

**Toward a New Balance: Literary Canon Formation and the
Evolution of Chinese American Literature**

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Introduction:

The Democratization of the American Literary Canon with Regard to Chinese

American Literature

Who gets to define what “America” means? What institutions support or undermine a particular definition? Under what historical condition does a group’s definition have more or less power than another’s? How does the continued repetition of such ideological statements have real, material effects on the ways people are able to live their lives? (Silva Gruesz 17).

More than 170 years ago, the first Chinese immigrants arrived in the United States of America, which can be seen as the starting point of Chinese American history and Chinese American culture. Today, the Chinese American minority is one of the major minority groups in the United States. However, although the early Chinese immigrants and first generation Chinese Americans bequeathed America with a wealth of Chinese cultural heritage, interest in Chinese American history and Chinese American literature has surged only recently. The period of social and civil reform, which originated after the 1950s, brought about many social changes for people belonging to an ethnic minority, such as Chinese Americans. It took somewhat longer, however, for these changes to be enforced in American politics or American scholarly institutions. Nevertheless, the institutionalization of ethnic cultural studies in the academe, such as Asian American Studies during the latter decades of the twentieth century, influenced the increase of scholarly and mainstream attention. Asian American academic programs placed Chinese American history from the margins into the limelight and Chinese American literature benefited from the reform of the academe as well. Taking this into account, what does this mean for ethnic minority literature in the United States today? Which literatures are included or excluded and according to which norms and standards are they considered to belong or not? What have legal, social, and historical issues to do with it and are those valid factors of inclusion or exclusion? Furthermore, what role does aesthetics play in the inclusion or exclusion of

ethnic minority writers and their works? All these questions are relevant to the debate on the process of the formation of a heterogeneous and diverse canon of American literature. In this thesis, I will examine Chinese American literature set in the context of mainstream American culture and the process of literary canon formation and its history in the United States, in an attempt to create a more inclusive image of the boundaries of inclusion or exclusion of American minority literature.

Since the call for revision of the homogeneous American literary canon towards a more diverse and multicultural one sounded in the United States over two decades ago, the debate about canon formation has never really ceased. Just as the literary canon itself changes along with the various social, political, and scholarly tides, the process of its formation is subject to ever changing currents of thought. However, since the start of the civil rights movement during the 1960s and 1970s and the culture wars that occurred in the wake of the period, gender, ethnicity, and race appear to be the liberal spearheads of the process of literary canon formation in the American academe. During the latter half of the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s, the Modern Language Association along with the Feminist Press prioritized the creation of a more socially, historically, and politically correct representation of American literature (Ruoff and Ward; Lauter, "Literatures" and "Multiculturalism") The focus shifted to ethnic, or colored, male and female writers, as well as works by white women, which aimed to bring about a change in the academe and, consequently, in American society. At the time, conservative scholarship mainly focused on the aesthetic value or literary merit of written works (Ruland), while the more progressive movement mostly chose works written by white women, colored men and women, or people belonging to a lower social class (Parker).

For Chinese American writers, the democratization of the American literary canon meant that their works could be included in the list of American classics and this is what

eventually happened. Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976) and Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) were both included in anthologies of American literature, in college syllabi, and eventually in the canon of American literature. The mainstream American audience popularized both books and, as a result, both works became almost instant bestsellers at the time of publication. However, Frank Chin accused Kingston and Tan of speaking to the American public in an inauthentic Chinese voice, because their books could be seen as Americanized versions of Chinese American culture (Chan et al. xi-xvi). Chin's opinion illustrates that resistance also existed within the Chinese American community. Frank Chin and Jeffrey Paul Chan, both Chinese American scholars, drew attention to the inauthentic voices of popular writers such as Kingston and Tan and also noted the more authentic material of Sin Far and Louis Chu (Chan et al. xi-xvi). Sin Far's *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (1912) and Chu's *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (1961) have been canonized as well, but according to Chan and Chin, both writers also received much critical acclaim in the American academe (xi-xvi).

Much research has already been done about the reform of the white American literary canon. In the last two decades, the academic debate has largely focused on the inclusion of ethnic minority literature into the canon versus the required aesthetic nature of the texts included. Paul Lauter actively debated the democratization of the American literary canon in his book *Canons and Contexts* (1990), in which he states that a call for a more diverse and multicultural American literary canon cannot be neglected, because the canon validates power (23). Lauter states that the canon teaches everyone's place in the social and cultural hierarchy, which justifies its democratization (268). Additionally, Harold Kolb Jr. notes that the process of literary canon formation is based on political choices (36). According to Kolb Jr., the canon reflects a country's cultural heritage and, therefore, it is important to create a diverse canon that functions as a cultural mirror which

represents the American people (35-6, 39). In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992), Toni Morrison notes that the white voice dominates American literature (5-6) and that the canon is composed of such books from which the colored voice is absent (18). Emory Elliott, on the other hand, notes that scholars in the academe are very influential to the shaping of America's literary culture and how society it eventually functions in society (5). However, he also believes that, without the loss of the canon's diversity, aesthetics and literary merit are important as well (Elliott 17). Ed Jonker, a Dutch historian, notes that the urge to canonize culture is has become a very popular political tool from the 1980s onwards and, therefore, the process is not always based on scholarly foundations (9). What is more, Jonker notes that the need for a democratized canon started just after the civil rights movement in the U.S. with the aim to deconstruct existing canons in the name of emancipation (9). This illustrates that different interests are at stake when the process of canon formation is concerned. Nonetheless, although the canon of American literature has been democratized and is not predominantly white or male any longer, racial hierarchy still affects the process of canon formation. Some minority groups whose voice has often been louder than that of the Chinese American minority, such as African Americans through the Black Arts movements in the 1960s and 1970s, have received much attention in American culture (Ogbar 29). According to Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, the African American struggle for civil rights empowered Asian American activism (29), which in turn led to the installment of Asian American programs in American universities in the 1980s and 1990s (Lauter, "Multiculturalism" 24). This has certainly been a big step forward, because the teaching of Asian American history and literature opens up the debate about a minority's culture and its literature.

This thesis aims to locate the borderlands that exist in American literature. It aims to unravel the importance of a work's aesthetic value as opposed to the influence it might

have as a multicultural artifact. Furthermore, it focuses on authentic as well as stereotypical Chinese American writings, in order to examine Chinese American literature's position in society. The debate on canon formation has often evolved in American society, from its early beginnings until today, and this holds true for the position of Chinese American literature. Therefore, this thesis focuses on Chinese American literature in the canon, literary anthologies, the classroom, and in American society, in order to provide the historical and present status of Chinese American literature as well as to supply further implications on teaching Chinese American literature together with the American literary canon. This thesis aims to contribute to the debate on multiculturalism and canon formation and proposes color-less reading of American literature.

Socio-Historical Context

The American literary canon remained unchanged for a long time. Many scholars saw the canon as something fixed and untouchable or an almost sacred collection of all-time classics mainly written by Euro-American white men (Chan et al.; Kolb Jr.; Lauter; Morrison; Parker; Ruland). Nonetheless, the turbulent decades of social and political reform during the 1960s and 1970s also influenced the hitherto seemingly inalterable nature of the American literary canon. Political reform groups ensured that the diverse literatures from people from different social classes, different minority groups, and of people with different sexual preferences also gained more publicity and attention next to mainstream American literature. The mainstream literature mainly consists of widely-read works that scholars, critics, and the general American public consider to be American literary classics (Lauter, "Literatures" 9, 10). Moreover, what people value in these canonical works are "complexity over simplicity, ... written over oral, ... the formal genres we call 'fine arts' over the 'practical' we call 'crafts'" (Lauter, "Literatures" 22).

Social and political activists of the Civil Rights Movement sparked the evolution to broaden the canon of American literature. However, ethnic minority literature was still not fully included into the canon of white Anglo-American men at the time. The existence of those literatures just out of the limelight of mainstream literature resulted in a lobby for a revised American canon in the 1990s. Aiming to do so, the Modern Language Association of America published several works on American literature such as *Redefining American Literary History* (1990) which was edited by A. LaVonne Ruoff and Jerry W. Ward Jr. and which American scholars considered to be a valuable contribution to the debate on traditional canon formation (Jakaitis; Payne; Wagner-Martin). The MLA aimed to redefine and reform the canon and, in addition, to provide American society with a more diverse national canon, which conservative critics such as Alan Bloom and E.D. Hirsh Jr. gravely resented.

The liberal mindset of the MLA and its proponents, which *Redefining American Literary History* conveys, countered the conservative views of Bloom in *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987) and Hirsch Jr. in *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (1987). These contradictory views illustrate the culture wars in the American academe and American society that reached its peak at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s. Liberal and conservative scholars' views greatly differed. Whereas the conservative scholars believed that the canon should not be democratized, but should focus on the great American classics instead, liberal scholars believed that the democratization of the American canon was inevitable (Lauter, "Literatures"; Ruoff and Ward; Ruland). However, despite the culture wars and the conservatives' resistance to the multicultural redefinition of American literature, the American literary canon gradually became more inclusive and more multicultural. Since the culture wars of the 1980s and 1990, the revised

American literary canon includes African American, Asian American, Latin American, and Native American literature (Donadio, par. 5).

Chinese American literature is also part of this expanded canon and the general texts on canon formation, together with Chinese Americans' particular social and historical context, reveals much about the Chinese American cultural heritage and its place within American history and society. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 singled out Chinese immigrants and prohibited them from entering the United States (Norton 492). Legislation that particularly aims to exclude a specific ethnic group from society can be seen as an act of racism that the government supports (Takaki 14). This legislation placed Chinese immigrants who lived in the United States outside society, which also influenced their position within American culture. Because Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans were not allowed to fully participate in American society, American people perceived them as the exotic oriental other. This not only enforced the exclusion of Chinese Americans, it also further estranged Chinese American culture and literature from general American culture. This contributed to the marginalization of Chinese American literature in the American academe and in the American canon up to the 1990s.

The American exclusion policies ensured that the influx of Chinese immigrants lessened after 1882. The government's anti-Chinese policies forced Chinese immigrants who were already living and working in the United States to move into Chinatowns. Moreover, the anti-Chinese attitudes that existed in society (Takaki 100), which national and state newspapers published in articles and poems, estranged the Chinese even more from the American people (Takaki 104, Norton 550-1). During late nineteenth and early twentieth century, newspaper articles with titles such as "Chinatown is Menace to Health" (1901), "Democratic Anti-Chinese Meeting Tonight" (1888), or "Brilliant Speakers Point Out the Dangers of Chinese Immigration to America's Shores" (1901) in for instance the

San Francisco Call or the *Los Angeles Daily Herald* were quite common, which illustrates that white Americans viewed East Asian immigrants through an Orientalist gaze. This means that they saw Chinese immigrants as exotic and as other. Most importantly, white Americans saw Chinese immigrants as sojourners who only came to America to find fortune over the backs of white laborers at the time of the Gold Rush from the 1850s onwards (Takaki 92). The majority of white Americans did not trust the Chinese immigrants, because they were afraid that the Chinese would take their land and their jobs. This happened to Chinese immigrants who came to America to help build the Pacific Railroad between 1863 and 1896 (Takaki 105). From mid nineteenth century to the early decades of the twentieth, the “Yellow Peril” raged at full force. White Americans resented the presence of Chinese Americans in California and through the power of legislation they managed to reduce the immigrants’ rights and influence (Norton 550-1). As a result, Chinese immigrants were only allowed to reside in Chinatowns, but without any rights to naturalization or citizenship. What is more, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, a United States Federal law signed by Chester Alan Arthur, made it almost impossible for Chinese immigrants to come to and settle in the United States until the Immigration Reform Act was amended in 1965 (Chae 3-5). Chinese immigrants were met with hatred and violence, which resulted in the segregation of the Chinese immigrant community and to their exclusion from American society.

These racist beliefs and fears of the past resulted in a story of the Chinese immigrants and their American-born families that contains instances of marginalization, segregation, and exclusion. The marginalization of Chinese culture extended well into the twentieth century, but decreased after Asian American programs and courses were installed in universities and colleges during the 1980s and 1990s (Chae 130-32, Li 186). The process of marginalization also influenced the position of Chinese American literature in

the canon of American literature and, for a long time, Chinese American writers occupied only a small place in the American canon (Chae 28). Although the MLA lobbied for a more inclusive collection of American literatures, which made the canon much more multicultural and diverse, there is still ground to be won. Not only is a correct and balanced literary representation of a country's cultures of importance, cultural representation of a minority's history is also vital, especially when that history contains many dark and violent chapters. Attention for many different chapters in American history, positive and negative ones, creates a comprehensive narrative. Perhaps it is time for American literature to open up the boundaries that still exist. Over the years, much has changed in American literary traditions and in American literary canon formation. The American canon started off as a group of works written by white elitist men during the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century. It then gradually changed after the activist movements for civil rights in society after the 1960s and 1970s. Perhaps, it is time for American literature to move beyond the tradition of placing its authors and their works into ethnic or racial categories, such as Chinese American writers or Chinese American literature, and value authors and their works based on literary qualities instead.

In order to create a comprehensive discussion on the position of Chinese American literature in the American literary canon, my research begins with the examination of Chinese American literature and its history. This starting point illuminates Chinese American literary traditions as well as its historical position within American culture and aims to generate the groundwork for this paper together with a discussion on American literary history and the process of canon formation in which Chinese American literature is embedded. A discussion of anthologies of American literature, general as well as multicultural ones, and their influence as teaching materials in the classroom aim to shed light on publishers' and teachers' influence on students' perception on general American

and Chinese American literature. This is relevant since the canon influences the entries of literary anthologies and teachers often assign their students readings from these anthologies in turn. Consequently, what happens in publishing influences the classroom. Attention for Chinese American literature in anthologies and in universities and colleges also influences society and, therefore, the general acceptance of ethnic literature and its inclusion in the canon as well. The investigation of these specific areas, which all relate to one another, aims to offer an overview as well as a critical discussion of America's literary culture and the implications it holds for America as a multicultural society.

Structure

Part one of this thesis looks at cultural power in American society. What constitutes cultural and social hierarchies? What kind of effects do these hierarchies have on minority literature and what is the role of social constructions? The first section focuses on Chinese American literature in particular in order to understand Chinese American literary production and the influences that the American academe and American politics exercises on it. In addition, it focuses on the conventions that the mainstream American culture demands of minority writers in return for general cultural acceptance. The second section focuses on Chinese American literature in relation to mainstream literature. In addition, the third section focuses literary aesthetics in relation to Chinese American literature. Part two of the thesis examines on scholarly power. What constitutes the power of scholarly publishers and academic institutions? Whereas the fourth section discusses anthology formation with regard to multiculturalism and aesthetics, section five looks at the influence of literary education in colleges. The fifth section focuses on Chinese American literature in the classroom. The last section aims to unite part one and two by creating a bridge between American culture, history, and society, through examining the existence of a

shared balanced cultural memory through literature. In these sections, the questions about race, ethnicity, and aesthetics combined aim to provide an answer to the process of literary canon formation in the United States with regard to Chinese American literature.

1. Chinese American Culture: Marginalization and the Power of Social Constructions

At the end of the twentieth century, the academe considered mainstream American novels by writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allen Poe, Herman Melville, Henry James, and William Faulkner to be highbrow literature (Lauter, "Literatures" 9). Before the turn of the twentieth century, however, British and American intellectuals and scholars considered Northern American literature to be provincial and they mainly focused on English literature (Dickstein 150). Only during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century scholars looked beyond American literature's perceived provincial nature and the focus shifted from Victorian English literature to American literature in American universities and in American society. Since books that had been recorded in the canon were mainly written by white American male writers, another wave of reform was badly needed. In the article "A Response to Ruland," Paul Lauter notes that the call for reform came during the 1950s, because, since the United States of America had become a world power, it needed a national literature that was worthy to represent it (330). And the reform came.

Before the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s, people who belonged to minorities did not really have a voice in American society and in its culture. One of the factors that contributed to this oppression is the historical preoccupation with race in the United States. Race has been, and still is, a marker of discrimination in the U.S., and it has "rendered the body into a text upon which histories of racial differentiation, exclusion, and violence are inscribed" (Ferguson 192). This means that race constitutes the way people perceive one another and one another's culture. What is more, racial minorities' literature has been underappreciated for a long time because of the racial hierarchy in American society. This is also true for Chinese American literature. Although Chinese Americans have been residing in America for nearly two centuries, it took a very long time for their history, culture, and literature to be acknowledged as one of America's literatures. Yet, the

works of literature that represent the Chinese American minority are not always considered to be authentic works of Chinese American fiction (Chae 44). According to Youngsuk Chae, much of the Chinese American fiction that entered mainstream American culture has been subjected to the process of Americanization and, as a result, is written according the tradition of the autobiography (45). Autobiography lends itself well to the narration of emigration experiences, because it stresses a narrative's authenticity. Nonetheless, according to Frank Chin, Chinese American writers such as Maxine Hong Kingston and Jade Snow Wong use this form narrative in order to sell their books to a mainstream audience (8). Chin notes that these works adhere to the Christian tradition because they "all write to the specifications of the Christian stereotype of Asia being as opposite morally from the West as it is geographically" (8). The autobiography derives from the Christian tradition of the spiritual autobiography, which focuses on the journey to overcome a crisis (Abrams 23). The mainstream American readership appears to accept Chinese American fiction more readily when Chinese American authors conform to American literary standards. Therefore, it can be said that Chinese American literature still undergoes a process of, conscious or unconscious, marginalization, because the power of the white mainstream reader demands Americanized minority literature that conforms to the Asian American stereotype.

To look into this claim about Chinese American literature and its authentic nature, the reform in the academe is an important starting point, as is the focus on Chinese American stereotypes. Moreover, the popularization of certain works of Chinese American literature is of importance as well, such as those by Kingston and Amy Tan. Yet, not only the critical and popular acclaim of Chinese American fiction plays a part in this process, the role of social constructions such as identity politics and Benedict Anderson's imagined

communities are of importance to the marginalization process of minority literature as well.

Social Constructions: Imagined Communities and Chinese Americans' Sense of Belonging

The concept of the American literary canon, the notions inclusion and exclusion, the sense of nation, the concept of the mainstream public's desires, the practice of identity politics, and the power of race in the United States are all linked to the term social construction. In a way, the society or geographical area of which people are part, or not, dictates their socially constructed conceptions of society and culture. American society itself can be seen as a social construction or, as Anderson conceptualized, an imagined community (1983). Yet, wherein lies the power of this imagined American community and in what ways does it treat issues of belonging when ethnic minorities are concerned? American society popularized the issue of belonging in order to maintain in power. It is a social invention constructed by the dominant majority, to suppress minorities, which holds true for the place of Chinese minority literature in society and in the canon as well.

Chinese Americans have long been excluded from this "imagined American community." After 1882, Chinese immigrants were not allowed to enter or, when they had already entered, they were excluded from American society. The immigration-quotas that the government created for migration from China were enforced until the Immigration and Nationality Act was amended in 1965 (Ogbar 32). In the United States, the notions of nationality and of belonging and exclusion came into being through nationalism during the twentieth century. Alys Eve Weinbaum states that "nations are brought into being by people whose access to print culture enables collective imagination to involvement in a political and cultural project that extends back into a 'immemorial past' and 'glides into a

limitless future” (167). In other words, language and literature are very powerful tools in creating social constructions and, once these constructions are firmly established, keep them into place. Cultural hegemony dictates which group's cultural artifacts are considered valuable and which cultures are not worth including, which eventually all leads back to power relations in society. Glenn Hendler confirms this when he notes that there has been a “long tradition in the United States of construing society as a strategic entity that represses or limits individuals” (225). This happened with the Chinese Exclusion Laws, for instance. When the dominant majority has its grip on a nation’s culture, through access to print and language for instance, more social power can be accumulated, because cultural hegemony influences the collective memory of a nation’s people.

From the 1880s anti-Chinese legislation up to its repeal in 1943, the American government employed its legal power to repress Chinese immigrants and Chinese American individuals. Eventually, this has led to their exclusion from U.S. society merely based on racial difference. Brent Hayes Edwards notes this as well and states that “identity definition” usually happens “through the exclusion of a range of “others” that often are “populations who have been denied the rights of citizenship” (83). The Chinese American otherness meant that many Chinese immigrants had no right to become naturalized or to be granted the privileges of citizenship. Such a kind of social and legal suppression also mutes a minority’s voice. Publishers only give minorities a chance to speak up if the minority writer adheres to the expectations of the general American readership. This means that Chinese American writers have to give in to the prevailing Chinese American oriental and exotic stereotype.

Chinese American literature balances on the divide between belonging and not belonging. It might appear to Chinese American writers that the only way to enter the imagined American community is to leave their authentic Chinese heritage behind and to

employ the Asian American stereotypes that exist in popular culture. For Chinese American literature, as mentioned earlier, this means that their works should be written as if they are perceived through the Orientalist gaze (Chae 31-2). According to U.S. Orientalism, the Western world only contains virtuous values, while the East is made up of all that is bad and backward (Prashad 175). What is more, U.S. Orientalism is tied to economic efficiency and racial inferiority. Because the dominant group is afraid to lose power, they suppress other groups in society, such as Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans. At the beginning of the twentieth century, anti-Chinese sentiments disenfranchised the Chinese American community from general American society through depicting them as sojourners. Journalists fed the yellow peril that existed in society at the time and anti-Chinese legislation underlined and legitimized anti-Chinese attitudes, which illustrates that Orientalism was a powerful tool to influence the position of Chinese Americans in society. Through the suppression of Chinese immigrants in California during the latter half of the nineteenth century, white Americans remained in power.

The Chinese in America have been suppressed throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Instead of being granted citizenship, Chinese immigrants were seen as sojourners and, at the time, were never fully accepted in American society. Chinese immigrants had to stay in their Chinatowns. The fear of the Chinese ‘other’ led to their marginalization in the U.S. They literally lived outside the American community, grouped together in their own enclaves within the United States. However, the civil rights movement’s urging to shake up social constructions concerning race, gender, and sexuality also led to the “expression [of race] as a cultural and political agency by marginalized groups” (Ferguson 192). By disempowering social constructions, people belonging to minorities took agency instead of remaining subjugated to the dominant majority’s whims. Minority writers started to celebrate racial diversity instead.

In the United States, race is a central aspect of society and culture. It decides who belongs and who does not; who is an agent or a subject. Chinese have long been unwelcome, and in the nineteenth and early twentieth century much has been undertaken to exclude them from American society. Because of their otherness, they did not belong to the American family, and neither did their literature belong in the American canon. This notion is, of course, a social construction. Although Anderson speaks of “imagined communities,” it is carefully considered who gets to play and who gets to watch the game in American society. Since print is power, people and their culture and literature are carefully placed outside society, unless people are willing to change. Not only were they excluded historically, grouped together and placed outside society, their popular literature was preferred to be canonized over more authentic works of Chinese American fiction. Although these popular writings are considered to employ many stereotypes, they did bring about change, because the step to authentic Chinese American literature and its acceptance might have become smaller as well. Chinese Americans are often labeled “the model minority,” but they are also always others in America. Perhaps these people want to deviate themselves from the mainstream American culture to maintain their authenticity and to preserve their customs and traditions or to keep them to themselves. Sometimes silence is a powerful gesture as well.

2. Cultural Reform: The Rise of Chinese American Literature

Since the 1960s and 1970s, certain works of Chinese American literature have become popular and more mainstream since minorities' activism for civil rights and equal opportunities in the United States. The reform in the academe and in American society after the 1950s influenced the general American public's perception of ethnic American minority groups. However, it seems as if popular Chinese American literature that has been accepted by the mainstream reader adheres to American literary standards, which means that Chinese American authors Americanized their traditional Chinese narratives. This appears in Maxine Hong Kingston's and Amy Tan's autobiographical novels when they narrate their "authentic experiences" and "ethnic differences" (Chae 45-6). According to Youngsuk Chae, Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* focuses more on the generational differences between mother and daughters than on the authentic Chinese American experience, in order to make the book more accessible for a white, possibly female, audience (113). In *The Joy Luck Club*, Jing-Mei Woo joins the Joy Luck Club of her mother's Chinese friends after her mother's death. The first time that she plays with her mother's friends, they ask her to portray her mother. Jing-Mei is lost for words, because she realizes that she does not know much about her mother's hopes and fears. Jing-Mei realizes that her inability to describe her mother shocks the other women:

And then it occurs to me. They are frightened. In me, they see their own daughters, just as ignorant, just as unmindful of all the truths and hopes they have brought to America. They see daughters who grow impatient when their mothers talk in Chinese, who think they are stupid when they explain things in broken English. They see that joy and luck do not mean the same in to their daughters, that to these closed American-born minds "joy-luck" is not a word, it does not exist. They see daughters who will bear grandchildren born without any connecting hope passed from generation to generation. (Tan 40)

Although Tan refers to Jing-Mei and her friends as Chinese American daughters with Chinese immigrant mothers, this situation of a younger generation that does not know or understands the older generation is universal and will be understood by a white American

readership. To what extent have Chinese American writers had to conform to white American literary standards to become acclaimed American authors?

The Civil Rights movement not only brought about change in American society, but it changed American culture as well. The social movement eventually led to a power-shift in the nation's culture. The change that started in the 1960s and 1970s continued during the 1980s and 1990s, for instance with the Reconstructing American Literature Project of the Feminine Press. According to Paul Lauter in his book *Canons and Contexts* (1990), this was an attempt to bring about the changes in American literature that had already taken place in society during the civil rights movement (260). Projects such as those of the Feminine press and, later, that of Lauter's *Heath Anthology of American Literature* (1990), and the Modern Language Associations' efforts to make the literary landscape more diverse and multicultural have certainly been fruitful. Today, the canon is much more diverse than it was fifty years ago, with its inclusion of ethnic and racial minority writers, female writers, and gay and lesbian writers. However, although minority writers have moved away from the margins, social and cultural power is still vested in the white mainstream majority (Chae 31). This means that the dominant white majority still decides whose literature is to be included or excluded. In other words, they decide which minority is accepted into the mainstream and what kind of stereotypical representation is expected to come along with it. Chae mentions that "these [Chinese minority] writers have to negotiate with or serve the mainstream publishers' demands, or skillfully filter literary and political censorship through artistic devices" (31). In order to be accepted into the mainstream, Chinese American writers have to betray their authentic cultural heritage. This illustrates that the mainstream literary market in the U.S. is still a very difficult domain to enter for ethnic minorities without having to give up their cultural heritage.

Not only mainstream American readers demand a certain kind of Chinese American literature, but other constraints such as canonical quotas influence the general acceptance of Chinese American literature as well. According to David Leiwei Li, the American mainstream literary landscape not only demands Chinese American fiction to adhere to existing oriental stereotypes, but Chinese American authors should attempt to represent a “canonical token” that is “symbolic of Asia, however conceived” in order for their works to become accepted (65). Although inclusion into the canon is certainly a positive development, writers having to compromise their own writings in order to receive popular and critical recognition can be seen as a deterioration of authentic literature. According to Li this “effectively reduces Asian American difference to a supposed uniformity that is self evident in a single text” (65). Of course, it can never be the case that one single entry into the canon should function as a beacon of Chinese, or even Asian, American culture, because Asian American culture consists of many diverse ethnic cultures. What is more, even within Chinese American culture many regional, traditional, religious and other kinds of differences exist. All these social and cultural restrictions and barriers lead back to one unifying term: race. It stands tall that race and ethnicity are both factors that decide whether a minority is included in or excluded from American society. Consequently, it also determines whose cultural heritage should be considered valuable or valueless.

The notion of race changed when ethnic studies departments were added to universities after the civil rights movement. Most of these ethnic studies departments “worked to challenge race as a mode of exploitations within U.S. society in particular” (Ferguson 192), because in American society race holds the power to exclude people who do not, according to the dominant majority, belong. University curricula also included Asian American studies programs. The attention for Asian American studies in the academe from the 1980s onwards also meant that the interest in the Asian American voice,

and what it had to tell, increased. In the introduction to *The Big Aiieeeee!* (1990) Jeffrey Paul Chan, Frank Chin, Lawson Fusao Inada and Shawn Wong eloquently explain the evolution of the Asian American voice:

In 1974, we published *Aiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian American Writers* (H.U.P.), and at that same time we said, “Chinese and Japanese Americans, American-born and raised, who got their China and Japan from the radio, off the silver screen, from television, out of comic books, from the pushers of white American culture that picture the yellow man as something that when wounded, sad, or angry, or swearing, or wondering, whined, shouted, or screamed ‘aiieeeee!’ Asian America, so long ignored or forcibly excluded from creative participation in American culture ... [Aiieeeee!] is more than a whine, shout, or scream; it is fifty years of our whole voice. (xi)

This quotation illustrates the historical position of Asian Americans within American popular culture, which was merely a stereotype without a real voice. The stereotypical representation of Asian Americans created little understanding of Asian culture in American society (Chan et al. xi). In the United States, racial identities play an important part in social categories, because, as Carla Kaplan puts it, “identity has long carried the meaning of relational and mutable identifications actuated either by the individual’s chosen identifications or by behavior that seems shared” (124). Asian Americans were marginalized as an exotic minority, which meant that there was almost no shared behavior between Asian American culture and white mainstream American culture. Not granting a people the right of speech is a form of marginalization that excludes people from society. This is a political process based on racial motives and the group who is in power controls the position of ethnic minorities such as Chinese Americans. The marginal position of Chinese Americans in society also affected the position of Chinese American culture in American society. This, in turn, influenced the position of Chinese American literature, which illustrates that the Chinese American minority was not only socially silenced, but culturally as well.

Nonetheless, this silence and the stereotype highly influenced the position of Chinese American literature in American culture. Although the attention for Chinese American literature in the American academe since the 1970s benefited society's acceptance of Chinese American writings, publishing houses played an important role as well. Based on the mainstream readership's reading preferences, publishers decide which works are viable for mass publication. This means that Chinese American writers have to adapt to American standards to be able to enter the mainstream literary market. According to Lauter, mainstream literature consists of works that scholars, as well as the general American audience, consider the norm, which largely consisted of white male authors' works up to the 1980s and 1990s ("Literatures" 9). Lauter furthermore notes that the existence of a mainstream that adheres to the aesthetic norm also means that something different exists, which is often "minor" or "lesser" ("Literatures" 9). Before the canon debates, minority literatures did not belong to the mainstream and were seen as other forms of literature. After the civil rights era, Chinese American literature started to get published and win popularity (Chae 1) Chae confirms that "[minority] writers have been dependent on mainstream publishing' companies demands for their books" and that these writers have "to negotiate the mainstream literary markets' demands placed on minority writings" (33). This explains that the voice about which Chan, Chin, Fusao, and Wong spoke, still has to measure up to mainstream standards in order to be recognized. This would also mean that if a Chinese American writer speaks in a voice that is too authentic, there might be no attention for it by the general American public, because it is too exotic. Minority groups are aware of this and change their voice because of it.

Cultural and social belonging, or inclusion and exclusion, are both social constructions. These constructions are supported by "the concentration of racial and economic power" (Berlant 37-8). This means that the dominant culture decides and, as a

consequence, this leads to white supremacy. Representation in culture is a battle between who is in power and who is subordinated. Minority groups such as Chinese Americans are aware of their position near society's margins, and although they have long been silenced, and perhaps still are being silenced, there is still an "insurgent consciousness" (Chae 55). As mentioned above, silence can be powerful as well, especially the "measured silence" (55) that Chae speaks about. Civil rights activism and the lobby for a more democratic canon of American literature provided Chinese American writers with a louder voice that was more easily recognized, even by the mainstream American audience. Yet, the civil rights movement not only led to the redistribution of social and cultural power, it also resulted in a focus on identity politics. According to Kaplan, "devalued identities" demanded a "redistribution" of social and cultural power (124). However, has this power been evenly redistributed in U.S. culture concerning Chinese American literature?

After the 1960s, American culture started to change and it gradually became more multicultural. The change affected American society, legislation, education, culture, and, consequently, literature. Lauter notes this change in American society after the 1960s and 1970s:

To be sure, the general belief of those who formulated ... the variety of ethnic studies programs that emerged in the 1960s, was that institutions like colleges and universities, or courts, or even political parties would necessarily be transformed simply by what would come in the wake of the entry of large new cadres of previously excluded people. They were right ... and they were wrong. ... the addition of new constituencies to the voter rolls, the student bodies, or even the curriculum, did not in and of itself produce revolutionary change. ("Multicultural" 24)

Lauter continues to state that much has positively changed in American society, but that social tension keeps existing and that the removal of boundaries alone has led to change, but not on its own ("Multicultural" 24). This holds true for Chinese American literature as well. The canon has been opened up as a result of the culture wars and this led to the

canonical inclusion of Chinese American authors. What is more, although writers such as Tan and Kingston have been accused of writing inauthentic literature and conforming to racist stereotypes, their works' popularity also furthered the acceptance of Chinese American writings.

Popular Culture: Mainstream Chinese American Literature

In the United States, the dominant white majority's power decides other people's place in society. Nonetheless, when ethnic minorities, such as Chinese Americans, regain the power of speech, it enables them to secure a different position in society. Popularization of Chinese literature leads to more acceptance, because an American sauce might make the Chinese tradition appear more edible for the general public. What does this popularization mean for authenticity, however? It is perhaps similar to stereotypes concerning Chinese American food. When it looks too authentic and exotic, the general American, or Western, public might refrain from eating it. This holds for literature as well: people want to read stories they can identify with, stories that make someone feel part of the family. Carla Peterson notes this as well, because "family . . . often functions as a code word, intended to stigmatize the deviant, those placed beyond the norm by virtue of their race, sexuality, class, or other social identities. . . . In its broadest extension, family becomes a metaphor for nation and even human kind" (114-5). American society can be seen as a family and if someone comes from a minority that deviates from the norm, he or she automatically does not belong to the family, which means that family is a tool of inclusion or exclusion. Chinese American writers who do want to be part of the family have to betray their cultural heritage, because of the white American mainstream audience's demand for stereotypical ethnic literature. Chinese American literature can often be seen as a stereotypical Orientalist performance (Li 65), but this is precisely what the general public wants to read.

Novels by Tan and Kingston conform to the literary standards that mainstream American culture sets for minority literature. Chae notes that Tan's focus on one family creates "the essential unit of social coherence" and this, in combination with a "common affective denominator," draws the white American audience into her stories (112). A statement of *The Joy Luck Club's* protagonist Jung-Mei illustrates that Tan's subject matter is not specifically Chinese American:

I didn't budge. And then I decided I didn't have to do what my mother said anymore. I wasn't her slave. I had listened to her before and look what happened. She was the stupid one. (141)

Jing-Mei refuses to listen to her mother and she starts making her own choices. This happens to many American teenagers and, therefore, a white American readership might easily identify with this part of Tan's narrative.

However, Tan also employs racialized stereotypes in her novel, such as a focus on Chinese's eating habits when Jing-Mei says, "eating is not a gracious event here. It's as though everybody had been starving. They push large forkfuls into their mouths, jab at more pieces of pork, one right after the other" (32). Tan portrays the Chinese American family having a chaotic dinner, instead of a shared meal in a relaxed atmosphere, which ties in with white American's Orientalist beliefs of Chinese Americans loud and ill-mannered as far as etiquette is concerned. Tan reflects upon Chinese cruelty through the Orientalist gaze. In school, a boy told Jing-Mei something about Chinese torture, which Jing-Mei's mother confirms:

"Chinese people do many things," she said simply. "Chinese people do business, do medicine, do painting. Not lazy like American people. We do torture. Best torture." (91)

This enforces the Orientalist belief of Chinese Americans as dangerous others. According to Edward Said a part of "Orientalism is – and does not simply represent – a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the

Orient than it does with 'our' world" (12). This can be linked to Ronald Takaki's reference to Orientalism as something that Americans believe to be "exotic, mysterious, strange and foreign" (487). Tan's description of Jing-Mei's family dinner and her mother's reflection on Chinese torture adhere to the Orientalist belief of Chinese customs as foreign and exotic. Chae states that "In this respect, Tan has actively participated in selling culture or ethnic difference as a form of an exotic commodity" (44). In Kingston's work, the Orientalist stereotype is present when she refers to Chinese talk-stories. At the beginning of *The Woman Warrior*, her protagonist says, "[when] we Chinese girls listened to the adults talking-story, we learned that we failed if we grew up to be but wives or slaves" (25), which invokes the exotic and Orientalist image of women as slaves. Further on in the novel, Kingston's protagonist says, "[in] China, my parents would sell my sisters and me. My father would marry two or three or more wives, who would spatter cooking oil on our bare toes and lie that we were crying for naughtiness" (93). The image invoked here is one of cruel Chinese parents and cruel Chinese women in particular, which confirms the Orientalist stereotypical dangerous nature of Chinese culture. Kingston's and Tan's adherence to the norm means that they confirm the Orientalist gaze of the mainstream audience, by creating works that cohere to the exotic stereotype of Chinese Americans as it exists in American society. This can be seen in both authors' work. However, conforming to this mainstream culture may lead to the loss of one's own cultural heritage and identity.

Kingston and Tan both became popular Chinese American writers who were seen as pivotal to Chinese American literature. Yet, what does this mean for other Chinese American writers and their works? Because some of them are considered to be less popular by the general public, are they indeed lesser because they deviate from the norms set by the mainstream? The works of Kingston and Tan were well-received by the general American public and their works have appeared on many college reading lists since. As a result of

their works' popularity, these two women became exemplary of Chinese American culture and literature. Chae believes that writers such as Tan, Kingston, and other popular writers write less authentically which makes their work Oriental (44). He states that “[Jade Snow] Wong’s *Fifth Chinese Daughter* and Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club* received popular recognition by catering to the existing stereotypes of “Orientals,” an exotic,” or a “model minority” (Chae 44). Some critics, such as Chan and Chin do disapprove of these practices:

The Christian social Darwinist bias of twentieth-century white American culture combined with the Christian mission, the racist acts of congress, and the statutes and city ordinances to emphasize the fake Chinese American dream over the real, until the stereotype has completely displaced history in the white sensibility. (xiii)

Chan and Chin wrote this preface in 1990 and much has changed over time. Nonetheless, works of fiction that employ the fake Chinese stereotype, such as those of Kingston, Tan, and Wong contribute to the replacement of the fake Chinese stereotype instead of authentic cultural representations. Employing stereotypes reinforces the Orientalist gaze. Because mainstream accredited authors appear to employ the stereotype, the general public may believe that nothing exists apart from those narratives. This might result in the notion that those accounts represent authentic Chinese American culture, while they are merely a popular depiction of what the mainstream supposes it to be. The danger of these “sentimental fictions” as June Howard notes, is that “they address the reader intimately; these market mediated stories circulate right through the heart and the home” (216). If the popular Chinese American works have this effect, the popular image of Chinese American literature and of the Chinese American community might be damaged through the stereotype, which might result in a loss of autonomy and authenticity.

Although mainstream Chinese American literature is perhaps not authentically Chinese American, the writers of these stories may build a bridge between stereotypical mainstream Chinese American literature and authentic Chinese American voices. Because

they reach a larger audience by exposure in the mainstream culture, they are perhaps able to open the eyes of a larger audience as well.

3. Canonizing American Literature: Literary Merit vs. the Preservation of the Cultural Memories

In the United States, the dominant white Anglo-Saxon Protestant majority controlled American culture and literature during the nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century. According Pamela Perry, up until then, white Americans considered themselves to be the dominant group who did not belong to any racial category in contrast to “colored and subordinated people” (243). White Americans saw themselves as the norm (Perry 234) and, as a result, set the normative standards for cultural production. After the 1950s, civil rights activism set a culture shift in motion that marked the beginning of the democratization of mainstream American literature and its canon. During the 1960s and 1970s, colored minority groups demanded democratization of American society, the academe, and American literature (Donadio, pars. 3-5; Ogban 30-1). Eva Cherniavsky states that people belonging to minorities focus on their race or ethnicity to win a place in American society and used it “to stake claims for political recognition on the basis of embodied particularity” (29). However, the stakes were not only of political importance, racial and ethnic minority groups aimed at cultural recognition as well. As a result, the emancipation of American literature was set in motion in the early 1980s and sparked the debate in the American academe as well. This led to the inclusion of Chinese American literature into the American literary canon, such as the works of Sui Sin Far, Louis Chu, Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan. Nonetheless, to what extend has the literary reform affected the requirements for canonical inclusion? Is a writer’s ethnic background more important than his or her work’s literary merits? As far as literary canon formation is concerned, do aesthetics count? According to Russ Castronovo, aesthetics is often considered to be an elitist term, which is “purely about the discernment of formal criteria such as unity, proportion and balance within the domain of art” (10), but has the

multiculturalization of American literature affected the perception of aesthetics and has it influenced the way in which American readership perceives literature's aesthetic values? Therefore, although the cultural memory of Chinese American literature should not be obscured, the aesthetic value of the texts included should weigh as heavy as the value of cultural preservation as far as the process of American literary canon formation is concerned.

Aesthetics and Literary Value

Although the inclusion of Chinese American literature into the canon is a positive development, the aesthetic value of the texts included should be taken into account as well. It should not be the case that, for reform's sake, ethnic minority texts with much socio-historical value but very little literary merit should be included. However, during the period of literary reform in the 1980s and 1990s, democratization and minority literature's inclusion seemed to go hand in hand. Literary scholar Heinz Ickstadt notices that literature and texts have become universal media and that those texts are chiefly judged on "cultural, ideological, [but] not aesthetic terms" (264). Since the call for social and cultural reform of the 1960s, the focus on literature's merit shifted from aesthetic to social value. Of course, aesthetics alone do not constitute a text's greatness, while its social and historical context play a part in its position in American culture as well. In the academe, notes Castronovo, scholars often perceive the aesthetic as an elitist tool that is used as "a conservative strategy of retrenchment that justifies art's putative evasion of political matters, mystifies class privilege as disinterestedness, and uses ideas of harmony and unity to excuse the status quo" (11). This stresses the importance of finding a balance between literature's aesthetic merits and the cultural memory a text conveys.

According to Ed Jonker, civil rights activism groups often use literature to stress a group's shared cultural memory in order to popularize the need for reform (9). Such a kind of popularization preferably supports authentic requests for a more equal representation from within ethnic minority populations and, therefore, constructing a shared American cultural memory should be approached with care. In addition, Youngsuk Chae states that ethnic minorities, such as Chinese Americans, should employ a "cautious and yet conscious strategy" because they are only allowed to "[speak] for themselves within the boundaries of hegemonic ideology" (44). Although the Chinese American minority has been given room to speak, cultural hegemony is still a real issue, because power structures in society reside in the America's dominant majority. What is more, this also ties in with the historical marginalization of Chinese Americans, as noted by Henry Yu, who state that in the United States "ethnicity commonly referred to the consciousness of exclusion or subordination" (103). This holds true for the Chinese ethnic minority in the United States and these measures influenced Chinese American's cultural production and Chinese American literature up to the end of the twentieth century.

During the second half of the twentieth century many reform movements emerged and American society gradually started to change regarding the position of ethnic minorities in America. The way in which American society perceived ethnic and racial minorities started to change as well during that period and, as a result, the way in which ethnic minorities thought about themselves changed. Yu notes that the term ethnicity and its usage after the 1950s "became to denote individuals or groups to understand themselves as separate or different from others" (103). Although the badly-needed call for reform positively changed ethnic minorities' position in the United States, the groups' feeling of separation might denote that they still not felt equal to Americans. Because Chinese Americans differed from white Americans physically as well as culturally, they were

perceived as Orientalist others. Yu notes that the only way for people belonging to an ethnic minority to become part of American culture was assimilation or Americanization (105). The United States' historical heritage of inclusion and exclusion has been relevant during the nineteenth and twentieth century and is still important today together with the social hierarchies that constitute it, as noted by Alys Eve Weinbaum:

Principles of inclusion and exclusion were hotly debated by political pundits favoring immigration restriction or curtailment and various population-control measures that, over time, profoundly shaped the racial, ethnic and class composition of nations by designating those who could rightfully belong and by circumscribing that belonging by restriction on the reproductive pool and designation of the progeny of "mixed" unions as "illegitimate" or foreign. (165)

Inclusion and exclusion are not only terms that can be applied on the process of American literary canon formation, but on the construction of American society on the whole.

However, what does this mean to the in- or exclusion of Chinese American literature? As the observations by Weinbaum and Yu illustrate, subordination and exclusion have been a very real practice concerning hyphenated Americans throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century. However, the reform of the American canon also led to the reconsideration of literature written by Chinese American authors and, consequently, authors such as Sin Far, Chu, Kingston, and Tan have been included into the canon because of it. Yet, the recent return to the aesthetic (Ickstadt 263) means that inclusion based on political or ideological popular belief preferably succeeds inclusion of Chinese American literature based on the works' literary merits in order to become an American classic.

Multiculturalism vs. Aesthetics

Many changes occurred in the scholarly debate on American literary canon formation during the past century. At the beginning of the twentieth century, a canon of American literature did not even exist the way it did around the 1950s. Before the turn of the century,

British literature was considered to be real literature, whereas the nature of American literature was believed to be merely provincial (Abrams 215-6; Dickstein 150). However, American scholars firmly established an American canon during the first half of the twentieth century (Abrams 216), although this canon mainly consisted of literature written by white Anglo-Saxon Protestant men. As the civil rights movement emerged after the Second World War, the democratization of literary canon formation was also set in motion in the United States. The movement that aimed to revise the list of American literary classics not only sparked the debate in the academe between conservative and liberal scholars in the 1980s and 1990s, but also led to the culture wars in American society (Gustavson 147). The culture wars debated which works belonged to the canon and were allowed to represent American culture and which works were considered unsuitable (Donadio, par. 2-5). In the 1992 summer issue of *American Literary History*, Richard Ruland and Paul Lauter entered the debate on canon formation after the publication of Lauter's *Heath Anthology of American Literature* (1989). The discussion between these two men clearly illustrates the discrepancy between aesthetics and ethnic inclusion. Lauter believes that minority literature and mainstream literature do not differ that much from one another in style and content, but the difference between the two is the historical subordination of people who belong to minority groups (331). Ruland, on the other hand, admits in the article "Art and a Better America" that he strongly believes that the differences do exist (357) and, additionally, he notes in the article "A Reply to Lauter" that "no canon can be enriched without confronting directly such questions of literary value" (335). This illustrates that according to Ruland aesthetics or literary merit should always be taken into account when canon formation is concerned, whereas Lauter also focuses on the social and historical importance of literature. The conservative and progressive stances in the academe seem to be at odds in the debate about inclusion or exclusion.

Although many minorities constitute the American people, whiteness is still the norm and, according to Chae, multiculturalism enforces white supremacy because it labels non-whites as “the others” (2). Chae notes that multiculturalism in America “suggests indirectly that the acceptance of cultural diversity or pluralism is likely to be tolerated as long as it does not threaten the power structure of the society, and that it may remain permissible within the boundary that white dominant (bourgeois) groups set up” (2). White superiority uses American multiculturalism and the focus on ethnic or racial difference to categorize ethnic minority literature. This existence alongside white mainstream literature stresses the otherness of minority literature. According to Perry not only the academe acknowledges this, but white domination is present in U.S. mainstream culture (244). She states that “the interests and values of white people are positioned as unmarked universals by which difference, deficit truth, and justice are determined. The normative character of whiteness is well-illustrated in ethnographic studies that reveal that, when asked, most whites will say that they have no racial identity, culture, or advantages as whites; they are just “normal.” This mindset reproduces white dominance by blaming people of color for failing to meet normative standards (Perry 244). White people are the norm in American society and American culture and this results in their dominance over ethnic or racial minorities.

The debate on social and cultural inclusion and exclusion has been a central point of discussion in twentieth century America and still is today. However, what role does the aesthetic play in this discussion? Not only does the debate on inclusion and exclusion of ethnic minority literature color people’s perception of American literature, the aesthetic structures people’s considerations as well. According to Castronovo, “‘aesthetics’ might enable a questioning of the forms by which we organize domains of politics and arts in the first place” (12). This shows that, although literature’s social aspects may support society’s

historical context, aesthetics may be a useful tool to look at the role of politics and arts in society and culture. A renewed focus on aesthetics may even create a break-through in the on-going debate about the place of ethnic minority literature in the United States, because reviewing a literary work's aesthetic value may provide an equal evaluation of all American literature. Ickstadt believes that aesthetics should be firmly grounded within the academe, and in American studies in particular (264), because he thinks that "the aesthetic does not deny the political, ethical, or historical dimensions of literary texts but engages them and mediates between them" (265). This would mean that the aesthetic nature of a text is as important as the social implications that the work carries. If Chinese American literature would be evaluated based on its aesthetic value, it would have equal opportunities with regard to mainstream American literature. As a result, the works of Chinese American writers would no longer have to adhere to the exotic stereotypes that their mainstream publishers demanded and this might diminish the Orientalist gaze.

A good example of a Chinese American writer who did not write according to the wishes of the white American readership is Sui Sin Far. Her stories were published at the beginning of the twentieth century, but went into oblivion and were rediscovered in after 1975 (Ling and White Parks 3). Her work is an authentic account of her life in America and represents Chinese American as well as white Americans carefully without using Orientalist stereotypes. Sin Far describes her characters as "well-educated" (83), "as up to date as any young American" (45), and "[self-improved]" and "intelligent" (43). Sin Far touches upon the difference between white and non-white in the story "Its Wavering Image" when Mark Carson, an American man, says to Pan "[you] have got to decide what you will be – Chinese or white? You cannot be both" (63). Carson, who represents white Americans, cannot accept Pan's otherness, since her appearance lies in between white and Asian. Sin Far shows the Orientalist gaze here, but she does not use stereotypes to convey

it. In “The Americanizing of Pau Tsu,” Sin Far writes that “[there] are some Chinese, just as there are some Americans, who are opposed to all progress, and who hate with bitter hatred all who would enlighten or be enlightened” (83). Here, she touches upon the Americans’ as well as the ethnic minority’s fear of progress. By drawing this parallel between Chinese immigrants and Americans, she relates the two to one another by supplying them with a universal feeling, instead of adhering to the stereotype and ostracizing white from non-white. It can be said that along with the discovery of Sin Far’s work, a true, unembellished Chinese American voice was unveiled as well.

When looking at Sin Far’s work, the question of aesthetics opposed to ethnic inclusion seems to be irrelevant. Sin Far’s work *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (1912) has a natural charm to it, which makes it just as valuable as any other canonized work of American literature. Hershel Parker notes in “The Price of Diversity: An Ambivalent Minority Report on the American Canon” (1991) that the process of canon formation is of course one of “making value judgments,” but he also says that it is important to read works that have gone into oblivion as well (15-6). Parker is against the inclusion of minority literature based on ethnicity and gender differences instead of a work’s aesthetic value (17) and he thinks scholars should go back to the sound school of literary criticism that existed before the 1950s (27). Parker’s comments illustrate that it is important to find the right balance regarding the canonization of American literature. Although it is important to take notice of literature that has been neglected in the past, yet for a work to be included into the American canon, it has to have literary merit to be labeled an American classic.

Sin Far’s work did possess these qualities and, what is more, she wrote in a true authentic Chinese American voice which Jeffrey Chan notices in *The Big Aiiieeee!* (1989):

Under the name Sui Sin far, “Water Lily” in Cantonese, Edith Eaton produced a series of stories that give us the only contemporary Chinese American portraits and

impressions of Chinese American life in San Francisco, Seattle, New York and Montreal. The Chinese and Chinamen of her stories, like herself, do not fit the Christian missionary and social Darwinist stereotypes. (111)

Sui Sin Far wrote from reality instead of prejudice and the inclusion of her works into the canon of American literature illustrates that it does not matter whether a work has been written by someone with an ethnic background or not, if a work's contents are authentic, original, and possesses literary merit, a writer's background is unimportant. Additionally, it would be unjust to label aesthetics as an elitist tool of inclusion and exclusion, because, alongside a work's social or historical value, it is a relevant signifier of quality and that is what a literary canon is about; quality and the socio-historical importance that it carries.

4. Anthology Entries: From *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* to *The Joy Luck Club*

The American literary canon dictates which works American society regards as literary classics. The academic debate is important for a canon, or canonical works, to remain in place. Teaching tools, such as literary anthologies, may support the canon and the process of canon formation. As a map of a country's literary landscape, the canon has been a hierarchical map based on white supremacy for a long time (Lauter, "Literatures" 9). Just as racial hierarchy influenced American society; it also influenced the literary canon. White supremacy dominated American society for more than two centuries and the debate about who belongs or does not belong in the United States continues today (Yúdice 108). Yet, this debate also influenced American literature and activist groups, scholars, and students aimed to make American literature just as multicultural American society (Lauter, "Implications" 330). The Modern Language Association's 1980s Reconstructing American Literature Project eventually led to Lauter's the publication of the *Heath Anthology of American Literature* (1989), which was a multicultural approach to American literature. Other anthologies, such as the *Norton Anthology of American Literature*, *The Anthology of American Literature* published by Prentice Hall, or McGraw-Hill's *The American Tradition in Literature* also ventured to represent a more inclusive image of American culture (Ruland, "Art" 337). To what extent, however, do anthologies contribute to the views of the landscape? What is more, do anthologies and their editors have the power to include or exclude? With regard to Chinese American literature, a balanced representation in American literary anthologies would mean that it not only includes the stereotypical Chinese American fiction, but that it features more authentic works of Chinese American literature as well. What is more, scholars and editors should judge ethnic minority literature and white majority literature on equal terms.

Reform Movements and Anthologies of American Literature

Most anthologies of American literature underwent major changes during the past three decades to supply a more realistic image of American culture. This reform and the focus on “identity construction” can be seen as a central theme to late nineteenth and twentieth century American society and culture (Ryan 197). Just as the American academe itself has been transformed during the second half of the twentieth century as a result of minorities’ struggles for civil rights, anthologies did not remain the same either. According to Hershel Parker, the focus in the literature departments changed from theory to criticism in the 1960s and he questions how New Criticism scholars without a literary historical background were able to “revise the canon responsibly” despite their lack of historical literary knowledge (27). The people about whom Parker speaks are precisely the scholars that aimed to make American literature more multicultural and more inclusive. The revisionist drive in the American academe and in American society can be said to be embedded in American exceptionalism. Donald E. Pease notes that “for historians and literary scholars [exceptionalism] became the principle by which they decided what events to give representation in the historical record and what literary and cultural works to accept in the canon. Historians ... approached the past U.S. in search of historical confirmations of the nation’s unique mission and destiny” (110). Pease’s words illustrate that, before the reform of the 1980s and 1990s in the academe, scholars believed that white American literature was most suitable to represent American culture at its best. Nonetheless, while the more traditional scholars might be able to go back to the Western tradition of historical, literary, and biographical research, opening up the canon provides a better and more truthful depiction of today’s American society and its literary culture.

On its publication in 1989, the *Heath Anthology of American Literature* was received with mixed feelings. Many people applauded the creation of a multicultural

reading of American literature, but others, such as Alan Bloom, E.D. Hirsch Jr., Richard Ruland, and Parker, had their doubts. Can it be said that the *Heath Anthology* really select its contents merely based on race, gender and class regardless of literary value? In the article “On the Implications of the Heath Anthology: Response to Ruland,” Paul Lauter states that he wants to enrich students’ views on literature and wants to teach them that there is more apart from the dominant white mainstream (330). What is more, by redefining American literature and people’s place in society, Lauter wants to presents these “windows to experience” to his students (331). Lauter’s words show that opening up the canon may lead to the enrichment of students’ cultural experience, as well as to the democratization of American literature and American society. Nevertheless, some scholars criticized Lauter’s project. Parker, the editor of the *Norton Anthology of American Literature* at the time, believed that the *Heath Anthology* focused on minority literature too much and completely lost sight of the aesthetic value of the texts included (19). Parker’s concerns can be seen as legitimate critique, because a writer’s minority background should not function as a wild card to be included into a literary anthology. At the time, Parker himself was re-evaluating the *Norton Anthology*’s contents and his reservations influenced the creation of a different, perhaps somewhat more traditional, anthology. Ruland strongly believes that the *Heath Anthology*’s mission to create a balanced yet inclusive representation of American literature is at least one that “must be disappointing,” because such a difficult task can never be truly achieved (336). His beliefs, and that of Parker, illustrate the reservations that still existed in the academe at the time and are also still relevant today, because finding the balance between ethnic inclusion and aesthetics is harder than it seems. Perhaps the only solution is an equal and transparent judgment of minority and majority American literature combined.

Redefining American Literature: General vs. Specific Anthologies

Liberal and conservative scholars' views differ regarding the debate about canon formation, alike their opinions on the developments of literary anthologies. Whereas the more liberal thinkers approved of the inclusive nature of progressive anthologies, conservative scholars applauded the more traditional works during the 1990s culture wars (Donadio, pars. 4-5). Parker, whose opinion is perhaps in the middle of the debate, believes that an anthology which contains particular sections of ethnic writers is not multicultural but rather a racist act based on white supremacy (19). This means that a section on Chinese American writers or Chinese American poetry, for instance, can be seen as a racist act of othering instead of a portrayal of American equality. Othering might also be a result of the cultural hegemony that existed in America throughout the centuries, since white supremacy had been a part of American culture for over three centuries. According to Pamela Perry, it also dictated who was to be excluded or not (245). As a result, people who were located outside the boundaries of the dominant American society, such as Chinese Americans, were easily being subordinated along with their exotic customs and culture. For Chinese immigrants it meant that they were excluded from America altogether after 1882 or were, at the very least, separated from white American society through the creation of segregated Chinatowns. Up to 1943, Chinese immigrants were not granted the rights to become naturalized citizens. Historically, white Americans saw Chinese Americans as sojourners, Orientalist others, or "strangers" (Takaki 13), who were placed outside society. This early marginalization of Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans in the United States led to the obscure status of Chinese American culture and its literature. Nevertheless, the re-evaluation of American literature has led to the rediscovery of Chinese American literature and poetry. The rediscovery and newly found appreciation of Sui Sin Far's work in the 1990s is a good example of the value of such endeavors.

However, whereas many mainstream publishing houses publish specific anthologies that focus on African American literature, for instance, an anthology of Chinese American literature has not been published yet. Although Jeffrey Chan, Frank Chin, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Wong published *Aiiieeee! An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature* in 1974 and *The Big Aiiieeee! An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature* in 1989, publishing houses such as Norton, McGraw-Hill, or Cengage Learning have not yet published an anthology specifically focused on Chinese American literature. Chan and his fellow editors felt the need to create an authentic representation of Asian American literature from their own cultural background and they created a reference work of Chinese and Japanese American literature. More general reference works that focus on Chinese American literature such as Harold Bloom's *Bloom's Modern Critical Views* generally concentrate on Maxine Hong Kingston's or Amy Tan's works (*Asian-American*). Although they are both canonical writers, there is more authentic Chinese American literature out there, such as the works of Sui Sin Far and Louis Chu. Moreover, teaching materials such as the *Bloom's Modern Critical Views* influence the classroom. When such materials are used in the classroom, it influences students' perception of American literatures. If these literary teaching materials mostly focus on canonical writers, students' frame of reference may become limited as a result.

Anthologies and Chinese American Literature

The views on American literary canon formation and on the nature of American literary anthologies have occupied scholars' thoughts and debates for many decades up to the present. Nevertheless, what does this debate mean to Chinese American literature and its place within the canon and within American culture? Although the efforts of scholars

and editors such as Lauter and Chan, for instance, have helped to bring ethnic minority literature and particularly Chinese American literature more into the limelight, has the position of authentic Chinese American literature really improved? Youngsuk Chae believes that the unequally divided power in society still influences the position and production of literature (33). Although he speaks about ethnic minority literature in general, this is true for Chinese American literature. Chinese Americans have been silent for a long time, perhaps more silent than the African American minority for instance, and this might also be a reason for their literature's place in the shadows of American literature. What is more, Orientalist stereotypes have also influenced the perception of Chinese American literature for a long time. In the "Introduction" to *The Big Aiiieeeee!*, its editors mention the white Americans' prejudice of Chinese American men as "effeminate closet queens like Charlie Chan" or "homosexual menaces like Fu Manchu" (Chan et al. xiii). As a result, the Orientalist gaze, or exotic Chinese stereotype, dictated the way in which the dominant white majority readership perceived Chinese Americans and Chinese American literature. This confirmation of the bias concerning Chinese Americans also influences the place of Chinese American writers and their works. Nevertheless, according to Chae, Chinese American authors consent into giving the mainstream audience what it wants and, as a consequence, some authors gladly supply their readers with reproductions of Chinese American stereotypes (37). These actions might lead to a confirmation of what the mainstream audience already believes about Chinese Americans, which makes it harder to return to a more authentic representation of Chinese American traditions. Perhaps, as Chae proposes, "the representativeness of these 'popular' Asian American multicultural writings needs to be re-examined" if they have only been written to appeal to the mainstream American audience's demands (33). If this is true, these instances of Chinese American writing cannot be seen as a true Chinese American literature, but they merely

supply the dominant majority with the stereotypical image they suppose to encounter. If these stereotypical works are the only works of literature or cultural artifacts that the mainstream white American audience consumes it will confirm existing popular Orientalist stereotypes. Therefore, a balanced evaluation of American literature that is based on aesthetics or on a text's literary merit as much as it is on its social context regarding the inclusion of minority literature would make the American literary landscape truly equal. This would mean that a writer's background does not matter at all, because what would truly matter for a text to be included in an anthology is whether it is well-written and original.

5. Teaching American Literature: Deconstruction, Aesthetics, and the Power of the Classroom

Anthologies of American literature can be seen as tools that support, distribute, or even expand the U.S. literary canon. What is more, many undergraduate and graduate courses on American literature make extensive use of anthologies, because they are very useful as primary source surveys of the nation's literary culture. The Modern Language Association's and the Feminine Press's efforts to reform and democratize the canon have been very fruitful and these efforts have influenced American universities' literary curricula as well. According to Paul Lauter, after the 1960s, many people in society and in the academe asked themselves how the canon had become the way it was and how racism and sexism had influenced the literary canon (*Canons* 98). Moreover, this set of questions has also guided the reform of the canon and of college and university syllabi. Teaching influences the nation's and the people's views on literature, since teachers have the power to select when they create their reading lists. These syllabi, in turn, dictate a student's knowledge, since it influences which works a student will read and which ones will be ignored. Therefore, teaching greatly influences America's literary landscape and its development in the future. This means that teachers and universities should make balanced decisions, because teaching American literature without losing sight of literature's aesthetic value and putting this literature into context simultaneously might safeguard America's democratic canon while doing justice to artistic and literary merit simultaneously.

Teachers' Social Power

Teachers have the power to expand, democratize, include, and exclude. Moreover, they also have the power to safeguard the aesthetic value of texts. Therefore, teachers'

decisions may well influence students' outlook on society. In his book *Canons and Contexts* (1990), Lauter touches upon the social and political value of teaching. He mentions that university curricula can be seen as "an elaborate set of signals directing students into the various tracks they will likely follow throughout their lives" (Lauter 256). Schools, therefore, can be seen as distributors of American culture and suppliers of the codes to understand it. This underlines the importance of the included works' contents, because works included in the curricula should touch upon a wide range of cultural artifacts and representations to reflect society's diverse nature. Lauter compares the creation of a curriculum or a body of knowledge for students with the building of a house, since creating a building is also about making choices and choosing direction or purpose. Lauter believes that "we harvest from the past the materials we believe important to constructing the building in which the future will be shaped" (257). This building will dictate students' knowledge and their world view. Yet, if teaching is this powerful, with which kind of outlook should students be sent into the world? With regard to American culture and literature, a diverse display of American cultures is very important, but students should be taught literariness as well. Literary or English students should preferably have an extensive mastery of American literary classics and their aesthetic value combined with the social or historical contexts of those works. These works should not be taught in isolation, but they should be anchored in America's past and, in that way, remain important in the nation's future.

Teaching Multiculturalism and Aesthetics

Yet, it is important to find a balance between American texts' literary merits and the social importance that they may carry. According to Lauter, more conservative thinkers sometimes argue that the literary reform movement deconstructed American literature and

aesthetics which would result in the “ruination of academic freedom, our democratic way of life, and even ... cultural diversity” (*Canons* 272). In the 1950s, literature departments in the American academe were solid establishments and, additionally, the reform movement that started in the 1960s made many members of the more conservative establishment in English departments nervous. However, as a result of the mainly WASP American literary canon, progressive scholars seeking to reform the American canon lobbied even more zealously and their efforts helped to reform and install new versions of curricula in American universities (Lauter, *Canons* 260). The deconstruction of American literature entails the shift in focus from Western or American classics to multicultural American literature. Establishing new programs and curricula, such as Asian American Studies programs and courses on Asian American literature, helped increase curricular diversity in universities and helped to supply students with a more representative image of American culture. What is more, not only the curricula had been changed after the 1960s, the terms to signify certain groups in society changed as well. Many Chinese and Japanese Americans, for instance, lobbied for the abolishment of the term “Oriental” to denote Asian immigrants or Americans of Asian descent (Wei Tchen 22), because of its racist nature. As a result, the less racist term “Asian” has been used from the 1960s onwards to denote people from Asian descent and the programs of study and courses that focus on their cultural heritage. This shows that not only the focus of study has changed immensely, but that the terms of discussion also became more politically correct.

Nevertheless, not everyone has welcomed this change of the WASP American literary canon to the more diverse, heterogeneous, and politically correct one. More conservative groups in the academe feared that the change to a more multicultural canon, which resulted in more multicultural syllabi, also jeopardized the aesthetic (Donadio, pars. 2-3; Elliot et al. 7-9). Consequently, this may have affected students’ perception of the

aesthetic as well. Hershel Parker states that the ignorance of literary merit not only risks placing “good literature in increasing danger of being ignored or misappropriated by the politically correct anthologists” but it also leads to “history itself [being] routinely violated” (23). Opening up the American canon has resulted in the badly needed reform of the list of white American male authors. However, the recurring focus on minority literature should not result in the loss of these American classics, nor should it lead to the neglect of American novels’ literary value.

Nevertheless, more conservative scholars truly regret the change of the canon of American literature and they even lobbied for one shared Western culture that consisted of great works of literature (Leitch 360). What is more, the disagreement of conservative associations such as the National Association of Scholars and the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics and the liberal Modern Language Association led to the culture wars of the 1990s (Leitch 360). The conservatives’ and liberals’ dispute was based on questions of ethnic inclusion, or the creation of a multicultural American literature, and aesthetic value. Whereas the conservatives believed that works could only be great if they possessed high levels of literary merit, liberals envisioned a realistic representation of America’s multicultural society. As far as canon formation is concerned, this ties in with Lauter’s beliefs, since “the variety of American lives ... allows us to teach the lesson of opening cultural canons so that the idea of culture is no longer restricted to the core of white men who claim to represent us, one and all. All American minorities form America’s majority as well” (*Canons* 270). As Lauter’s words illustrate, the majority of American society is indeed made up of many different minority cultures and equal representation of these groups is important. However, this should not jeopardize the literary and artistic value of the entries that the American literary canon contains. Whether these works have been

written by majority or minority writers should not affect the literary greatness of a canonical entry.

Ivy League Minority Literature

The emancipation of the American academe after the 1960s influenced many American universities and colleges and, consequently, the Ivy League institutions. It is relevant to look at the position of Asian American Studies and Asian American literature in these Ivy League Universities, because they represent America's most prestigious educational and scholarly institutions. Brown University's curriculum contains several courses on Asian American literature, which includes introductory literature courses as well as specific ones such as "'Model Minority' Writers: Cold War Fictions of Race and Ethnicity," "Asian American Travel Narratives," "'Extravagant' Texts: Advanced Studies in Asian American Literatures," and "American Orientalism and Asian American Literary Studies" (*English*). This illustrates that students can choose from different subjects regarding Asian American literature at Brown. Brown offers its students the chance to gain in-depth knowledge about specific aspects of Asian American literature, which might reduce prejudice and bias concerning popular Asian American literature.

Brown is not the only Ivy League university that offers such courses, yet the other Ivy League institutions offer more courses on African American literature than on Asian American literature. Columbia University offers no courses on Asian American Literature (*Graduate and Undergraduate*) and neither does Yale (*Course*). Cornell University offers an introductory course on Asian American literature (*Graduate and Undergraduate*), alike Harvard (*Department*), Princeton (*Graduate and Undergraduate*), and the University of Pennsylvania (*Graduate and Undergraduate*). Dartmouth University's English Department offers an introductory course on Asian American Literature as well as a course on

contemporary Asian American literature and culture (*Course*). Although not all of the Ivy League Universities offer Asian American literary courses, the majority of them teach at least introductory courses or a few specialized courses. Today, even the most elitist educational institutions of the United States offer Asian American literature courses as part of their curriculum, which denotes multiculturalism influenced even the top level of the American academe since the 1980s. This can be seen as a positive development, since the research and teaching of these institutions carry much weight in the United States and in the world.

Teaching Oriental Stereotypes

What does the change in curricula and syllabi, however, mean to Chinese American literature? The social change that originated in the 1960s not only supported the lobby of Chinese American and Japanese Americans to create a switch of terms in society from the label “Oriental” to the more neutral term “Asian,” but this change of society also helped to show in which “ways reality is constructed and policies are formulated” (Wei Tchen 25). In other words, society and its culture can be said to be social constructions that function to organize society. In addition, when a marginalized minority group starts to question their place in society and overturns it, then socially constructed nature of racial hierarchy becomes clear. This holds true for Chinese Americans in the United States as well. They have been socially as well as historically marginalized, which influenced their position in today’s American society and American culture as well. Many Orientalist and exotic stereotypes that circulate in popular culture influence the way the mainstream American audience perceives Chinese Americans. In *The Joy Luck Club*, for instance, Amy Tan begins her novel with an inauthentic Chinese story. In the story, the mother character says, “[in] America I will have a daughter just like me. But there, nobody will say her worth is

measured by the loudness of her husband's belch" (17). Tan invokes the image that the husband's status defines how others value his wife. According to David Leiwei Li, Tan focuses on Asian men as "oppressors of women ... to epitomize the Eastern origin of patriarchy ... leaving the white American patriarch unscratched and unscathed" (114). According to Krista Comer, this is reinforced by the white western audience's "triumph of civilized white masculinity over savagery" or the "heathen Chinese" (240). Consequently, social constructions, as transmitted through mainstream cultural representations, reinforce the socially-constructed marginalized position that the Chinese American minority holds in American society. Sui Sin Far, on the other hand, does not adhere to what Li called the "unambiguous gender references" to Asian males as the "oppressors of women" (114). On the contrary, in "The Story of a White Woman Who Married a Chinese" Sin Far places the Chinese husband in a more positive light than the American one:

"Answer me, girl," said he.

And in spite of my fear, I shook off his hand and answered him: "No husband of mine are you, either legally or morally. And I have no feeling whatever for you, other than contempt."

"Ah! So you have sunk!" – his expression was evil – "The oily little Chink has won you!"

I was no longer afraid of him.

"Won me!" I cried, unheeding who heard me. "Yes, honorably and like a man. And what are you that dare sneer at one like him. For all your six feet of grossness, your small soul cannot measure up to his great one." (76-7)

The discussion between a white American man and woman, former husband and wife, carefully illustrates the difference between the Orientalist gaze and a more balanced perception the Chinese. The white man calls the Chinese immigrant an "oily little Chink" (Sin Far 76), which confirms the early twentieth century beliefs of Chinese as "strangers" (Takaki 13) or heathen Chinese. The woman's opinion of the Chinese man as a sincere human being instead of a Chinese male is balanced and unprejudiced. She does not give in to the Orientalist stereotype and this enables Sin Far to show neutrality exists along side prejudice in American society, which is an important lesson to be taught.

All in all, education plays a very important role in a nation's society. Not only does it influence students' knowledge about their own society, culture, and about the world, it also teaches them and guides them to become informed citizens. The natural place in society that someone is endowed with at birth influences one's perception of society, yet this position which seems so natural is actually constructed. This socially constructed marginalization has influenced the lives of many people who belong to minority groups in the United States. Yet, the reform movements of the second half of the twentieth century enabled a bloom of minority cultures, which led to an increase in appreciation for Chinese American literature as well. The reform of American literature also influenced the American academe and American education, which, in turn, has led to a surge of interest in Chinese American literature in society. As a result, Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan were among the first Asian Americans to become canonical authors. Nonetheless, from within the Chinese American community, sounds of dismal riveted concerning the representation of Orientalist stereotypes in the latter authors' works. Yet, many Asian American literature syllabi in American universities contained these two authors' novels. This not only confirms students' exotic Chinese American stereotype, but it also reinforces their Orientalist gaze, which is the opposite result of the lobby for more equal representation. Yet, if teachers are to include authentic Chinese American works, alongside the highly appreciated but more stereotypical works, this would create a more realistic picture of American society for students. What is more, when education is seen as a political tool to educate a new generation of citizens, well-read students who have enjoyed many high-quality representations of America's many cultures, may become a new generation of citizens who are able to take American society and the racial hierarchies that still exist to a higher level.

5. The Future of American Literature: Aesthetics and Shared Cultural Memories

The canon of American literature and its influence on anthologies and education is important for the teaching of Chinese American literature and its position in American literature. However, it is also important for the place of Chinese American literature in American culture and Chinese Americans' position in American society, since a shared cultural memory may unite American society and create an American community. Early Chinese American history almost starts with immigration restrictions in 1882. Soon after the arrival of the first Chinese immigrants, the United States' borders started to close rapidly and this influenced the Chinese immigrant community, since they were seen as racialized others. They were the first immigrant group which was excluded solely based on racial grounds. This resulted in the conscious or unconscious categorization of people from Chinese descent, which supported a socially constructed American culture that is based on racial hierarchy and which greatly influenced the history of Chinese Americans. After 1882, Chinese Americans' narrative became a story that dealt with segregation, exclusion, and Orientalist attitudes of white American citizens. As a result, this historical narrative influenced Chinese American literature and, therefore, attention for Chinese American literature may anchor the Chinese American experience into the grand narrative of American culture.

Chinese Americans were not allowed to become part of the American family because of the 1790s Naturalization Act and the 1882 Exclusion Laws. Only free white immigrants were eligible for naturalization and could, potentially, become American citizens. These American politics of exclusion and immigration restriction also influenced American culture. Minority groups such as Chinese Americans have been marginalized throughout their presence in the United States and this has long been the case for their literature as well. This historical and cultural marginalization influences the present,

because a shared cultural memory may contribute to a more equal American society. Therefore, a shared cultural memory for all Americans, regardless of race or ethnicity, is very important and it is important for the canon and anthologies to be as inclusive as possible, yet entries should be equally judged on literary merit and aesthetics as well. A re-reading of American literature without regard to the hyphenated identities in America, such as Chinese Americans, may create more acceptance and appreciation of different forms of American literature and may create a neutral balance in American culture.

White Cultural Domination

Before the civil rights era, the United States was a community constructed by the dominant voice of white Americans. American history focused on white American events for a long time, just as the canon of American literature consisted of works by WASP American writers up to the 1950s. The United States is often represented as an immigrant nation and a country of opportunity for all. For Chinese immigrants, however, the dream of being successful in America often ended in deception. Moreover, this feeling of disillusionment not only heavily affected Chinese immigrants' lives, but the legal omission of Chinese immigrants from American society also impaired the Chinese American heritage and mainstream perceptions of it.

This violent suppression of Chinese immigrants, through several Exclusion Laws as well as the Naturalization Act of 1790, eventually led to the marginalization of Chinese immigrants and their American-born descendants. During the early decades of their arrival, Orientalist attitudes and fear of the Yellow Peril that existed in mainstream white American society resulted in the segregation of Chinese immigrants from mainstream society. Many Chinese men had no choice but to reside in concentrated and crowded living quarters in American Chinatowns. However, after the Second World War, the Exclusion

Act for Chinese Americans was repelled, and Chinese immigrants could become naturalized citizens from the first half of the 1950s onwards. What is more, the post-WWII years also saw the emergence of the civil rights movement, which eventually led to the literary reform movements in the 1980s and 1990s. Paul Lauter's leading role in the movement resulted in revisions of the traditional American literary anthology and into the democratization of the literary canon. The revision of the canon after the Second World War was badly needed, because many different minority groups were omitted from American literature. American culture and literature have been dominated by the white mainstream majority for a long time and the time for change came after the 1960s. As a result, the democratization of American literature and its canon have resulted in a more inclusive American literature.

Along with the democratization of the canon came the notion that American literature did not only exist of white or black voices, but that many more ethnic minorities existed in between that binary opposition. The diverse nature of American minority and majority literature is what makes American literature compelling. Yet, the inclusion of ethnic minority literature into the mainstream white canon, on the other hand, affected ethnic minority literary production. For Chinese American culture and literature it meant that they gained more recognition in popular culture from the 1990s onwards, but it also meant that Chinese American authors became influenced by the mainstream white readership. After the lobby for a more inclusive and multicultural representation of American literature, the white mainstream readership seemed to appreciate Chinese American literature more if Chinese American authors adhered to the recurring stereotype and refrained from expressing political beliefs. The problem of this stereotypical Chinese American literature production and its appreciation in mainstream American culture might be problematic, because it might reinforce the mainstream audience's popular Orientalist

beliefs while they are incorrect and biased. If the democratization of the canon of American literature has led to a greater appreciation of Chinese American literature, but only of the more stereotypical works such as the ones by Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan, then the digestion of this inauthentic Chinese American literature may lead to a misunderstanding of Chinese American culture. While cultural absorption through the reading of literature influences cultural memories, minority literature should at least be taught and included after equal and unbiased consideration. Texts should not be included based on mainstream popularity, but based on literary and aesthetic value and based on the implications that a text may have on American culture and its future.

Chinese American Literature in American Culture

The mainstream influences the demand for certain kinds of cultural production and, in order to be read, authors often give in to such demands and Chinese American authors have not been an exception to this rule. Nonetheless, the influence of the academe on cultural production, mainstream preferences, and on cultural memory and its preservation is very powerful. For Chinese American literature and its cultural heritage this means that when a work is being taught in an academic institution, it is likely to keep circulating in America's cultural arena. As a result, this influences which minority groups are included in American culture and which minorities are partly or their entirety rejected. At the same time, this illustrates the power that lies in the American literary canon and in the institutions that create it. This implicates that the canon should not only be seen as a means to convey a country's culture, but that it is an extremely powerful social tool as well. Perhaps it can even be said to be a force that shapes society and the way that people with different backgrounds perceive one another. The power of these cultural institutions should therefore be handled with care.

If the literary canon has the ability to shape people's thoughts and beliefs concerning inclusion and exclusion, the social and historical implications of a text should be just as important as the aesthetic value of a particular work. If minority text were to be included based on content and socio-historical importance only, a mainstream American readership might easily surpass the notion that ethnic minority texts possess aesthetic merits as well. For Chinese American literature this means that the white readership, since it demands stereotypical fiction, thinks that Orientalist Chinese American literature is all there is to Chinese American cultural reproduction. Therefore, the American academe should not focus on including as much minority literature as possible, but they should carefully examine each entry based on literary criteria before labeling it a canonical American text.

The Legacy of Multiculturalization and the Future of American Literature

Cultural inclusion and exclusion is a social process. Moreover, it can even be said that the choice of who belongs or not is a social construction that comes from within the dominant majority. For American society it means that mainstream white American society dictates which minority and which minority culture is to be marginalized and which minority is to be, partially, accepted. However, if white American society is a social construction, the Chinese American exclusion and segregation was socially constructed through the white Americans' othering as well. This shows in the historical othering of Chinese as sojourners who were best to be excluded from America entirely. As a result, this kind of spectatorship and the social and cultural bias that comes along with it, not only controls a minority group's place in American culture, but American society determines a group's social position as well.

The nature of American culture and society, as it is based on social and racial hierarchy, makes American notions of equality and liberty seem socially constructed as well. Social classes dictate the notion of freedom and opportunity for particular minority groups, because of the social hierarchies that exist in American society. Throughout history, the United States has spread principles of freedom and equality around the world. Yet, within America's own borders these set of principles decided which ethnic culture was worthy enough of being Americanized and, consequently, included as a part of American culture.

However, did the efforts of the literary reform movement reach the envisioned results of making American literature and culture more multicultural and increasing its diverse nature without losing sight of literariness? Has the canon been reformed with regard to both literariness and multiculturalism? Finding the balance between the two is a very difficult task, which requires the courage to look at included and excluded texts alike and re-value them based on equal terms. This might mean that some minority text will not make it after all, but other texts written by dominant majority writers will be dropped as well. The other way round, texts that have formerly been excluded may well become a part of America's literary culture. If the American people and their culture are able to overcome the socially constructed nature of their culture they may be able to create a transparent and equal literary culture that is free of institutionalized bias instead. To end with a line from Sui Sin Far's *Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Other Stories* (1912) that concerns American as well as Chinese American people's ignorance and prejudice concerning race and gender differences in American society, one of her characters says, "Lord, what a fool we mortals be!" (92). When encountering other people's culture and literature, people often judge with their own frame of reference in mind, without keeping an open mind. Today, America is made up of so many different minority groups, even up to the point that the white majority

may become a minority group in itself based on its sheer numbers. The American community will evolve when people are tolerant and accept social as well as cultural differences. For American society to lose its occupation with race and its focus on racial hierarchies would mean a true evolution of American's diverse nation and culture.

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