that at least for Chinese American writers, they are more restricted in their literary creation than their non-ethnic peers. As a result, the burden referred to by Kingston reveals a certain set of underlying rules governing the creation and reception of Chinese American literature, which I referred to as “the politics of representation” in the introduction. It is also believed that gender plays a role in the politics of representation as the debate on authenticity is to a large extent a debate led by Maxine Hong Kingston, a Chinese American woman writer, and Frank Chin, a Chinese American male writer and critic. It is arguable that women writers are more restricted by the politics of representation because what weighs on their shoulder is not only a resistance against racism, but also a resistance against sexism, both present in the ethnic community and the mainstream American society. In this chapter, attention will be devoted to outline and make sense of the restricting aspect of the politics of representation: what these politics of representation are, how they come into being and how they affect the reading and reception of Chinese American women’s literature. The analysis will be organized primarily along two dimensions, the political dimension and the commercial dimension.

Politics of Representation: A Political Dimension

Although the debate seems to center on certain Chinese American authors, Maxine Hong Kingston in particular, the debate concerns deeper issues within the Chinese American immigrant community. Some critics see the disagreement as essentially a debate on gender. They argue that the criticisms towards Kingston’s book articulated by some Asian American scholars are a result from the conflict between feminism and the patriarchally structured ethnic community (Kim xix, Cheung 239, Bow 32). Sheng-mei Ma pushes this line of argument further and argues that the issue of Orientalism is “inextricably entwined with gender; it is predicated on a gender dialectic”. Thus the debate on ethnic authenticity is a skirmish between the male and female authors of Chinese origin and in particular between Kingston and Frank Chin.

According to him, these authors rebel against Orientalism at each other's cost: whereas the male authors accuse the women writers for the gelding of Asian American men, women writers retort with the condemnation of the "misogynist Asian tradition inherited by most Asian American men" (28).

Arguments have also been raised from the perspective of culture. Lisa Lowe and Begonia Simal Gonzalez, for instance, attribute the cause of the debate to the divergence in perspectives between the Asian American purists and cultural pluralists. Critics following this line of argument point out that the cultural purists' rigid insistence on cultural authenticity reflects their ahistorical view of culture and their fear of multiplicity. Yet other critics also warn that the advocacy for pluralism could be dangerous, since the existence of the ethnic cultural is often at stake in the encounter with the mainstream culture. In attempting to bridge the cultural difference between "East" and "West", many early generations of Chinese American authors end up in normalizing American values and "[trading] one kind of Orientalism for another" (Chen 379). As a result, ethnic culture has a precarious relationship with the mainstream culture and it is difficult to negotiate an approach to ethnic culture that is neither assimilationist nor ahistorical.

By briefly reviewing the debate and the issues discussed by the critics, it becomes clear that, rather than seeing Chinese American literary works as crafted artistic compositions, the critics tend to give more attention to how Chinese Americans and the immigrant community in general are represented to the mainstream society through the literary works. In other works, the debate reveals that for many critics, the social implication of the works weighs as much as, if not more than, the aesthetic value. Specifically, although Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* is at most a mediated record of the individual experience in the Chinese American immigrant community, and therefore its reliability can be subjected to question, it is nevertheless often discussed as a representation of the immigrant community and is regulated as such.

In the case of Kingston, the tendency to conflate the artistic, non-representative aspects of the book with the factual representation of the ethnic community should not be simply dismissed as a mistake. Such tendency precisely points to what Kingston refers to as the burden of representation faced by many ethnic writers. Unlike their white peers, acclaimed ethnic authors are more likely to be seen as the few representatives who can speak for their ethnic group and can be heard in

the mainstream culture. Furthermore, such conflation reflects a desire of the ethnic community to articulate its voice and to be heard also in the mainstream society. Yet as such opportunities are not sufficiently granted to the ethnic community, especially before the status and value of Chinese American literature were recognized by the mainstream society, the issues of who are entitled to be the literary spokesperson for the community and how the community is represented in literature are therefore not only issues of aesthetics, but also contestations on the power to define, to represent and to make visible the ethnic community. In the well-known article “Can the subaltern speak”, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her discussion on the representation of subaltern women warns that the political aspect of representation should not be confused with its aesthetic aspect. By discussing Karl Marx’s use of “*darstellen*” and “*vertreten*” in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, both of which are translated into “representation” in English, Spivak points out,

In the guise of a post-Marxist description of the scene of power, we thus encounter a much older debate: between representation or rhetoric as tropology and as persuasion. *Darstellen* belongs to the first constellation, *vertreten* – with stronger suggestions of substitution – to the second. Again, they are related, but running them together, especially in order to say that beyond both is where oppressed subject speak, act and know *for themselves*, leads to an essentialist, utopian politics (71, emphasis original).

For Spivak, “*darstellen*” refers to “re-presentation, as in art or philosophy”; “*vertreten*” refers to “speaking for” in the political sense (70). The confusion of these two senses of “representation” could lead to political consequences. Yet, in the case of *The Woman Warrior* as well as Chinese American literature in general, these two aspects are intricately intertwined and it is impossible to speak of either aspect without the other. In other words, the aesthetic representation of the ethnic group is always already political and the aesthetic representation is taken as that which speaks for the ethnic community. The inevitability of such conflation is resulted from the marginal position of both Chinese American literature and Chinese American community in the American society. With the complication of the Orientalist, feminized and racist stereotypes plaguing the image of Chinese Americans in the mainstream society, there is also a general anxiety over misrepresentation among the intellectuals. The underlying rules governing Chinese American literature are

therefore a systematic set of representational politics, which are caused by the social and political complexities confronted by Chinese Americans. This representational policy also renders clear the concealed hierarchical power relationship within in the ethnic community and between the ethnic community and the mainstream society.

Although it appears that the debate is mostly situated within the ethnic community and the contention falls on the distortion of ethnic reality, stereotyping and the liberty Kingston takes in modifying classical Chinese texts, the debate should not be discussed in isolation from the mainstream reception of the work and the image of Chinese American ethnic group perceived in the mainstream society. To a certain extent, it is not the literary representation of Chinese American in *The Woman Warrior* as such, but the positive reception and the praise of authenticity the book gets from the mainstream, white critics that make the book the center of the contention. Willingly or not, the mainstream success the book achieves gains itself a position to speak *for* the ethnic community. As a result of such position and the power it gains from such position, its representation of the ethnic group and culture is of greater consequence and it matters more than those less successful, and less read, literary works. The mainstream readership also brings about the issue of how the Chinese American individuals and community are being seen in the mainstream American society. To a large extent, the purpose of disciplining misrepresentation in ethnic literature is to guard against the possibility of misreading by readers from without the ethnic community, as their knowledge about Chinese American culture and the Chinese American reality is limited. The anxiety over misrepresentation is hence also an anxiety over either an assimilationist, or a stigmatized image of the ethnic self. Such an anxiety is very much shared by the individuals within the ethnic community.

Meanwhile, although the book is spoken of highly by white critics, the warm reception does not necessarily suggest that when moved beyond the boundary of ethnic community, the value of the work can be genuinely appreciated. Neither does such appreciation necessarily suggest that the work is read more appropriately in the mainstream than in the ethnic community either. For instance, in response to the mainstream praise, Kingston laments in “Cultural Mis-readings by American Reviewers”, “I suspect most of them of perceiving its quality in an unconscious sort of way; that they praise the wrong things” (55). Indeed, ethnic writers do not enjoy more freedom in writing in the mainstream society than they do within the ethnic community. In the mainstream society there is a set of representational politics which

exists prior to the self-regulation from within the ethnic community. It is for this reason that the community is uneasy about the representation made by authors including Kingston, Tan and Hwang. For the same reason, the community is also anxious about the stigmatized image of the ethnic self.

To understand the relationship between the regulations the ethnic community imposes on itself and the superior white culture, it would be useful to make a digression here and discuss the concept of “*ressentiment*” in the ethnic context. In discussing the numerous cases of internal feud among Chinese artists and scholars, Rey Chow develops the Nietzschean term “*ressentiment*” along the line of Max Scheler and applies it to the postcolonial context. *Ressentiment*, according to Scheler, often has two characteristics. First, it occurs more easily when equality is generally assumed in a society while factual inequality persists. Second, “it tends to become externalizable when a particular target (a person or group) can be identified as the cause for our privation, for our impotence in altering the situation in which we feel injured” (Chow 185-186).

Chow argues that in the colonial situation, *ressentiment* is usually directed towards the colonizer who oppresses and exploits the colonized. In the aftermath of colonialism, *ressentiment* and the feeling of inferiority persist and the resentment is frequently directed to certain members of the ethnic group. She observes,

Exactly at this juncture of a seeming liberalization from colonial domination (territorial and ideological), when those who were previously subjugated begin to enjoy a modicum of democratized access to the representation of their own historical existence, *ressentiment* tends, I would contend, to assume its hold fiercely on the postcolonized ethnic community ... This psychic structure of a reaction to the injustice created by the coercive and unequal encounter with the white world, a reaction that, in the course of postcoloniality, ends up directing rancor toward certain members of the one’s own ethnic group (186).

The case of ethnic minority in North America presents certain differences from the postcolonial situation discussed by Chow, yet the debate on authenticity can also be seen as resulted from a similar postcolonial *ressentiment*. In a footnote later in her book, the contention on Kingston is also noted and is referred to as “[t]he best example of an Asian American writer who was, on achieving general recognition,

accused of selling out” (228). The similarity between the ethnic case and the postcolonial case demonstrates clearly that there exists a hierarchical relationship between the mainstream culture and the ethnic one and that the postcolonial condition can also be applied to the ethnic group.

The inferiority of ethnicity particularly finds its expression in the representation of ethnicity. As Edward Said rightfully observes in *Orientalism*, “what is commonly circulated by [cultural discourse and exchange within a culture] is not ‘truth’ but representations” (43). The inferiority of ethnicity is not biological; rather, it is constructed as such through the stereotypical, stigmatized and inferior images of the ethnic community and individuals. Hence, representation is a process of materializing certain ideas about ethnicity and these ideas in turn have a material effect on the ethnic community. They shape and reshape the community and the individuals.

It is also for this reason that the assimilationist and negative representation of the ethnic community made by its member may hit a raw nerve with the community and such representation often triggers contention within the community. The contention on which could be seen as a legitimate representation is to a large extent articulated in relation to the inferior image of the ethnic community already existing in the mainstream society. It therefore follows that if the ethnic community imposes a set of politics of representation on itself, it is because there is already a politics of presentation existing in the mainstream society. The self-regulation exists as a reaction, and as a binary opposite to the mainstream one. The mainstream praise of *The Woman Warrior* and some Chinese American critics’ denunciation of the work is precisely a case in point here. However, the political dimension does not account for the whole of the restrictive side of the politics of representation. As the production of literary works in contemporary society is closely associated with the market where the works are consumed, the commercial dimension is playing an ever more important role in the politics of representation. The following section of the chapter will try to illustrate this aspect.

Politics of Representation: A Commercial Dimension

Orientalism and ethnic stereotyping form a more political as well as historical dimension of the politics of representation. Such representational politics is also in

accordance with American racial policies, including The Chinese Exclusion Act,⁵ which begins in 1882 and is not repealed until 1943. However, when discussing the contemporary condition of Chinese American literature, a few changes need also to be considered. The racial discourse in North America has changed since the successive civil rights movements in the 60s and 70s and multiculturalism gradually gains ground. As a result, racism becomes a more diffuse cultural phenomenon; racial stereotyping and stigmatization become more subtle and implicit. In an article discussing racism towards African Americans in the United States, the authors observe that after the demise of the legalized system of racial segregation and discrimination, considerable racial inequality still persists. “Old-fashioned racism has disappeared as an effective political force, replaced by a societal consensus on general egalitarian principles; few want to go back to the old days of formal segregation and formal discrimination” (Sears et al 22). Moreover, rather than being a target of institutionalized stigmatization and exclusion, the presence of ethnic diversity and the proximity with ethnic difference become to a certain extent desirable in a multicultural society. In the following paragraphs, this aspect of the representational politics will be discussed.

⁵ Chinese Exclusion Act is a discriminative United States Federal Law which restricted Chinese labors, skilled or unskilled, from entering the United States. The implementation of the law also affects the immigrants who are already settled, as they need a certificate to re-enter. Similar legislation includes Page Act of 1875, which prohibited the entry of “undesired immigrants”, in particular Asian women, as they may involve in prostitution, from entering the United States. This consequently leads to the severe gender imbalance in the Chinese American immigrant community. The scholar Deborah Madsen also notes, “[t]he Chinese Exclusion Acts of the late nineteenth century placed severe limitations upon the development of Chinese ethnic communities in the United States. After the influx of cheap labourers from the late 1840s on, immigration restrictions meant that only members of certain classes—merchants, diplomats, and scholars—were allowed temporary entry. The polarization of these two categories of Chinese Americans gave rise to two distinct traditions of Chinese writing in and about America: a ‘high’ cultural tradition and a ‘low’ working-class tradition.”

These changes, however, should not be perceived as a break with the earlier, discriminative racial discourse. They are rather a continuation and modification of the previous ones. It would also be a mistake to think that the more commercial dimension of the politics of representation is no longer ‘political’. Both dimensions are at work in constructing the ethnic representational politics: the political dimension constructed through orientalization, stereotyping and stigmatization during the period of colonialism and the early stage of trans-Pacific immigration feed to readers’ expectation of Chinese American literature⁶ and it has a far-reaching affect on how it is perceived at present. Although it is observed that there are relatively few Chinese American literary works known to the public at the time when *The Woman Warrior* was published, the readers, however unfamiliar with the ethnic community, do not read the book without expectation. The praise for *The Woman Warrior*’s authenticity clearly indicates that there is a pre-existing “authentic” image of the Chinese American and that the work caters to such expectation.

Although readers’ expectation and reception do not determine the production of literature, they nevertheless can be used as useful entry points to analyze how contemporary Chinese American literature is produced and consumed. Reader’s reception and the publishers’ marketing strategy reveal a different dimension of the politics of representing the Chinese American and in comparison to the one outlined earlier, this dimension reflects the changes and is therefore more pertinent to the contemporary Chinese American reality.

The expectation and reception of the reader is a complicated issue and it cannot be separated from issues including critical reception, the marketing strategy, ethnic representation and ethnic policies in the mainstream society. These issues

⁶ This could also be said of some works that challenge the reader’s expectation by opposing the previous images. Although it can be said that these works offer a new vision of ethnicity, they nevertheless confirm that there is a prior image of the Chinese American and the vision offered deviates from it. The strategy of subverting the reader’s expectation is indeed adopted by Chinese American authors, as Partridge observes, “texts written by Chinese American writers in the contemporary era seek to challenge our society’s predominant views of Chinese ethnicity. These texts seek not to conform to the reader’s expectation, but to transform them” (11). But they exist as a binary opposite to the pre-existing image.

mutually influence and reshape each other. In *Beyond Literary Chinatown*, the critic Jeffrey F. L. Partridge gives an enlightening instance of the strategy adopted by the American publisher HarperFlamingo in marketing Patricia Chao's *Monkey King*. Through the analysis, he points out that two points are emphasized by HarperFlamingo in selling the book. First, by evoking the critical reception of the work, HarperFlamingo flatters the taste of the reader through the suggestion that their taste is "already validated by those who are supposed to have good taste" (8). Second, it tries to sell the experience of an ethnographic adventure. According to Partridge, the adventure offered by Chinese American literature is safe and easy, as it is an "opportunity to explore another world as an armchair social scientist, to move, that is, in the safety of virtuality from outside to inside" (8). Ethnic literature, therefore, become a quasi tour guide that non-ethnic readers purchase to gain an "authentic" insight into a particular ethnic community.

Among scholars who work on the issue of cultural tourism, one powerful critique is offered by Sara Ahmed. In her work *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*, she specifically explores the relationship between "strangers", multicultural society and the consuming, Western subject. A specific concept she develops in relation to her topic is "stranger fetishism". Through her specific reading of the Marxist "commodity fetishism", Ahmed notices an analogous relationship between objects and figures, and argues that "the process of fetishisation involves, not only the displacement of social relations onto an object, but the transformation of fantasies into figures". Strange fetishism, therefore, "is a fetishism of figures: *it invests the figure of the stranger with a life of its own insofar as it cuts 'the stranger' off from the histories of its determination*" (5, emphasis original). Later in her book, she further outlines the immediate relationship between commodity fetishism and "stranger fetishism": first, the object is detached from "the social relationship of labour and the production that produced it". It is through the detachment that the object is valued. Secondly, Ahmed points out that the objected "becomes the stranger". It is by projecting the object as that which contains "the 'truth' of the strange or exotic", that it is consumed (114). As such, Ahmed concludes that "[the] fetishism of the commodity becomes displaced onto the fetishism of cultural difference: we value the lost object by assuming *it contains difference in its own form*" (114-115, emphasis original).

To put it simply, stranger fetishism can be seen as a specific form of commodity fetishism in the contemporary, multicultural and consumerist society. By concealing how its strangeness is produced and determined historically, the object is endowed with value and become sellable as it has difference and offers a certain exotic experience. Therefore, ethnic difference disguised as “the strange” becomes marketable and its consumption is encouraged. Yet it should be noted that such difference does not necessarily suggest ethnic or cultural difference as such, it is only marketed as ethnic or cultural difference. Thus, “difference” in this case is a discourse; it is constructed so that the commodity becomes desirable. While enabling the consumers to have an ethnic experience and thus become mobile in their identity, stranger fetishism fixates the members of the ethnic community to an image that is portrayed as what the Western subject is not. The image might not necessarily be a negative one, yet it nevertheless assigns the ethnic minority a stereotypical image.

Stranger fetishism is, as Ahmed observes, particularly pronounced in the marketing of lifestyle products in the West. The Western consumer is invited to ‘go ethnic’ through what she or he might eat, drink, or wear (116). Similar processes can also be found in the consumption of ethnic literature. By depicting a strange, yet “authentic” ethnic experience, non-ethnic readers are given the illusion that they can also “experience” ethnicity, without encountering annoyances such as discrimination and marginalization that usually accompanies the experience of being ethnic. This ethnic experience, not surprisingly, is also closely related to the aspects of lifestyle (food and clothing), culture (tall tales, language and customs) and experience from the margin. These selling points are not only present in the content of the works, but are highlighted in the title. From *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (1961) by Louis Chu, to *Joy Luck Club* (1989) (indicating a form of Chinese gambling) and *The Kitchen God’s Wife* (1991) by the bestselling author Amy Tan, and then to the more recent *Eating Chinese Food Naked* (1998) by Mei Ng and *Joss and Gold* (2001) by Shirley Geok-lin Lim, a large number of the titles of Chinese American literature are recognizably ethnic and this cannot be a coincidence. Although *The Woman Warrior* appears to be a neutral title, Kingston nevertheless adopts extensively the exotic depictions of food, clothing and Pidgin English in composing *The Woman Warrior*. With common features such as the ones mentioned above, it is not hard to find out that there is a similar pattern in a considerable number of Chinese American literary works available on the North American market. Such pattern can be mass produced and consumed. By doing so, the

market also imposes its policy in the representation of the Chinese American. Ethnic lifestyle and experience are hence made sellable through the production of ethnic literature. As commodities, the authenticity of the content, among standards including literary style, narrative skills and critical recognition, becomes one of the important factors in the evaluation of their quality. It is therefore not surprising that before the publication of *The Woman Warrior*, the publisher has re-labeled the work as non-fiction, a genre which puts emphasis on factuality, despite the fact that the author had in mind the genre of fiction when she composes her work (Wong 249). Though it can be argued that the book is an autobiography, and even though persuasive arguments have been made to justify the re-categorization,⁷ the claim that the market is entirely irrelevant in the decision is unlikely to be tenable. Similarly, on the back cover of the Vintage edition of *The Joy Luck Club* published in 1998, the renowned feminist writer, Pulitzer Prize winner Alice Walker comments, “[i]n this honest, moving and beautifully courageous story Amy Tan shows us China, Chinese American women and their families and the mystery of the mother-daughter bond in ways that we have not experienced before.” The marketing strategy adopted in selling Tan’s book is strikingly similar to the HarperFlamingo case Partridge analyzes, and it is successful. With the acknowledgement of a well-know feminist writer for its authenticity, the book’s superior quality as a commodity becomes doubly guaranteed.

The unproblematized stress on authenticity makes Chinese American literary works vulnerable to the critique of faking and exoticization. Authenticity is in itself an ambiguous concept in literature as language mediates the lived experience. To what degree such mediated experience can be authentic, and whether or not authentic experience can be made tangible are difficult topics that are worth a book length study. For the purpose of the thesis, suffice it to point out that by creating a discourse on “authenticity” in marketing Chinese American literature, Chinese American literary works are subject to additional judgments other than the aesthetical and/or the political ones. These additional judgments further restrict the creative potential of

⁷ See Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, “Autobiography as Guided Chinatown Tour? Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* and the Chinese-American Autobiographical Controversy” and Shirley Goek-Lin Lim, “The Traditions of Chinese American Women’s Life Stories: Thematics of Race and Gender in Jade Snow Wong’s *Fifth Chinese Daughter* and Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*”.

Chinese American literature, and it tends to reproduce certain ethnic stereotypes. In the following chapter, attention will be given to how the literary works selected by the research project conform to, negotiate with, and actively contest this restrictive aspect of the above outlined politics of representation. The research will begin with an analysis on Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, since her book is relevant to the authenticity debate discussed in this chapter. It therefore serves as an appropriate starting point. From this book, the thesis will go on with the discussions of the other two works. Through the discussions, the thesis demonstrates that the politics of representation is not a stable entity with fixed contents and that the contestation to the politics of representation made by Chinese American women writers is an on-going process.

Chapter 2 Contesting Ethnicity

“We belong to the planet now, Mama. Does it make sense to you that if we’re no longer attached to one piece of land, we belong to the planet? Wherever we happen to be standing, why, that spot belongs to us as much as any other spots.” Can we spend the fare money on furniture and cars? Will American flowers smell good now?

The Woman Warrior, 107

As the previous chapter has made clear, the burden of representation weighed heavily on Kingston when her first major work *The Woman Warrior* was published in 1976. The work was confronted with starkly different, and even contradictory, receptions after its publication. A heated debate was triggered among the attackers and the defenders of the book. Whereas the book was recognized on a national level (National Book Critics Circle Award for non-fiction) and praised by many scholars for its poetic style, interwoven plots, and its fresh and innovative articulation of the experience of a second generation Chinese American daughter, others, mostly critics with the same ethnic background as Kingston, or those who are familiar with the Chinese culture and immigrant community in North America, criticized the book because Kingston’s presentation of Chinese culture and Chinese American community appears to be distorted, unrealistic, orientalist and exotic. Specifically, many of the criticisms center on the genre of the work. Originally intended to be published as fiction by the author, the work became relabeled by its publisher and marketed as non-fiction. This subsequently subjected the book to the accusation of faking Chinese culture and selling out ethnicity to the white, mainstream market. As one of the Chinese American critics, Benjamin R. Tong, writes, “She has the sensibility but no conscious, organic connection with [Cantonese] history and psychology ... [I]f she and I were ever to meet, she would know that I know she knows she's been catching pigs [tricking whites out of their money by giving them what they think is Chinese] at too high a price” (Wong 1988, 3).

If the book was to be read as an introductory guide to the Chinese American community, the accusations towards Kingston’s work would have been legitimate. However, the genre of *The Woman Warrior* is ambiguous. Although it is labeled as

non-fiction, it is fictionalized on several levels. To begin with, the dreams and imaginations are narrated in a matter-of-fact tone. As Sau-ling Cynthia Wong points out, “[t]he prose slips from the subjunctive to the declarative with but the slightest warnings”. Except the “perhaps’s” and “it could have been’s” at the beginning of the stories, “the bulk of the narration is in the simple past tense” (Wong 1992, 251). Secondly, the author takes great liberty in rewriting the classical tales, myth and history. The famous Mulan story rewritten by Kingston in the chapter entitled “White Tiger” is in fact a combination of popular folklore, legend and quasi history of heterogeneous times and various historical figures. Whereas such modifications may be easily spotted by readers within the culture, readers without sufficient background knowledge may unquestionably take Kingston’s version as what the culture really is. Thus Wong points out in another article of hers entitled “Necessity and Extravagance in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*: Art and the Ethnic Experience”, “[a] weightier task awaits her, namely, educating the reader about the reality of Chinese-American life” (Wong 1988, 4). Moreover, in the work, the male members of the ethnic community are under represented. In many instances they are depicted as sexists and misogynists. Such representation is misleading to readers unfamiliar with the immigrant community and its cultural tradition. Finally, on the formal level, the non-linear narrative of the work diverges from the common perception of an autobiography which presents the life experience of the narrator in an orderly, lineal manner. The narration in Kingston’s work is non-linear, the events narrated do not necessarily have and may defy outside reference. Even Kingston herself at times discredits the factuality of her stories by providing different versions of the same story. Consequently, rather than a truthful representation, as is expected by many critics and readers, *The Woman Warrior* is an artistically wrought autobiographical work and it resists either the “authentic” or stereotypical representations of the Chinese American experience. In this chapter, I intend to present a reading of Kingston’s work which highlights the aspect of the work as a Chinese American woman’s attempt to define Chinese American identity, despite that the ethnic identity is usually defined by the male members of the community. This is done through the skillful re-writing cultural memories within the family and the ethnic community. The politics of representation is thus contested by Kingston’s work from the aspect of gender and ethnicity. On the other hand, the chapter is also aware of the limits of *The Woman Warrior*, especially the repercussion in Kingston’s effort to claim

Americanness for the Asian American community. As a result, the work marginalizes the immigrant who does not identify with the American national identity and those who fail to assimilate. This leads to a further dimension of the politics of representation, namely the question of nationality, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

1. Revisiting *The Woman Warrior* after two decades: Rewriting as a mode of ethnic subjectivity

The Woman Warrior is essentially made up from memories, or rewritten memories, of a second generation Chinese American girl growing up in China Town. Yet, different from many autobiographical works which focuses on the protagonist him- or herself, the memory of the protagonist Maxine is filled with stories and experiences of other people, especially her female relatives, that she has heard from her mother or has witnessed by herself. As a result, the chapters of the book are organized according to the stories of herself, her mother and aunts. Also, instead of simply recording the stories, Maxine actively adds her own interpretations and modifications to the stories, so that these stories and experiences become a source of empowerment for her. The opening chapter narrates a haunting story of the spiteful suicide of her paternal aunt, who commits adultery and gives birth to an illegitimate child. The second chapter records a fantasy of the young Maxine and the contrast between her disappointing realities with this fantasy. It narrates a brave woman warrior who fights for her people and eventually has justice done. The fantasy is based on a traditional Chinese folk tale of Hua Mulan. It is to a large extent because of Kingston's modification of this traditional folk tale that the book is criticized. The major part of the third chapter narrates her mother's experience at a medical school in China and her immigration to the United States. In this chapter, the mother is portrayed as a resourceful, fierce and fearless shaman who is capable of adapting to difficult conditions, healing, and even exorcising ghost. The following chapter narrates the tragic story of her maternal aunt, Moon Orchid, who moves to the United States to re-claim her husband but eventually fails and loses her mind. The final chapter records Maxine's own growing up stories in China Town, her frustration as a second generation Chinese American daughter, and her final reconciliation with her conflicting identities. Through the analysis of the work, the chapter will show how it contests the politics of representation, yet at the same time confirms to it on other aspects.

1.1 (Stereo)Typing and Resistance: An Oppositional Reading

Shaped by the combining forces of the colonial history, Orientalist imagination as well as the contemporary commercial market, the politics of representation reveals that the field of Chinese American literature is governed by regulations imposed by both the ethnic community and mainstream society. Yet despite such restrictive forces, significant works are nevertheless produced among Chinese American authors and some of them also managed to sell well. In this part of the chapter, I will offer a reading of the very work by Kingston to show how the politics of representation can be negotiated and moved beyond. Through my close reading, this section will demonstrate how, rather than being restricted by the politics of representation, *The Woman Warrior* uses the representational politics as a condition from which Chinese American women reconstructs their identities.

As some critics point out, *The Woman Warrior* does strengthen certain stereotypes in representing Chinese American culture and Chinese American community. In addition to the well-known critique articulated by Frank Chin that Kingston's exoticized rewriting of Chinese myths and history contributes to the existing stereotype (135), Sheng-mei Ma also observes that, Kingston included, "Chinese Americans frequently take on the white gaze at their nonwhite object" (25). For him, the depiction of Chinese American body, behavior and the Pidgin English used by Chinese Americans in *The Woman Warrior* are typical of the Orientalist stereotyping. Indeed, she "coins words including 'talk-story' to refer to her magical realistic storytelling and she also depicts the American born children's feeling of shame towards their parents behavior, which is in accordance with the Orientalist stereotype that portrays the Orientals as the Other to the civilized Western subjects. Although Ma rationalizes that Kingston's stereotyping is strategic, since it aims at debunking the very stereotype, he nevertheless states that such strategy puts Chinese Americans into a dilemma since in resisting the Orientalist discourse, Chinese Americans acknowledge and even internalize "the vocabulary of Western constructions of themselves" (26).

Ma outlines a binary move that may be read into many Chinese American literary works. Such oppositional reading of Kingston can also be found in a number

of other critics.⁸ However, no matter whether or not the author is deliberately debunking the stereotypes, and no matter whether she is being strategic in the use of stereotypes, these are the questions beyond the speculation of the reader. Further, it is felt that the accusation of stereotyping is directed too easily to Kingston. In many cases, these criticism confuses literary types with stereotypes, since the distinction between them is nuanced. In *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations*, Richard Dyer points out that “the social type/stereotype distinction is essentially one of degree. It is after all very hard to draw a line between those who are just within and those definitely beyond the pale”. According to him, “[t]he type is any character constructed through the use of a few immediately recognizable and defining traits, which do not change or ‘develop’ during the course of the narrative and which point to general, recurrent features of the human world” (13). Indeed, by definition, type and stereotype share some common features in that they are immediately recognizable and that they are associated with a certain group of people.⁹ In the analysis of Kingston, most critics I come across discuss the stereotypes in the representation of Chinese American rather than first of all discussing what is considered typical for Chinese American. The concept of a typical Chinese American is rarely defined. Similar observation has been made by Sau-ling Cynthia Wong. She asks,

“[i]n what does the “standard” version of Chinese-American reality – which Kingston is supposedly guilty of distorting – consist? ... When one scrutinizes the concept of typicality which, for racial minorities, is notoriously vulnerable to the vagaries of the dominant ideology, as Chan and Tong are no doubt aware – one realizes a simple truth. While one can speak of the Chinese-American experience, the Asian-American experience, or the minority experience for convenience, in

⁸ See “‘Crossing the Sun and Lifting into the Mountains?’ The Eccentric Subject in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*” by Pirjo Ahokas, “Chinese American Ethnogenesis: From Jade and Lotus Flowers to Chinatown Cowboys, Bananas and Monkeys” by Begona Simal.

⁹ Although it is perceived that stereotype is often seen as a term of abuse and misrepresentation (Cf. Dyer 11, Chow 52), the thesis will argue in Chapter 4 that it is not necessarily the case and that stereotype is used more to regulate, rather than to stigmatize.

contexts where generalization is needed and not detrimental to the nature of the discipline, no such thing exists in literature, where (to borrow from William Blake), ‘to particularize is alone distinction of merit’” (1988, 4).

Although in her article Wong is essentially concerned with the authentic and distorted Chinese American experience, her observation on the unspecified “standard” experience is comparable to my observation on the “type”. It is problematic to accusing an author of stereotyping without first delineating the distinction between stereotype and type, since the usage of a particular image, a type, is essential in literary creation. It is therefore necessary to highlight this nuance between “stereotype” and “type” to raise awareness of such ambiguity.

Rather than imposing a purpose on the author, or readily accusing her of using stereotypes, this chapter intends to put these issues aside and approach the work from a different starting point. In a discussion of ethnic stereotyping, Stuart Hall points out that reversing the stereotype cannot be a productive approach to deconstruct it, as “it has not escaped the binary structure of racial stereotyping and it has not unlocked what Mercer and Julien call ‘the complex dialectics of power and subordination’ through which ‘black male identities have been historically and culturally constructed’” (272, Cf. Mercer and Julien, 137). In a similar vein, a reading that plants such dialectic opposition into *The Woman Warrior* not only fails to provide a convincing account on why stereotypes are present in the work, it also fails in its particular reading to recognize the potential of the work.

As an alternative reading, I argue that Kingston’s rewriting of Chinese culture and her use of (stereo)typical images are the necessary results of the politics of representation outlined in the first chapter. Understood to be a regulation underlying the representation of gender and ethnicity in the mainstream media and culture, the politics of representation affects how ethnic minorities and woman are perceived in a given society, but it also restricts them to a certain fixed typification. Whether the author is conscious of the representational politics or not, and whether she is being strategic to oppose it, it is always already at work in the presentation, and it is difficult to be transcended. A predicament as it is, the politics of representation, including prevalent stereotypes, recognizable signifiers of the ethnic culture and the demand of the market, can nevertheless be used to the work’s own advantage. The use of

folklore, history and certain (stereo)typical image makes the work recognizably Chinese to its readers. In particular, the folklore and history are essential components of the immigrant past and community; they are signifiers of a certain culture. Yet, it should be noted that rewriting is also necessary. As it has been mentioned earlier on in this chapter, ethnicity is not necessarily compatible with the liberation of women. In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston has expressed pronounced feminist sentiments by stressing the importance of the mother-daughter bond, reconstructing the histories of her silenced female relatives and marginalizing the role of fathers, husbands and brothers.¹⁰ Meanwhile, she also tries to emphasize her identity as a Chinese American immigrant. The two aspects are put together in her work by using and modifying family history and classical Chinese texts, such as the obliterated history of her aunt in the opening chapter and the myth of Mulan in the second chapter of the book.

Instead of an opposing move, the work affirms its identity as Chinese American by invoking specific, albeit somewhat (stereo)typical, cultural signifiers. However, by including them in the book alongside other ethnic images, the work presents a diversified image of Chinese American instead of being limited to certain (stereo)types. In addition, as coping with (stereo)types has been commonly experienced by individuals in the ethnic community in negotiating their identity, the book precisely captures such a struggle of negotiating with stereotypes. Rather than seeing the politics of representation as an oppressive regulation that either needs to be obeyed or to be subverted against by the ethnic authors, I argue that the politics of representation is a reproductive force that is commonly encountered, and it is necessary to negotiate with it to become different and to resist the process of reproduction. The Chinese American identity is not defined randomly by any individual; it is defined collectively by individual members of the minority group, the ethnic community, and the mainstream society. It is perceived through its image in the public. The process of definition is a regulative one which sets rules to the production of ethnic literature, and in particular ethnic women's literature. To a certain degree, these rules reveal a predicament that a subject in a homogenizing, reproductive capitalist system has to face when s/he intends to define his identity. These points will

¹⁰ Maxine and her mother Brave Orchid are main characters in the work, whereas none of the male characters receive a major role in the book.

be illustrated in detail through an analysis on the mechanism of memory in Kingston's rewriting of a family story of her aunt and the well-known Chinese myth of Mulan.

1.2 An Affirmative Reading of *The Woman Warrior*

With regard to the criticism launched against *The Woman Warrior*'s use of stereotypes, many scholars have tried to defend the work. Yet what is often overlooked in the defense is the mechanism of memory in passing down immigrant history and culture. Immigration is a process in which customs, values and concepts are set in motion. Accordingly, in this process, memories of the past are prone to change and even get lost. The loss of memory is fought against by the immigrants through their attempt to safeguard the tradition and to preserve the hope to return home. The importance of cultural memory, as well as the tension between forgetting and remembering, is reflected in Kingston's work. The word "memoir" in the subtitle also suggests that it attempts to overcome the loss of memory and to establish a link with the past.

Ironically, in the book, the attempt of the protagonist Maxine to record the memory opens with the prohibition to remember. When Maxine starts to menstruate, her mother tells her the shameful adultery and spiteful suicide of her paternal aunt. The family condemned the aunt to oblivion as she has brought shame: she must be forgotten as if she has never been born. The moral of the story is that Maxine should not disgrace her family and it functions as a warning to police young girls' sexuality. The command to forget involves a paradox. Although she is supposed to be dismembered and forgotten, it is precisely because she can be used as a warning that the memory of her lingers on. Her story gets passed on to the next generation and she herself becomes a mythical figure in the family.

However, the scant memory of the aunt nevertheless confronts Maxine with the impossibility to remember as well as to forget right from the beginning. On the one hand, the family decree to forget is sustained by the violation of the very decree. The prohibition takes effect only when remembering is possible, i.e., when the story of the aunt is told to the younger generation. If the story and the aunt are completely forgotten, then it becomes meaningless to remind the younger generation that the aunt must be forgotten. In Kingston's writing, the prohibition initiates the memory and the memory of the story in turn becomes the condition to forget. On the other hand, the aunt cannot be remembered as a lived being due to the absence of the details of her

story. She exists only as an allegorical figure to convey moral teachings. The useful part of her story is told once and for all by the mother, nothing more is known. Therefore, she is trapped between remembrance and oblivion and it is impossible to remember her as being once a woman with blood and flesh. Her erasure in the living memory can never be complete.

The story of the aunt gains a mythical status in the family through the necessary repetition, the secrecy, and the prohibition to remember. The mother's narration of the story may also mystify the story, as it is likely to be fictionalized so that its function as a warning can be intensified. The story survives as it functions to deter, yet in fulfilling this function, it becomes more than a plain allegory. It is fascinating because it cannot be fully remembered and thus remains unfinished. It is moreover "haunting", to use Kingston's word, because it returns yet not fully, like a phantom, whose existence is not fully embodied. The hauntingness can only be exorcised when the aunt is fully accommodated in memory, with flesh and blood. This is possible only when the memory is tampered with so that it is no longer subject to the prohibition.

As Kingston's book carries out, the sketchy story narrated by the mother expands into a narrative of the possible motives of her adultery and the richness of her inner world. She imagines her aunt as a woman with artistic sensibilities. "[C]aught in a slow life", and discontented with her "big wife" position in a forced marriage, she may have been unwilling to remain obscure among the faceless women in her village (8). Kingston writes, "my aunt combed individuality into her bob" (9). Her individuality, pursuit of beauty and extravagant desires make her an artist of life and the protagonist identifies with her aunt in this respect. As Sau-ling Cynthia Wong points out, "the aunt is seen chiefly as an artist: ...she worked in a dangerous medium – her life – eventually sacrificing herself for the few ephemeral manifestations of sensuous beauty which came her way" (Wong 1988, 9). In this version of her story, she commits adultery since she refuses the fate of a living widow. Because the peasants cannot understand her sensitivity and artistic nature, they make her an outcast. Moreover, Kingston justifies her aunt by comparing her to the men in the family, as Yan Gao observes: "Kingston also speaks in defense of No Name Woman by contrasting her fulfillment of her obligation to cultural norms with her male family members' breaking of cultural norms" (Gao 272). The aunt is a victim of the

patriarchal culture: while the men are free and even encouraged to embark on adventures, her adventure is severely punished.

The aunt is remembered as an artist with sensitive emotions despite the extreme bleakness of her reality. Her adultery is reconstructed as an expression of her artistic sensitivity and a brave attempt to break free from the family confinement. Through the reconstruction, the story is possible to be remembered and retold. Further, rather than a threat, the story becomes meaningful, liberating and worth remembering. Maxine's re-created memory saves her aunt from a patriarchal and misogynous narrative and re-includes her into the family lineage. Instead of being haunted, Maxine can claim ancestral help from this modified memory.

The extraordinary case of the No Name Aunt demonstrates that remembering and forgetting are both indispensable in the making up of memory. Memory is not static; it is the dynamic composition of the remembered, the misremembered, and the forgotten. A remembered story is essentially functional. Its preservation is motivated by its meaningfulness and the necessity to remember. The dynamic characteristic of memory is particularly pronounced in oral histories and folktales, as their references are themselves unreliable and can be subject to question. Therefore, it can be argued that memory is "mis-remembering" all along. Although the exotic story on riots, the patriarchal regulation on female sexuality, family punishment, infanticide and suicide appeals to the stereotypical Orientalist imagination, Kingston nonetheless confirms the protagonist's family lineage and her identity as a Chinese descent. Yet by "mis-remembering" and transforming it, the new story challenges the patriarchal narrative of the family and ethnic history. As Kingston's memoir unfolds, it is revealed that mis-remembering is not only needed when memory is forbidden; it is also necessary for immigrant memory in general.

Kingston's rewriting of the family myth is followed by the rewriting of a national myth: the myth of Mulan, a woman warrior who dresses as a man and goes to war for her country. Unlike the story of the aunt, which is required to be forgotten, the myth of Mulan is taught by the mother so that Maxine remembers her origin. However, in *The Woman Warrior* the national myth becomes a displaced myth because the immigrants have traveled across the ocean, and its meaning can no longer be registered by the descendants of the immigrants.

The story of Mulan is a popular myth in China. As a result of its popularity, the image of the heroine appears in various art forms including folk story, poetry,

drama and even later TV series and films. Despite the diversity in form and content, these versions all share the basic plot that a peasant girl joins the army in the place of her aging father who has no grown up son. The oldest daughter thus disguises her gender by wearing man's clothes and fights in the army vigorously. This basic plot comes from *The Ballad of Mulan*, which was composed during the period of Bei Wei (ca. 386-534). The original ballad is a simple story of only about five hundred words. As the ballad goes, Mulan comes back from the war and is rewarded by the Khan. Mulan declines the Khan's reward of being a minister at the court and returns to her village where her family welcomes her by slaughtering pigs and sheep as if she is a son.

It should be noted that in the book Kingston does not seek to establish her version as the legitimate one of the myth. Indeed, she highlights the fictionality of her version and the necessity of remembering it as that. She states that her version is inaccurate from the beginning: “[n]ight after night my mother would talk-story until we fell asleep. I couldn't tell where the stories left off and the dreams began, her voice the voice of the heroines in my sleep” (Kingston 19). The new version further challenges the assumption that myths can be and need to be remembered in its original form. The version recorded in her book differs significantly from the mother's as it is essentially based on Maxine's already blurred childhood memory. Thus instead of a passive record of the mother's words, the memory is transformed by the remembering process into a conscious and active reconstruction.

It is also necessary to recall the shared insight of Roland Barthes and Levi-Strauss on myth as a form of language with multiple layers of signification. The same can be said of the myth of Mulan examined here. The myth of a woman warrior may not be significant to the mother, as her interpretation of the myth remains within its conventional interpretive framework: But the story strikes a different resonance on the part of the daughter. Among all the stories told by her mother, the myth of Mulan is remembered because it features an inspiring woman warrior who has achieved more than what is expected from, and allowed for, a traditional woman. As Maxine contemplates, “[my mother] said I would grow up a wife and a slave, but she taught me the song of the warrior woman ... I would have to grow up a warrior woman” (20). Like the story of the aunt, the myth has to be remembered otherwise so that its feminist potential can render itself apparent.

A closer look at the widely accepted version of the myth reveals its limits and its potential for a feminist interpretation. The narrative initiates with a lack and the need to fill the lack: as the elderly father is incapable of joining the army and as there is no adult son in the family, the grown-up daughter volunteers to join the army in her father's stead. As a result, the heroine's entry to the narrative is premised on the absence of a hero. It is only when she disguises herself as an adult son that the lack is made up of and the narrative moves forward. The narrative proceeds as the heroine continues to disguise herself as a man to achieve military glory. The story ends with the revelation of the heroine's true gender identity. Towards the end of the narrative, despite her military feats, the heroine declines the emperor's reward to serve in the imperial court and asks permission to return to her family, which is the place assigned to women in the patriarchal and feudal society. The myth, although it expresses certain primitive feminist sentiments in the celebrations of a woman warrior, nevertheless demarcates the separate space for men and women. The public space, the battle field, the court, is the place for men and the private space, home and family, is the place for women, where she is bound to return. Meanwhile, in indicating that performing the duty to the father and the emperor as the legitimate motive for a woman to disguise as a man, the myth also propagates the feudal ideology of loyalty, servitude and community.

Apparently, the message conveyed by the myth becomes displaced once it travels across the ocean. For a second generation immigrant born in the United States, home and homeland are puzzling concepts as they are neither inherent nor coherent. The immigrants are homeless in the homeland while the land where they actually construct their homes remains, culturally and emotionally, foreign. Home is deprived of its materiality and emerges as a figure. Meanwhile, the feudal ideology conveyed by the myth is also obsolete in the capitalist, individualistic North America. The gendered division of space is perceived as oppressive as women have achieved equal rights and become more active in the public sphere in the postwar period, thanks to the war itself as well as the successive waves of feminist movements. The myth epitomizes the conflict Maxine faces at home. She is devalued as a woman. It is only in leaving home that she can be recognized as being capable of achieving as much as men.

For Maxine, the myth of Mulan suggests the possibility to harmonize the somewhat impossible identities of being both a Chinese American daughter and an

independent woman unconfined by the family. But this layer of meaning is unlikely to become pronounced should the original structure of the myth remain. As it has been argued previously, the story has to change or it remains a meaningless story for entertaining children. In the rewriting of the myth here, the functionality of memory is once more stressed. When defending herself against the criticisms of exoticization, she contends that “myths have to change, be useful or to be forgotten. Like the people who carry them across oceans, the myths become American....I take the power I need from whatever myth” (Outka 460). In the book, the figure of Mulan is reconstructed as a role model for the adolescent Maxine as well as a model for the yet to be defined concept of “Chinese American woman”. In her rewriting, the basic storyline of a woman warrior disguising herself as a man to fight is still recognizable, yet its narrative structure has been changed. Instead of an initial lack, the narrative is motivated by a desire to accomplish a quest, as in the Bildungsroman genre. The initiation and the ending of the narrative are thus connected with the pursuit and the fulfillment of the quest. Such a structure enables the narrative to portray a woman warrior in her own right, not as a substitution.

Further, the story is therefore not reproductive. First of all, the story does not repeat the mythical structure that already exists in a specific culture, although it is affirmative of its origin. Secondly, the heroine does not repeat what a man is supposed to do and retires to the household to resume her role as a woman when the task is accomplished. Instead, she explores what a female body can do: she is not an imposter for an adult son, but is recognized by her soldiers as a woman dressing as a man; she does not go to war unprepared, but is chosen to undergo years of martial training so that she can defend her village when she is ready; finally, rather than a maiden heroine as the original myth has it, Kingston’s heroine balances skillfully the multiple, and potentially conflicting identities of a wife, a mother and a leader of a rebellious army. Rather than a negative lack, the story highlights a positive desire that enables the heroine to transform the social system in which she finds herself. Such a non-reproductive aspect of the story challenges the reproductive force imposed by the politics of representation.

These adaptations make the story both relevant and inspiring to the protagonist. As Maxine is frustrated by both gender discrimination at home and racial discrimination in American society, she too longs to fight back as the warrior. The new story also provides the protagonist with multiple and empowering modalities of

becoming woman, so that she can move beyond the traditional roles of daughter, wife and mother. The myth is remade so that it can be a source of empowerment. Kingston's rewriting suggests how memory survives through time and space. Contrary to the conventional understanding of memory as a nostalgic look to the past, the memory of the immigrants is markedly future oriented. It helps to establish coherence between the immigrant past and future. Forgetting is not presented as a failure of memory, or an indication of the inadequacy of the capacity to remember. It is a selective process inherent to the make up of memory. It is through both remembering and forgetting that myths are remade so that it can be used by the immigrants to make sense of their changed reality.

As remembering is necessarily "mis-remembering", the exotic Oriental stories in *The Woman Warrior* needs not to be read as a deliberate stereotyping or a strategic subversion. Rather, it is a gesture to affirm the identity of Chinese American while transforming the fixed Chinese American identity. Although the use of exotic stories conforms to the politics of representation, it nevertheless manages to resist its reproductive force and maps out different possibilities for being Chinese American, and more importantly, being Chinese American as a woman.

2. Ethnic Relegation in *The Woman Warrior*

In the previous section, I argued that Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* can be read affirmatively, so that while it conforms to the politics of representation to a certain extent, it also moves beyond it and presents gender and ethnic difference through remembering and rewriting. Therefore, instead of evaluating the book according to its authenticity, which sees it either as a reproduction of the politics of representation or as a strategic resistance to it, the rewritten memories of the family and the homeland culture can be a source of empowerment for both the protagonist and other ethnic women. My reading argues that remembering differently enables the protagonist Maxine to affirm family and national lineage, to find strength from her heritage, and to adapt them to a new territory. Hence she finds a new image and a different mode of subjectivity for Chinese American women, an image different from either Chinese or American.

I maintain that *The Woman Warrior* offers a productive mode of writing Chinese American racial and gender difference, but it is not, and should not be, the only way of writing difference. This is because in Kingston's attempt to define

Chinese American ethnic identity, she repeats a binary mode of inclusion and exclusion. It is noticeable that in *The Woman Warrior*, although Kingston distances her protagonist from both Chinese and Americans, the two distancing stances differ in quality. Indeed, although Kingston's protagonist is affirmative of her Chinese heritage and is empowered by it, the book should be seen more accurately as an attempt to claim American nationality for both the protagonist and the Chinese American immigrants, in particular the offspring of the first generation immigrants who were born in the United States. As a result, rather than simply presenting the protagonist Maxine as a Chinese descendent living in the United States, Kingston makes a deliberate effort in emphasizing the protagonist's Americanness and differentiating the second generation Chinese Americans represented by her protagonist from "the real Chinese" (49). Not surprisingly, in the book the protagonist's identification lies not with China, but with the Chinese American community and America. She is first and foremost an American, and then a Chinese American, but never Chinese. As Kingston states in an interview,

I have been thinking that we ought to leave out the hyphen in 'Chinese-American', because the hyphen give the word on either side equal weight, as if linking two nouns.... Without the hyphen, 'Chinese' is an adjective and 'American' a noun; a Chinese American is a type of American (Cultural Mis-readings, 60).

This interpretation of the Chinese American's national belonging is transcribed in the book through referring to the protagonist and her siblings as their mother's "American children", who are disappointments to their mother as they are not Chinese enough. Even the mother, who often laments about having no China to go back to after the Communists' taking over, also differentiates herself from the new immigrants from China by calling them the Communists with whom she is "too old to keep up" (107).

Kingston's attempt to claim Americanness for Chinese American is successful as the work is well received and indeed it has bought mainstream attention to the ethnic community. It demonstrates that the category of "Chinese American" is also a constituting part of the United States. This is empowering as the Chinese American community has historically suffered from exclusion and stigmatization. Yet such an attempt can also be problematic as it excludes the immigrants who do not identify with the American nationality, as well as those who fail to assimilate with the American society, from the Chinese American immigrant community. In this section,

textual evidences from *The Woman Warrior* will be given to illustrate how the emphasis on Americanness can be a problematic, binary move of exclusion. The focus here is on the fourth chapter of her book.

In *The Woman Warrior*, not only the Chinese Americans are named differently (American) from the “real Chinese” and the FOBs¹¹, a detailed contrast between the second generation Chinese Americans and the new immigrants can also be found in the chapter entitled “At the Western Palace”. In this chapter, Kingston offers a disturbing account of her maternal aunt Moon Orchid’s visit to America to reclaim her husband, who leaves Moon Orchid and their daughter in China and later marries a younger wife in the United States. Due to the difference in birth place and cultural environment they grow up with, Moon Orchid, as well as her daughter who has lived in the United States for five years, are portrayed differently from Brave Orchid’s born and bred American children. In the scenario depicting Brave Orchid awaiting Moon Orchid at the airport together with her two children and the daughter of Moon Orchid, the differences are presented in the form of clear opposition. As the following chart illustrates,

Scenario: Brave Orchid waiting at the airport to pick up Moon Orchid together with Moon Orchid’s daughter and her own children	
Brave Orchid’s children	Moon Orchid’s daughter
“Her American children could not sit for very long. They did not understand sitting; they have wondering feet” (113).	“Next to Brave Orchid sat Moon Orchid’s only daughter, who was helping her aunt wait” (113).
“[Brave Orchid’s] bad boy and bad girl were probably sneaking hamburgers, wasting their money. She would scold them” (114).	“On the floor [Brave Orchid] had two shopping bags full of canned peaches, real peaches, beans wrapped in taro leaves, cookies, Thermos bottles, enough food for everyone, though only her niece would eat with her” (114).

¹¹ FOB stands for “fresh off the boat”, which refers to the immigrants, in particular Asian immigrants, who newly arrive from a foreign country and are yet to be assimilated into the culture of their destination.

(Responding to Brave Orchid's request to call out for Moon Orchid) "But her children slunk away. Maybe that shame-face they so often wore was American politeness" (118).	"At least the niece called out, 'I see her! I see her! Mother! Mother!' ... she shouted, probably embarrassing the American cousins, but she didn't care" (117).
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The niece comes to America as Brave Orchid arranges a marriage for her with "a rich and angry man with citizenship papers" and to such an arrangement the niece submits herself without complaints (128). Comparing to the impatient and willful "American children", the niece is described as demure, subservient and has no American manners. In the quotations listed in the chart, it seems that Kingston adopts a neutral tone in describing the niece and a criticizing one in describing the "American children", yet ambivalence is nevertheless felt in Kingston's choice of words. Brave Orchid's son and daughter are both adults, yet in depicting them as children who need to be disciplined, the description suggests a certain degree of humor and leniency. The bad children have their ways and although they need to be scolded, the scolding needs not to be taken seriously. The niece, although she is described as good natured, is silenced, dependent on her husband, and does not even have a name mentioned in the whole book.

As to Moon Orchid, who newly arrives from China, she is depicted as eccentric and absurd. She is unable to make her own living: she cannot even help with folding clothes in the laundry when she first arrives and her ability to work hardly progresses as she stays. Her reluctant attempt to reclaim her husband also turns out to be a failure, as she is too scared to speak to him and Brave Orchid does the talk for her. After their confrontation, Moon Orchid gradually becomes schizophrenic.

Both Moon Orchid and her daughter are portrayed as "the lovely, useless type" (128). Although their submissive personalities, inability to break the confinement of the household and go out to the public sphere could be seen as virtues for women in a patriarchal, yet-to-be-emancipated society, they lead to their displacement in America. Their difficulty to fit in is also visible on the level of the body. Moon Orchid is described as "a tiny, tiny lady, very thin, with little fluttering hands" (117). Brave Orchid, on the other hand, is a big, muscular woman who "can carry a hundred pounds of Texas rice up- and downstairs" and "could work at the

laundry from 6:30 a.m. until midnight” (104). Although, like her sister, she is thin and have not worked before her immigration, her body is capable of undergoing the transformation from an upper class Chinese lady to an immigrant women who survives the harsh working class conditions and the discriminative racial policies in America. Lacking the ability to transform, Moon Orchid loses her mind, is sent to a mental asylum, shrinks to bone and eventually dies there (160).

Unable to adapt, the frail immigrant women from well-to-do background in China suffer and pine away in America. They cannot survive the harsh immigrant situation if they are left independent. Yet the lower class immigrants are no better. In brief paragraphs, these new immigrants are described as violators upsetting American norms. As Brave Orchid complains, “[i]mmigrants nowadays were bandits, beating up store owners and stealing from them rather than working. It must’ve been the Communists who taught them those habits” (127). From these differentiated narratives on Chinese Americans and the Chinese who are in America, it is not difficult to see that the ability to connect the Chinese identity and the American identity, and in particularly the ability to acquire Americanness and to respect American norms, is essential for becoming Chinese American. These narratives further reveal a hierarchy existing in the portrayal of those who can be seen as Chinese American and that of the new immigrants, who are essentially Chinese. Ill-mannered, unable to survive the immigrant condition and eventually fail to become American, the Chinese in this chapter is relegated to an inferior, stigmatized position. Unlike the Chinese Americans who manage to leave their homeland, enter the United States territory, start new lives, construct homes and families there, the Chinese are either immobile and therefore stay in China, or fail in assimilation even though they managed to enter America.

This mode of representing Chinese American by representing them as a specific group of Americans but not Chinese is adopted by many Chinese American authors. Failing to adapt and turning schizophrenic is also frequently encountered in Chinese American narratives. In Amy Tan’s bestseller *Joy Luck Club*, a similar character, Ying-Ying "Betty" St. Clair, also goes crazy as she confuses her traumatic past in China and the reality in America. In his book *Immigrant Subjectivities in Asian American and Asian Diaspora Literature*, Sheng-mei Ma observes that there is “gulf between Chinese and Chinese Americans” as in Chinese American discourse, the Chinese Americans deliberately demarcating themselves against the Chinese by

depicting their alienness and even degeneracy (35).¹² He further argues that “[b]y demarcating themselves from this foreign group, Chinese Americans empower themselves, albeit in an ambiguous manner” (27).

Ma argues that the degenerative representation of the Chinese in relation to the Chinese Americans is an indication of Chinese American’s internalized Orientalism. A term originated in Edward Said’s influential work *Orientalism*, Ma described it as “a means for the West to grasp and domesticate the Other; it refers to one culture’s attempt to control the other by fashioning it, a malleable object, according to one’s own imaginings” (Ma 24). Importantly, pertinent to the politics of representation discussed in this chapter, Orientalism could be understood as a means of regulation and domination. As Said states, Orientalism is “[a] Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” and it has infiltrated different academic, aesthetic, cultural, social, political, and economical aspects (3-6). Although in his book Said restrains himself to the discussion over Orientalism in the Arab world, his theorization can be readily applied to other discourses, including the East Asian one and the Chinese American one. Ma, for instance, has taken up this concept and developed it to analyze the internalized Orientalism among the Chinese Americans. He observes that Chinese Americans, who are born and grow up in the United States, often “take on the white gaze at their nonwhite object” (25). Consequently, they see themselves as inferior and attempts to assimilate to the white culture. Accompanying this assimilating move is the move to project Orientalism to the Chinese. This, according to Ma, enables the Chinese Americans to “separate themselves from what they deem to be the true Other, China and Chinese immigrants, creating the impression that they could identify with mainstream America” (25). By giving texture evidences he selected to study, he ends his chapter on Orientalism in the Chinese American context with a pessimistic note that, although the Chinese American male and female authors both try to fight the Orientalized representation of the Chinese Americans, and that in order to achieve this they even contend against

¹² In his analysis, he gives examples from works by David Henry Hwang, Frank Chin and Maxine Hong Kingston herself. He also uses *Moon Orchid* as an example, though with different emphasis. Whereas my emphasis falls on the ability to survive and acquire Americanness, Ma emphasizes on *Moon Orchid*’s aged body, her bizarre behavior, and the Chinese custom of marrying a young son to an older woman.

each other on the issue of sexism and feminism, they nevertheless both present the Chinese body as Orientalized and undesirable. From my analysis on *The Woman Warrior*, I agree with Ma that the pattern in Chinese American literature to relegate Orientalism to “the Chinese” who fail to identify themselves as Americans and those who fail to assimilate is problematic. This ethnic relegation, i.e., transferring stereotypes and stigmatizations to a number of ethnic individuals who are excluded from the ethnic community, not only fails to challenge the construction of stereotypes, it also perpetuates and legitimizes the Orientalist stereotypes as well as the hierarchical power relationship between the West and the rest, in this case, the developed America and the under-developed China.

By analyzing the Orientalist stereotypes present in Chinese American literature, Ma attributes the cause of what I call ethnic relegation to Chinese American’s internalized Orientalism. However, in his analysis, there are still questions that remain unaddressed. For instance, is internalized Orientalism the only cause for ethnic relegation? And also, what are the political and ideological motivations that lead to the relegation of the Chinese in Chinese American literature?

Different from Ma who focuses on the stigmatic representation of the Chinese in Chinese American literature and the Chinese American immigrant community, which is problematic in itself, in the following chapter I intend to situate the ethnic relegation to a larger social context, namely, the construction of American and the issue of national belonging. Chapter 3 thus tries to ask why in many Chinese American literary works, among which *The Woman Warrior* can be seen as a representative, the Chinese Americans almost uniformly see themselves as essentially Americans. As the chapter will point out, the one-sided national identification does not necessarily have a direct relationship with the immigrants’ place of birth and the cultural environment they grow up in. Rather, it also has to do with the representation of the immigrants. This observation will be fleshed out in the following chapter and it is believed that this will substantiate the politics of representing Chinese American immigrants discussed in the first chapter. In addition, through a close reading of Nieh Hualing’s *Mulberry and Peach*, I try to find an alternative interpretation of the Chinese American immigrant’s national belonging. In doing so, I will argue that the Chinese American community is a heterogeneous group where different ways of being Chinese American could be allowed.

Chapter 3 Contesting Nationality

“He says he still must continue investigating my case if they decide I am an undesirable alien they must deport me, where do I want to go? I say I don’t know. He says he doesn’t know what’s the matter with Chinese all the Chinese people he’s investigated answer the same way, the Chinese are foreigners who haven’t any place to be deported to, this is a difficulty he’s never encountered in investigating other aliens.

Mulberry and Peach: Two Women of China

What Kingston has done in *The Woman Warrior* is to challenge the politics of representation imposed on Chinese American literature. It successfully redefines the meaning of being Chinese American from a woman’s perspective. Partially due to the book’s canonical status in Chinese American literature, its mode of representing Chinese American, i.e., claiming Americanness for the Chinese American and stressing assimilation, is replicated by many later works. This in turn forms a hegemonic discourse, which marginalizes and stigmatizes the Chinese American immigrants who disidentify with Americanness and fail to assimilate. As has been pointed out before, the politics of representation is not a fixed entity and it evolves through time. In this chapter, special attention will be given to the new aspect of representational politics, which is referred to in the previous chapter as “ethnic relegation”. The chapter will end with a case study on Nieh Hua-ling’s *Mulberry and Peach: Two Women from China* and explore how ethnic relegation is contested and why it is necessary to challenge it.

1. The Mechanism of the One-Sided National Identification

Among the stereotypes in the representation of Chinese American immigrants, one of them is that they are inscrutable aliens in American society and culture – both in the literal and figurative sense. This sense of alienness can be seen as a result from their Mongolian physical traits, their linguistic and cultural differences, but it was also deliberate intensified by the institutional marginalization and exclusion of Chinese immigrants in America, especially at the early stage of the immigrant history. When

outlining the politics of representation in the first chapter, I have already elaborated that the stereotypical and Orientalized representation of the immigrants is in accordance with the racial and immigrant policy prevalent in the United States. Partially due to these legislations, the immigrant community was segregated, homogeneous in its demographic composition and the gender imbalance was staggering. The Chinese personnel that stayed and were permitted to enter the U.S. are usually sojourners for business, diplomats and the uneducated migrant workers, who kept their wives and children in China. These people were expected to return to their homeland when their work is done. The first generation of Chinese American literature, which appears at the turn of the 19th century and is mostly written by scholars and students from China, also subscribes to the notion that the Chinese are unknown aliens to the Americans.¹³ These writings, characterized by its high-brow scholarly and literary style, are conscious of and sensitive to the American racist discourse at the time, the privilege of the white culture as well as the pre-industrial and semi-colonized status of the homeland. They tend to portray the Chinese immigrants and culture as inferior and benign. As the literary scholar Deborah Madsen observes,

This polarization [of the elite immigrant culture and the low, working class immigrant culture] produced specific literary consequences, notably the dominance of an apologetic mode of autobiographical writing, aimed at apologizing for and explaining the true nature of Chinese cultural practices. These writings attempted to represent the Chinese perspective on American racism, while simultaneously

¹³ See Elaine H. Kim, “Defining Asian American Realities through Literature”. In this article, Kim points out that “Scholars and diplomats, who had been exempted from exclusion legislation aimed at restricting the entry of Asian laborers into the United States, comprised a disproportionately large part of the early Asian American voice. Addressing an Anglo American audience, they tried to win sympathy for the people of the educated elite of which they were part. Their portrayals of Asia are focused on high culture, and their criticisms of American society are tentative and apologetic” (94). Her view is in agreement with what I argue in this chapter that the early generations of immigrant writers position themselves as foreigners to the American society. More on Chinese Exclusion Acts, go to chapter 1, note 2.

adopting and responding to white fears and prejudices. These prejudices, which also underpinned the exclusion laws, were based on the premise that uncontrolled Asian immigration would bring to an end the “white” character of the United States (260).

Madsen uses this division between the high immigrant culture and low immigrant culture to make sense of the authenticity debate in Chinese American literary criticism. Yet her observation also reveals that the early generations of Chinese American writers tend to represent themselves as foreigners to the mainstream, white Americans. At the same time, they also portray themselves as assimilable in the American society, as they would not challenge the white hegemony. Thus, in early immigrant writings, the stereotypes of both “perpetual foreigner” and “model minority” are both confirmed.

Similar observations have been made by other scholars. Fu-jen Chen, for instance, points out, that “early Chinese American writers positioned themselves as ‘ambassadors of good will,’ explaining Chinese cultural practices to the mainstream reader and dispelling negative images of their ethnic group” (379). The usage of “ambassadors” as a metaphor to describe the early generations of Chinese American writers precisely captures the point that they are representative foreigners to the readers they target. Not surprisingly, such a positioning distances the author and the ethnic community from the mainstream Americans and it contributes to the narrative that the Chinese Americans are outsiders to the American society.

The representation of Chinese American immigrants as foreigners is motivated by certain racial, cultural, historical and institutional realities and this stereotype is not entirely a linguistic construction. That being said, this stereotype persists after the early migrants have become permanent settlers in the land, their offspring naturalized as U.S. citizens and the racist legislations gradually lifted. Chinese immigrants, as well as immigrants of Asian descent in general, are still treated as foreigners, if not unwelcome foreigners. When describing her protagonist Mona Chang who grows up in the affluent suburb Scarshill, Gish Jen writes, albeit with a distinguishable tone of irony, that “[in Scarshill] they’re like permanent exchange students”, even though Scarshill is a liberal place and people do not “throw crab-apple mash” at Mona and her sister, which is a big improvement in comparison to the neighborhood they used to live in (6). Seemingly a lighthearted description, it captures a paradoxical predicament of the Chinese American, in particular the generations that are born in

the United States: although they are American citizens, they are *seen* as foreigners despite their citizenship status. This impression, moreover, is often linked with stigmatic connotations. The Chinese American immigrants' shared the desire to rid themselves of this representation and their attempt to claim their Americanness can therefore be seen as a resistance to this very stereotype.

The discourse on the alienness of the Chinese American immigrants evolves a life of its own despite the fact that much of the materiality supporting such discourse has been removed. Naturally, questions can be asked on what motivates this stereotype to persist, which purposes it serves and what consequence it has thereafter. These are valid and important questions in their own right. But in this chapter, I will try to demonstrate how such a stereotype affects the differentiated representation of the Chinese and the Chinese American. By differentiating from the Chinese, Chinese Americans distance themselves from the Orientalist, stigmatizing stereotypes and thus empower themselves. This in turn enables them to challenge the stereotypical image of Chinese Americans as perpetual aliens. Although a legitimate observation, it appears to be too simplifying to see the one-sided identification merely as a resistance to the stereotype, since it also involves issues such as the construction of a multicultural nation, the asymmetrical power relation between nations, as well as the reproduction and consumption of ethnic difference. The tendency to other the Chinese in Chinese American literature does reveal a binary move taken by the Chinese American to re-label themselves as American and to delegate the Chinese to the Oriental Other, yet the chapter argues that such a binary move also reveals how racial difference is in turn differentiated as assimilated difference/sameness and inassimilable differences. By further differentiating racial difference and defining which difference can be accepted and which cannot, racial difference becomes manageable and can be assimilated in a multicultural society.

In a critical review of the literature on Asian Americans in education entitled "Contesting the Model Minority and Perpetual Foreigner Stereotypes: A Critical Review of Literature on Asian Americans in Education", the authors point out that the representation of Asian American as foreigners can be resulted from the racialization of the immigrant community in a society where racial discrimination still persists. Quoting from the legal scholar Angelo N. Ancheta, they argue, "[t]he racialization of Asian Americans has taken on two primary forms: racialization as non-Americans and racialization as the model minority' (p. 44). This outsider racialization constructs

Asian Americans as foreign-born outsiders” (Ng, Lee and Pak 96). The discussion of the image of “modal minority” alongside the image of “perpetual foreigner” is interesting because in these two images, Asian Americans are paradoxically seen as both insiders and outsiders in the American society. As the authors further explain by quoting from C. Kim, “Asian Americans are ‘racially triangulated’ vis-à-vis Whites and Blacks through two interrelated processes of ‘relative valorization’ (Whites valorizing Asian Americans relative to Blacks) and the process of ‘civic ostracism’ (Whites constructing Asian Americans as foreign and Other, p. 107)” (Ng, Lee and Pak 96). Through the observation that the Asian Americans are ambivalently positioned in relation to other ethnic groups, the authors point out that the process of racialization operates on different levels and it is not necessarily binary. Further, it reveals that in a multi-ethnic society, a certain ethnic group is not a monolithic whole, but one that has internal differentiation and hierarchy. What the thesis wants to point out is that even in such a multidimensional process of racialization, binary opposition is still at work: the differentiation of the Asian immigrant community along the line of insider/outsider precisely shows that race is managed through the binary pair of inclusion and exclusion. The inclusion of a certain racial and ethnic group is paradoxically made possible by the exclusion of the very group, or at least certain aspects of the very group.

When analyzing the underlying ideology in the construction of the multicultural Australia, Sara Ahmed, who has done extensive researches on multiculturalism and post-colonial studies, observes that although the policy of multiculturalism practiced in Australia gives an impression that the country is more open and more tolerant to different cultural forms, this image of openness and tolerance is nevertheless based upon exclusion. She argues,

Those cultural forms that are ‘more acceptable’ are precisely those that may look different, *but are in fact the same underneath*. As a result, this multicultural nation accepts those differences that do not threaten the ‘we’ of an Australia being: the differences that cannot be reduced to mere appearance become *the unassimilable* (106, emphasis original).

She continues a few paragraphs later,

Multiculturalism as an official discourse hence involves narratives of partial assimilation or incorporation (through which the ‘we’ of the nation can appear different) as well as narratives of partial expulsion

(through which the ‘we’ of the nation defines the limits of what it ‘can be’). Both the narratives of incorporation and expulsion involve differentiating between others, which produces simultaneously, two figures of the ‘stranger’, including the one who can be taken in, and the one who might yet be expelled (the other who *is* a stranger) (106, emphasis original).

For Ahmed, the multicultural Australia is expected to have a more tolerant and inclusive image, yet such an image is nevertheless constructed through a selective inclusion and exclusion of differences. For her, cultural difference itself is differentiated into “the assimilated” and “the unassimilable” (Ahmed 106). What is accepted is therefore not so much difference itself but sameness in disguise. This observation on the Australian multiculturalism is comparable to the multicultural policy in America. The aspect of inclusion and exclusion is particularly pronounced in the representation of Asian Americans as both “model minority” (inclusion) and “perpetual foreigner” (exclusion). By incorporating the immigrants who identify with American values and aspire to realize their own American dreams, the image of America as a white-dominant society where racial minorities are discriminated and excluded as non-Americans changes. The diversified demography helps to construct a free and inclusive America where differences are accommodated. What is concealed in this image, however, is that although its citizens appear to be different, they uphold more or less the same core value and identification. Further, the image of a multicultural American is not simply achieved through the differentiated representation of immigrants of the same ethnic group. It also regulates the representation of the immigrants. This image of diversity privileges certain values, beliefs and identifications that are needed for an immigrant subject to become an American subject. It thus has a function to exclude difference and to safeguard the American norms.

The binary move of inclusion and exclusion is clearly visible in *The Woman Warrior*. The second generation Chinese Americans, well assimilated and accustomed to the American value and custom, are categorized as Chinese Americans. Their Chineseness, which is reflected through their physical appearance, language ability, and cultural memory including the folktales narrated in the book, are incorporated in American society. Yet Moon Orchid and her daughter, as well as the new immigrants, although they live in America and share more or less the same physical traits,

language ability and cultural memory, are disqualified as Chinese American due to their “strange” behavior and value. Their Chineseness is thus unassimilable to the American society. Apparently, the representation in the book is in accordance with the binary move needed to construct a nation in which racial minorities can also find a place. It can be argued that Chinese American authors deliberately construct an representation of the Chinese American that can be more easily accepted in the American society, so that mainstream attention can be given to the voice and unique experience of the ethnic community. Yet I nevertheless maintain that such a phenomenon is also resulted from the immigrant’s internalization of and identification with the American national image.

It is because the immigrants identify, willingly or unwillingly, with being Americans, and by identifying with the American identity, they agree with or acquiesce in the fundamental inclusion and exclusion needed to construct this national image, that they produce a dualistic representation of their own ethnic community. As a result, those who do otherwise are considered to be non-Americans, despite their location and citizenship status. Here, it can be observed that the limit of the ethnic group they attempt to define coincides with the very boundary of the United States as a nation. This is indeed a matter of internalization, as Ma rightfully points out, but I further argue that such internalization is not merely a result of internalized Orientalism, but also a result from the very reality that they are American citizens and are required to identify with the national identity. In other words, it is not merely Orientalism that the immigrants internalize, but also the fundamental inclusion and exclusion that is required to become American. Meanwhile, as Chinese American literature are considered to be literary works produced by Chinese Americans, those who disidentify with the national identity are excluded from the category of Chinese American. Consequently, the voices of those who do not conform are silenced and they are unrepresented and alienated in the Chinese American literary representation. The fact that *Mulberry and Peach* are often not considered as American immigrant literature is a case in point here.

At this point, it would be useful to pause for a moment and consider the following question before the chapter advances. Why do many Chinese American literary works attempt to resist the perpetual foreigner stereotype and stress upon an American identity? Or to put it even more simple: why is it undesirable to be seen as a foreign migrant who designates mobility and cultural difference? The question is

particularly interesting because in some postmodern critical theories, the ability to move, as well as the status of being nomad and migrant, often seems privileged.¹⁴

To begin with, I argue that to resist stereotypes is not simply because stereotype produces a fixed, ahistorical and usually negative image of a minority group. Neither is it simply because this stereotype impinges on the immigrants' legal entitlements. It is also not the case that the Chinese immigrants *always* identify with the national identity of their adopted land.¹⁵ The Chinese Americans' overwhelming identification with American nationality can in fact be taken as a particular case, which is resulted from the apparent asymmetrical power relation between the homeland and the adopted land. As a First World nation and a political and economic superpower, the United States can often provide its citizens with political and economical stability, first world facilities, as well as the possibility and freedom to achieve their dreams. This aspect is indeed often reflected in immigrant literature as the political instability in China is written about, either in detail or briefly, by the three selected works in this research project. The immigrants in these literary works also often do not identify with, or are even victimized by the political regimes in their homeland. Whereas in many Southeastern Asian contexts, including Indonesia, retaining Chinese citizenship or identifying themselves as Chinese to differentiate themselves from the locals can provide a certain degree of convenience and privilege, for instance in commerce (Chandra 2012); in the North American context, being American, is often seen as more desirable, as a hierarchy between a first world nation and a third world nation can be clearly perceived. Indeed, the political, cultural and economic hegemony held by the United States has triggered successive waves of immigration from across the Pacific, and especially from Taiwan, after the communist

¹⁴ The tendency to privilege migration and nomadic status is critiqued by Rey Chow and Sara Ahmed, among other critics. See *The Protestant Ethnics and the Spirit of Capitalism* and *Strange Encounters*.

¹⁵ For instance, in Elizabeth Chandra's presentation entitled "We the (Chinese) People: Revisiting the 1945 Constitutional Debate on Citizenship in Indonesia", an account is given to the internal difference within the Chinese immigrant community in determining their citizenship status at the time when the Republic of Indonesia as an independent nation is formed. Unlike the North American case, a considerable proportion of Chinese Indonesian insists on keeping Chinese citizenship.

rule in the mainland was established. The continuous wave of migration is facilitated by the open-door policy between the U.S. and Taiwan in 1965.¹⁶ in the case of *Mulberry and Peach*, although the novel does not specify what the protagonist's motivation for immigration is and it is suspected that she migrates for political reasons, it cannot be argued that the hegemonic position held by the United States have no influence in her choice of immigrant destination. Finally, as it has been mentioned before, all three literary works selected for this research have, without exception, in their narrations on China the depiction of the communist terror and the political turmoil. This may be a result of the prevailing anti-communist sentiment in North America, and in particular as a result of the legacy and repercussions of McCarthyism. Combined with the stigmatic, Orientalist representation of the Chinese, the unequal power relationship between China and America, as well as the anti-communist discourse in North America make the Chinese identity even less desirable for the Chinese American immigrants.

Having approached the issue of national belonging from the perspective of Orientalism, Chinese American stereotypes, the construction of nation and the unequal power relationship between nations, I want to round of the discussion by adding a commercial dimension to the discussion. In accordance with the politics of representation of the Chinese American immigrants outlined in the first chapter, I want to show that there is a commercial dimension to be found in this deliberate attempt to "other" China and the Chinese in literature. As the narrative on exotic experience and insiders' knowledge of the other have a market demand, these narratives become sought after and it is likely that this demand is reflected in the policy of publication and the end products that are available in the market. As both insiders and outsiders to the American society, the Chinese American immigrants have a privileged and more "reliable" position as native informants to produce the representation that is demanded. Therefore, it can be postulated that to a certain degree of exoticization and Orientalization is encouraged in the production and commoditization of ethnic literature to appeal to the consumption of exoticism and foreignness. It could also be suspected that the invisibility of literary works that defy

¹⁶ For a detailed discussion on American hegemony and its effect on trans-Pacific migration in Taiwan, see Yu-Fang Cho, "Rewriting Exile, Remapping Empire, Remembering Home: Hualing Nieh's *Mulberry and Peach*", page 162.

American identification is not because these works are non-existent, but because they are not published and thus not visible in the market. Or, even when they are published and well received, as in the case of *Mulberry and Peach*, they are not labeled as Chinese American literature but as Chinese literature. Among the literary works that repeat the pattern of ethnic relegation, as self-exoticization is undesirable due to the historical exclusion of the Chinese immigrants, the “real” Chinese becomes the target of exoticization. Conscious or not, Chinese American authors are caught in a double bind in depicting China and the Chinese: on the one hand, they intend to lay claim on their American identity to defy the perpetual foreigner stereotype; on the other hand, the market demands exotic narratives. This double bind – both enabling and limiting – is particularly visible in *The Woman Warrior*, as I have shown in the previous chapter

Complicated by issues including stereotypes, power, the construction of a multicultural nation and the market, it cannot be justified to simply attribute the cause of ethnic relegation in Chinese American literature to the author’s internalized Orientalism. It misses the point to simply criticize the stereotypical representation in Chinese American literature. To categorize Chinese American literature as either fake or authentic further runs the risk of falling into a binary trap, as first of all it excludes difference and diversity from the immigrant experience and immigrant culture. Also, by privileging what is authentic and bashing what is considered to be fake, gender and racial hierarchies will be inevitably established in the process. In line with my affirmative approach to Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*, I argue that the productive approach to Chinese American literature is the appreciation of difference and diversity, rather than regulating and disparaging the alleged “mis-representation” in individual works. Different facets of immigrant life should be encouraged. On the other hand, the “othering” tendency visible in many Chinese American literary works should not be overlooked. Instead of merely criticizing this tendency, the dimensions outlined in this section should be taken into consideration when discussing the pattern of ethnic relegation. These politically embedded issues are interrelated and affect each other. Although it is impossible to pinpoint the exact cause of ethnic relegation (I argue all are at work), they reveal the complexity of the issue and that ethnic relegation cannot be contained within the ethnic community. A larger context is needed in considering how this could be changed.

In the following section, I try to explore how the inclusion and exclusion required for the construction of a nation can be challenged. This is achieved through a

close reading of Nieh Hualing's most influential work *Mulberry and Peach: Two Women from China*. By demonstrating that the work can be categorized as Chinese American literature, I also question the linguistic and identity hegemony in Chinese American literature.

2. Diasporic literature in the landscape of Chinese American literature

So far in this chapter, I have outlined the problems surrounding the issue on the stigmatization of the immigrants who fail to assimilate. The question that therefore follows is how it is possible to produce a representation of the Chinese American community without stigmatizing and relegating Orientalist stereotypes to the Chinese and the immigrants who do not share the American identification? For Rey Chow, as stereotypes serve a certain purpose, they are inevitable in cross-cultural representation. Through an analysis of Derrida's discussion of Chinese ideogram, she notes,

Derrida's move to read across cultures, like those made by many others, involves a moment in which representation becomes, wittingly or unwittingly, *stereotyping*, a moment in which the other is transformed into a recycled cliché. Whereas stereotypes are usually regarded pejoratively, as a form of entrapment and victimization of the other, the case of Derrida shows that stereotypes can be *enabling*: without the cliché of Chinese as an ideographic language, as a writing made up of silent little pictures, the radical epistemic rupture known as deconstruction could perhaps not have come into being in the manner it did. (Chow 63, cf "How (the) inscrutable Chinese" 71, emphasis mine).

As it has been demonstrated earlier in this chapter, ethnic relegation serves a purpose, which is to construct a free, inclusive image of the United States where ethnic minorities also have a place. Under such a multicultural grand narrative, I agree with Chow that the binary move of inclusion and exclusion, as well as relegating Orientalist stereotypes, is inevitable, since few alternatives are available and imagined in the cultural symbolic to represent difference. Similar to Derrida, many Chinese American authors reproduce stereotypical narratives on the Chinese. In this regard, I argued that a change to the stereotypical representations cannot be introduced simply through artistic innovation or creative literary imagination. In other words, new representation is not *willed* into existence through the individual artist's creative

capacity. Rather, change can only take place through a re-conceptualization of the nation, national border, belonging and citizenship status. A rethinking of what America is, and what makes an American, is necessary to facilitate the literary production of different images of the Chinese American immigrants.

In Chow's discussion on cross-cultural representation, she seems to hold the somewhat pessimistic view that representation in a cross-cultural context is always superficial and that stereotypes are inevitable. Yet with regard to what I am concerned with in this chapter, namely ethnic relegation and the one-sided construction of national belonging in Chinese American literature, I argue that change can indeed take place and can be found in some literary works. One exemplary work in this regard is *Mulberry and Peach: Two Women from China* by Nieh Hualing.

Mulberry and Peach narrates the life story of Mulberry, a Chinese woman migrating through various mainland Chinese cities, fleeing from the mainland for Taiwan in the aftermath of the communists taking over and eventually journeys to the United States to avoid successive life-threatening circumstances. In the process of her migration, she gradually turns schizophrenic, acquires a dual persona and eventually is taken over by the other persona, Peach, who, in contrast to her previous self, is elusive, free-spirited, rebellious and sexually unbounded.¹⁷ The four parts of the novel are essentially composed of the fragments from Mulberry's diary written in different phases of her life. The first excerpt details Mulberry's escape from her parental home to Chungking to take refuge from the Japanese invasion, during which process her boat is stranded and she is confined in the boat. The second excerpt narrates her stay in Peking during the communist siege of the city and her subsequent flight from the mainland with her husband. The following part records her confinement in an attic in Taiwan together with her husband and daughter, as the husband embezzles the government funds and attempts to avoid prosecution. In the final excerpt, Mulberry's life and journey across the United States are narrated. The narration starts with

¹⁷ It should be noted that although the other persona Peach eventually takes dominance in Mulberry/Peach's schizophrenia conflict, the two personae are not binary opposites. Neither should they be read as one represents the Chinese identity and the other the American identity. Rather, Mulberry and Peach are united within each other in the novel from the beginning till the end.

Mulberry's application for American permanent residency and ends with her transformation from Mulberry to Peach, her alternative persona due to her schizophrenic mental condition. Although placed in a chronological order in the four chapters, these fragments are strung together by Peach's letters to the American Immigration Service officer. As such, the narrative is not a lineal record of Mulberry's transformation to Peach. The temporal and geographical continuity of Mulberry's border crossing is continuously interrupted by Peach, who roams freely across America and narrates back in time. In this chapter, the analysis will be centered on the final part of the novel, as it tells of Mulberry/Peach's experience in the United States, and her endeavor to acquire permanent residency. Further, in this part, Nieh records a wide spectrum of Chinese American individuals and new immigrants from China and Taiwan. As such, various national identification and dis-identification are represented. These representations enable the chapter to take a close look at the issue of Chinese Americans' national identification. Through an analysis of the protagonist's contestation of her national identification, the chapter tries to show that different modes of national identification do exist among the Chinese American immigrants and their dis-identification with the American identity needs also to be represented in literature.

Composed in America in the Chinese language, serialized in Taiwan but banned from mid-serialization, published for the first time in its entirety in Hong Kong in 1976, translated into English by Jane Parish Yang and Linda Lappin and published in the United States in 1981, Nieh's novel, like her female protagonist, has experienced a series of dislocations and relocations in its production and publication. As a result, the novel cannot be categorized by a single geographical label. As Sauling Cynthia Wong notes in the Afterword to the novel, the work is at times seen as modern Chinese literature, overseas Chinese literature, Taiwanese literature, exile literature, diasporic literature, feminist literature and Chinese American literature (Wong 1997, 210).

Despite the various labeling, the work is nevertheless seen primarily as a "quintessential Chinese modernist novel" (Cho 159). As the literary scholar Jean Amato observes, Chinese diasporic literature differs from Chinese immigrant literature in the United States in that the former has been "preoccupied with themes of nostalgia, longing, and loyalty to a Chinese homeland and culture" whereas the latter "is mainly oriented towards domestic-centered representations of immigrant

assimilation, the minority condition, and ethnic hybridity” (32). This distinction drawn by Amato is to a large extent also the distinction between *Mulberry and Peach* and the Anglophone, American identified and American centered literary works represented by *The Woman Warrior*. Indeed, taking a closer look at the novel, it is not difficult to find that although Peach’s correspondence with the American immigration officer runs through the entire book, only one of the four chapters is devoted to Mulberry’s life in the United States and her attempt to obtain permanent residency, the result of which remains unclear even when the novel ends.

However, in my opinion, *Mulberry and Peach* should be considered as a piece, and even a masterpiece, of Chinese American literature for several reasons and in what follows I will outline these in further detail. First of all, the subplot of Peach’s journey from east to west across the United States runs through the whole novel. This journey can be seen symbolically as an immigrant woman’s attempt to map out the nation she inhabits, despite the fact that her citizenship status is not recognized by the American authority. Indeed, Peach is defiant and unbound by the regulation imposed on (illegal) immigrants. She deliberately informs, through correspondence, the Immigration Service agent about her whereabouts in the journey. In one of her letters, she writes, “[i]f you want to chase me, come on” (11). Rather than conforming to the institution already established on the land, Peach’s constant transgression and border-crossing present a different possibility of being ‘in America’.

Secondly, in addition to the protagonist’s attempt to challenge the national identity, the work, by depicting an alternative mode of national belonging, also challenges the assimilation oriented narratives in immigrant literature. As Amato points out, “[b]y their narrative focus on a more global reorientation of an ethnic Chinese cultural identity, such immigrant texts can work to interrogate place-bound narratives of national belonging” (36). As it has been made clear previously in the chapter, the one-sided national identification in Chinese American literature is problematic and it perpetuates certain hegemony both in literature and in the American society, hence it is necessary to reflect on and challenge this one-sided national identification. In this regard, *Mulberry and Peach* could be seen as an alternative to the overwhelming American identification in Chinese American literature, as the protagonist endeavors to stay in the United States permanently yet resists identifying with the American.

Lastly, as the novel is originally written in Chinese, it challenges the linguistic and cultural hegemony in the Chinese American literature and literary criticism. The majority of the Chinese American literary works, no matter whether they are defined as such by the academy or by the publishing industry, are written in English. Translated works are rarely considered as Chinese American literature. This emphasis on linguistic homogeneity in Chinese American literature may also reflect the emphasis on assimilation within the ethnic community, since acquiring the language can be seen as one of the first steps to assimilation. As a literary work narrating a women's experience in the United States in the Chinese language, the re-labeling of Nieh's work as American canon has political consequences.

To make these points more concrete, it is necessary to take a close look at the final part of the novel, which is set in the United States. The final part of *Mulberry and Peach* begins with an intriguing conversation between Mulberry/Peach and the Immigration Service agent, as Mulberry/Peach is required to give a deposition at the Immigration Service in regard to her application for permanent residency in the United States. Towards the end of the conversation, the naturalness of American national identification for immigrant subjects is explicitly challenged. As the interrogation goes,

(Man from the Immigration Service) "Are you loyal to the American government?"

(Mulberry) "I'm Chinese."

(Man from the Immigration Service) "But you're applying for permanent residency in America. Are you loyal to the American government?"

(Mulberry) "Yes" (203).

This exchange shows that loyalty to the American government is a prerequisite for the immigrant subjects who seek to stay permanently, or to be naturalized as an American citizen. Yet for Mulberry, loyalty for to the American government does not come *naturally* as she identifies herself as Chinese. This is made obvious as she answers disobediently "I'm Chinese", which highlights the unnaturalness for her to be loyal to the American government. The second answer, which is markedly opposite to her first one, shows that the American national identification is adopted contingently and strategically by Mulberry as such an answer is required from her so that she could

achieve her end. For Mulberry/Peach, it is necessary to perform her American identification in this situation, yet such a performance is essentially a parody.

Two observations can be derived from this exchange. First, American identification and the sense of belonging, which includes loyalty to the American government, cannot be negotiated by the immigrant subjects when they seek to stay in America. The immigrant subjects are expected to identify with America and an alternative identification is prohibited in the official discourse. Second, the immigrant subjects who refuse to identify often hides away the national identification of their choice in order to become citizen. In the case of Mulberry/Peach as well as the immigrants who share her homeland identification, their true sense of identification and belonging are usually silenced. This conscious silencing of alternative national identifications is in accordance with the overwhelming American identification and desire to assimilate in Chinese American literature. As alternative identification is not encouraged and sometimes even prohibited in the official discourse and the public sphere, writing and publishing literary works representing such identification are accordingly fewer.

Although the Chinese identification is repressed and hidden away from the public sphere and in their dealings with the authority, they are nevertheless expressed privately by the immigrants and amongst themselves. The Chinese identification may also come back in the form of nostalgia when they are naturalized and their citizenship status becomes secure. In Nieh's novel, many immigrant subjects display to a certain degree a double sense of national belonging. This double sense can clearly be found in Chiang I-po, one of the lovers of Mulberry/Peach and a major character in the final part of the novel. He is depicted as a professor at an American university who attaches importance to keep up his respectability and dignity in society, although under his social appearance he is a hypocrite and despicable person. This is reflected by his attempt to persuade Mulberry to abort their unborn child, despite that he is a catholic. Naturalized as an American, Chiang I-po is Christianized, acquires an English name Bill, marries a Chinese American wife and sometimes even speaks English to his fellow Chinese. Despite being a model immigrant who successfully realizes his American dream, he secretly identifies himself as a Chinese. As the book shows, during the broadcast of Apollo 11 landing on the moon, he turns off the TV and turn up the volume of the stereo playing a nostalgic Chinese song. He remarks, "[w]e're Chinese. What do Americans on the moon have to do with us? Let's listen to

Golden Voice sing. When I left the mainland she was really popular” (Nieh 206). For him, the event of moon landing, a display of power by the United States during the cold war, cannot be compared to a nostalgic Chinese song. In another narration, Chiang I-po is found “competing to call out the names of old alleys in Peking” and singing Peking Opera in his living among several other Chinese immigrants (Nieh 224 - 227). However, the national belonging for Chiang I-po is essentially ambiguous. His Chinese identification may be resulted from his nostalgia after securely settling down in the United States. As his wife remarks, “[w]hen I met him, he was working hard on his Ph.D. at that time he wasn’t interested in anything Chinese, he didn’t even have Chinese friends. But now, it’s just the opposite! Anything Chinese is good!” (226). Yet for him, even this nostalgia is only expressed privately and in enclosed locations, such as in his own living room and at Mulberry’s apartment. These confined spaces can be seen as a clear sign of the repression of his national identification.

An interesting gender difference can be found in the different expressions of national identification between Mulberry/Peach and Chiang I-po. Whereas the male character “rationally” represses his identification and consciously confines it in private, the female character appears to be unbound, subversive and more daring in her expression. The contrast between the “rational” male and the “irrational”, transgressive female may find echo in Julia Kristeva’s theorization on the symbolic and the semiotic, and especially in her formulation on the semiotic chora. For Kristeva, the signifying process operates in two modes: the semiotic and the symbolic. The semiotic refers to “the extra-verbal way in which bodily energy and affects make their way into language” and the symbolic refers to “a way of signifying that depends on language as a sign system complete with its grammar and syntax” (McAfee 17). Yet rather than taking the two modes as polar oppositions, Kristeva maintains that the two are intertwined and the semiotic may find ways to come back to the symbolic and disrupt the orderly, structured symbolic. The Kristeva scholar, Noelle McAfee further notes, “[t]he semiotic aspect of signification signifies what is ‘below the surface’ of the speaking being” (18).

Kristeva’s discussion of the semiotic is closely related to the concept of “chora”, i.e., “an essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and their ephemeral stases” (Kristeva 25). She develops the term “the semiotic chora” since for her chora is the location where the semiotic meaning is produced. A term borrowed from Plato, “chora” (χώρα) has a clear feminine

connotation, as it can be associated with womb, wetnurse and the mother. It thus follows that the semiotic is located on the feminine side, although in Kristeva's work the feminine does not necessarily bear a correlation with the biological woman.

The difference between the semiotic and the symbolic theorized by Kristeva can be compared to the difference between woman and man described in the novel. Significantly, in one of the scenes in the final part of *Mulberry and Peach*, when Mulberry/Peach and Chiang I-po's wife Betty are talking together about the unfaithful husband, they are found in the basement of the Chiang house, whereas Chiang I-po is upstairs with his friends talking about China. According to the novel, the basement is the territory of Betty ("he calls me the underground American" (226)) and the upstairs living room is that of Chiang I-po ("I call him the upstairs Chinese" (226)). They organize their lives differently in their respective territories, and according to Betty, her husband rarely comes down to the basement. While in the novel it appears that the difference in territory is reflected in the difference in national belonging, it can be argued that the differentiated territory also reflects the difference between the symbolic and the semiotic, a difference that further indicates sexual difference. Whereas the symbolic appears to be more stable, organized and rational, the semiotic structured underneath the symbolic is capable of disrupting the symbolic. Indeed in the novel, Chiang I-po's nostalgic getting-together with his friends, his Peking Opera singing and laughter is interrupted, precisely at the moment when Mulberry/Peach emerges from the basement and appears at the doorway to the upstairs living room (228). In the novel, the subversive potential of the semiotic developed by Kristeva is clearly embodied by women in the novel.

In addition to revealing the unnaturalness of immigrants' identification with their adopted land, the novel further reveals that the need to inhabit a land does not correlate directly with national identification. When explaining his frustration on the hardship in staying in the United States, another character, Deng, a Ph.D student from Taiwan and also a lover to Mulberry/Peach, rants,

"It took me the strength of nine bulls and two tigers to escape from the mainland to Taiwan, and the strength of nine more bulls and two more tigers to escape from there to America. Once in America, I scrubbed toilets as a janitor, waited on tables. I have only a few more months until I get my Ph.D. but once I get it, then what? Go back to Taiwan? I

couldn't stand it! Go back to the mainland? I can't do that, either. Stay here? I'm nobody!" (Nieh 211).

For Deng as well as for Mulberry, staying in the United States does not necessarily mean that they identify with the American values and norms. They do not identify themselves with Americans; rather, they are trapped in America because they have neither home to return nor anywhere else to go on to. Yet whereas for Deng home is still a source of nostalgia, which is manifested by a crystal paperweight containing a Great Wall replica he treasures, Mulberry shows no nostalgia for home. As Yu-fang Cho points out, "[f]or Mulberry/Peach, the return to home is not only impossible but also undesirable; she is constantly on the move in search for the ultimate yet unattainable refuge" (160). For Mulberry, in particular, America is one of a series of confinements she experiences throughout the novel. Like her previous confinements, which include a stranded boat she takes to Chungking, the house of her husband in Beijing and an attic in Taipei, her confinement in America also involves a paradox: although being confined, the state of being confined nevertheless implies an act of transgressing borders. As she does not have permanent residency, her confinement in the United States is always threatened by the danger of deportation. Yet by roaming freely across the American territory, attempting to dodge the Immigration Service agent, escaping from a hospital in Lone Tree, Iowa and finally transforming into Peach, she is also defiant of the Immigration Service and seeks to claim a piece of territory for her to stay, even though her claim on the American territory cannot be recognized as legitimate.

The legitimacy an individual can claim on a certain territory is mocked in the novel. During Mulberry's road trip across America, she stays in a dilapidated water tower but is forced to leave. Before her departure, she hangs up a wooden plaque on the water tower in a mocking emulation of the American astronaut Neil Armstrong's act of planting a plaque and an American national flag on the surface of the moon. Mulberry's plaque reads,

A WOMAN WHO CAME FROM AN UNKNOWN PLANET
ONCE LIVED IN THE WATER TOWER
FEBRUARY 22, 1970 – MARCH 21, 1970
I CAME IN PEACE FOR ALL MANKIND. (Nieh 196)

The irony of Mulberry's plaque hanging gesture becomes manifested when it is compared to that of Armstrong's. This reference is indeed being made at various

points of the novel. As a white, male, legitimate American citizen, Neil Armstrong could travel to the moon and claim it for humanity, or even claim it for the United States, as the American national flag implies. His action is not only seen as legitimate, but also a feat. It is “one giant leap for mankind”, to use Armstrong’s own words. Yet as an immigrant without citizenship and as a non-white woman, Mulberry’s right to stay in America remains uncertain: she is being interrogated and investigated by the Immigration Service, her alternative national identification has to be repressed, and even her sexual relationship and her unmarried pregnancy may affect the decision on her residency application.

By foregrounding Chinese Americans repressed alternative national belongings and questioning the individual’s legitimacy of claiming a land, I argue that Nieh’s novel renders visible what is silenced and repressed in the construction of a unified national identity. It also provocatively questions the natural relationship between national identification, cultural belonging and citizenship. It shows that national identity is not defined by a certain territory people inhabit, but by the political, cultural, racial and sexual regulations imposed upon that particular territory. Therefore, for immigrants, the physical entry into a land does not necessarily denote the possibility to stay. It is only by going through a process of acculturation and naturalization that one can stay legitimately. This process, however, could be repressive and discriminative.

A final point to raise here is that by questioning different individual’s entitlements to claim a territory, the book also challenges the hegemony in Chinese American literature. As it has been argued previously, many Chinese American literary works center on American national belonging. The understanding that Chinese American immigrants are essentially Americans and then Chinese descendents also finds its expression in Asian American literary criticism. As a result, the majority of the authors and books included in Chinese American literature share this identification and the literary scene is dominated by works written in the English language. This choice of language reflects, but also intensifies the one-sided national identification. Originally written in Chinese, I argue that *Mulberry and Peach* challenges this linguistic hegemony in Chinese American literary criticism.

The close reading of *Mulberry and Peach* reveals that the novel maps out a different mode of being in America, i.e., inhabiting without necessarily identifying with the American nationality. It demonstrates that ethnic difference is not only the

assimilable physical and linguistic differences, but can also be the “unassimilable” difference in national identification and cultural belonging. The book further resists the emphasis on American national identification in Chinese American literature and brings awareness to those who do not identify yet seek to stay in America, i.e., “foreigners who haven’t any place to be deported to” (Nieh 223). This aspect of ethnicity in North America needs to be considered since America remains one of the most frequent destinations for refugees and political dissidents.

Chapter 4 Beyond Chinese American

“Jewish is American,” Mona says. “American means being whatever you want, and I happened to pick being Jewish.”

Mona in the Promised Land, 49

With *The Woman Warrior* attempting to claim Americanness for the Chinese American immigrants on the one hand and *Mulberry and Peach* trying to bring attention to the Chinese diasporic population that is reluctant to identify with the American national identity on the other, the protagonists in these two separate works offer two different interpretations of being Chinese American. They also successfully claim their legitimacy in inhabiting the land, both as ethnic minority and as woman. It seems, in citing these two works as case studies, the thesis has mapped out two clear directions for Chinese American women to define their identities. It is understandable that in early Chinese American immigrant literature there is an overwhelming tendency to identify with being American and to emphasize assimilation, as this is caused by the political exclusion and cultural marginalization experienced by the Chinese American immigrants. Yet it is also necessary that different literary works are produced so that the dominant assimilative discourse in Chinese American literature can be rethought and alternative modes of ethnic and national identification are represented. Nieh Hualing's *Mulberry and Peach* is an excellent example in this regard because it questions the naturalness of the American identification among the immigrants. The novel can also be seen as a response to Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* examined in the second chapter, since it brings to the center what Kingston's work alienates, namely, the Chinese diaspora in America who endeavors to claim a right to stay.

In bringing together these two strands in Chinese American literature, it seems that this research project could come to a closure. However, to wind up the thesis just like this would still leave a few issues to be clarified. To begin with, the close readings of the two works appear to be the binary opposite to each other as each more or less focuses on one of the poles of the Chinese American identity. Yet the relation between the chapters is continual rather than binary. Although the chapter on

Mulberry and Peach can be seen as a reaction to the assimilation theme present in *The Woman Warrior*, it is intended to be a continuation to the contestation done by *The Woman Warrior*, namely, the contestation on ethnic identity. In my analysis on *Mulberry and Peach*, the emphasis is not the possibility of being Chinese, but the possibility of not conforming to either pole of the hyphenated Chinese American identity. It is true that in the novel, Mulberry/Peach identifies herself as Chinese. Yet she does not in fact wish to be a Chinese citizen living in China. Moreover, she rebels against the gender code imposed on women in China.¹⁸ Thus through her voluntary exile, she is both deterritorializing the identity as a Chinese woman and as a Chinese American immigrant. Comparing to the protagonist Maxine in *The Woman Warrior*, who tries to claim Americanness while retaining her identity as a second generation Chinese immigrant, Mulberry/Peach highlights the possibility of not conforming to and moreover giving new meaning to these two identities. This continual relation between the chapters will be more pronounced in this final chapter, which focuses on moving beyond either the Chinese or the American identity.

Secondly, it is believed by the thesis that there are various ways to interpret the Chinese American identity besides the two directions already mapped out in the previous chapters. In both *The Woman Warrior* and *Mulberry and Peach*, the representation of the Chinese American identity is to a large extent restricted in the framework of the Chinese and/or American identity. Neither of these two works offers possibilities of moving beyond the category of being Chinese and/or American. This leaves us to question whether it is possible to imagine a Chinese American identity that is not restricted by the taken for granted, hyphenated Chinese and/or American one. In other words, is it possible to be different and become other than being either Chinese, or American, or a combination of both? What are the new territories to be mapped out in the representation of the Chinese American identity and the immigrant experiences? Without addressing these questions and providing an outlook for the future of Chinese American immigrant literature, my project of

¹⁸ For instance, in the first section of the novel, Mulberry runs away from home and steals from her mother the family heirloom which is to be inherited by her brother. Her explicit expressions of sexual desire are also a rebellious act to the conventional gender role.

investigating on how the Chinese American women can be represented differently in literature remains uncompleted.

Thus in this chapter, the primary concern will not be how the ethnic identity (being Chinese) and the national identity (being American) are regulated by the political and commercial dimensions of the politics of representation outlined in the first and third chapter, or how they are in turn being contested by the immigrant authors. Rather, the main focus here will be to outline new possibilities in being Chinese American immigrants.

Following Mulberry/Peach's challenge launched against the assimilation paradigm in immigrant literature, the thesis will try to demonstrate that it is possible for Chinese American immigrants to identify with neither Chinese nor American. Or to put it differently, it is possible to interpret the Chinese American identity differently and enrich the Chinese American experience through multicultural encounters. This is a process in which the Chinese American identity becomes different from the commonly perceived one or the stereotypical ones. By crossing the boundaries of the pre-defined identities, the Chinese American immigrants can become other, or more precisely, become-other, as it will be explained later in this chapter. Representing this mode of becoming-other in literature, in this regard, is in itself a contestation to the Chinese American stereotypes and the confinements faced by Chinese American literature.

Similar to the previous two chapters, my points will be illustrated in this chapter through a close reading of Gish Jen's novel *Mona in the Promised Land* (1997). Jen's novel is chosen here for several reasons. First of all, as a Chinese American author of a new generation, Jen offers a more contemporary narrative of the immigrant experience. In comparison to Kingston's and Nieh's work, both of which are mainly set in the time period before the 70s, Jen's novel is set in late 60s and 70s, where the civil rights movement reaches its peak and the social environment became more tolerant for the immigrants.

Kingston's and Nieh's work are both more ethno-centric in that the stories narrated in these two books take place mostly within the Chinese community. *Mona in the Promised Land*, however, mainly narrates the immigrant experience outside the enclosed China town and in the multicultural American society where the Chinese, the Jews, the African Americans co-inhabit. As a result, the characters in *Mona in the*

Promised Land experience complex encounters with various ethnic identities. These encounters in turn affect the characters' understanding of their own identity. They also provide new grounds for moving beyond the hyphenated Chinese American identity and for giving new interpretations of being Chinese American. Furthermore, different to the protagonists in *The Woman Warrior* and *Mulberry and Peach* who are more or less torn between the identities of being Chinese and American, Jen's protagonist Mona Chang intentionally seeks to be neither Chinese nor American: her daring desire is to become Jewish, just like the youngsters she grows up with in the Jewish nationhood. Finally, as an accomplished writer, Jen's use of subtle irony and jokes is remarkable. She is able to observe acutely the frequently overlooked racial issues in the American society and present them in such a matter-of-fact tone that the language provokes the reader to reflect on their absurdity hidden beneath everyday banality.¹⁹ For these reasons, Jen's novel offers a fresh and provocative perspective to my research on Chinese American racial and gender difference in the contemporary society. Finally, through narrating the protagonist's daring desire, which is shared by many of her peers in the novel as well, the work offers an opportunity to look at the desire of becoming-other among the younger generations of Chinese American immigrants.

The chapter will be organized in two parts. In the first part, I mobilize the fixed interpretation of the Chinese American identity, which is often seen as a continuum between the pole of the Chinese identity and the pole of the American

¹⁹ For instance, in regard to the too generalized category of "Asian American", Jen writes, "[i]n another ten years, there'll be so many Orientals they'll turn into Asians; a Japanese grocery will buy out that one deli too many" (6). Scholars working in the field of Asian American studies have also made much effort in raising awareness to the internal heterogeneity within the category of "Asian American". The renowned scholar Lisa Low, who has worked extensively on multiculturalism, postcolonial studies and Asian American studies, has also particularly discussed this issue in her article "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Differences". Another example of Jen's use of language can be found in her irony on using black to describe skin color: "if she were a cabinet door or a shade of hair dye, people would have a name for her exact shade. But as she is only a person, she is called black" (170).

identity. By dislocating the Chinese American identity from the confinement of the two poles, I try to question again the possibility of an authentic Chinese American identity. In doing so, I demonstrate that the Chinese American identity should not be seen as a stable mode of being with an essence. Rather, the identity is essentially lived out, and authenticity can be found in various modes of living out the given identity. Based on the observation in the first part, I elaborate on the concept of ‘becoming’ as well as to address the question “what it means to become Chinese American”. The concept of becoming will help the thesis to understand the Chinese American identity not as being, but as a transgressive process that brings new experiences to the immigrant community. Further, the mode of becoming presented in *Mona in the Promised Land* is an embodied one and it is a process without teleos. The Deleuzian thoughts on becoming will feature prominently here. Via Deleuze, I also see both Jen’s protagonist Mona and her work as a line of fight that disturbs the fixed Chinese American identity and the hegemonic discourse in Chinese American literature.

1. Ethnic identity, ethnic body and ethnic authenticity

Mona in the Promised Land narrates a coming-of-age story of the protagonist Mona Chang, a second generation Chinese American girl growing up during the late 60s and 70s in a fictional Jewish neighborhood called Scarshill in the New York City. The novel is a sequel to Jen’s debut novel entitled *Typical American* (1991), which narrates the story of Mona’s father Ralph Chang’s story of realizing his American dreams and eventually giving up his Chineseness to become a “typical American”. The second novel begins with the move of the Changs from the Chinatown to the affluent Jewish neighborhood Scarshill. Growing up in the Jewish district, the younger daughter Mona endeavors to become Jewish. Her transformation is realized through a series of performative acts, including converting to Judaism, acquiring knowledge on Jewish culture, attending temple gatherings, socializing with Jewish youngsters of her age and eventually marrying a Jewish man. Many mishaps take place during the process and not surprisingly, her self-ethnization is opposed by her parents, who believe that assimilation should be the right choice for their daughter. This generational difference towards the Chinese American identity is also felt among the authors studied in this thesis: whereas Kingston in her work tries to harmonize her Chinese and American identity, and whereas in Nieh’s novel many characters

oscillate between the Chinese and the American national identity, Jen's teenage characters display a common desire to be different.

The narrative of the novel spans mostly through Mona's high school years and it is divided chronologically into three parts. It opens with the Changs' move to Scarshill and Mona's entry to the Jewish community. Already in the first chapter, Jen's protagonist has demonstrated that her ethnic identity, that is, her Chinese identity, is performed and fluid. She is convinced, however naively, that she is capable of switching her identity to whatever she likes. Thus when her mother insists on her becoming American, i.e., to assimilate to the mainstream American culture, Mona protests, "Jewish is American ... American means being whatever you want, and I happened to pick being Jewish" (49).

Later in the novel, Mona gradually comes to the realization that the project of identity switching is not so easy as she has believed and that not everyone is capable of and has the opportunity to do so. But at least in the first chapter, she is confident that she is able to be a Chinese American daughter at home, a catholic by registration, a Chinese expert in her neighborhood, and later a converted Jew among her friends. As the chapter shows, upon moving to Scarshill, Mona tries to gain popularity among her peers and neighbors by acting like an expert in everything Chinese, despite the fact that her knowledge about China is limited to a few words in the Shanghai dialect and a few things that her mother tells her but she does not believe. She impresses Barbara Gugelstein, a confirmed Jewish girl and later her best friend, by bragging that she does karate, which in fact is a Korean martial art. Moreover, she tells her that the Chinese get pregnant with tea; she taste-tests her friends' mothers Chinese cooking and declare them to be authentic, although they are not like her mother's because her mother's is home style, which means, "not in the cookbooks" (6); and she tells the tale on how the Chinese eat monkey brain instead of the fact that the Chinese eat tomato with the skin off, because the latter is not sensational enough (8).

Ironically, Mona's knowledge on being a Chinese turns out to be nothing but wrong. At best, the Chinese identity she performs is an inauthentic hotchpotch of a number of Eastern Asian identities. As Begona Simal Gonzalez observes, "[Mona's] early attempts to gain acceptance by flaunting authentic – which is really "fake" – "chineseness" (5) make cultural boundaries all the more questionable" (232, in text quotation from the novel). Although apparently the young Mona in grade eight does not intentionally perform her ethnic identity parodically and her sole purpose is to

gain popularity, her acts nevertheless challenge the notion that identity can be a defined and stable entity with an authentic core. Being Chinese, for Mona, is not to behave like what the Chinese really do, but to perform in a given context what people believe about being Chinese. As a result, she keeps it a secret that she prefers frozen food over her mother's authentic Chinese home cooking. She even questions the authenticity of her mother's cooking, since she has never seen "a stir-fried tomato in any Chinese restaurant [she has] even been in" (7). Clearly, for Mona and her mother Helen Chang, being Chinese has starkly different definitions, but Mona is recognized within the Jewish community as no less a Chinese than her mother, who, as she grows up in and migrates from Chinese, should be more "authentic" than her daughter. Playing with her fake Chineseness in the Jewish community, Jen's protagonist provocatively challenges the readers to reconsider what it means to be an "authentic" Chinese.

Unlike Mona, who plays with her fake Chinese identity, her sister Callie Chang is becoming a "real" Chinese. In the Chang family, Callie is the model daughter her parents expect her to be. Like a good Chinese daughter, she goes to Harvard University, obeys her parents' will to study medicine, and decides to take up the responsibility of taking care of her parents when they grow old. It therefore seems natural that Callie decides "to be in touch with her ancestry" (129). Arguably an expected choice to be made by a Chinese American, Callie's becoming Chinese is surprising because, as the novel reveals, before going to university she always hates to be Chinese. It is only after taking a liberal arts education as a freshman at Harvard and being influenced by her radical African American roommate Naomi that she comes to the realization that there are various modes of being Chinese and her parents' way to be Chinese is not the only one. As Jen wittily puts it in the novel, "Callie is indeed sick of being Chinese, but there is being Chinese and being Chinese" (167).

It should be noted that Callie's emphasis on her Chinese heritage is fundamentally different from that of Mulberry/Peach's discussed in the previous chapter. In *Mulberry and Peach*, the protagonist's insistence on being Chinese comes as a resistance to the oppressive requirement for the immigrant to identify with the national identity of her adopted land. It can also be read as a resistance to the one-sided emphasis on assimilation among the Chinese American immigrants. Callie's becoming Chinese cannot be read as a resistance. Further, unlike other Chinese American characters including Chiang I-po in *Mulberry and Peach* who turn back to

their Chinese identity, Callie's choice is not a result of nostalgia, either. Rather, inspired by Naomi who takes Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth and Roberta Flack as ancestors (129), Callie's becoming Chinese is a gesture of self-empowerment which is not so different from that of Maxine's in *The Woman Warrior*. Yet unlike Maxine, who puts great emphasis on her American identity, as one of the new generation of immigrant children growing up in the midst of the civil rights movement, Callie is visibly more confident in her identity as an American and she is more explicit in her expression of being a Chinese descendent. As Jen describes by the end of the novel, Callie becomes "so Chinese that Ralph and Helen think there is something wrong with her" (301). Callie's becoming Chinese implies a gesture of double affirmation: on the surface, she is affirming her ethnic identity as a Chinese, yet on a deeper level, the expressed affirmation of her ethnic identity can only be possible when her identity as an American is affirmed. Indeed, as the novel demonstrates, for the new generation of Chinese Americans represented by Callie, assimilation is no longer an emphasis. Born to the well-assimilated immigrant parents, these children enjoy more freedom to experiment with different ways of being Chinese American.

As the novel goes on and more characters are introduced, it turns out that the teenager characters mostly share Mona's desire to be different, and they perform various switches to different identities as they grow up. In addition to the Chang sisters, two Jewish youngsters Andy Kaplan and Seth Mandel switch to Japanese as they give Mona phone calls under the name of Sherman Matsumoto. According to the novel, the name belongs to a Japanese boy whom Mona has a crush on when she is thirteen. Also, Barbara does a nose job and loses her typical Jewish appearance. Another schoolmate of Mona's, Eloise Ingle, who has always considered herself to be a WASP, suddenly finds out that her deceased mother was Jewish. These intentional and unintentional switches further challenge the assumption that there is an essence underneath a certain identity and that an identity can be authentic and stable. Just like Seth's comment on his identity, "I am afraid I am an authentic inauthentic Jew... More ethnic than religious. However, in the process of becoming an inauthentic inauthentic Jew" (113). Seth's definition of his own identity reveals that his Jewish identity is a process rather than a state of being. His statement also makes it clear that in the process of becoming, this identity is bound to lose its authenticity. Therefore, born a Jew and "[has] liked Judaism so far", which makes him an authentic Jew, he also lives in a tepee, wears a dashiki, sleeps on a tatami mat after starting to pose as

Sherman on the phone and eventually acquires Chinese eating habits and turns a little Chinese after marrying Mona. This array of multicultural performances makes Seth, a born and “authentic” Jew, inauthentic. However, even born authentic, such authenticity endowed by birth can be undone and thus Seth can become “inauthentic inauthentic”.

In an analysis on the plot in which Seth hires a Japanese imposter to make Mona believe that there indeed is a Sherman calling her, the literary critic Erika T. Lim argues that the novel disrupts the one to one correlation between body and ethnic identity. In her article entitled “Mona on the Phone: The Performative Body and Racial Identity in *Mona in the Promised Land*”, she observes that the confirmation Mona gets from seeing a “Sherman” actualized in a Japanese body shows that it is often assumed, and taken for granted that an ethnic identity is essentially embodied. The irony of the novel, therefore, is that the Japanese identity perceived through the “Sherman” speaking over the phone – i.e., through language – is actually detached from the identity perceived through a body. The “Sherman” who calls Mona has never been Japanese, yet upon seeing a Japanese body, Mona nevertheless is convinced that the body she sees belongs to Sherman.

In addition, Lim observes that although the “Sherman” on the phone has a changed voice and his English is very much improved compared to the boy who barely speaks English Mona has encountered at the age of thirteen, she nevertheless rationalizes herself into believing that this “Sherman” is the boy she knows. She believes that the change in Sherman is resulted from Sherman’s “immersion in another culture” (227). Here, Lim comments,

Mona’s assumption that this change in the ostensible Sherman’s speech is a result of “immersion in another culture” (227) is a further irony because, of course, Seth is immersed in American culture but that culture is not to him “another” culture: it is simply the one he has always known. Jen’s comic elements also point to larger and more serious issues: these very racialized understandings of the relationship between culture and body have been exemplified in attitudes that paint Asian Americans as foreign others who may be immersed in “American” culture but are never an inherent part of it (Lim 53, in text citation from the novel).

Lim's remark reveals that for Asian Americans, their cultural identity is always already ambiguous: whereas their ethnic body signifies a certain cultural and ethnic heritage, the cultural identity they actually practice may very well be another. In other words, the cultural identity they inhabit is usually other than the identity that matches their physical appearance. However, in Lim's article, by emphasizing that "it is impossible to see the body in a culturally neutral way" and that "the body is always already immersed in culturally constructed meanings" (56), it appears that she assumes a constructive view in understanding cultural and ethnic identity. My thesis disagrees with this view. As this chapter will demonstrate later, the ethnic body is not merely a passive surface for cultural inscription. It also actively participates in the actualization of gender and ethnic identity. Thus Mona's ethnic body, with her Mongolian feminine traits, also matters in the switches of identities narrated in Jen's novel.

From the analysis on Mona's performance of her Chinese identity, Callie's affirmation of her Chinese identity, as well as Seth's liberal desire to be "inauthentic inauthentic Jew", it can be concluded that ethnic identity is to a large extent performed; it does not have a fixed authentic meaning and therefore is capable of multiple interpretations; and lastly, the ethnic body is not necessarily a signifier of the ethnic identity. However, at this stage, it seems that for the characters, becoming different is effortless and it can be willfully performed. This is, however, by no means the case. In the following section, the thesis will show that in the novel, becoming-other is inseparable from impossibilities and failures. The difficulties notwithstanding, the desire of becoming-other displayed by the adolescent characters reveals a force to constantly push boundaries and bring difference into being. Such force should be seen positively, even when what is desired is unattainable. These points will be clarified by reading further through the novel as well as by discussing the concept of becoming understood by the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. My reading wants to advance that it is precisely the "impossibility of becoming" that makes it to an ongoing project without telos. What matters in Jen's novel is not whether Mona becomes Jewish or not, but the very process and the desire of becoming. Although Mona's project is bound to fail, the failure nevertheless propels Mona to become-other and to introduce new meanings to the Chinese, Jewish and American identity.

2. Becoming-Chinese-American

Although the seemingly easy and free identity switches performed by Mona and her young friends give the impression that they are nothing more than adolescent idiosyncrasies of the well-to-do middle class kids, these performances nevertheless reveal that ethnic identity is more flexible than it is usually thought to be. Comparing to the previous generations of Chinese American immigrants (represented by Mona and Callie's parents Helen and Ralph Chang) and Chinese American authors (represented by Kingston and Nieh in this thesis), the new generation articulates bolder interpretations of being Chinese American. Further, they demonstrate that individual desire plays a significant role in the process of ethnic switch. Mona and her friends' desire to be different is not a result of a "lack". It is rather a positive and experimental force that tries to make new connections, to deterritorialize stabilized identities and to push the limits of the ethnic bodies. Such a desire is moreover a nomadic desire, as the scholar Chung-Hsiung Lai points out in his analysis on the same novel, "it is reasonable to say that everything that flows in the economy of diasporic identity as an unfolding of potentiality ... is but a nomadic desire" (6).

If Jen's novel is merely read as a record of the willful adolescent identity switches whose ends are eventually achieved, then the novel would be interpreted in an idealistic way and much of its powers would be lost. In the following section, the thesis tries to demonstrate that the most powerful aspect of Jen's novel is that it reveals the difficulties and impossibilities in the process of becoming-other. Such impossibilities are accentuated in the chapter entitled "Camp Gugelstein" and in the parts of the novel that leads to the chapter "Camp Gugelstein".

The chapter "Camp Gugelstein" features a dramatic breakup of the Utopian ethnic co-inhabiting. Intended to be a gesture of racial solidarity, the youngsters, Mona, Barbara and Seth, adventure into a philanthropic social action, namely, finding accommodation for the African American cook Alfred, who works at the Chang's pancake house and is thrown out by his girlfriend from home. They finally find him a shelter in the servant's quarter in the Gugelstein mansion while Barbara's parents are away for holiday. Although a secret at the beginning, Alfred's presence is soon found out by Barbara's cousin Evie who during that time also lives in the house. Rather than becoming alerted by the stranger, Evie welcomes Alfred and the house later becomes a place frequented by Alfred's African American friends. Hence "Camp Gugelstein" comes into being. As a social hub where people of different races come together, the

Gugelstein mansion is literally a miniature of the multi-ethnic North American society where the population is heterogeneously composed and anti-racist and multicultural policies are enforced. As the novel unfolds, initially, the getting-together of Jewish-, Chinese- and African-American is as friendly and harmonious as it can be. However, discords sets in later as a valuable silver flask goes missing in the house. Unable to find the flask, Barbara, together with Mona and Seth, starts to suspect their black guests and question them whether they have seen it. Taking offense of their hosts' mistrust, the lower class African American group leaves the mansion in a fury.

Many scholars have singled out "Camp Gugelstein" as the climax of Jen's novel and there are various readings of this chapter. Jeffrey F. L. Partridge, for instance, argues in his book *Beyond Literary Chinatown* that the chapter reveals the persistence and pervasiveness of the racialized categories in American society (181). Through his reading, he reveals that "while Chinese Americans, Jewish Americans, and African Americans may share a common position as minorities in a hegemonic political and social environment, their minority status is not equally conceived" (183). The inequality in minority status refers to the fact that the Jewish immigrants are seen as model minority and the Chinese American as "The New Jews" (Jen 3) at the time when the novel is set, whereas the African Americans community is perceived as lower class, undereducated and is usually a target of social stigmatization. As a result of this inequality in minority status, Partridge argues that Mona's belief that being American means being whatever one wants to be is a naive one and it is an idea Mona eventually grows out of through learning lessons from experiences, including the breakup of Camp Gugelstein. More pessimistically, Fu-jen Chen reads "Camp Gugelstein" as a dystopia which symbolizes the inevitability of social antagonism. Despite their good intention, Mona, Barbara and Seth fail to realize that "a harmonious relationship [among the races] is merely an imaginary one" and therefore the failure of the camp is inevitable (Chen 385).

For these two scholars, "Camp Gugelstein" is a disheartening wakeup call for the youngsters who naively believe in racial equality, freedom and social mobility in the North American society. Mona enjoys the freedom to become Jewish because she is economically well-off, receives better education, socializes with liberal Jewish young people, and above all, her desire of becoming Jewish is still thought to be "moving forward, from what in the 1960s was not yet considered a 'model minority'

to what was at least considered a ‘better’ minority, a move which brings her one step closer to whiteness” (Partridge 184).

Instead of following these scholars’ lines of argument, which are valid readings of the chapter, the thesis intends to read Mona’s desire of becoming Jewish more affirmatively. Naive as it might be, Mona’s confidence in the possibility of becoming-other reveals a distinctive individual desire that motivates the process of becoming and it is the process of becoming that defines Mona’s identity, i.e., a Chinese American becoming Jewish. As the novel reveals, such desire also pushes the boundaries of gender and ethnic identities. Although later Mona realizes that becoming-other is not as easy and free as her adolescent self has imagined, it can be argued that the desire of becoming-other stays with her until the very end of the novel. As the epilogue shows, just before marrying Seth, Mona plans to change her last name, not to Mandel, but to Changowitz, a Jewish nickname made up by her Jewish friends from her original surname Chang. Furthermore, she thinks that “Seth would change his name to match” (Jen 46, 303). She is also becoming a mother herself, raising a mixed race daughter who likes Italian food better than either Chinese or Jewish food (Jen 303). This daughter, Io, will inevitably bring about problems that challenge the traditional method of mothering. Finally, she is becoming her mother’s daughter again²⁰, as reconciliation between Helen and Mona is indicated at the very end of the novel. The reconciliation shows that although Mona is not becoming the daughter her mother expected her to be, her becoming-other could still be recognized by her family.

A clarification has to be made here because more than once this chapter uses a hyphen to connect becoming and other. This is to differentiate “becoming other” and “becoming-other”, a usage inspired by the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, who has worked on the concept of becoming both in his book *Difference and Repetition* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, a work he co-authored together with Félix Guattari.

²⁰ In Chapter Fifteen, after Mona comes back from her escape from home, Helen refuses to recognize Mona as her daughter by saying “Who is this? ... Is this my daughter?” (295). According to the novel, the stressed relationship between the mother and the daughter lasts over a long period of time and it does not soften till Mona’s wedding.

As it has been pointed out in this chapter as well as in previous chapters, gender and ethnic identity are not fixed. They do not have defined meanings and each individual is capable of living out his or her gender and ethnic specificities. In this regard, having an identity, i.e. being Chinese American, being woman, etc., is always living out a certain variation of the given identity and therefore becoming different from the commonly perceived, sometimes stereotypical identity. Further, for the immigrants, becoming Chinese American often involves a move to become different from the previous self, or to become different from the ethnic identity signified by the body they are born into. Therefore, becoming other than oneself or other than a given identity is usually inevitable.

However, this mode of becoming other is still too much bounded with being and identity. Although individual experiences differ from each other, “the extent of the variety and change of the experienced world has been diluted by a limited conception of difference: difference-from-the-same” (Parr 21). Consequently, although becoming other is inevitable, such becoming does not necessarily push the limits of a given identity or challenge the norms required so that an individual becomes a subject. Ready instances can be found in many of the characters depicted by the three novels. The immigrants aspiring to assimilate and become American, including Helen and Ralph during the earlier half of *Mona in the Promised Land*, or those who nostalgically returns to their ethnic identity, such as Chiang I-po depicted in *Mulberry and Peach*, are definitely going through a process of becoming other than their previous selves, but their identities remain within limits of what is accepted and expected from them. Although there are individual differences in their experiences, these differences remain “difference-from-the-same”. As a result, their identity construction has a majoritarian tendency, to use Deleuze’s words, as this process of becoming other tends to reduce difference to sameness.

The becoming other of Mona’s, Callie’s and Seth’s are markedly different from the immigrants mentioned above. Not only is Mona’s endeavor to become Jewish rarely shared by other Chinese American immigrants, she is also actively living out her desire and therefore pushing the limits of what a Chinese American woman can do through performative acts including immersing herself in a mikvah²¹ and by changing her name to Changowitz. Meanwhile, Callie also performs a

²¹ A ritual bath required for Mona’s conversion to Judaism.

different kind of becoming other. Although she attempts to find her roots and become Chinese, such an attempt is not a nostalgic return to the “authentic” Chinese identity. The Chineseness performed by Callie is different from the Chineseness understood by her parents. Her identity as a Chinese immigrant is actively defined by herself and in the process of becoming, she brings difference to the Chinese American identity. Not surprisingly, her Chineseness is found to be perplexing even for her parents who come from China. Like Mona, she is also pushing the limits of being a Chinese American: although she goes to Harvard to study medicine and becomes a pediatrician, as one would expect from a member of the stereotypical Chinese American model minority, she is also consciously putting emphasis on her ethnicity, actively speaking as an Asian American and building up solidarity among the Asian Americans (301). Finally, as it has been discussed previously, the “inauthentic inauthentic Jew” Seth intends to become, pushes the limits of the ethnic body. His process of becoming challenges the assumption that there is a necessary correlation between the ethnic body and the ethnic identity.

For these youngsters, their “beyond the pale” interpretations of their ethnic identity reveal that there is a minoritarian tendency in their identity construction. Contrary to the majoritarian tendency, the minoritarian tendency disturbs the process of reducing difference to a homogeneous system. Instead, it brings difference and multiplicity into being to resist the domination of a defined, “authentic” way of being ethnic minority. Apparently, the two modes of becoming other are markedly different and in order to differentiate the two, the thesis uses “becoming-other” to refer to the latter one. This usage is inspired by the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, a ground-breaking work written by Deleuze and the French psychoanalyst Félix Guattari, the two theorists use formations including “becoming-animal” and “becoming-molecular” to flesh out the concept of “becoming”. As a key concept in the Deleuzian philosophy and in his unique understanding of ontology, becoming is theorized in *A Thousand Plateaus*, *Difference and Repetition* and other works by Deleuze. Later scholars have also devoted numerous books and articles to the understanding and development of the concept. As a result, a brief introduction is not enough to do justice to the concept. But for the sake of the thesis, it can be understood as

the continual production (or ‘return’) of difference immanent within the constitution of events, whether physical or otherwise. Becoming is

the pure movement evident in changes between particular events ...
 Rather than a product, final or interim, becoming is the very dynamism
 of change, situated between heterogeneous terms and tending towards
 no particular goal or end-state (Parr 21).

Clearly, the becoming-other of Mona, Callie and Seth constantly produces differences that challenge the conventional understandings of being and identity as fixed, authentic and essential. This is in line with Deleuze's challenge of the emphasis on being and identity in canonical Western philosophy. Further, although the performative acts undertaken by Mona give the impression that she imitates what a Jewish person would do, these acts are not imitative. This is because Mona's becoming-Jewish is not a process that reproduces an immediately recognizable and commonly accepted Jewish identity. In other words, Mona is bound to fail if she desires to acquire a Jewish identity that can be accepted universally. This point will be examined in detail later in the chapter. But here, suffice it to say that Mona's non-imitative process of becoming-Jewish has yet another parallel with Deleuze's understanding of becoming. According to Deleuze, becoming is not imitation:

Becoming produces nothing other than itself. We fall into a false alternative if we say that you either imitate or you are. What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes.... Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own; it does not reduce to, or lead back to, "appearing," "being," "equaling," or "producing." (1987, 238).

Becoming therefore is not a transitional period between a starting point and an end point. "Becoming is neither merely an attribute of, nor an intermediary between events, but a characteristic of the very production of event" (Parr 22). In other words, becoming is not teleological. It is an ongoing, immanent process without a visible, known aim apart from the movement of becoming. In *Mona in the Promised Land*, this becoming without telos is reflected especially in what could be called "the impossibility of becoming something specific". Rather than transforming from a Chinese American girl into a Jewish girl, Mona's desire to become Jewish is ultimately impossible to be accomplished because the Jewish identity she fashions for herself can always be questioned. Mona Jewishness is articulated primarily through religion. Yet her physical appearance and her family lineage may always bring about doubt to her Jewish identity. Although one can become Jewish by converting to

Judaism, the Jewish identity is also heavily racialized in the first half of the 20th century through Nazism. As a result, it is believed that Jewishness can be perceived through physical appearance. As Alfred jeers, “Jewish? ... You expect me to believe that? Uh uh. Not until you grow your nose, baby” (Jen 136).

Indeed, Mona’s body becomes the limit for her becoming-Jewish. Such impossibility reveals that becoming is not the imitation of a series of performances that signifies the Jewish identity. Rather, it is a process to embody a different identity and it pushes the limits of what a body can do. Rather than undertaking unbounded transformations such as altering her physical appearance, Mona’s becoming-Jewish in the novel is a process of embodied, corporeal becoming. What Mona has achieved is not the teleological Jewish identity in the negation of her Chinese heritage, but the deterritorialization and reterritorialization of the Chinese, Jewish and American identity: a cacophonous identity of Chinese-Jewish-American. But such becoming is nevertheless real and possible: what Jen says of Seth, “an authentic inauthentic Jew” who is becoming “an inauthentic inauthentic Jew”, can also be said of Mona (112). Indeed, it is not the pure, unambiguous racial identity that has to be preserved, but its multiplicity, heterogeneity as well as its potential to proliferate. It is also precisely because a pure, unambiguous identity is unattainable that the process of becoming turns to a never-ending one. Just like Mona has to convince Alfred of her Jewish identity, Mona’s Jewishness is not self-evident and her process of becoming-Jewish cannot be fully achieved.

Similarly, Mona’s gender identity is also actualized through her body, although she does not have a “standard” female body. As Jen humorously describes,

Barbara’s is the body Mona is still waiting to grow into: Her breasts, for example, are veritable colonies of herself, with a distinct tendency toward independence. Whereas Mona’s, in contrast, are anything but wayward.... Later Mona will realize how in the popular conception Orientals are supposed to be exotically erotic, and all she’ll want to say is, But what about my areolaless nubs? Not to say my sturdy short legs – have you ever seen a calf so hammy? ... Her underarms too – actually she boasts a few wisps there (75-76).

In comparison to her friend Barbara, Mona laments that her body is “not old enough for sex” (75). Yet this body nevertheless materializes into a woman’s body through menstruation, sexual activities and motherhood. Like her ethnic identity, what Mona’s

body becomes is a specific version of being woman: an ethnic, heterosexual woman who chooses to become a mother. It is not the seemingly sexless body that determines Mona's gender identity. It is what the body can become that matters. Mona's becoming-woman, although less radical than her becoming-Jewish, reveals that the process of becoming is an embodied one.²² As it has been argued earlier in the chapter, Jen's work has demonstrated that the body is not necessarily the signifier of a certain ethnic identity. This frees the body from being defined and restricted by an identity. Here, through the narrative on Mona's becoming-Jewish, Jen further shows her reader that it is more productive to see the body in a process of becoming. It is precisely because the body is not in a stable state of being but in an active process of becoming that individuals can realize the potentials of their body, push the boundaries of the fixed identities and make it possible to become-other.

It follows that ethnic identity and gender identity are not performed despite of the body. As Jen's novel reveals, gender and ethnicity are actualized through the process of an embodied becoming. As such, gender and ethnic identity is not to be understood as a fixed, inert state of being but a process of becoming. It is moreover possible to detach being and identity from this process of becoming, as it is an ongoing one without a specific end point. This way to understand gender and ethnicity is similar to the way of understanding ontology advocated by Deleuze. As the Deleuzian scholar Kathrin Thiele points out, "[i]n such understanding, ontology stays no longer as the thought of 'what is', but it becomes the thought of what '*this world is capable of*' – always already more than what it seems to be, always already a question of attitude, of *how* to create this world, and thus always already an *ethical* approach. (22, emphasis original). In terms of gender and ethnic identity, it is possible to substitute what Thiele phrases as "this world" with "this body". The ontology of

²² It should be noted that Mona's becoming-woman should not be isolated from her becoming-Jewish. In deterritorializing her ethnic identity, Mona is also deterritorializing the identity of Chinese American woman. Further, a generational difference in gender identity can be found between Mona and her mother Helen. As Jen narrates, Mona uses Tampax despite that "Helen is against Tampax" (214). Also, it is indicated that Helen disapproves Mona's giving birth to her daughter before marriage: "When Io was born, [Mona] thought surely her parents would relent, never mind that she and Seth weren't married" (298).

gender and ethnic configurations therefore is not so much about what a body is, e.g., a woman, an ethnic minority, etc., but rather what the body is capable of becoming.

A body, however, has its limits in becoming and an ethnic body has its signification despite what is performed by the very body. Furthermore, what the body signifies may give proximity to certain identities and not to others. Whereas it is possible for Mona to be recognized as Jewish, Jewishness is unlikely to be achieved by Alfred. In the novel, the suggestion to become Jewish is indeed made to Alfred by Mona and Barbara, yet it is also their reaction to the missing flask that reveals the naivety of this suggestion. Barbara, Mona and Seth's suspicion of Alfred and his friends renders clear what these black bodies cannot do at that moment, i.e., becoming rich, educated and respectable like the Jews. Furthermore, the suspicion may also be a result from the historical stigmatization of the black body, as the African Americans quickly associate Barbara's suspicion with racism. Although both African American and Chinese American are non-white minorities, it is the African Americans, rather than the Chinese American, that are under suspicion because the black skin is more likely to be linked with poverty and crime whereas Mona's body is often linked with model minority. Again, it is what the body can do and can become, rather than what the body is, that signifies ethnic identity. Alfred understands why he cannot become Jewish: "[w]e're never going to have no big house or no big garage, either, ... We're never going to be Jewish, see, even if we grow our nose like Miss Mona here is planning to do. *We be black motherfuckers* [sic]" (137). It is not because he does not have a Jewish body that he cannot become Jewish, it is rather what his body is capable of doing that matters.

As a result, becoming-other in *Mona in the Promised Land* is an embodied, transgressive process with any final determination unattainable. Although to a certain extent the switches performed by the characters can be seen as performative, the chapter nevertheless reveals that the performance is not a willful and unbounded action. The performance, in other words, has to be one that the body is capable of doing and becoming. Accordingly, the ethnic body gives the form to becoming. The material body is not a clean slate awaiting cultural inscription. Becoming is the becoming of a body with configurations such as gender, race, sexuality and class. It is on such a body that the process of becoming takes place.

Reading *Mona in the Promised Land* alongside the Deleuzian philosophy leads to some illuminative understanding of gender and ethnicity. First of all, Jen's

work, when read along the line of Deleuze, frees gender and ethnicity from being limited by a certain identity. The previous two literary works analyzed in this thesis have already shown that identity can be contested and new interpretations can be given to an existing identity. Jen's work goes one step further and points out that gender and ethnicity are always already in the process of becoming. There is not an authentic way to become woman and/or to become ethnic, yet the process of becoming is nevertheless real and possible. Secondly, rather than presenting a post-modern identity free play, Jen in her novel shows that becoming is a difficult, failure-bound process with its end point unattainable. Yet it is precisely because of these characteristics, becoming is an ongoing process that constantly deterritorializes the boundary of norms and identities. It is a minoritarian process that leads to real ethnic and gender differences.

Conclusion The Effect of Literature

In the first chapter of this thesis, I have discussed the article “Can the Subaltern Speak” written by Gayatri Spivak. According to Spivak, the word “representation” has two senses, one refers to “speaking for” as in the political representation, and the other refers to “re-presentation” as in the aesthetic representation. The two senses are related but “irreducibly discontinuous” (70). I have also pointed out that in the case of Chinese American literature, especially during the time when Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* was published, the two senses are often run together as literary works are put in the position to speak for its ethnic group. Meanwhile, I also maintain that ethnic literature should be freed from bearing the burden of speaking for the ethnic group.

In distinguishing the two senses embedded in the word “representation”, Spivak categorizes the aesthetic representation to the sense of “re-presentation”, “as much a substitution as a representation” (71). Although in “Can the Subaltern Speak”, Spivak does not discuss aesthetic representation in detail, her arguments gives the impression that art, including philosophy, painting, and probably literature as well, is a form of representation, one that represents reality. Her use of the word “portrait” to illustrate the aesthetic dimension of representation also to a certain degree confirms this impression. But is it productive to understand art as representation?

In my discussion on literature, I have pointed out that it is dangerous to do so. One of the direct consequences of taking ethnic literature as a realistic record of the ethnic experience, or regulating ethnic literature as such, is that a number of ethnic literary works are to be misread as “inauthentic” or “fake” representations of the ethnic community. Additionally, the stress on authentic representation inevitably reduces the ethnic group to a homogeneous entity since non-normative and transgressive experiences are marginalized. Literature’s creative potential to produce difference and singularity will hence be lost. The debate in Chinese American literature on the authentic representation of the ethnic group discussed in the thesis is precisely a case in point here. The political and aesthetic aspects of representation are not to be confused. Yet this is not because literature is “re-presentation” whereas political representation is mediated, but because literature does more than mere representation. Literature, in particular ethnic literature, should not be seen as a mouthpiece for the group of people it represents. Literature is also mediated, although

its way of mediation and the implication of this mediation are different from that of the political representation.

From the analyses of the three literary works I have selected for this thesis, it becomes clear that rather than taking ethnic literature as a re-presentation of the ethnic group, literature has the potential to push the confinement of the sedimented identities and introduce ethnic and gender differences. In their separate ways, Maxine Hong Kingston, Nieh Hualing and Gish Jen all provide narratives on ethnic experiences, yet these experiences should not be seen as realistic representations of the ethnic group or reproductions of the same gender and ethnic identities. Instead of being defined by the male members of the community and the mainstream society, Kingston demonstrates that a woman is also capable of defining her identity by re-writing patriarchal narratives of the national myth and the family history. Her protagonist is a warrior-like woman who successfully harmonizes her Chinese and American identity. The work thus provokes thoughts on what “Chineseness” means for a Chinese American woman.

Building upon what Kingston’s work has left out, namely, the immigrants who do not or fail to assimilate with the American society, Nieh’s work reveals that identification with the adopted land does not come naturally for the immigrants. The emphasis in the immigrant community on assimilation could become a hegemonic discourse as it alienates those with alternative national identifications and excludes them from the ethnic community. The novel thus reconsiders what “American” means for an immigrant woman and challenges the emphasis on assimilation in Chinese American literature.

More audaciously, Jen shows that a Chinese American woman can move beyond being either Chinese or American. In presenting a teenager protagonist aspiring to become Jewish, Jen’s novel reveals that becoming, rather than being, is a more productive way to conceptualize identity. As there is no fixed definition for gender and ethnic identity, to be woman, or to be ethnic is always already becoming. Furthermore, what Jen presents in her novel is a becoming that is an ongoing, transgressive process without having a fixed end point. This mode of becoming, referred to as becoming-other in this thesis, deterritorializes, reterritorializes fixed identities and produces differences that are not difference-from-the-same. The work thus detaches gender and ethnicity from fixed identities and opens them up to becoming and difference.

Thus, do these works represent ethnic experience? To a certain degree of course they all do. Certain signifiers in these three works make them very much recognizable as Chinese American. They include myths, stories, rituals, customs, and in particular food, which are featured prominently in *The Woman Warrior* and *Mona in the Promised Land*. As it has been pointed out in the thesis, these signifiers are needed for ethnic literature to be recognized as ethnic, and – in globalized capitalism – to sell well. Yet as it has been pointed out in the first and third chapter, there is a tendency in Chinese American literature to reproduce these signifiers, they become stereotypical and they restrict different experiences from being produced and presented in literature. While representing certain aspects of the ethnic community and presenting the readers narratives on ethnic experiences, the selected works also have the prowess to produce and bring attention to differences. These works therefore steer away from the perception that literature is a representation of a “real” world. Rather, they imagine ways of living in the world through becoming-other and through the constant production of difference. They ‘think’ about being ethnic and/or being woman, and they enable their readers to think with them, without commanding them to think in a certain light. Using literary devices including rewriting, magic realism, stream of consciousness, symbolism, parody and irony, it could be argued that these works present without re-presenting. What they present is precisely the potential to introduce difference as well as to actualize what is yet to be actualized.

It is also this capacity to think and to present difference that differentiates literature from political representation and other sociological forms of representation. Contemplating on what literariness is, Rosemarie Buikema writes that

[t]he nature and effect of literature is different from other social and cultural practices because of this specific form of semiosis. Mimesis of the divergent also accounts for the fact that literature in particular, although this is true for art in general as well, can focus on absolutely everything. But whatever it deals with, its most important effect is always the production of awareness. Becoming aware of difference. Literature performs an awareness of alterity, of the other, of what is new and different. Thus, literariness comprehends the dimension of language that has the capacity to reveal the world. It has the potential to create new realities, not by giving us what we want, but by dissecting and deconstructing our expectations (6-7).

This process of not only producing the awareness of difference, but also producing difference itself, can be found in the three literary works studied in this thesis. It is the effort they make to write about differences, making new connections, and mapping out new territories that makes them stand out in ethnic literature. It is also for this reason that the thesis tries to bring academic attention to them.

Literature's ability to bring awareness to differences and to produce differences makes it different from the political representation. Yet its effect is nonetheless political. Throughout my thesis, I have demonstrated that these works have, via their separate ways, brought attention to the ethnic community, resisted the stereotypes of the ethnic community, challenged the hegemonic discourse in the community and given new understanding to gender and ethnicity. They share a common effect of deterritorializing the Chinese American identity, Chinese American literature as well as the American literary canon. These characteristics further qualify them as "minor literature", a term developed by Deleuze and Guattari in *Kafka, Toward a Minor Literature*. According to the two theorists, "minor literature" has the following characteristics,

The three characteristics of minor literature are the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation. We might as well say that minor no longer designates specific literatures but the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature (1986, 18).

Although the three works' use of language is not the focus in my thesis, it can be argued that they, at least in the case of *The Woman Warrior* and *Mona in the Promised Land*, deterritorialize the English language by inventing new vocabularies and appropriating the major language, English, for minor use. Deleuze and Guattari in their book mention that African American literature has a deterritorializing effect to the English language. It is believed by the thesis that the Chinese American literature has the same effect.

More importantly, and more pertinent to the discussion of the thesis, it is these works' political implication that makes them minor literature. Although these works do not make a political claim for the ethnic community they come from, and indeed the thesis has argued that they should not be seen as a representation of the ethnic group, through the narrations on family stories, individual concerns and experiences,

they nevertheless provoke rethinking of the immigrant identity, ethnic community and the North American society at large. Commenting on Kafka's work, Deleuze and Guattari write, "[t]he individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within it. In this way, the family triangle connects to other triangles – commercial, economic, bureaucratic, juridical – that determine its values" (1986, 17). In a similar manner, the works selected by the thesis also have other stories entertained with the individual stories they narrate. These other stories, as it has been brought to the fore by my thesis, are stories about the social, racial and national issues in the North American society.

Finally, these works have the function of collective and revolutionary enunciation", as Deleuze and Guattari phrase it. It should be noted that being collective does not mean that they are representative of the group. These writings on difference construct lines of flight that disturb the ways in which the "Chinese American woman" is defined and perceived in the mainstream American society as well as in the ethnic community. They demonstrate that it is possible to be different yet they do not command others to emulate their difference. Their collective action is to make visible the difference and to accommodate multiplicity within the ethnic community as well as the society.

From Kingston to Jen, the Chinese American women writers have strived to create a unique literary tradition and it is high time that their endeavors were appreciated.

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