中文摘要

美国华裔文学历经长达100多年的历史，真切反映华人漂洋过海来到美国追寻美国梦的艰辛奋斗，乃至一代又一代的华裔对其身份的诉求。本论文从文化分析的角度，解读二十世纪六十年代以来的美国华裔文学中美国华裔的身份诉求。主要分析雷庭招的《吃碗茶》、汤亭亭的《女勇士》、《中国佬》和《孙行者》三部作品以及伍慧明的《骨》，探讨美国华裔所经历的东西方文化之间和中华文化内部的冲突与碰撞，追寻新的身份认同。

美国华裔文学的主题内容与华裔的思想感受和生存境遇息息相关。自我身份的困惑、双重文化的冲击促使华裔积极寻求一种有别于过去的新的文化身份，实现中美文化的交融，从而找到在美国生存的平衡支点。汤亭亭的三部作品，《女斗士》、《中国佬》及《孙行者》反映出华裔美国人身处于东西文化交会下所遭受的困境。虽然如此，书中主角仍然企图努力在这种双重文化背景下，找到自己在美国社会中的定位。更为重要的是，身份的诉求不仅仅限于华裔个人身份的诉求。华裔群体，作为美国的一支不可忽视的少数族裔，在东西方两种文化的碰撞中生存，积极面对美国主流文化，固守优秀的中华传统，努力创建真实可靠的华美感性，获取认同的文化身份。

本论文由五个部分组成。

首先是引言部分，简单介绍美国华裔文学中对身份的研究，以及论文所涉及的课题的价值，并提出论点。其次，论文的主体分为三章。论文的第一章结合史实引出对美国华裔文学中身份问题的探讨。第二章通过对《吃碗茶》、《女勇士》、《中国佬》、《孙行者》以及《骨》的文本分析，剖析华裔的身份危机。论文的第三章探寻身份诉求的新趋向，美国华裔积极寻求在双重文化的境况下身份定位的一种平衡，使两种文化交融。最后是论文的结论，综合前文所论证的内容，重申论点。

关键词： 身份认同；身份危机；身份诉求；平衡

Abstract

Chinese American literature has undergone a more-than-100-hundred-year -long history, providing a true-to-life revelation of Chinese Americans' struggles in America and their efforts to seek a proper identity. This thesis centers on the identities of Chinese Americans with a cultural analysis of five well-selected influential Chinese American works since the 1960s. They are Louis Chu's *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (1961), Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976), *China Men* (1980), *Tripmaster Monkey* (1989) and Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone*(1993). By discussing the five literary texts, this thesis attempts to explore the identity conflicts of Chinese Americans who struggle and survive in the Sino-US cultures and between the worlds.

The theme of Chinese American literary works reflects Chinese Americans' concerns. They desire to search for a new identity so that they can establish a harmonious relationship between American culture and Chinese heritage. They come along with a hope that they can be recognized as someone different from what they used to be. Chinese Americans have to find a balance in order to locate themselves. Maxine Hong Kingston's three volumes, *The Woman Warrior*, *China Men* and *Tripmaster Monkey*, disclose the struggles of Chinese Americans and their inner conflict when they confront Chinese and American cultures. Kingston believes that by retelling Father and Mother's stories, Chinese Americans build their new cultural identity.

Most significantly, what they desire is not limited to an individual identity seeking. And this request has to do with a bicultural identity. So they make efforts to creat a distinctively Chinese American sensibility, an authentical Chinese American cultural identity.

The thesis consists of five sections.

The Introduction comes first. Identity is an important issue when making researches on Chinese American literature. This thesis chooses to study identity seeking and belonging. The theme of the thesis is given in this section.

Next, three chapters follow. Chapter one deals with the source of identity. Chapter two explores the crisis of identity by analyzing *Eat a Bowl of Tea*, *The Woman Warrior*, *China Men*, *Tripmaster Monkey* and *Bone*. Chapter three is devoted to the new tendency of identity, Chinese Americans trying to find a balance in the bicultural context. Last, the Conclusion restresses the theme of the thesis.

Key Words: identity; identity crisis; identity seeking; balance

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学位论文作者签名：涂志琴　　导师签名：廖洪中

签字日期：2006 年 5 月 20 日　　签字日期：2006 年 5 月 21 日

学位论文作者毕业后去向：

工作单位：　　电话：

通讯地址：　　邮编：

Introduction

The study of Chinese American literature is drawing more and more attention in China and it also invites a significant and growing concern in American literature.

The famous "gold rush" in the mid-nineteenth century opened up Chinese migration in the United States, which leads to the shift of their identity. The US appealed to the early Chinese as a promised land. They traveled to America in the 1850s in order to earn a living and make a fortune when gold was discovered in California. And their arrival on the strange land was accompanied by "American Dream". However, reality went against their belief. What they confronted was severe racial discrimination due to their Chinese origin, instead of making the desirable fortune they anticipated. The Chinese immigrants were nothing but cheap laborers. They were despised and suppressed. In the 1870s and 1880s anti-Chinese sentiments rose, harsh and sharp. And in 1882 the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed, excluding the Chinese from entering the US on the basis of race. The first Chinese immigrants felt bewildered with their social situation in the US, especially their embarrassed cultural identity. The dilemma turned out to be confusion with the birth of their children in America. These American-born Chinese were puzzled at their identity belonging. Were they Chinese, American, or Chinese American? They were eager to pursue a new identity that can match their racial minority group.

It is true that Chinese American identity was of great importance at the time when Chinese Americans were struggling to have their voices heard. In the late 19th century and early 20th century Edith Maud Eaton (1867-1914), born to a Chinese mother and an English father, wrote under the pseudonym of Sui Sin Far. Eaton chose a Chinese American identity to write about her multi-racial background, to portrait Chinese in America at a time when America

was in its heyday of anti-Chinese legislation. [1]

The passage of the Immigration Act of 1924 further limited more Chinese immigrant population. America transformed the Chinese from a pariah race threatening the shores of America in the 19th century to a comical and stereotypical figure in the pulp fiction of the 1920s and 1930s. Characters such as Charlie Chan and Fu Manchu were created. The Chinese were aware of their disadvantaged position in the United States. Any writing about their lives and thoughts would no doubt cause great trouble. Chinese immigrants faced a wave of violence, terror and discrimination. Keeping silence became a safe and clever way of avoiding danger for the Chinese immigrants. The power of Chinese American literature was extremely weak. Things changed due to the Second World War, for the war brought China and America into allies, ending the 61-year Chinese Exclusion Act.

Many early Chinese American works, especially the autobiographies, attempts to celebrate the ability of Chinese to assimilate into American culture and be good Americans. Pardee Lowe's autobiography, *Father and Glorious Descendant* (1943), includes a note on the cover stating that Lowe joined the army immediately after turning in the manuscript of his book, thus proving himself to be a "loyal minority." In Jade Snow Wong's autobiography, *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1950), Wong tells the story of her struggles to survive in two separate worlds. Her strict father represented the traditional Chinese society. More recent Chinese-American autobiographies have initiated a much more complex dialogue between the so-called "traditional" China and "modern" America. Maxine Hong Kingston's memoir about her female Chinese ancestors, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* weaves a story of her family's life in Stockton, California, where she was born in 1940, with the folk stories of China, particularly the story of Fa Mulan, a woman warrior.

It is clear that Pardee Lowe, Jade Snow Wong and Maxine Hong Kingston, representative authors of Chinese American literature, recognize the

significance of the issue of identity. Actually, in Chinese American literature, identity has always been an important issue. [2]

A comprehensive survey on celebrated contemporary Chinese American writers discloses that many researchers put much interest in the paradoxical identity and the representation of subjectivity of Chinese American in the awkward position. In the process of their migration, aphasia, unhousedness, dislocation, and returning "home", the identity and nationality of Chinese American becomes unstable and keeps shifting. This is why identity politics considered so intriguing in the postmodern contest.

It is discovered, when exploring Chinese American literature, the theoretical framework of identity analysis often resorts to the postcolonial discourse. Post-colonialism marks the Western negation of non-Western culture and value, emphasizing the cultural relationship between the First and the Third World, or between the colonized and the colonizer, and the transformation of different cultures as well. By Edward Said, Orientalization is introduced, stressing that the European-Atlantic identity is superior to all the non-European peoples and cultures. [3] The Oriental is the person represented by such a thinking. The man is depicted as feminine, weak, yet strangely dangerous. Thus, a stereotype comes into being that crosses countless cultural and national boundaries. Homi Bhabha in his *The Location of Culture* analyzes the postcolonial culture that undergoes a process of changes, from negation to negotiation, and then to hybridity.[4] Identity is based on difference. In this case, cultural negotiation is inevitable. The colonial discourse turns the difference into other because the immigration of the colonized to the West makes hybridity of the West. As a result, cultural negotiation makes it possible for the marginalized to identify with the dominant discourse through identification.

Similarly, the focus of this thesis is on identity seeking. However, the discussion in this thesis is based upon cultural analysis on five well-selected Chinese American literary texts instead of the prevalent approach, postcolonial

discourse.

The Chinese American literary works since 1960 have drawn the special attention of more and more critics with their Chinese Americans' marginalized status as well as their struggles in American mainstream society. This thesis limits its discussion to Louis Chu's *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (1961) [5], Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976), *China Men* (1980), *Tripmaster Monkey* (1989) [6] and Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone*[7] and explores identity conflicts of Chinese Americans who struggle and survive in the double cultures and between the worlds.

Naturally, this survey of identity seeking and belonging in Chinese American literature cannot be exhaustive, and the works chosen delineate but a very small fraction of the material available. Some other concessions have to be made, including limiting the focus to prose narratives, even though many excellent poetry and dramatic works written by Chinese Americans have been published. Some interesting topics as Chinese American art and cinema are also left out. Furthermore, literature written before the late 1950s will not be discussed in detail, even though the beginning of Chinese American literature can be traced as early as the mid-nineteenth century. In these works, however, the United States is often entirely absent. They are written by authors who consider themselves exclusively Chinese/Asian. Some of them do not reveal their American experiences at all and solely write about their home country. One of the few pre-1950s writers who explicitly deals with the subject of identity is Sui Sin Far (Edith Eaton). She, therefore, needs to be mentioned here at least briefly. Sui Sin Far (1867-1914) was half-Chinese and half-English and lived in the United States and Canada. She looked white but had a strong identification with people of Chinese origin. Being partly white and partly Chinese, she encountered many difficulties in her life. She nevertheless appreciated both of her hybrid backgrounds and, in spite of all the problems, never tried to deny either. She was often forced to reflect on her identity, and hence she often included the question of identity in her writings. Sui Sin Far

defended the Chinese in America against the stereotype of being dirty, corrupt and incapable of assimilation.

Moreover, since identity, fiction, and history are often closely intertwined in Asian American literature and "yellow history is still the great yellow mystery,"[8] Historical information will be added whenever appropriate.

Reviewing the Chinese immigrants and their descendants' experiences in American history, Chinese American literature provides a true-to-life revelation of their struggles in America and their efforts to seek a proper identity. Nowadays, literature and other media are in a powerful position to work against ignorance, prejudices, and stereotypes and to play an important role in the process of helping to create or redefine identities in a positive direction. Generally speaking, the theme of Chinese American literary works reflects Chinese Americans' concern. They desire to search for a new identity so that they can establish a harmonious relationship between American culture and Chinese heritage. They come along with a hope that they can be recognized as someone different from what they used to be. Chinese Americans have to find a balance in order to locate themselves. Most significantly, what they desire for is not limited to an individual identity seeking. Instead, they make efforts to create a distinctively Chinese American sensibility, an authentical Chinese American cultural identity.

Notes

[1] Naseem Hines and Shawn Wong. Asian and Asian-American Tradition Language Arts. PPS Geocultural Baseline Essay Series, 2001 Revised.

[2] Elaine H. Kim. Defining Asian American Realities Through Literature. *Cultural Critique*, No. 6, The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse (Spring, 1987) , pp. 87-111

[3] Said, Edward W. *Orientalism.* New York: Penguin Press, 1994.

[4] Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture.* London: Routledge, 1994.

[5] Louis Chu, *Eat a Bowl of Tea..* Seattle: U of Washington P, 1979.

[6] Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc, 1977.
Maxine Hong Kingston, *China Men* . New York: Vintage, 1989.
Maxine Hong Kingston, *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book.* New York: Vintage, 1990.

[7] Ng, Fae Myenne. *Bone.* New York: Harper Perennial, 1994.

[8] Jeffery Paul Chan, Frank Chin, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Wong, preface to the Mentor Edition, *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian American Writers*, ed. Chan et al. New York: Mentor, 1991) xxiv-xxv.

Chapter One Source of Identity

Since the 1950s, the topic of identity has become popular in the West. As far as Chinese American literature concerned, cultural identities have gained considerable attention. Cultural identities often refer to feelings of belonging and are frequently plural in contemporary society, in particular as a result of geographical and social mobility. Homi K. Bhabha's asserts that by articulating differences in the "Third Space" or the cultural "in-between," the colonized Other produces its identity. The literary analysis of identity is often done by the transposition of a character into a strange setting. Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1989) is, for instance, particularly well suited as a basis for the study of cultural identities. She strives to identify the differences in her cultural "in-between" and disclose a "Third Space" between her Americanness and Chineseness, dealing with Chinese Americans' experience in different generations as a way of exposing cultural colonization and portraying the group's identity.

1. Trapped in Poverty and Struggling for Survival

When the first Chinese immigrants resided in the continental United States in the 1850s, they were actually aliens in the foreign land. They provided a good supply of powerful labor forces for the cultivation and development of the US. They worked as miners day and night, and then built the transcontinental railroad. No matter what efforts they made, American dream seemed beyond their reach. The moment the transcontinental railroad was completed, thousands of Chinese laborers were driven to cities where they had to take inferior occupations, working in laundries and restaurants. With the increase of the atmosphere of anti-Chinese movement, they were rejected by the American society and white workers even threw competitive threat upon them. Since the Gold Rush, the Chinese immigrants experienced a hard time, full of

agony and grief. The nation-wide racism against Chinese ethnic group eventually separated them from the mainstream society and trapped them in the Chinatown. Labeled with Chinese origin and completely maintaining traditional customs and dress, these immigrants and their descendants on the foreign land managed to survive. They constantly struggled to define a place for themselves within the US. Pleading for tolerance and protesting discrimination the voices of early Chinese immigrants were bitter, angry, and appealing. Unassimilated, they refused to discard their heritage, on the one hand. On the other hand, they were not given a chance to become equal partners by the host society. When they decided to settle in America, they were clear that there was a long, long way for them to seek a new identity for the sake of survival.

2. Between the Two Worlds

Amy Ling remarks on the "between-world" phenomenon of residents of Chinese ancestry in America: "Whether recent immigrants or America-born, Chinese in the United States find themselves caught between two worlds. Their facial features proclaim one fact--- their Asian ethnicity but by education, choice, or birth they are American" [1]

Chinese American literature mirrors what the Chinese experience in America, including their struggle and puzzle, pains and pressures, and so on. One man's identity changes when he migrates. Cultural displacement or migration helps establish cultural identity which continues to undergo transformation. Chinese Americans, located in hostile country, have become aware of searching for a favorable identity. Identity of Chinese immigrants, especially the second-, the third-, the fourth-, and the fifth-generation Chinese Americans has become complex.

Second generation Chinese Americans, growing up in Chinatown between the 1920s and 1940s, experienced this dilemma of being caught between two worlds. They became more exposed to a Western lifestyle and ideas of individuality through public school, church and popular culture. They

experienced cultural conflicts and identity dilemmas when they attempted to bring together the different value system of their home culture with that of the mainstream American society. Even though they intended to merge into the American society, assimilating into mainstream culture, they still could not get rid of the fact that they had a Chinese cultural background. Upon the occurrence of this exposure, some Chinese Americans began to resist the traditional beliefs and practices of their immigrant parents, even to the extent of ridiculing their "old-fashioned" ways. [2] They considered themselves totally Americanized. Showing an intense desire to enter the mainstream society, they speeded the process of Americanization. As a result, the conflicts and clashes between them and their parents became tense. Ironically, they were doubly marginalized: neither the mainstream culture nor the Chinese culture embraced them.

Such a dilemma made Chinese Americans realize their confusion: to identify themselves with the dominant American culture or to keep their Chinese identity. Thereby, they took into consideration seriously about their identity belonging and identity seeking for a place in American life.

3. Mistaken Identities

Chinese became, like many other ethnic groups, especially members of so-called visible minorities, stereotyped as soon as they touched American soil. The Chinese represented in literary pieces of this time were angry, bitter people pleasing for a fair and just society. One stereotype is based on Fu Manchu. In most cases, the Chinese immigrants are depicted as females. The best-known Chinese stereotype in American popular culture may be Charlie Chan. The fat little Chinese detective was "born" in 1925. His character was created by Earl Derr Biggers, who wrote six Charlie Chan novels. In spite of his clumsy appearance and his bad English, Charlie Chan was able to solve the most complicated murder mysteries, mostly due to his "Oriental" wisdom, patience, and "the sixth sense." Charlie Chan is a finished product who is educated and domesticated by the West, and in return serves the West faithfully.

Because stereotypes of the dominant society are often reflected in understandings of self, stereotypes create a great misunderstanding and distort Asian Americans' self-conception and affect the development of a positive sense of ethnic identity. For instance, the "model minority" stereotype suggests that Asians and Asian Americans are hard working individuals who can and have overcome barriers to emerge as successful minority members. Though this stereotype appears to carry positive connotations, this image is a myth for many Asians and Asian Americans, and it is a hegemonic device employed to create tensions among racial-ethnic groups. Given that a history of oppression and stereotyping can lead to identity formation problems, exploring one's racial-ethnic identity can create a sense of understanding through reconceptualizing past perceptions into new and positive ideals of the self and group. In other words, because one's racial-ethnic identity can reflect the acceptance of stereotypes about self, the exploration and reformulation of its meaning can bring about a sense of strength and validation to self and group.

Since these misrepresentations and exclusions mainly take place in the realm of culture, they also have to be challenged in culture. In Chinese American literature, Frank Chin together with his associates Jeffery Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Wong are the first to openly declare war on stereotypes and misrepresentation.

4. *Aiiieeeee* on Identity

Frank Chin is an important figure in the Chinese American literary scene in the seventies. He represents an angry voice in Chinese American literature. As pioneers in this literary movement Frank Chin and his team members start with the deconstruction of these stereotypes. The result is their 1974 edition of *Aiiieee*: *An Anthology of Asian American Literature*, which heralds the first announcement of a Chinese American literary identity. It marks the beginning of the discussion about Asian American identity, what can be called "Asian American," i.e. what Asian American is and who is part of it. In their landmark introduction to this anthology, often compared to declaration of Asian

American literature, they propose what they think Asian American literary identities should be. They prove the stereotypes are wrong and dispel them for good. Prior to discussing literature, it is better to explain sensibility. When explaining sensibility, it is better to outline the history first. And the precondition to outline the history is to dispel the stereotypes, to prove the falsity of the stereotypes.

The Chin group consider it extremely important that Asian Americans become aware of their culture and sensibilities so that they have something to be proud of. This is considered highly important since Asian Americans seem to have already internalized the prejudices, rejections, and racial stereotypes they encountered in white America and therefore start to believe not only that they have no cultural integrity as Asian Americans, but also that they are inferior to whites. American culture, protecting the sanctity of its whiteness, refuses to recognize Asian American literature as "American" literature. America does not recognize Asian American as a presence, though Asian/Chinese Americans have been here for seven generations. For seven generations Asian/Chinese Americans have been aware of that refusal, and internalized it, with disastrous effects.[3]

The "disastrous effects"are self-contempt, self-rejection, and the cultural and political silence of Asian Americans. The editors are convinced that it is time for the silence and self-rejection to end. Anyway, *Aiiieeeee!* is meant to be an inspiration to all Asian Americans to deal with their culture, to be proud of it, and to become more active and speak up for their interests.

Notes

[1] Ling, Amy. *Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry.* New York: Pergamon, 1990.

[2] Yung, J. *Unbound Feet.* A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco. Berkeley: University of California Press. 1995. p. 115.

[3] Chan, Jeffery Paul, Frank Chin, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Wong. Preface. *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian American Writers.* Ed. Chan et al. 1974. New York: Mentor, 1991. xiii

Chapter Two Crisis of Identity

The Chinese Americans' experience has undergone dramatic transformation since the 1960s. The works by contemporary Chinese American writers continue to express strong concern for the fate of immigrants in America around the generation gap, cultural conflicts, desires for personal freedom, and the struggle against prejudice. But the focus of their writing has shifted from a search for a place in mainstream life to an authentical Chinese American cultural identity. This chapter constitutes an important part of whole argumentation, examining the issue of identity crisis through major works by Louis Chu[1], Maxine Hong Kingston[2] and Fae Myenne Ng[3], who are, no doubt, well-known representatives of Chinese American literature.

1. *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (1961): Impotence Shattering Hope

Ben Loy's impotence is a killing hurt to his new bride Mei Oi. It is most significant to understand Louis Chu's *Eat a Bowl of Tea.* The novel deals with the generational conflict between immigrants and their children and the emergence of a new concept of identity from this conflict. It is based on actual historical situations and events, giving accurate images of the time and communities they are in. It was popular among Chinese Americans but was mostly ignored by literary critics until it was rediscovered by the *Aiiieeeee!*-editors and became the object of closer examination.[4] The *Aiiieeeee!*-editors appreciated this novel because of its realistic approach showing Chinese American communities as they really were, from a Chinese American point of view and not from a Chinese or Chinese-according-to-white perspective. The ideas of Chinese American identity is truly reflected in this literary work.

1.1 A Bachelor Community

Eat a Bowl of Tea takes place at exactly this point of time when harsh American laws against Chinese immigrants are removed and it also witnesses the transition from a bachelor society to a more normal family-based community.

Chinese immigration to the mainland started in the 1850s during the California gold rush. After the gold rush, many Chinese worked in quartz mines. While at the gold and quartz mines, they were mostly self-employed, which changed when, beginning in the 1860s, they started working in railroad construction. In fact, a majority of the entire workforce involved in the construction of the Central Pacific Railroad was Chinese.[5]

The Chinese immigrants at first considered themselves to be temporary migrants or sojourners who went to America in order to return after three to five years to their Chinese villages as rich men. Often enough, the immigrants did not make enough money to be able to return to China. The conditions for settling down and founding families and communities were improved after the immigrants stopped doing migratory work in mines and railroad construction and went to work in industrial production, agriculture, canneries, or started to be self-employed as storekeepers, restaurant owners, or proprietors of laundries. Unlike the Japanese, whose government was on better terms with the American government at that time, the Chinese remained subject to exclusionary immigration laws, and there was nothing like a Gentlemen's Agreement for them that would have allowed Chinese women into the country. The result was an intense shortage of Chinese women and huge "bachelor societies," communities which consisted almost entirely of (aging) men. This changed only slowly when the National Origins Act which, among other things, prohibited Asian women and even wives from entering the United States, was lifted in 1943 and the War Brides Act was enforced in 1945. The latter allowed Chinese wives and children to come to the United States to join their husbands and fathers.

Eat a Bowl of Tea tells the story of a New York Chinatown family of the

lower middle class. The setting is placed in the isolated, bachelor-dominated culture of New York's post-World-War-II Chinatown. The characters of Wah Gay and Lee Gong are portrayals of emigrant fathers leaving their wives behind in China. They are driven by hostile social forces into married bachelorhood in Chinatown some thirty years ago. They are seemingly fulfilling the same role of sadly sacrificing home and hearth to work in the foreign land of "Gold Mountain" in order to return one day. In contrast, these two men are gladly living lives of cynical ease in the bachelor Chinatown community, not working but earning a living from a religious commitment to gambling in the Money Come clubhouse. The "bachelors" know only two categories of women: their wives who faithfully wait for their return in their Chinese villages and the prostitutes they frequented when they were younger. For them, the two categories are two entirely different worlds: the first is appreciated and honored (at least most of the time), where the second is lusted after but morally despised. Due to their long separation from their wives, they might have forgotten that a wife usually is a sexual partner, too, and not only the "rice cooker" they remember.

Even though he is a younger generation, Ben Loy has followed his father to maintain a sexual relationship with women. He, too, becomes a frequent customer of prostitutes before he is married. It is unimaginable that things go against him and give him a blow with regard to his loose behavior. After marriage, he soon becomes impotent and is, like the old "bachelors," unable to make love to his wife.

In the bachelor community, parental supervision is the mainstay. Wang Wah Gay, an old Chinese immigrant running a small gambling place called the "Money Come," in Chinatown, decides that it is time that his son Ben Loy, who had come to the United States a couple of years earlier and works as a waiter in a Chinese restaurant in Connecticut, gets married. He wants him to marry a girl from China and thinks that the daughter of his old friend Lee Gong, who also lives in Chinatown, might be the right choice. Lee Gong is Wah Gay's

immigrant friend coming to the United States on the same ship from the same Chinese village. Both of them share the idea of joining two families by their children's marriage and firmly believe that it is their parental duty to arrange to have their children married. Wah Gay and Lee Gong inform their wives, who live in neighboring villages in China, of their idea, and Ben Loy is sent to China to meet his prospective wife. So when Mei Oi and Ben Loy get married, the two fathers, Lee Gong and Wah Gay, are quite content being the ones who arranged the marriage and having celebrated it according to custom in a Chinatown wedding banquet. They now expect grandchildren, hope of life, rather than difficulties.

Parental supervision is best demonstrated when Wah Gay' daughter-in-law Mei Oi's adultery exposed. The consequence is family ties, personal relationships, and the whole of the Chinatown community are seriously disturbed. Being frustrated and born with her husband's impotence, Mei Oi is soon seduced by Ah Song, who is a friend of her father's and father-in-law's and is known as a "wife-stealer." Soon everybody knows about their affair, Mei Oi becomes pregnant, and the consequences have to be faced. Wah Gay slashes off a piece of Ah Song's ear when he sees him leaving his son's apartment while Ben Loy is at work. Ah Song wants to sue Wah Gay but has to give up this plan when the Wang Association, a Chinatown tong both he and Wah Gay are members of, intervenes. Then Ah Song has to face his punishment to be banned from New York by the Association.

The bachelor community together with parental supervision leads to Ben Loy's spiritual impotence.

1.2 Ben Loy's Impotence

Ben Loy, Wah Gay's son, who has settled in the US after a period of military service, is sent back to the home village. He is used to having his interests arranged and protected by his father and the larger Wang family, as has been the practice of Chinese society for generations. His immigration, job-hunting and marriage are all taken care of.

When the two immigrant families discuss their children's joint marriage, Ben Loy is a little reluctant about entering into an arranged marriage. After he goes hometown for marriage, he is pleased to find his bride Mei Oi a beautiful and educated girl. The marriage turns out to be out of his expectation, satisfying him. The new couple marry in China, then spend their honeymoon in Hong Kong, and eventually arrive in New York.

While living in a bachelor community, Ben Loy follows all the habits that are shared by the Chinese immigrants in Chinatown. He even becomes a frequent visitor to the Hotel Lansing in New York for a "nice girl". Wherever he goes, he sure finds a "nice girl" or sleeps with different girls. Dramatically, six weeks after his wedding Bey Loy loses his manliness. He feels self-scolded due to his impotence. Facing that her wife Mei Oi is around him every day, his self-scold grows deeper because he makes his wife a living widow. He cannot regain his virility, no matter what medical help he seeks.

Ben Loy realizes his own sexual incompetence, which is magnified by his inability or unwillingness to recognize or admit that his wife is "knitting a green cap" for him, although all of Chinatown seems aware of it. Not until he is confronted by his father with the "news" of his wife's infidelity does Ben Loy respond. He is apparently more disturbed by being forced into action, and by losing face, than he is by the fact of Mei Oi's adultery and subsequent pregnancy. Ben Loy then confronts his wife, and assaults her, but fails to confront the man with whom she is involved. The role of "heroic avenger" is taken up by his father. Ben Loy's literal impotence really reflects a metaphorical castration, which implies his wife's adultery.

1.3 Mei Oi's Frustration

At first everything seems perfect: Mei Oi is delighted at the prospect of marrying a young and attractive "gimshunhock" (Gold Mountain sojourner). Also she learns that Ben Loy is "healthy boy with two good hands and legs" because it is often said that "American soldiers returning to China all have artificial limbs". (Chu, 1979, 53) She is convinced her marriage with Ben Loy

forecasts a promising future. She says farewell to her maiden's life in China happily. It is unimaginable to be a farmer's wife if staying in China. Mei Oi's marriage is the destination of her past and the departure of her new life in America, which is her dream she longs for. She employs the exile archetype to pursue her new identity.

Shortly after the wedding Mei Oi discovers a lack of physical and emotional gratification in her new role as a wife. The trouble starts as soon as they arrive in Hong Kong. Ben Loy, who in China did not experience any of these problems, turns out to be impotent and remains in this state throughout most of the novel. In New York, Mei Oi soon gets frustrated, sitting alone in her Chinatown apartment while her husband works as a waiter. She wants to get herself a job but is not allowed to do so by her husband. "When a group of women get together ... they do nothing but gossip. And when they do, there's bound to be trouble." (Chu, 1979, 80) In addition, she finds her profound sense of cultural dislocation. "How much can you cry? Who can hear you cry? And who cares when you are ten thousand folds of mountains away from home?" (Chu, 1979, 66) Her inner voice reflects her emptiness. She does not have any friends or family with whom she could spend time. Her father is of no great help since he is more or less like a stranger for her. She had never seen him before she came to New York because he had left their village before she was born. Mei Oi's disappointment at the physical condition of her husband, her loneliness in a strange place, and the idle life contribute to her involvement in the affair with Ah Song, a widely known womanizer. Mei Oi, bored and frustrated, therefore does not resist for long when Ah Song appears at her doorstep to seduce her while Ben Loy is at work. Quite the contrary, she even becomes an active part of their relationship, looking forward to his visits.

The lack of fulfillment she encounters through her husband's impotence parallels the emptiness she discovers in the idealized role prescribed for her by the closed migrant community in contrast to the growth and fulfillment of self that she believed would follow from arrival in this new home. As a result, she

turns from a nice and shy eighteen-year-old girl who was brought to a big city like New York, into a seductive and inscrutable woman who is aware of her qualities and desires. Mei Oi's transition reflects the emergence of sort of new feeling among immigrants.

2. Maxine Hong Kingston: A Woman Warrior

Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976), *China Men* (1980), and *Tripmaster Monkey* (1989) disclose the struggle of Chinese Americans and their inner conflict when they confront a Chinese and American binary culture. Kingston believes that by retelling Father and Mother's stories, Chinese Americans build their new cultural identity.

2.1 Culturally Confused Woman Warrior

The Woman Warrior is a novel primarily about a search for a personal identity, but Kingston also suggests that the identity she is looking for is not a single inflexible one, but can be many things, all making up a part of her identity. In her dramatic autobiographical style, she tells the tales of several women, both real and fictional, whose stories have shaped her life. Kingston describes the ambiguity of living on the interface between two cultural traditions, the pain of defying some elements of her Chinese heritage, and the struggle to find a legitimate private and public voice in American society. She always questions throughout the text the definition of identity, both from a viewpoint of gender, and from a cultural viewpoint. Kingston reveals the cultural conflicts that have affected her and how, ultimately, she is able to fight back and find her own identity.

2.1.1 Confused Girl

In *The Woman Warrior* Kingston describes her mother's historical tales as "talk-stories". Her childhood memories have to do with growing up in Chinatown as the daughter of Chinese-born parents. And the mother Brave Orchid's stories play a dominant role in the daughter's access to China and Chinese culture.

Mother is more deeply rooted in Chinese tradition, clinging to the ideals of Confucianism that sing high of male superiority and female inferiority. In particular, a woman must follow "three obediences and four virtues." When educating the daughter, Mother tells her about the home village in China, informing her that the bad girls are always sold in China. In addition, Ghost is the key word in the story. Mother very often tells the stories of ghosts, each in a different ghost-like figure. She thinks these stories are good lesson to provide morals and guidelines for her daughter. Instead, the daughter cannot understand the full implications of the stories. Besieged by the ghosts and besieged by the fear, Kingston gets confused. She cannot distinguish the truth from the stories. On the other hand, her confusion exposes the overwhelming power of her mother's stories that have deeply carved in her mind. As a result, she sets out to question her identity.

Failing to identify herself with the Chinese culture in her mother's "talk stories" and the American culture mingled with ghosts, Kingston's frustration leads to create her identity crisis. To Kingston, what she has to face is the translating of the Chinese stories told by her mother into an American context so that she can make sense of them, figure out what they really mean to her. In this case, the stories can help her in her American life.

Mother's oral story of No Name Woman, who violates the obediences and virtues thus receives punishment, provides insights into Kingston's discovering her cultural history. So, when years pass, Kingston rewrites No Name Woman's story based on her own understanding of the patriarchal nature of traditional Chinese society, breaking her silence since her girlhood. Kingston also exposes the unfair discrimination against women in traditional Chinese society when she discusses how sons are favored more than daughters. She even imagines that her aunt's illegitimate child must have been a girl. By rewriting the story of her own version, Kingston overcomes her cultural confusion and her fear of frightening ghosts in her mother's stories and in her American reality. When she writes, she finds herself a voice and an identity.

2.1.2 Kingston's Fa Mulan

Actually, Kingston is a girl with rebellious spirit. When she realizes that girls are not celebrated like boys in a Chinese family and community, Kingston makes a new version out of Chinese ballad of Fa Mulan. The original household legend portraits Fa Mulan a fantastical Chinese heroine, disguised as a man, who successfully fights in a war in place of her old father, and then after twelve years of war happily takes a triumphal return to her family and village. In her book, Kingston's Fa Mulan weighs a lot. It is a heroic portrayal depicted by Kinston for she is trying to break the stereotypical image of Chinese women. Kingston employs the first person to narrate the story. Being led by a bird Fa Mulan reaches the top of a mountain, where she meets an old couple, who represent ultimate wisdom and enlightenment. They offer to teach her to be a warrior, being capable of living in harmony with nature. Through the fifteen-year hard training Fa Mulan equips herself with almost supernatural powers. She is well-trained so that she returns home ready to face different tests as the extreme survival examination. When the village families are called upon once again to send male family members for service in the army, Mulan's arrival is showered with glories by her family as if they were welcoming home a son. Fa Mulan and a growing army of soldiers move across China to fight giants and overthrow the country's evil emperor. After all her warrior commitments, Fa Mulan goes back to the everyday life to become a normal housewife and mother. In Kingston's talk-story, Fa Mulan, the perfect woman warrior, is not limited to the gender-biased position that Chinese patriarchal society traditionally demanded of its women.

The tale of Fa Mulan strengthens Kingston's ideology that the heroine Fa Mulan mirrors herself. Therefore she writes:

The swordswoman and I are not so dissimilar. May my people understand the resemblance soon so that I can return to them. What we have in common are the words at our backs. The idioms for *revenge* are 'report a crime' and 'report to five families.' The reporting is the vengeance - not the beheading, not the

gutting, but the words. And I have so many words – 'chink' words and 'gook'words too - that they do not fit on my skin. (Kingston, 1977, 53)

Through Chinese myth Kingston begins to consider her Chinese American identity. The woman warrior Fa Mulan is Kingston's heroine. She desires to be a Mulan-like woman in her "American" life, not fighting giants and barons but racial and sexual discrimination. She wants to acquire Mulan's supernatural powers so that she, a weak Chinese girl, is no longer afraid of being sold or waiting to be married off. Her weapons, though, cannot be swords but words. She has to learn to talk, to express herself, before she herself can talk story as well, and --- to enter the autobiographical level --- eventually to become the writer Maxine Hong Kingston. It is very difficult for her to talk in public at first. She is not confident about her English at school and does not dare to speak up in class. But she sees the need to talk, to express herself: "I thought talking and not talking made the difference between sanity and insanity. Insane people were the ones who couldn't explain themselves." (Kingston, 1977, 166) Since Kingston is terribly scared about ending up like the many "crazy women" she has seen, [6] she works hard to improve her talking skills and succeeds.

In *The Woman Warrior,* Kingston, living in the interface between her mother's Chinese myths and her American dreams, poignantly articulated the ambiguous identity of Chinese Americans. The use of myth helps her to find a way to write Chinese-Americans into American history and to search for her own Chinese American identity. In a word, Kingston creates a new version of a classic Chinese myth to reflect her hard situation as a woman in the traditionally patriarchal Chinese society, and to help construct her female Chinese American identity by making the protagonist perform the traditionally patriarchal role of a male hero without leaving behind her maternal role. She never stops questioning social values so as to explore her own identity as a Chinese American woman.

2.1.3 Cultural Confusion

Kingston, no doubt, comes across numerous difficulties while she experienced growing up as a Chinese-American female. She does not feel completely American, because she must attend Chinese school and at the same time, feels her mother's pressure to conform to Chinese customs. She does not feel completely Chinese, either. Like so many other immigrant children, Kingston struggles to claim an identity for herself between two worlds that do not completely accept her.

The strict traditional Chinese ways her mother is always putting on her counteracts Kingston's search for a harmonious location between two competing cultures. Her mother's talk stories have given her fears and insecurities, bad dreams. Throughout her identity-forming process, she finds that she must assert herself by breaking away emotionally from her mother, who has been the center of her life. No Name Woman is portrayed as a timid woman who is cast out of her village, just as Kingston is a quiet girl who does not belong to either culture. No Name Woman represents those desperate, rebellious aspects of Kingston's personality as she fights back against the oppressive Chinese culture. To punish her village, No Name Woman kills herself and her child in the family well. Like No Name Woman, Kingston is a female struggling with the harsh customs of her culture. The conflict that exists is mother versus daughter, and daughter versus society. She must find her own voice and avenge herself on the culture that is so hard on women and which imposes a silence on her.

To become more assimilated into American culture, Kingston believes that she must totally reject her "Chineseness," traits and customs that she connects most with her mother. To avenge herself against the Chinese culture, Kingston breaks the silence and tells her story. Though she is caught between two very disparate cultures, Kingston makes efforts to search to place a middle ground in which she can live within each of these two respective cultures. Thus she can achieve a life that is rich in Chinese heritage and American culture.

Ultimately, she creates a new, hybrid identity between them.

China is "invisible," an intangible place that Kingston only hears about; America is "solid," not only because she physically lives in it, but because she interacts daily with other Americans and necessarily wants to fit in. Her frustration and her inability to identify with neither the Chinese culture in her mother's "talk stories" nor the American culture so thick with ghosts create a crisis. How to reconcile this conflict between these two disparate cultures becomes her thesis, the problem she attempts to solve. The inevitable result is not just cultural confusion, but a sense of dislocation.

2.2 China Men: Fathers' Quest Story

Similarly in *China Men*, Kingston again combines old Chinese legends and family stories, but this time the male members of Kingston's family are the center of attention. Maxine, however, is still the storyteller, who narrates both the legends and the "factual" material in the book. She examines retrospectively into the past with a view to rewrite the fathers' immigration history.

2.2.1 A New Definition of Chinese American History

In *China Men*, Kingston gives an account of Chinese American history while telling the stories of her male relatives like her father, her maternal great-grandfather, her paternal grandfather, her great-uncles. Their stories are closely related with their fate in the United States, each dealing with its respective American experiences. Some work in the sugarcane fields of Hawaii, some help build the railroad in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, and the others sell vegetables on the street. What these Chinese American men have done contributes greatly to the norm of Chinese American experience and Chinese American history as well.

The term of the narrator's fathers in *China Men* refers to a general concept. Indeed, there are more grandfathers beyond her biological relations. These grandfathers differ from each other in personality. Each creates his own

personal history. In this sense, they appear as forefathers in Chinese American immigrant history. Their stories are representative of many Chinese American immigrants. Although at first a private family history is concerned, the stories of the narrator's grandfathers are told, Kingston's horizon goes beyond the family history. Her purpose is to write a history of Chinese Americans in America, to create a new definition of history for Chinese Americans through the individual stories of the fathers.

2.2.2 Feminization of Tang Ao

China Men's opening chapter "On Discovery" appears like a fairy tale. It tells about a man named Tang Ao who, looking for the Gold Mountain, crossed an ocean, and came upon the Land of Women. Here the character Tanf Ao is an introduction. He sails to the Gold Mountain, which is a mytonymy for America. Unfortunately, Tang Ao does not find gold and becomes a rich man as he desires. Instead, he is captured in the hands of hostesses on the land of women. He then is turned into a woman, dressing like a woman and being treated like a woman.

It seems that Tang Ao's experience discloses his mistreatment as a female when he comes to America, which sure brings him a physical and psychic trauma. Tang Ao's experience is not limited to himself. Kingston pinpoints the feminization of Chinese men who came to America, which is based upon the stereotype of Chinese men. Tang Ao is forced to have his ear pierced and have his foot bind, which totally follows the traditional practice of Chinese females. He appears weak and powerless. In this respect, Kinston's gender role for women is ironic. Kinston maintains a masculine ideal should be applied to work against the stereotypes of Chinese males and in this way, to assert their Americanness.

2.3 Ah Sing's Frustration

The quest for identity in *Tripmaster Monkey* does not revolve around a mother-daughter or a father-daughter relationship as it does in *The Woman*

Warrior and *China Men*. Instead, her emphasis shifts from the private to the public sphere—from family, parents, and ancestors to friends, coworkers, and communities while Kingston continues examining ethnic and gender identity in *Tripmaster Monkey*. It takes up a much broader view, revolving around the relationship between a Chinese American child and his community. Although this shift in emphasis from private to public reflects Kingston's formal shift from the semi-autobiographical form of *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* to the novelistic form of *Tripmaster Monkey*, it also reflects a thematic shift in focus from individual "I"to collective ethnic identity "We".

However, the interconnection between individual and collective identity which appears intricate cannot be ignored. *Tripmaster Monkey* clearly calls attention to the intertwining strands of individual and collective identity, but focuses on the latter.

2.3.1 Wittman Ah Sing: Unusual Name

Wittman Ah Sing is the main protagonist's name and he is an indigenous Chinese American. Kingston depicts Ah Sing a twenty-three-year-old fifth generation Chinese-American US citizen with some titles such as an actor, playwright. He appears as an image of a sixties hippie, a Berkeley graduate in English and a director of his own theater.

The name Wittman Ah Sing is more like the combination of an American name and a Chinese one. The mid name "Ah", in most cases, is typical of Chinese way of addressing a person's nickname before the first name. It is mainly a sound, a vocative, carrying no meaning. "Ah Sing" is never a last name, so it at best serves as a nickname used by close friends or peers.

Wittman Ah Sing, is called "Wit Man" by his "aunties," emphasizing a dominant aspect of his individual identity—his wit. At the same time, however, Wittman's collective national identity as an American is indicated by the name "Wittman," which aligns Wittman with "that most American of poets", Walt Whitman, whom "his father tried to name him after" (Kingston, 1990, 161). And Wittman's collective ethnic identity as a Chinese American is

signified both by the misspelling of "Whitman" as "Wittman" and by his unusual surname, "Ah Sing," which is both uniquely American in its evocation of Whitman's "Song of Myself" and uniquely Chinese American in its phonemics and suggestion of the writer as "singer" or "performer" in the ancient sense of privileged keeper, transmitter, and creator of stories now lost or left behind. These various notes, so to speak, in which Wittman's name may be sung, bring individual and collective identity together in one song, one name, one space, one body. And the elision of letters, the syntactic switches --- between Wit Man, Wittman, and Whitman --- signify not notes dropped but individual, ethnic, and national identities merged. The emphasis, however, despite the legacy of individualism embedded in Walt Whitman's name, is clearly on collective identity; all nominal variations except "Wit Man" (which appears in only one chapter) emphasize Chinese American and/or American collective identity, as does *Tripmaster Monkey* as a whole.

Besides having an unusual last name, Ah Sing, in his long hair, beard, cowboy boots, Indian poncho, and old brown Wellingtons, has "different" looks and life experience. Wittman Ah Sing, however, is seen by many critics not only as a postmodern "China Man," but also as a new national figure, a man who redefines the character of "American," expresses a new vision of American culture, and invents a new American language.

2.3.2 Ah Sing's Conflict with American Community

Tripmaster Monkey dramatizes Wittman's frustration with his American community. He is constantly in conflict with the dominant society that spurs in him feelings of anger and frustration, alienation and despair. Although he acquired a liberal arts education from Berkeley, Ah Sing finds it hard to adjust to the real world. He realizes that he has never had a viable sense of self since he has lived in the margins all his life, he is keenly aware of his outsider status.

Kingston, at the very beginning, depicts Ah Sing as one who, suffering from social and psychological isolation, considers suicide every day, fantasizes his suicidal act, and envisions his body shattered into fragments. He

is a racist paranoiac, sees things in racial terms, and rejects his racial identity as an Asian American.

Ah Sing is fully influenced by the western dominant culture and he shows great enthusiasm in mimicry, which is exemplified in the first chapter "Trippers and Askers". A good example is "To be or not to be"(Kingston, 1990, 3) when he asks himself in a suicidal declaration. The meaning, however, is not just limited to a quotation by Shakespeare's Hamlet. Ah Sing, when he follows such a quotation, he then appears to be in despair. What he gets is not a reward at all, rather, he is constantly reminded of distorted images of the Chinese by the Western heritage and popular culture in which he is steeped. Actually, the name of Wittman Ah Sing is not a proper one, which also reflects Ah Sing's identity crisis in his community.

While in school, Ah Sing could at least momentarily foster his ideal ego in his imaginary world and fantasize himself as Hamlet, Ishmael, and other "alien" identities. When Ah Sing leaves school, the conflict is inevitably aggravated. While out of school, he finds that he loses his stage. Later throughout the novel, Ah Sing half-seriously questions if he has become "paranoid". Even after five generations of ancestors on American soil, Ah Sing is still asked where he comes from, how long he has been in this country, or if he can speak English. The color of his skin, the features on his face reflect his Chinese ancestry, and he is automatically seen as a non-American or an "alien" by a majority of people for whom the image of an American precludes a person of color.(Kingston, 1990, 6) Over and over again he emphasizes that "his province is America. America, his province." (Kingston,1990,41) Insisting that he be acknowledged as an American, Ah Sing says, "I declare my looks --- perfect.... So it's not Mount Rushmore, but it's an American face." (Kingston, 1990, 314) Obviously, the pressure of the dominant society makes him trapped in an identity crisis that endangers his psychological state. Facing the identity crisis that leads him to the verge of paranoia, Ah Sing stands at a critical moment. It seems that there are two alternatives before Ah Sing, either

pursuing his extinction by the death drive or starting a "progressive" journey in pursuit of transformation into a subject with a new position. To be lucky, Ah Sing rebels. *Tripmaster Monkey* best witnesses the protagonist's *progressive* journey through his identity crisis and his psychological breakdown on to the "true understanding" of his identity.

Ah Sing's journey begins at the very end of the first chapter when he declares that he is "the present-day U.S.A. incarnation of the King of the Monkeys" (Kingston, 1990, 33). Monkey King is a legendary superman in *Journey to the West*, a 16th century Chinese classic. The journey symbolizes a search for enlightenment. In tale, Monkey King is endowed with superpower of seventy-two transformations. Ah Sing decides to reinvent his identity, he transforms himself into the Monkey King. Monkey King together with his supernatural seventy-two transformations is a perfect metaphor for the multiple transformations of identity those marginalized persons like Ah Sing must undergo in order to survive in a hostile environment that is constantly stereotyping them.

2.3.3 Ah Sing's Conflict with Ethnic Community

Besides his problems with the dominant society, Ah Sing also has a conflict with his ethnic community. Chinese-American society demands that he work at a "good" job so that he can establish himself economically, socially, and politically within the dominant society. "Work" not "play" should be the guiding force in his life.(Kingston, 1990, 171) Ah Sing's ethnic society's insistence upon the usefulness of work needs to be seen within the context of the socio-historic conditions of Chinese immigrants in America, whose survival in this land depended on their ability to be good and useful workers.

Ah Sing's parents, Ruby and Zeppelin Ah Sing, are performers, and they are totally unlike this image of the "typical" Chinese-Americans. With parents in show business, the pressure on Wittman from them or the Chinese-American community to do "useful" work is not so overpowering. He tries to reverse the belief that all Chinese immigrants came to America to make money, insists that

"the difference between us and other pioneers, we didn't come here for the gold streets. We came to play." (Kingston, 1990, 249-50) Ah Sing, eventually, gives up his meaningless jobs and devotes himself fully to writing, directing, and producing his play. "Yes, the play's the thing" says Wittman. (Kingston, 1990, 34) Surely Kingston, with her propensity to play with words intended the pun on "play" here: to make theater and to have fun. Ah Sinf's "play" turns out to be serious work since it aims to build community and arouse political consciousness among minorities.

Early in the novel during his crisis of identity, Ah Sing recognizes the need for a theatre. He makes a promise to Nanci that he will write her a play and revive the Asian American theatre. "The reason he doesn't have right livelihood," he says, "is that our theater is dead." (Kingston, 1990, 249) Ah Sing employs his theater as a platform to fight against racial stereotypes. In this sense, the revival of a Chinese-American theater is a social practice to reinvent and reconstruct a community.

Furthermore, Ah Sing's sense of tolerance with his Chinese-American community is worth mentioning. In the opening scenes of the novel, Ah Sing appears as a self-absorbed, intolerant, acutely self-conscious young man. He is no doubt a A.B.C.--- an Ameican Born Chinese. More frequently, he directs his critical gaze on anybody and everybody, especially on a newly arrived Chinese immigrants referring to them contemptuously as "Fresh Off the Boats." Derogative of their dress, of their actions, of their behavior, he finds them so "uncool!" (Kingston, 1990, 5) Projecting his own confusion and insecurities about his identity onto them, he is ashamed to be associated with such people and wants to distance himself from them.

Actually, it is a ridiculous matter for Ah Sing to have such a feeling of superiority. The dominant society does not accept him as an equal. The color of his skin, which is the same as that of the Chinese immigrants he is so critical, will mark him "Other" in the eyes of the dominant society despite his considerable Americanization. Later in the book, it becomes evident that Ah

Sing's attitude toward people in general---especially Chinese, Chinese-Americans, and women --- is significantly changed. His previous sarcasm and lack of patience gives way to accommodation and acceptance of others.

3. Fae Myenne Ng's Bone: Dilemma in Defining Identity

Fae Myenne Ng's novel *Bone* is a good representation of Chinese American literature in contemporary period. *Bone* is a book about being a second-generation Chinese American, a female living in Chinatown. The setting of the novel is faithfully based upon Ng's birthplace, San Francisco's Chinatown. In her book, Ng gives an accurate description of San Francisco's Chinatown with the first person point of view, reveals a family's struggle to define themselves.

3.1 The Family of Leong

In *Bone*, the family of Leong is most concerned. The Mother, Mah, works in sweatshops and Stepfather, Leon, who works out at sea for a long period. They tend to do the jobs that no one else will work in order to provide the best opportunities for the children. The other family members are three daughters: the oldest is named Leila, middle child Ona, and the youngest Nina.

Leila lives and works in contemporary San Francisco Chinatown. She works at a school there; her job involves being the bridge between the classroom teacher and the parents. Nina, the youngest, described as the one who "reacts," moves away as far as she can, to New York. There she first works as a flight attendant and later as a guide for tours to China. Ona, the middle girl, is always the quiet one. She kills herself by jumping from a building. The reason for her suicide is not clear; maybe she did it because her parents did not allow her to continue to meet her Romeo-like boyfriend.

Leila and her two sisters have a difficult childhood due to the fact that their parents are immigrants and very poor. Fae Myenne Ng puts a substantial amount of emphasis on the struggles Mah and Leon have to go through in order

to get where they are. Mah always works very hard as a seamstress during the day she worked in a sweatshop and at night at home. Leon is away working as a seaman most of the time. He even takes up other low jobs available. Even though both of them work very hard, they are still in hardship. Leila, later, becomes the backbone of the family, Mah explains. However, three daughters present different ways of dealing with the circumstance under which they grow up. Leila describes herself as the one who can "endure." Even though she finds it difficult, she still tries to help her parents and takes care of them, and even takes care of other Chinese. She stays in Chinatown because of her parents, even though she would like to live with her boyfriend Mason outside of Chinatown. Only when she marries Mason does she decide to move. It is at this point that the book starts, then moving backward in time to the moment after Ona's sudden death. Ng skillfully employs Leila's childhood memories in-between to explain the situation.

3.2 Leon's Paper Identity

As one of the old men in Chinatown, Leon is the image of the Chinese laborer whose dreams never come true, and when his biological daughter Ona died, he suffers great pain which follows his parental guilt and broken promises. As far as Leon concerned, his paper identity decisively leads to his suffering and failure, in another word, his tragedy.

To better understand paper identity, the concept legitimacy is briefly introduced at first. From 1882 until 1943, the United States government imposed exclusionary legislation against the Chinese. During this time, the Chinese American communities established in the mid-nineteenth century grew not because of migration, but rather natural increase accounted for the greater numbers of Chinese recorded on the official census records. The question of legitimacy that seems particularly pressing for Chinese-Americans, whose history is marked by legal, political, and geographical exclusions and demarcations, can be found its revalation in Ng's *Bone*. Leila and her stepfather Leon in particular must work within legal, political, and familial

discourses to establish their identities, their "ancestry," and their cultural place in America.

In the case with Leon, he encounters embarrassment about his authentic identity in terms of legitimacy. When Leon and Leila visit the social security office to apply for his retirement benefits, Leon encounters the bureaucratic demand for a single, coherent, consistent identity that can be "proven" on paper. Ng describes the scene in this way: The interviewer was polite, and patient. He asked Leon why he had so many aliases? So many different dates of birth? Did he have a passport? A birth certificate? A driver's license? (Ng, 1994, 56). This request for proof of identity, as an official American citizen eligible for benefits, infuriates Leon, but not because he objects to the state-regulated procedures for legislation.

Actually, Leon keeps a suitcase full of papers which document his personal history. He carefully saves every letter, every certificate, admitting that in America, "paper is more precious than blood". (Ng, 1994, 9) Leon strongly believes his documents originally legitimated him an authentic identity. Thus he reacts angrily to the polite young man for his strong belief in the valid papers which allow his entry into the United States despite strict immigration laws. It is unexpected that his papers have now been challenged. As Leila observes, when the social security office does not accept Leon's application, "it was as if all the years of work didn't count." (Ng, 1994, 55) The "work" Leila refers to here is not only the wage-labor from which Leon will now retire, but the work he has put into constructing an authentic Chinese-American identity.

To be honest, Leon occupies his present identity in relation to his paper father, Grandpa Leong who was already an American citizen. Leon paid five thousand dollars to use Grandapa's surname. Thus, Grandpa facilitated Leon's entry and legislation. Exactly, Leon's relation to Grandpa Leong is nothing but a business transaction. However, in the novel, they two maintain a seeming paper father-son relation because of the contractual agreement they made. As a paper son, Leon has to keep promise to send Grandpa Leong's bones back to

China for burial, which, eventually, turns out to be a broken promise.

In this country, paper is more precious than blood, because restrictive immigration laws cause people to create "paper" identities --- to become "paper sons," in order to enter the country. When Leon is asked to produce his papers at the social security office, it can be seen that identification papers reflect or represent an original, authentic subject.

Leila rummages through Leon's suitcase to look for an "affidavit of identification", a piece of paper that would certify Leon's status and satisfy the social security office as well. Instead, Leila encounters records indicating Leon's failures --- records that are useless to the state, in excess of the identity he must prove to the social security office. The affidavit identifies Lai-on Leong as citizen of the United States; this is Leon's false identity, the one he purchased years ago. The letters of rejection she finds construct another version of Leon, one who is "unfit" for the army and "unskilled" for work..

Leon becomes a U.S. citizen by lying about his parentage; he is a "paper son." He multiplies his lies, believing that "If you don't tell the truth, you'll never get caught in a lie." (Ng, 1994, 55) Though Leon curses at the young white man working at the social security office, he knows clearly that he cannot control the situation and he will make no headway; in a bureaucracy, the office itself contains the authority, not the individual occupying it. The individual official merely cites the law.

Leon blames all of his bad luck, including Ona's death, on his failure to return Grandpa Leong's bones to China for proper burial. In short, Leon's paper identity frustrates attempts to establish a coherent, stable identity or legitimate citizenship. Therefore, Leon is doomed to his tragedy.

3.3 Leila's Identity Conflict

Leila is a second generation Chinese American, caught between traditional Chinese female submissiveness and middle class American individualism. Her ethnic ambiguity is revealed through her understanding of women's place in Chinese culture and history. The family of Leong produced three daughters as

shown in the beginning of the novel, "We were a family of three girls. By Chinese standards, that wasn't luck." (Ng, 1994, 3) Having boys in the Chinese culture is considered a blessing and beneficial to the family name, however, being that the Leong family consisted of three girls, they are known as "a failed family". (Ng, 1994, 22) To have a female child is to have bad luck, because they are useless, they show no bravery, and they serve no purpose. What's more, the family is the product of her mother and stepfather Leon. Leila is the child of Mah's affair with a man, who left her knowing she was having a daughter. So Leila adopts the man's, or, her father's name Fu Louie. Then Mah met Leon and they fell quickly for each other. Their daughters Ona and Nina followed Leon's name. Such a family, no doubt, receives a special attention in Chinatown.

Leila understands many traditional Chinese customs and values since she and her parents are Chinese, but having been educated in secular American schools, she also comprehends and conforms to American society. Leila's mother Mah is a first immigrant rooted in Chinese culture and traditions dominated by Confucianism, which emphasizes principles of interpersonal relationships. In one case, when Leila arrives and discloses that she and Mason are cooking steaks, Mah scolds, "Don't eat American every day.... It's not good for you" (Ng, 1994, 48). In another case when Leila moves in with his boyfriend Mason outside Chinatown, Mah dislikes it because there are "No Chinese there" (Ng, 1994, 191). She warns Leila not to eat too much American food because it is not good for her, and she reminds Leila of all the Chinese dishes she used to like. So Mah is a typical mother clinging to Chinatown, she is afraid Leila will forget her ethnic traditions and identity. To Leila, when Mah tries to speak as a traditional Chinese parent, she refuses the notions of obedience and submission. Quite the contrary, she conveys her deep mind to her mother that "this is not China," and when she sees Nina in New York she says: "How can I tell her my tastes have changed like everything else?" (Ng, 1994, 48) It is obvious that Ng tries to express such an idea in the

book that while Chinatown is essential to Mah and Leon, the children, or the second generation, have crossed the border, that is, they have ventured outside Chinatown in order to find fulfillment.

In Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone* the narrator Leila's father travels to Australia and never returns, and Leon and her mother's marriage gives Leila a new identity, Leon's stepdaughter. During a search of Leon's room at the San Fran for proof of his legal identity, Leila fantasizes about "gathering all Leon's papers, burning his secrets and maybe his answers, and then scattering the ashes into the bay". (Ng, 1994, 60) Her decision to preserve Leon's fragmented American identity suggests her conflict between being an obedient daughter blind to Leon's failing and admitting her independence from a man emasculated by race asymmetry. She "never forgets," acknowledging, "I'm the stepdaughter of a paper son and I've inherited this whole suitcase of lies. All of it is mine. All I have are those memories, and I want to remember them all" (Ng, 1994, 61). Leila is well aware of the paper/blood and parent/child binaries characterizing her relationship with Leon which lessens the immediate oppression of gender and race asymmetry. At the same time, however, the binaries expose elements of her bicultural identity dependent on the asymmetry.

With regard to the question of identity, Leila at no point in the novel finds herself having an identity conflict. Her problems are rather of an emotional nature: her family stands at the center of her worries. Like many adult second generation Chinese Americans, Leila feels guilty and concerned about her parents for their hard immigrant lives. It is difficult for her not to feel too involved in her parents' lives, to let go and stop worrying and caring all the time. She knows that she needs to lead a more independent and selfish life, but finds this hard to do. She knows that she cannot compensate for her parents' past and present hardships, but she nevertheless feels obliged to them because she loves them. At the end of the book she solves this problem and finds a compromise between leading her own life and caring for her parents. She considers leaving Salmon Alley, her Chinatown home, and now this prospect does not frighten her

anymore, since she is confident that she will always remember everything: "I was reassured. I knew what I held in my heart would guide me. So I wasn't worried when I turned that corner, leaving the old blue sign, Salmon Alley, Mah and Leon - everything – backdaire [sic]." (Ng, 1994, 194)

Leila's conflict is not primarily based on ethnicity. It is more a problem that many people face when they cut the cord from someone they love. In Leila's case, the situation has become more difficult due to the situation of their family and their immigrant life, the harsh fates of her parents.

Notes

[1] Louis Chu was born in China in 1915 and immigrated with his parents to the United States as a boy. He attended high school and college in New Jersey and received an MA from New York University. He worked for New York City's Department of Welfare, became director of the social center, and was also involved in other community work. During WWII he served in the U.S. Army in Southeast Asia. A "well-known figure in New York's Chinatown," he later hosted a radio program and owned a record shop there. He was said to have been "the only Chinese disc jockey in New York City" until his death in 1970. *Eat a Bowl of Tea* was his only novel.

Louis Chu, *Eat a Bowl of Tea*.. Seattle: U of Washington P, 1979.

[2] Kingston is one of the best-known Chinese American writers in the history of Chinese American literature up to now. She was born in 1940 in Stockton, California, and was raised in the United States in an American background. She received education in the University of California at Berkeley and currently teaches at UC Berkeley. *The Woman Warrior* (1976), *China Men* (1980), and *Tripmaster Monkey* (1989) are Kingston's three novels which receive most of the attention.

Kingston, Maxine Hong. The Woman Warrior. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc, 1977.

Kingston, Maxine Hong. China Men. New York: Vintage, 1989.

Kingston, Maxine Hong. Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book. New York: Vintage, 1990.

[3] Fae Myenne Ng was born in 1957 in San Francisco's Chinatown, where her parents settled after they had immigrated from China in 1940. Ng grew up together with her brother in a hard working family; Ng's mother was a seamstress in a garment factory, and her father worked as a cook. In 1984 Ng received her Master's Degree in Liberal Arts, and in 1989 she moved to Brooklyn, New York, where she has lived and worked since.

Ng, Fae Myenne. *Bone.* New York: Harper Perennial, 1994.

[4] Jeffery Chan. introduction, *Eat a Bowl of Tea*, by Louis Chu. Seattle: U of Washington P. 1979. 4.

[5] Takaki, Ronald. *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*. Boston: Little, 1989.

[6] The "crazy lady" is a popular motif in Asian American literature. There are many works with mad women in them. One of the nicest is maybe Hisaye Yamamoto's short story "The Legend of Miss Sasagawara" (anthologized, for example, in *The Big Aiiieeeee!*). On crazy ladies in Asian American literature see, for example, Kim, *Asian American Literature* 253-55. A recent variation of the "crazy lady" can be found in Nora Okja Keller's amazing first novel *Comfort Woman.*

[7] Juhasz, Suzanne. "Maxine Hong Kingston: Narrative Technique and Female Identity." Contemporary American Woman Writers: Narrative Strategies. Ed. Catherine Rainwater and William J. Scheick. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1985. 172-89.

Chapter three New Tendency of Identity

1. A New Self from a New Chinese American Sensibility

Eat a Bowl of Tea covers more than a Chinatown adultery scandal or a love affair and family conflict. It indicates the Chinese immigrant's status as the "other" within a dominant culture. In *Eat a Bowl of Tea*, New York's Chinatown is characterized as a male society through its economic closure and psychological, social, and cultural stagnation. Chinatown, to a great extent, stands for what is familiar and comfortable to them. In the life of their fathers, the United States and their population are almost entirely hidden. They hardly play a role at all since Chinatown seems to be self-sufficient. They work in Chinatown, they go shopping in Chinatown, they socialize with other Chinese immigrants in Chinatown. All their livelihood remained in the Chinese community. In this way, they surely feel a sense of home and homeland through community.

As a matter of fact, to Wang Wah Gay and Lee Gong, the representatives of Chinese immigrants in Chinatown, contemporary American society is a strange world. They are isolated from it, and their only contact to contemporary China consists of the letters they exchange with their wives, whom they have not seen for about twenty years. They thus do not know contemporary family life, neither from observing American families nor from their own experience. All they know are traditions, codes of behavior, and conventions from their own youth, and they transplant these directly from the old China, a China that does not exist in that form anymore, to New York Chinatown.

They closely cling to their old-fashioned opinions, but meanwhile they have a double standard. While they themselves live a rather "loose" life,

spending their time gambling and hanging out talking and gossiping, frequenting prostitutes, they are clear that they are unable to fulfill their roles as husbands and fathers due to their absence from their families. Therefore they expect their children to be morally pure and to be perfect children and spouses. It is the exact case with Wah Gay's hope. He cherishes that his son Ben Loy has a perfect marriage.

However, the identity crisis stems from a generational conflict, from a clash between old traditions and values and a life in a "new" world. Ben Loy's impotence and Mei Oi's loneliness and disappointment at the physical condition of her husband parallel, working for the conflict of their identity. Ben Loy experiences a transformation of consciousness. He, as the transitional generation of immigrants, realizes that no matter how vaguely, the need for a new way of life is different from that of their parents. By accepting Mei Oi's infidelity and her "love child", Ben Loy acts against all traditions which are, in this case, represented by some well-meaning but incapable fathers and the other old men of Chinatown. Ben Loy is forced into realizing he must establish a new identity free from dependence on his elders, free from the influence of their fathers, free from the influence of a patriarchal society. He is tired of playing the role of the dutiful son, keeping silent while his father told him what to do. (Chu, 1979, 240)

It can be understood if Ben Loy disowns his wife for her infidelity, and that would be the traditional thing to do. But Ben Loy does not desert Mei Oi and instead decides to stay with his wife. Furthermore, he accepts the child as his own. They move to San Francisco Chinatown to start a new life, leaving the past behind. After that, things seem to improve: Ben Loy starts talking about his problems with his wife, and Mei Oi no longer feels bitter about his impotence but is understanding and full of sympathy. Ben Loy recovers and regains his virility only after he leaves New York Chinatown, and through his taking many bowls of thick, bitter Chinese herbal tea. It is important that this change in the relationship between Ben Loy and Mei Oi and the cure of Ben

Loy's impotence could only happen after the two have left the confining borders of New York's Chinatown. As Jinqi Ling writes: "The central action of the novel concerns the unraveling of the elders' negotiations, followed by recognition on the part of both bride and groom that their relationship must be renegotiated on a non-traditional basis."[1]

Ling is of the opinion that the changes in the young couple's relationship "signify the crumbling of the old bachelor order, increased freedom for the new generation, and the beginning ... of Chinese-American community in the United States built around family life and children."[2] Chu's novel is read by many critics as the first expression of an Asian American or, more specifically, a Chinese American sensibility. In contrast to earlier depictions of Chinatowns in Chinese American literature, Chu's description is considered authentic and realistic.[3] Efforts are made to establish a new, seemingly anti-patriarchal Chinese American identity embodied by a new generation who make it "the herald of the new Asian American sensibility."[4]

A feature of this new sensibility would be not to submit entirely to the new (American) culture, but also not to cling to the old (Chinese) one. With the symbolic collapse of the old social order in the form of his father's self-imposed exile from Chinatown, Ben Loy's impotence is cured by the emancipation from the old values represented by his father and the other "bachelors" and by starting a new and modern life, but it is also cured by "eating tea," a traditional and old-fashioned medical practice. He thus abandoned those features of Chinese culture which have become useless for his present situation, but he has kept others which are still valuable.

As the title of the book *Eat a Bowl of Tea* informs, Chinese tea is endowed with deep meaning more than a traditional drinking tea. While the traditional Chinese prescription may indeed be wholly or partly responsible for Ben Loy's rejuvenation, the more evident source of his regeneration, or the couple's regeneration is the breaking away from the insular community with its insistent parody of traditional social structures and rigid gender roles in order to seek a

home for themselves in a new world. Anyhow, Mei Oi experiences true joy and great pride from her pregnancy though she is certain that it is not her husband's child. She wins a happy ending, giving the birth to a child, regaining the love of a recuperated husband, and ushering a new life in a more relaxed environment. Ben Loy has lost his impotence, at the same time, his spiritual rebirth comes about when he severs old ties and strengthens himself in a living culture. In the last scene of the book, the young couple are planning to invite their fathers for the haircut party of their second baby.

Eat a Bowl of Tea reflects the emergence of new feelings among immigrants, especially from the transitional Chinese immigrants, concerning with the tension between indigenousness and assimilation, between cultural isolationism and general acceptance, between "tribalism" and "globalization". Once Mei Oi's affair is acknowledged, the couple is exiled from Chinatown. It is also Mei Oi's second exile. Since the couple moves to another Chinatown, they might remain isolated from American society. On the other hand, the ending of the novel reveals they manage, in contrast to their fathers, to initiate the first step to a more normal and settled life. Ben Loy's new individuality and independence construct a new self. All in all, Chu reveals increasing cultural atrophy following from a long-standing and cherished exile consciousness within immigrant communities concerning tension and confusion over cultural assimilation. The key to personal and cultural virility lies in both "drinking deep" from the source of one's ethnic origins while also forging and celebrating a new identity in this newly discovered home, free from the declining dynamism that may be attributed to cultural isolationism.

2. From Self Identity to Ethnic Identity

Kingston's three books can be seen as three in one depicting the history and fate not just of individuals, but also of the Chinese Americans. She devotes to manifest a progression from the naive, insecure, culturally confused individual "I" to a sophisticated, confident and bicultural collective "we" for not just the protagonists, but the Chinese Americans that they represent.

The Woman Warrior, also called mother book, starts with a culturally confused "I." The narrator Kingston ventures into the imaginary past to seek her mother and to acknowledge the strength of her cultural heritage. She is more explicit and powerful in bringing out the question of identity and cultural heritage by means of creating rich images, myths, and fantasies . The second book, *China Men*, continues the quest into the realm of the fathers. The daughter claims American for her Chinese forefathers by depicting how hard they have worked to contribute to what is now America. With such a strategy, she validates her own identity as a legitimate American, a Chinese American. In *Tripmaster Monkey*, Kingston focuses in particular on the recognition of Chinese American male and female identity. The central figure Ah Sing tries to reinvent Chinese American identity by criticizing the cultural hegemony of the so-called American community. But most important, *Tripmaster Monkey* is intent upon exploring the way in which ethnic and gender identity operate as part of a broader national identity. Kingston's description of Chinese American male and female identity, in other words, is accompanied by a description of American identity.

2.1 Transcending Bicultural Identity

The facts that Kingston's parents are Chinese and Kingston is an American-born second generation Chinese American play a decisive role in her bicultural growing background. Kingston is a Chinese in terms of her ties of blood. From the perspective of education and language, she is also an American woman. Speaking of nationality, she is an American because of birth citizenship. Kingston insists on her American identity, which actually constitutes a part of her identity. However, her identity as an American has not been accepted by American society. Taking advantage of her bicultural experience, Kinston is always struggling for a coherent cultural identity. She also has to cope with the disadvantages and problems she finds as a woman throughout her life. As a consequence, her quest for identity is double-edged because she has to deal with her hybrid and female identity to construct her life.

Kingston finds a new way to construct her life stories with a bicultural voice that is imbued with her imagination and dreams. In *The Woman Warrior*, her use of a Chinese myth is not accidental at all. Kingston reflects her own Chinese heritage through this myth in which she identifies herself with the Chinese heroic female figure. Nevertheless, the myth of Fa Mulan is not enough for Kingston because it does not allow her to cope with her American heritage. She readapts it to her fictional autobiographical novel to deal with her hybrid existence and to achieve the audience's identification with Fa Mulan. In this sense, Kingston's re-adaptation of this myth in the written media is one of her ways to come to terms with her quest for identity and her place within society.

Regarding Kingston's Chinese American identity, it has to be pointed out that she does not maintain the position she takes in her monologue. She does not continue her rejection of all things of Chinese. The monologue is a reaction to the many things in Chinese culture Kingston does not understand or dislikes, and it reflects her conflict between her "American" life and her "Chinese" life and the generational conflict with her parents. After she has grown up, Kingston sees things differently; she has found a way to reconcile the two cultures and the two generations, and she has found a way to deal with talk-stories and her position as a Chinese American woman. The book ends with a story of which Kingston says: "Here is a story my mother told me, not when I was young, but recently, when I told her I also am a story-talker. The beginning is hers, the ending mine." (Kingston, 1977, 184)

The traditional Chinese tale of Fa Mulan represents Maxine Hong Kingston's symbolic warrior woman who takes her father's place in battle and fights bravely in the battlefield and finally returns victoriously. This legend is not original; however, Kingston revises it mostly. In the traditional tale, Fa Mulan follows traditional rules. She must be pious not only to her father but also to her nation. She takes her father's position to fight in battle just because she needs to maintain "man's honor." Fa Mulan must disguise herself as a

soldier carefully because the "Chinese executed women who disguised themselves as soldiers or students, no matter how bravely they fought". (Kingston, 1977, 39) So the traditional tale only ends up reduplicating another patriarchy. In Maxine Hong Kingston's version of the legend, she rewrites the story and empowers the woman warrior Fa Mulan. Fa Mulan not only maintains her femininity but also gets masculine power. She is just like an androgyne. Fa Mulan leaves her family to seek her future. Her masters are an old man and woman. However, the couples are the embodiment of perennial, natural forces. They are always changing, but they are also always in harmony. Fa Mulan says, "he appeared as a handsome young man . . . and she, as a beautiful young woman who ran bare-legged through the trees . . . By this time I had guessed from their manner that the old woman was to the old man a sister or a friend rather than a wife". (Kingston, 1977, 28) In other words, the couples transgress the limitation of gender. They do not reduplicate the patriarchal system. Their combination does not count on husband-wife relationship. So the couple is the ideal model for Kingston to emulate.

In Maxine Hong Kingston's *Woman Warrior*, the Chinese-American female author endows Fa Mulan with power to undermine the traditional purpose of the character. This traditional Chinese girl Fa Mu Lan transgresses the patriarchal man-made structure in the exotic American society. Kingston also gives room to her Asian heritage by setting the myth of Fa Mulan in a Chinese landscape with Chinese figures. Her negotiation with her bicultural identity is activated by this tension between her American self and her Chinese ancestry.

2.2 Claiming America

In Chapter two "The Father From China," Kingston describes her father as a silent man, and in Chapter fourteen "The American Father," this man tells two entertaining stories: one is about a friend who steals a chicken and keeps it under his sweater, and the other about two feuding poets; he also talks about a

Los Angeles Massacre of Chinese. (Kingston, 1989, 255) It is a significant change of a silent father to a "talk story" father in *China Men*. In fact, evolution from a silent man to a "talk story" man whom the daughter calls "the American father" manifests a change caused by the father's progress in his social position. He finally owns his own house and business in America and is, therefore, no longer homeless. His work in the new country endows him a sense of self-worth. This final portrayal of the successful, talking father counter-balances the portrayal of the earlier frustrated, silent father.

During the process of revisiting and rewriting her father's past, the narrator wins her father over to her and, most important of all, she reintegrates him into her life as a Chinese American. The voice that she tries to find for her father is the voice that she can rightfully inherit. With that voice of the father, she claims America for him. And while she is doing that, she also claims America for herself as his legitimate heir.

The repeated emphasis on the initially frustrating yet eventually triumphant experiences of sojourner Chinese forefathers in *China Men* signifies the narrator's wish to declare her own triumph via her fathers.

One of the stories in *China Men* tells that the white people proclaim when the railroad is finally finished: "Only Americans could have done it". (Kingston, 1989, 145) The narrator then argues that her grandfather, Ah Goong, is therefore an American for "having built the railroad". (Kingston, 1989, 145) Kingston is actually constructing through her grandfather a bond that links her to all the male ancestors who are founders of America. She creates for her China Man ancestors the pride that she could share as a descendant, as a Chinese American.

What's more, the feminization of Tang Ao "acts metonymically for the emasculation of China Men in white America," as Donald Goellnicht puts it.[5] The emasculation of Chinese American men, mainly through laws that prevent them from having "normal" families and jobs and through racism in general, is confronted in all of the stories, showing all the male characters in their pain and

dignity and portraying them in a sympathetic way. Kingston tells the stories about her male relatives, however, she does not depict men as weak and incapable in general, but always points out the reasons for the unfortunate situations in which they find themselves namely racist ones. She turns them into heroes of their own kind; in their own way they are "claiming America," as she puts it.

Kingston generally achieves what the editors of *Aiiieeeee!* expect of Chinese/Asian American literature: she creates literature that is distinct from Asia and white America, but also related to both at the same time --- her literature is definitely Asian American. This can be seen in the way she uses language, the topics she chooses, and most of all in the way she intertwines Chinese tales and past with American history and present.

Question of identity is a targeted problem the heroes and heroines are trying to solve. In Kingston's work her heroes and heroines suffer a great deal as well, but they end up as persons who are able to come to terms with their dual heritage and actually live with a Chinese American identity. A good example is Kingston's brother. During the Vietnam war, in spite of being a pacifist, he joins the U.S. Army. He has to serve in many Asian countries and there is often asked "What are you?" His answer then is always very simple and clear: "Chinese American". (Kingston, 1989, 294-296) Alternatively, he could have easily claimed being "American", without any modification, especially since he is wearing an American uniform. But he is conscious and proud of both his backgrounds. He has already found his particular American identity. His confidence in his American identity is rooted in the fact that he, like many Chinese (American) people before him, actively participates in American history, namely by fighting in one of the most important wars the United States was involved in. He is "claiming America," just as many Chinese (American) men have in the past. The brother has, as well as Kingston, found his Chinese American identity. Kingston shows that a Chinese American identity can be both, male and female.

To be brief, Kinston's main achievement in *China Men* is to show Chinese Americans in their place in American history, and thereby to "claim America" for them.

2.3. Seeking Collective Ethnic Identity

Like Kingston, Ah Sing in *Tripmaster Monkey* is more than a "story talker" as he also wields his pen to write the "talk stories" down. Ah Sing endows great values on writing. His play becomes a site of cultural and political struggle and survival, a site of resistance and rebellion for all Chinese-Americans.

Ah Sing's last subjective transformation is epitomized in his final action --- "One-Man Show" --- in which he puts on his last role --- Ah Sing. In his tragic-comic soliloquy, Ah Sing reveals how he lives with role ambivalence, with conflicting desire, and with split subjectivity. At first, Ah Sing presents himself as an angry and demanding subject who speaks against white critics whose reviews of his earlier shows call them "exotic," "sweet and sour," or "inscrutable." Next, he turns to identify with what, in the eyes of the dominant American community, is "inscrutable." Assuming such thing-like qualities as "little squinny eyes" (Kingston, 1990, 312), Ah Sing declares his "looks --- teeth, eyes, nose, profile --- perfect". (Kingston, 1990, 314) He claims that "these eyes are cowboy eyes with which I'm looking at you, and you are looking back at me with cowboy eyes. We have the eyes that won the West." (Kingston, 1990, 314) Furthermore, on the stage Ah Sing eats a banana that with its "yellow" skin and "white" flesh arbitrarily signifies Asian/Chinese Americans. His stunt of eating a banana suggests his subjectification of *the thing* he once rejected. Following the act, Ah Sing declares the emergence of "I" that means warrior in Chinese:

> We used to have a mighty 'I' [. . .]. At one time whenever we said 'I,' we said 'I --- warrior' [. . .]. Don't let them take the fight out of our spirit and language. I. I. I. I. I. I. I. I. I --- warriors win the West and the Earth and the universe. (Kingston, 1990, 319)

The "I. I. I. I. I. I. I. I" speaks for a multiple, many-voiced "I," an "I" that

stands in this particular example as a Chinese American male's battle cry. Ah Sing demonstrates that only in the act of articulating "I" can "I" exist. However, the "I" claim is not made just for himself; Ah Sing is doing it in front of and on behalf of his Chinese American ethnic group --- teaching them to say "I". Clearly, there is a difference between the quest for an "I" of the centered individualist belonging to the dominant society and that of the "I" of the marginalized and stereotyped minority. Wittman is operating more on a social level. He fights for the whole community and struggles to claim a collective identity for his people.

In *Tripmaster Monkey* Ah Sing combines his individual artistic goals with a communal vision, and the result is his play. As a playwright, director, and actor, Ah Sing wants to break the existing hegemony of the dominant society in art and literature. He wants to start a new tradition in American theater that would enable marginalized groups in American society to tell their stories on their own terms. And he wants to use artistic form of play partly through talk-story to expose racism, to talk about it openly, and to direct attention toward it with the hope that this awareness will help minorities to fight it. Therefore, his play is a passionate call for resisting the hegemonic control of the dominant society over the cultural, social, ideological, political, and economic lives of Chinese-Americans.

To conclude, *Tripmaster Monkey* reconciles the protagonist with his community and strengthens the image of a Chinese American in harmony with his community. This protagonist is no longer a lonely and culturally confused "I". He secures communal support and loudly announces his own ethnic identity. The picture he has brought forth is a new generation of Chinese Americans, a bicultural "we" --- who can enjoy their lives on the New Continent by empowering themselves with their Chinese heritage.

3. Ambiguous Consciousness to Self-affirmation

In Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone*, generational and cultural conflicts are examined through a survey on a Chinese American family's life and their suffering from

one daughter's death. It offers a new paradigm of spiritual quest that challenges the notion of a unified self achieved through the realization of one term in its other. Leila, the narrator "I", tries to balance her life between family obligations and her desire to escape from Chinatown and live with her boyfriend, which is exemplified by her relationship with her stepfather Leon and through the gap with her mother. *Bone* is not about the exterior of San Francisco's Chinatown, but rather a narrative about the interior reality of a community.

While identity is not a problematic issue in *Bone*, the questions of home and belonging become more concerned. Leila does have a home, but it is a difficult one, that does not provide security and warmth. Her family framework is not intact anymore, since her parents live separated from each other, and one of her sisters is dead by committing suicide and the other chooses a new life far away from the home. Leila differs, partially because she is the eldest daughter in family Leong. She feels strongly connected to her family and also to Chinatown, where she has spent all her life, but she knows she has to leave both in order to enjoy a happy life she is always seeking. When she along with his boy friend is ready to move out of Chinatown, she expresses a strong desire not to move too far away from their Chinatown roots. The solution she finds is to physically leave her family and surroundings, but to keep them in her heart and memories. This is totally different from her two sisters.

As Leila understands it, both Ona and Nina have made choices. Ona chooses death over life. Nina chooses to be American, starting a new life in New York far away from China town. Unwilling to follow Ona's or Nina's lead, Leila, with her strong responsibility to her parents, realizes her own choices. Leila's sense of her self and her relationship to others goes beyond the "soul-searching," unselfish, opposite to her sister Nina. The last word of the novel "backdaire" establishes momentarily Leila's self through the invention of a new language, which voices Leila's unwillingness to privilege either her Chinese or American identity or to break identity into clean-sheared roles that

define one's place in culture and, by extension, one's self and power within that culture. Leila understands her apparently contradictory identities as Chinese, American, woman, sister and daughter, and then blends individual and cultural self-identities, thus going beyond awakening self to renaming the world in which she lives to accommodate multiplicity.

As Kafka states, Ng's Leila Fu Louie (her father's name) is a quest figure journeying from "ambiguous consciousness" to "self-affirmation" [6] Leila has experienced a conflict between her Americanness and her Chineseness. When her American self almost defeats her Chinese self, Leila realizes Chinese tradition is rooted in her. Therefore, between American culture and Chinese culture, her conflict undergoes a triumphal change, from clash to harmony. Leila finally makes it, being one who is neither too Chinese nor too American, in other words, a Chinese American like herself, is valued.

Notes

[1] Jinqi Ling, "Reading for Historical Specifities: Gender Negotiations in Louis Chu's *Eat a Bowl of Tea*," *MELUS: The Journal of the Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 20.1 (1995): 40.

[2] ibid 46.

[3] ibid 35.

[4] Hsiao, Ruth Y. "Facing the Incurable: Patriarchy in *Eat a Bowl of Tea*." *Reading the Literatures of Asian America.* Ed. Shirley Geok-lin Lim and Amy Ling. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1992. 151-62.

[5] Donald C. Goellnicht, "Tang Ao in America: Male Subject Positions in *China Men*," *Reading the Literatures of Asian America*, ed. Shirley Geok-lin Lim and Amy Ling (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1992).

[6] Kafka, Phillipa. *(Un)Doing the Missionary Position: Gender Asymmetry in Contemporary Asian American Women's Writing.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997.

Conclusion

From the time Chinese began to immigrate to the United States during the gold-rush age, Chinese immigrants in America started a new life with their cherished American dream. However, the reality went against them, and the dream was broken. Most of them struggled at the bottom of the American society, the representative image of Chinese Americans described in American literature used to be a weak female, or Fu Manchou, the like. In the eyes of Westerners, they were always "outsiders". Actually, they were in an unfavorable position on the new land and they strived to change.

The United States is also a land of immigrants from other countries. This makes the United States multicultural. Just as any other immigrant groups in the United States, Chinese Americans often struggle to reconcile their perception of themselves with everyone else's view of them. They make efforts to assimilate themselves into the mainstream culture, and acquire sense of belonging to the mainstream society. They are eager to be recognized. Since the twentieth century, both immigrants and American-born Chinese have found themselves caught between the two worlds. As immigrants, they need to achieve an American identity. They also struggle to retain a Chinese identity. Moreover, these two identities are not easily compatible with each other.

Louis Chu's *Eat A Bowl of Tea* deserves a special place in the study of Chinese American literary traditions. It makes a start in defining a Chinese American identity which is no longer defined by stereotypes and which no longer has to be either Chinese or American, but could be both. In *Eat a Bowl of Tea*, New York's Chinatown is characterized as a male society through its economic closure and psychological, social, and cultural stagnation.

When exploring the issue of identity crisis and identity paradigm, Louis Chu turns his attention to Chinatown to depict a new image to break the

established stereotype. His characters find a home in the United States and become Americans of Chinese origin. The Chinese American sentiments and identities expressed in his work are close reflections of their time and circumstances, and even though they are quite progressive then, they are, from a more contemporary point of view, still incomplete because they dealt only with the male perspective and their communities. The controlling power of the original culture is embodied in fathers, victims of racial discrimination who wish to perpetuate a family structure that is incompatible with the new circumstances. Through the resolution of family conflicts, the young protagonists free themselves from the limiting ideologies imposed upon them by their fathers and create a new identity that harbingers the gradual transformation of American culture.

Maxine Hong Kingston, one of the first Chinese American writers, manages to go into depth, to create a space for women, and to show that it is possible for both Chinese American men and women to claim their place in the United States and to find an identity for themselves.

Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, *China Men* and *Tripmaster Monkey* disclose the struggle of Chinese Americans and their inner conflict when they confront a Chinese and American binary culture. Kingston invokes an autobiographical style of writing to voice concerns of the Chinese American community. She believes that by retelling Father and Mother's stories, Chinese Americans build their new cultural identity. In *Tripmaster Monkey*, Chinese Americans make a new community and collective identity in American society after re-telling their parents' histories. Therefore, Kingston achieves in claiming America and reconstructing Chinese American cultural identity. Kingston is that voice for Chinese Americans.

Bone differs greatly. There are no comic effects like in *Eat a Bowl of Tea*. Different from Kingston in her *Woman Warrior*, Fae Myenne Ng's protagonist Leila Leong does not have any mythical heroes to dream about but always has to face harsh reality. *Bone* is not about "authentic" Chinese or

Chinese-American identity; it is not about recuperating one's "lost" roots, heritage, or culture. Instead, the novel reveals how identity, and especially ethnic American identity, is a negotiation of terms and significations, in which "authenticity," "heritage," and culture itself are produced and re-articulated. Ng affirms a self who transcends dual personality by resisting reduction to a single ethnic identity, by recognizing gender and race asymmetry underlying the dualisms she faces and "backdaire" in the end articulates Leila's movement from one position of ambiguity to another.

Chinese American writers contribute greatly to Chinese American literature. In fact, many Chinese American writers are living in a similar kind of dilemma for general Chinese immigrants. They explore in depth into the identity conflicts within the Chinese American community and within the American mainstream society, focusing on Chinese Americans' struggles in their long journey to seek identity, individual or ethnic.

It is confirmed that Chinese American identity consists of a bicultural background. Chinese Americans are living in two worlds leading a double existence. In the immigrant world of their parents, they have to well-behave based upon their parents' teachings and win their approval. While outside their Chinese home, they have to change their way of life to assimilate into a new culture and wish to win the acceptance by whites. They have developed their identities with the influence of two different cultural backgrounds. What they are engaged to achieve is a search of their own novel ways in which a peaceful coexistence is desired, balancing two cultural forces and developing a generally accepted cultural identity.

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