



# **Cultural Mediations in Chinese American Literature**

First and Second Generation Immigrant Writings

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## Foreword

What made me want to choose “Cultural Mediations in Chinese American Literature” as the topic for my “hovedfag” thesis was the stories I have read about Chinese immigrants’ special encounter with the “Gold Mountain.”<sup>1</sup> When I read the syllabus for a graduate course in “Immigrants and Immigration in the United States: Studies in Qualitative Sources” I was stunned to learn how the Chinese coming to America were treated, and I started to wonder if the discrimination they experienced had ceased to exist.

Later, when I read literary works by Chinese American writers for a course in “Cross Cultural Mediations in American Literature” I found traces of Chinese Americans still being treated as majority culture’s Other, and I wanted to explore further if and how different texts written by Chinese Americans reflect this. As part of my course work I did a close reading of Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* and when I first started on my thesis I wanted to include this text in my discussion. Later I realized that there were other voices, not so well known in Norway, which also deserved to be heard, and considering the enormous amount of critical attention given to *The Woman Warrior*, I decided to turn to other texts by Chinese American writers.

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<sup>1</sup> “Gold Mountain” is what the Chinese have called the USA due to the nineteenth century gold rush in California, and later for being a land of opportunity. As a curiosity I can mention that the “New Gold Mountain” was used as a synonym for Australia.



## **Introduction**

### **Glimpses into a Historical Past**

During the 1960s and the '70s the notion "multiculturalism" emerged in the USA as a consequence of the Civil Rights movements as well as antiwar campaigns, women's liberation movements, student upheavals, and lesbian movements. Those who supported multiculturalism, as opposed to the assimilationist ideal of the melting pot concept, claimed that multiculturalism meant acceptance of different ethnic groups and their culture, religion, and language, thus keeping peace and harmony between them and between them and the state. Accordingly, the male WASP cultural hegemony was challenged by other voices; writers from African American, Asian American, Native American, and Latino American backgrounds emerged as well as gay and lesbian voices, and together they made up a new literature which mediated their special experiences and messages. In other words, writers from different ethnic groups were tired of being positioned and described as the Other by the dominant culture and they started writing back using their own voices, their own authorial signatures, signaling what Betsy Erkkila calls "a wish to gain visibility, voice and representation in American literature and history" (582). Today these literatures have moved from the margins to the center of attention, appreciated by readers and critics alike.

In the USA Chinese immigrants in particular have always been looked upon as not only being the Other but also Exotic and inassimilable. The texts I have chosen are all by Chinese American women and written or told in English. One might say that Chinese women were doubly marginalized, first, as women they were suppressed by their own culture, and second, as first or second generation immigrants they endured suppression by American

majority culture. Chinese women were, for instance, denied the right to accompany their husbands to America.<sup>2</sup> The authors have deliberately chosen to write in English, which in postcolonial and multiculturalistic terms can be seen as the silenced Other appropriating the dominant language in reclaiming a voice. In order to give a sense of changes from first to second and third generation immigrants and the development of Chinese American women's (literary) voices, I have chosen texts that represent the time span from the first Chinese immigrants arrived in 1849 until today. The point of departure for the discussion of the individual texts is the text itself, and by analyzing them both with regard to content and form I will try to reveal how personal and communal identities are constructed and shaped in and through different types of narrative. To help me achieve this goal I have chosen the life stories of Wu Tien Fu, Law Shee Low, Mary Tape, and Chun Ho; the autobiographies: Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, and Elaine M. Mar's *Paper Daughter: A Memoir*; and finally two works of fiction: Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone*, and Amy Tan's *The Bonesetter's Daughter*.

Since most of the texts are autobiographical in one way or another I find it necessary to include some remarks on the terms *autobiography* and *life narrative*. First of all, one might note that Smith and Watson make no clear distinction between autobiography and life narrative because they claim that the latter includes the former (3). A study of Chinese American literature involves recognition of how the author's position in society and culture leaves an imprint on a text. Another premise for the present study is that autobiographical writing has significance that goes beyond the strictly personal. This point is made by Robert F. Sayre when he argues that, "Autobiographies [...] may reveal as much about the author's assumed audience as they do about him or her, and this is a further reason why they need to be read as cultural documents, not just as personal ones" (qtd. in Smith and Watson vii).

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<sup>2</sup> In the following America will be used as an abbreviation for the United States of America.

Michael M.J. Fischer supports a similar idea when he remarks that, “What [...] seem initially to be individualistic autobiographical searchings turn out to be revelations of traditions, [and] re-collections of disseminated identities [...]” (198). In other words, the personal stories reveal as much about their own ethnic group’s coming to terms with a cultural heritage on the one hand and a dominant culture on the other, as they do about each individual’s personal struggle or search for an ethnic identity s/he can accept and find useful. Furthermore, as Sayre suggests, the implied reader should also be taken into consideration. As I will return to in connection with the discussion of individual texts below, this perspective is important especially to the extent that the texts can be said to be “writing back” to dominant culture.

In order to understand cultural mediations in Chinese American literature it is necessary to look at the Chinese immigrants’ history in the USA because as Europeans we have hardly learned anything about it at all. Shirley Geok-Lin Lim says in “Immigration and Diaspora”:

Although it is true that, except for Native Americans, all Americans are descended from immigrant populations and are members of diasporas, Asian American immigration history manifests distinctive differences from that of other groups. These differences, attributable to historical legislative racism against Asians [...], have been continuously foregrounded and thematized in Asian American literary productions. (291)

Among Asian Americans the Chinese Americans, in my opinion, have rendered in their writings the most visible institutional discrimination. Below, under the heading of “Encountering Institutional Racism,” I will look more closely at the Chinese American immigration history and also very briefly mention what happened in China in the period from

1850-2002 because I believe this knowledge will give us a better understanding of the texts that we will look into, not only the early texts, but also later ones. If we do not know what happened in China in 1966, for instance, how can we understand the significance of the utterance made by Man Yee's father in *Paper Daughter*: "You were born on a special day, do you know that? 1966 is important for the Chinese, do you know that?" (8-9)? In other words, some knowledge of the historical-cultural context adds to the understanding of these texts, and in my discussion I will look at both the "literariness" and the cultural aspects or "politics" of the different texts.

At the thematic level the Chinese American writers often use encounters with racism as an image of their own experience as being positioned as the Other by the dominant culture; Wu says: "More than anything else that unites us, everyone with an Asian face who lives in America is afflicted by the perpetual foreigner syndrome. We are figuratively and even literally returned to Asia and ejected by America" (79). Sau-ling Cynthia Wong fortifies the image when she comments: "Manners can be changed, but not skin color; as the Other, Chinese Americans will always, to some degree be spurned" (90).

In addition to racism, food is an important issue in Chinese American literature, Roland Barthes says: "food permits a person to partake each day of a national past" (qtd. in Wu 216). Food is also closely connected to the theme above, that is, racism, because seen from the position of the dominant culture Chinese food might be exotic, and different, something that describes the Other. In reference to how "specific relationships of domination" figure in Chinese American texts, Sau-ling Cynthia Wong says that "Images of food and eating in Asian American literature provide an especially cogent illustration of this point" (19). A majority of the texts I have chosen are preoccupied with food, and one might ask: how does this emphasis on food work on the reader, and is it intended to work differently on a white audience than on an insider, that is, a Chinese American?

The picture or image of China, whether good or bad, is a repeated concern in the texts written after 1949. Is the China described real, or is it a version that exists in the USA created by memory in order to find a usable past, a history which can help create a cultural identity? Fischer calls the turning to the past a “retrospection in order to gain a vision for the future” (198).

Hence, what I will pay special attention to in the texts are instances of racism, references to food, and memories about China, because in my opinion these themes and issues are important markers of Chinese ethnicity, and, according to Fischer, as such they are “deeply rooted emotional components of identity” (195). As already mentioned all the texts I have chosen are told or written by women and have female “I” persons or protagonists, and therefore it is also natural to comment upon how their double suppression is textualized. Finally, when found important, I will comment on class.

## **Encountering Institutional Racism**

The emigration from China in the nineteenth century is estimated to count at least 2.5 million people, where a total of approximately 300,000 immigrated to the USA. Most of them intended to be sojourners, that is, they came to the “Gold Mountain” with the intention of becoming rich and then go back home. The Chinese immigrants were hired in mining, railroad building, agriculture, and manufacturing, or they found work as domestic servants and laundry workers. Generally they were paid less than their white fellow workers, and in addition they were accused by the labor union for stealing jobs from white manual workers. From the beginning they also encountered different forms of what is referred to as “institutional racism,” what Roger Daniels calls “a whole series of discriminatory ordinances and statutes from the municipal to the federal level” (245). In 1852 a Foreign Miners’ Tax, which affected primarily Chinese miners, was raised, and special taxes were demanded from Chinese fishermen, laundrymen, and brothel owners. Unarmed Chinese were beaten, murdered and shot down in The Los Angeles riot in 1871, and similar incidents took place all over the country in the 1870s and 1880s; for instance, the massacre of Chinese miners at Rock Springs, Wyoming, in 1885 resulted in 28 dead and property damaged for \$147,000 (Yung 22).

As a result of an immense pressure from labor unions and people with power, Congress passed the Naturalization Act of 1870 and later the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882; the former said that only free whites and persons of African descent could become naturalized American citizens whereas the latter excluded all Chinese laborers from entering the USA for ten years. Both these Acts were of paramount importance in limiting the number of Chinese

people entering the US. In 1892 the Exclusion Act was renewed for another ten years by the Geary Act, which also said that any Chinese who was caught without legal papers could be sent out of the US after one year of hard labor. The Exclusion Act was extended indefinitely in 1904 until finally it was set aside in 1943.

However, the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which was made in 1868, said that all persons born in the USA were to be considered citizens; in other words, Chinese persons born in the US were citizens, and as such they could travel back to China and still be able to re-enter America on returning. In addition, they could marry in China (anti-miscegenation laws forbade intermarriage between whites and Chinese) and bring back their children but not their wives who were prohibited by Chinese law to emigrate until 1911 (Yung 19). In addition the US Page Law from 1875 made it very harsh for Chinese women to immigrate to America. Even though the law was made in order to regulate prostitution it proved an effective tool in preventing Chinese wives and daughters from entering the US because until proven different all Chinese women were looked upon as prostitutes and as such prohibited entrance. Furthermore, it was difficult for Chinese women to find a job in America. For instance, in San Francisco in 1870 only five of the 1,223 manufacturing businesses hired women (Yung 26); hence it was cheaper for a laborer to keep his wife in China where she had family and could work in the fields.<sup>3</sup> As a result the Chinese population in America mainly consisted of men; in fact, according to Yung, in 1890 of a total population of 107,488 only 3,868 were females (293)! It was not until 1946 when Congress, in connection with the War Bride Act, passed a separate law, which allowed wives and children of Chinese Americans to apply for entry without taking the quota system into account, that the maladjusted ratio of male/female began to decline. Finally, in 1952 Chinese women were allowed to enter the USA on the same conditions as men.

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<sup>3</sup> Most Chinese laborers had emigrated from the rural areas in the Pearl River delta in southeast China.

Due to diplomatic and trade interests merchants, Chinese officials, students, and travelers were not included in the Exclusion Act, and this is the loophole many people used in order to be able to enter the US between 1882 and 1943. Either they tried to become scholars whilst still in China, or if they had the means, they put money in a business in order to be entitled merchant or co-merchant, or they bought their entry as a “paper son.” In order to be able to be granted entry as the latter, an American citizen had to announce the boys or men who wanted to immigrate to the USA as his sons. Thus, 92,411 Chinese people entered the USA between 1882 and 1943 as compared to 258,210 before the Exclusion Act (Yung 22).

According to Daniels 51.1 percent of the Chinese population lived in California in the year 1900 (240), and when we know that almost half of them lived in large cities we can also assume that quite a few were affected by the 1906 earthquake and fire in San Francisco. Even though this event was a disaster for most people, it was also another loophole for Chinese immigration because people lost their birth certificates and had to have new issued. Thus, as Maxine Hong Kingston puts it in *China Men*: “An authentic citizen, then, had no more papers than an alien. Any paper a China Man could not produce had been ‘burned up in the fire of 1906’” (150). Accordingly, many were those who claimed to be American citizens when the time for distributing new certificates came. However, the Chinese had to wait until 2 October 1965 to be treated on equal terms with other immigrants; through the Immigration and Nationality Act Congress stated that immigration quotas, which earlier had been based on the percentages of the ethnic populations in the US, should be phased out over a five year period. According to Daniels all the released numbers were then to be distributed on a totally new basis where family reunion took precedence and where no country should receive more than ten percent of these numbers (338, 340). For the first time in history immigrants from the Western Hemisphere were restricted in numbers.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For more information about the history of the Chinese immigrants in America see Daniels chapters 9 and 10, Gjerde chapters 6-14, Kingston in *China Men* 151-159, and Yung.

Another important aspect of Chinese immigration that has to be mentioned are the distinct patterns of settlement and the formation of Chinatowns. Most immigrants lived in ethnic enclaves when they arrived in the US but what was special to the Chinese immigrants as compared with many other immigrant groups was that they tended to stay on in their closed society; even well to do Chinese continued to live in Chinatowns. The explanations for this stability are numerous but there is reason to believe that the main cause is prejudice and discrimination met outside Chinatown, and in addition, in 1878, different state laws held that the Chinese immigrants should stay within specific areas; according to Yung “they were generally not allowed to live outside [...]” (22). When we look into the different texts in chapter one, we will discover that this specific feature of Chinese immigration is reflected in most of them because all, except *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*, are set in Chinatowns.

## **A Brief Outline of Recent Chinese History 1850-2002**

If we take a brief look at what happened in China during this period, we might first get a better picture of what motivated Chinese immigration to the US, or to use another term, what the push factors for emigration were. Second, when we learn how the Chinese population in general suffered throughout these years, we may also be supported in our belief that it was prejudice that made the US government exclude the Chinese from entering the country. There are reasons to believe that the government supported the Native Sons of the Golden West who said: “California was given by God to a white people, and with God’s strength we want to keep it as He gave it to us” (qtd. in Wu 97), because Theodore Roosevelt, who was President from 1901 to 1909, said: “no greater calamity could now befall the United States than to have

the Pacific slope fill up with a Mongolian population” (qtd. in Wu 239). In addition, it is my belief that the following brief outline will enable us to discover and find traces of how changes in Chinese history are reflected in the different texts; we might also be able to discover whether the different authors give a correct picture of China, or if it the China they describe is invented.

According to Førland and Tønnesen China was part of the Manchu empire until 1911 when the Qing Dynasty was overthrown and a Republican form of government was introduced. However, before this happened more than twenty million people had died during different wars with Britain, France, and Japan (105). Not long after 1911 the Warlord period started, which as the name indicates, meant that different generals ruled in different areas and fought against each other. Most of the larger cities along the coast were at this time under foreign rule. Ordinary people, who mostly were peasants, suffered and were happy to see the Communist party born in 1921. The Nationalist party called the Guomindang, led by Sun Zhongshan or Sun Yat-sen, was also strong, especially in the northeast. Jiang Jieshi, better known to us Europeans as Chiang Kai-shek, took over the leadership of the party in 1925 when Sun died, and in 1937 when Japan attacked China, Jiang turned to the US for help. The US saw Communism as a threat and wanted by all means to confine it; hence they supported Jiang and Guomindang, but still seven million people died during the war with Japan which ended in 1945 (199).

The Communist party under the leadership of Mao Zedong had since its beginning in 1921 grown stronger each day, and in October 1949 Mao declared the People’s Republic of China. Hence, Jiang Jieshi had to flee to Taiwan where he was still supported by the USA as the legitimate leader of China, and when the Korean War started in 1950 the US fought with South Korea against North Korea which was aided by the Chinese army.

Another tragedy which has to be mentioned is the Big Leap Forward where Mao tried to make China into an industrial nation within a minimal time limit, that is, from 1958 to 1960. The result was disaster and starvation, and according to Førland and Tønnesen, approximately twenty million people died (237).

The last events I want to mention are the Cultural Revolution and President Nixon's visit to China. The former started in 1966 and was initiated by Mao and guided among others by his wife. Originally the campaign was aimed at Mao's rivals in the party administration but thousands of innocent people suffered and families were ruined.<sup>5</sup> In other words, the Cultural Revolution failed, and in 1969 the foreign minister Zhou Enlai, who already had turned his face toward the USA, more or less functioned as head of state. As a consequence of this, in 1971 China entered the UN as a legal representative of the Republic of China, and in 1972 President Nixon visited China as the first American president ever to do so. In many ways this was the starting point for the "westernization" of China which today has reached unexpected heights, with, for instance, participation in the Olympic games, English language schools everywhere in the larger cities, and free investment policy.

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<sup>5</sup> Personal accounts of these events can be found in Jung Chang's *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China* and in Xinran's *The Good Women of China*.



## **Chapter 1**

### **From Silenced Other to Speaking Self**

Whether recent immigrants or American-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. (Shirley Geok Lin-lim 290)

In Chapter one we encountered briefly how racism operated on the federal and the state level, and saw how this affected the Chinese immigrants as a group. In addition we learned a little about what happened in China in the same period. I now want to trace racism down to the individual level and see how it is reflected in different texts written or told by first or second generation Chinese female immigrants. In addition I want to pay attention to how food and the image of China are used in the search for communal and personal identity.

As mentioned in the introduction I have chosen texts which represent the time span from 1850 to 2002. Due to the scarce number of Chinese female immigrants and their lack of knowledge of the English language it is hard to find texts from the nineteenth century; neither Hamilton Holt, nor Thomas Dublin whose collections of immigrant voices are famous have included encounters of Chinese women's lives in America. Consequently, when it comes to this period I have to rely on stories told to and written down by other persons. Such stories are what Smith and Watson call "ghostwritten" narratives where "multiple levels of coaxing take place"(53), which means that there can be an ongoing invisible struggle between many

voices, and the autobiographer's oral voice can have been changed in order to make the written story more intelligible to the audience. Hence, Smith and Watson claim that it is important to consider four different types of "I"s when reading any type of autobiography, that is, "the real or historical 'I', the narrating 'I', the narrated 'I', and the ideological 'I'" (59). Furthermore, we should keep in mind who the implied reader is, or, as Smith and Watson comment, we have to "consider the kind of reader the text asks us to be" (69). In addition, texts can be read in many different ways depending on the eyes that see, where in the world, and when in time the reader is situated, that is, the way texts are read is context dependent.

In my opinion, there is a difference between the texts from the nineteenth century and the texts written during the last three decades of the twentieth century; the former appear to be mere accounts of life as it is encountered as immigrants in the US, not as instances of "writing back" to the dominant culture, which some of the latter writings can be said to have as their political agenda. Hence, the real or historical "I" might be more eminent in earlier than in later writings.

### **1849-1943 Voiceless Wives and Daughters**

The texts discussed in this chapter are all so called as-told-to narratives or collaborative life narratives as Smith and Watson call them. In addition Wu Tien Fu, Chun Ho, and Mary Tape's stories are quoted in works by contemporary writers and researchers, which means that things most probably have been left out, and the stories can have been altered in order to fit

into different projects. Still I believe what they have printed to be correct, because in addition to naming their sources the original dates of publication are given either in the text or as footnotes and are as follows: Mary Tape 1892, Wu Tien Fu 1894, and Chun Ho 1898.<sup>6</sup> Law Shee Low told her story in an interview with Judy Yung October 20, 1988.

Wu Tien Fu was six years old when she came to America as a “mui tsai,” that is, a domestic servant, in 1893. The mui tsai was placed in an affluent home or a brothel, and “was generally regarded by the Chinese as a form of charity for impoverished girls” (Yung 37); however, the best a mui tsai could hope for was to be married, and the worst that could happen to her was to be sold as a prostitute. Wu Tien Fu was sold to a brothel in San Francisco and was later rescued by Donaldina Cameron who brought her to live at the Presbyterian Mission Home in 1894. In *Unbound Feet* Yung reprints parts of Fu’s story as she told it to Ms Cameron:

[...] When I saw her [mother] cry I said, “Don’t cry, Mother, I’m just going to see Grandma and be right back.” And that worthless father, my own father, imagine, had every inclination to sell me, and he sold me on the ferry boat [in China]. (qtd. in Yung 39)

How she was brought to the USA the story does not say but she was found in a brothel on Jackson Street:

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<sup>6</sup> Mary Tape’s story is quoted by two different researchers, that is, Judy Yung and Xiao-huang Yin, who both give as their source Ruthanne Lum Mc-Cunn. *Chinese American Portraits: Personal Histories, 1828-1988* (San Francisco: Chronicle, 1998) 41. In addition Yung refers to the *San Francisco Morning Call*, November 23, 1892, 12. Yung has taken the account of Fu from Victor Nee, and Bratt de Bary Nee, *Longtime Californ’: A Documentary Study of an American Chinatown* (New York: Pantheon, 1972) 83-90. In addition Yung refers to Mildred Crowl Martin, *Chinatown’s Angry Angel: The Story of Donaldina Cameron* (Palo Alto: Pacific, 1977). Whereas Gjerde has found Chun Ho’s story in the National Archives, Immigration and Naturalization Service, in Washington DC, Ho’s story was taken down by U.S. Commissioner of Immigration, Hart H. North in San Francisco September 17, 1898.

[My owner] used to make me carry a big fat baby on my back and make me to wash diapers. And you know to wash you have to stoop over, and then he pulls you back, and cry and cry. Oh, I got desperate, I didn't care what happened to me, I just pinched his cheek, his seat, you know, just gave it to him. Then of course I got it back. She, his mother, went and burned a red hot iron tong and burnt me on the arm. (qtd. in Yung 39)

This story of course makes us feel sorry for the girl but what is more important in my opinion, is that it also gives us a picture of the Chinese men as cruel brutes, fathers as well as brothel owners, which again would support the idea that the Chinese were inhumane and not assimilable. In other words, stories like Fu's helped sustain the Chinese Exclusion Act even if not intended to, because, according to Yung, Protestant missionaries were the only ones who were up against anti-Chinese attitudes and legislative work (36).

Another story, which functions in a similar way, is the one told in 1898 by Chun Ho, a prostitute in America, to U.S. Commissioner of Immigration Hart H. North in San Francisco, reproduced in Jon Gjerde's *Major Problems in American Immigration and Ethnic History*:

I arrived in this country, together with six other girls brought by this woman on the 22nd of June, 1893. We all came on fraudulent certificates. [. . .]

I was told to claim that I was a married woman; that my husband's name was a Mr. Tsoy, merchant in San Francisco. I was also told to claim that my parents were in San Francisco. I was told that if I stuck to these claims I could be landed, and I was landed. (qtd. in Gjerde 250-251)

Later Chun Ho managed to be rescued and taken to the Presbyterian rescue home by Miss Cameron who brought the police along:

Tsoy Lung Bo has ever since, from time to time, been demanding from me the amount he paid for me, threatening to kill me if I should not pay it before going home to China or leaving the mission. (qtd. in Gjerde 251)

What we learn from these stories is that both mui tsais and prostitutes were treated badly not only by men but also by well to do Chinese American women. Hence, for readers of these accounts, who there are reasons to believe were mostly white since the majority of the Chinese immigrants were illiterate, it was easy to draw the conclusion that Chinese women were no better than Chinese men and should be banned from entering the USA, and, as we know, they were. Still, most probably, these stories were taken down by the missionaries in order to obtain financial support for their work amongst Chinese immigrants, and were not, as already said, meant to harm the Chinese population in America.

Mary Tape's story is extraordinary for this period but still worth including because she was one of the few Chinese women speaking up against racism. According to Xiao-huang Yin, Mary Tape was born in Shanghai and left to grow up in an orphanage managed by missionaries (27). At the age of eleven she was brought to the US, to San Francisco, where she lived together with other women at the Ladies' Relief Society. Later she met her future husband, Joseph Tape, a Chinese American who worked as an interpreter for the Chinese consulate in addition to having his own business. Mary was taught English at an early age and therefore had the advantage of not having any language problems in the USA, which turned out very handy when her children were old enough to be sent to school. What happened in 1884 was that her daughter was not allowed to attend the neighborhood school outside

Chinatown because “the association of Chinese and white children would be very demoralizing mentally and morally to the latter” (qtd. in Yung 49). Even though Mary was supported by the federal court in her claim that her children had the same rights as other children to go to a public school, the local Board of Education evaded the law by instituting a segregated school for Chinese children. Most women, and especially Chinese women, would at the time not have spoken back to the authorities but Mary did:

Dear sirs, Will you please to tell me! Is it a disgrace to be Born a Chinese? Didn't God make us all!!! What right! have you to bar my children out of the school because she is a Chinese Descend. [. . .] It seems no matter how a Chinese may live and dress so long as you know they Chinese. Then they are hated as one. There is not any right or justice for them. [. . .] May you Mr. Moulder, never be persecuted like the way you have persecuted little Mamie Tape. Mamie Tape will never attend any of the Chinese schools of your making! Never!!! I will let the world see sir What justice there is When it is govern by the Race prejudice men!  
(qtd in Yung 49)

Although her written English shows that she did not completely master the language, her message is perfectly clear.

Law Shee Low was born in Guangdong Province in 1904. At the age of seventeen her parents could not afford to have her at home any longer and married her off to a Gold Mountain man with whom she immigrated to America in 1922. In 1988 Law told her story to Yudy Yung: “We had no food to go with rice, not even soy sauce or black bean paste. Some of our neighbors even had to go begging or sell their daughters [...]” (60). When Law arrived in the USA she was detained at Angel Island, the west coast’s answer to Ellis Island: “It was

like being in prison” and the food was so bad “they [the Americans] must have thought we were pigs” (65). The Chinese women were humiliated both at interrogations where, as mentioned earlier, all were thought to be prostitutes until proven otherwise, and at the medical examinations where they had to undress in front of male doctors. Law was detained for ten days before the Board of Special Inquiry questioned her:

One woman who was in her fifties was questioned all day and then later deported which scared all of us. She said they asked her about [life in China] the chickens and the neighbors, and the direction the house faced. How would I know all that? I was scared. [...] When the interpreter asked me whether I visited my husband’s ancestral home during the wedding, I said no because I was afraid he was going to ask me which direction the house faced like the woman told me and I wouldn’t know. (Law Shee Low 65)

However, her husband who was allowed to be in the interrogation room, which according to Yung was quite unusual, had given a positive answer to the same question, and when Law was sent back to the barracks she was sure she would be deported. In addition to being a clothing salesman Law’s husband was a Christian and had connection with Donaldina Cameron, and this combination is probably what helped Law obtain a landing permit.

Looking back, if we read these narratives simply as if the historical or the real “I” is talking to us, the stories support what we have learned from history: that life was very harsh for Chinese women in America at the turn of the nineteenth century, and that there were mainly three types of women, namely the prostitute, the mui tsai and the merchant’s wife.

## **1945-1966: Awakening**

The attitude towards the Chinese in America changed during World War II and according to a public opinion poll in 1943 rendered by Elaine H. Kim “only 3 percent thought Chinese were cruel” and “only 4 percent thought Chinese as treacherous” (59). Now was the time for the Chinese to prove that they were worthy of being called Americans, hence critical voices towards the American culture would only harm their integration, and maybe that is why so few are heard in this period. Those who *do* speak more often criticize their own community for not trying harder to become integrated in the larger society and they question their ancestral traditions; one of them is Jade Snow Wong.

### ***Fifth Chinese Daughter***

Jade Snow Wong’s autobiographical novel *Fifth Chinese Daughter* was published in 1950 but some of the twenty-eight chapters were printed earlier as essays in different magazines, and maybe that is why 1945 is sometimes given as the year of publication. In the author’s note to the original edition Jade Snow Wong calls her book “a careful record of an American Chinese girl’s first twenty-four years” (xiii). Although the text should be classified as autobiographical writing, *Fifth Chinese Daughter* is written in the third person point of view, and as such it is a clear example of what Smith and Watson call “a subject always in process of coming together and of dispersing” (60). In addition it is a good example of how a person who is brought up to be well-mannered according to Chinese cultural standards tries to show respect to the Chinese

literary form because “autobiography as such was virtually unknown [in China], since for a scholar to write a book about himself would have been deemed egotistical in the extreme” (Kim 24). However, according to Xiao-huang Yin, in China it was also thought trifling to write fiction; thus by writing *Fifth Chinese Daughter* Jade Snow Wong has appropriated an American or Western genre and way of expressing herself. In my opinion the text can also be read as a *Künstlerroman* because we follow the protagonist’s development and recognition of her ability to produce artistic craft. Moreover, *Fifth Chinese Daughter* can be said to contain elements also of the Chinese novel which “offered many side excursions and indulged in subplots which it never intended to finish” (J.S.Wong 216), such as those related to “Uncle Kwok,” “Cousin Kee,” “Marriage Old and New Style,” “Rediscovering Chinatown,” and the story of the promised date with Joe. Hence the book itself, by welding Western and Chinese generic forms, is a representation of what it means to be Chinese American.

Jade Snow being an ABC, an American-born Chinese, was given birth in Chinatown, San Francisco in 1922; her father, Wong Hong, owned a small garment factory, which mostly produced overalls, and her mother was a housewife and a factory worker. Both her parents were first generation immigrants, and her mother had even had bound feet back in China. When Hong came to the USA around the turn of the century he had a hard time and was turned down by his fellow countrymen. However, the Cumberland Presbyterian Chinese Mission helped him and as a consequence he became a Christian. The reason why this is important to know is that his conversion made him “[...] as serious about Christian precepts as he was intent on Confucian propriety” (73). Whether he spoke English or not I am in doubt because first the narrator tells us that “The mission [...] taught him English at night school,” and later we learn that “Daddy and Mama spoke only Chinese” (72, 135). I take this ambiguous information to be just a reflection of the way the book is composed, that is, by essays written during a time span of ten years, and not as a sign of an unreliable narrator.

In the introduction to the 1989 edition of the book, Jade Snow comments that she wrote *Fifth Chinese Daughter* in order to create “better understanding of the Chinese culture on the parts of the Americans” (vii). Due to this the tone is mature and explicative even when the protagonist encounters racism from Americans. When Jade Snow was eleven years old her father sent her to an American junior high school outside Chinatown where there were no other Chinese students; Jade Snow made no friends among the foreigners but “Being shy anyway, she quietly adjusted to this new state of affairs; it did not occur to her to be bothered by it” (67). In order to save the bus fare Jade Snow often walked home from school, and this was when she heard “Chinky, Chinky, Chinaman” for the first time; a classmate of hers, Richard, was the source of the prejudiced words. Jade Snow pretended she had heard nothing and left the school building:

As she went out of the doorway, a second eraser landed squarely on her back. She looked neither to the right nor left, but proceeded sedately down the stairs and out the front door. In a few minutes, her tormentor had caught up with her. Dancing around her in glee, he chortled, “look at the eraser mark on the yellow Chinaman. Chinky, Chinky, no tickee, no washee, no shirtee!”

Jade Snow thought that he was tiresome and ignorant. Everybody knew that the Chinese people had a superior culture. (68)

Instead of raging against Richard and accusing him of having a prejudiced attitude toward Chinese Americans, she used her Chinese cultural heritage to help her explain to herself and her readership that Richard was one of the ignorant who had low grades and a “home training [which] was obviously amiss” (68).

Only one more overt episode of racism is included in the book: after graduation from Mills College Jade Snow sought employment and asked the college placement office for guidance, and albeit she was among the top ten students she received no help; on the contrary, her interviewer remarked:

Oh yes, I can give you some good advice, if you are smart, you will look for a job only among your Chinese firms. You cannot expect to get anywhere in American business houses. After all, I am sure you are conscious that racial prejudice on the Pacific Coast will be a great handicap to you. (188)

Even now Jade Snow does not speak back but she reveals her feelings to the reader: she “felt as if she had been struck on both cheeks,” and later we learn that after this incident she was more eager than ever before to obtain a job with an American firm because “her knowledge that racial prejudice existed had never interfered with her personal goals” (189). There are many covert hints in the text about how she acquired this knowledge. For instance, when she worked for the Kaiser family Jade Snow had to do all the housework and look after the children, and even though they treated her well, she was constantly reminded that she was lucky to have such a job. In the same period Jade Snow went to a dance arranged by the Chinese Students’ Club. In other words dances were segregated in high school, and why Jade Snow was surprised that “she was accepted as an equal wherever she went” at Mills College she does not say (157), we can only guess. When she worked at the shipyard we learn that “Her boss was kind, and except for his expression of interest in the Chinese culture, she was never made conscious of her ancestry” (195). However, the person who really pointed out her difference from the mainstream American was her father. Jade Snow had tried to convince her parents that she was an individual the American way whereupon her father answered, “You

are shameless. Your skin is yellow. Your features are forever Chinese” (130). Finally, when she was asked to deliver a speech in connection with her graduation from junior college she argues with herself whether or not she should do it: “Might not this be an opportunity to answer effectively all the ‘Richards’ of the world who screamed ‘Chinky, Chinky, Chinaman’ at her and other Chinese?” (134), and she decides to go ahead. Thus we learn that Jade Snow has met prejudice more than twice even though she does not say so overtly.

In nearly all the chapters in *Fifth Chinese Daughter* the theme of food is included. The narrator explains in detail the ordinary food consumed on a daily basis in addition to more special food served at different gatherings and festivals such as the Chinese New Year, the Moon festival, births, weddings, and funerals. A Chinese American reader would probably nod in recognition to these descriptions whereas a non-Chinese, or what the narrator calls a foreigner, would be presented to a totally different culture from his or her own. As mentioned earlier Jade Snow Wong’s intention is to “bring better understanding of the Chinese people” to the Western world, hence the intended readership is white (235).

Jade Snow is aware that the Chinese food is reckoned to be different and exotic and she wants to explain to the reader that it is healthy and tastes good, and in addition it is in fact possible to make it yourself, thus we find a recipe on egg foo yung and tomato-beef. A humorous account of the difference between the Chinese and the American cooking traditions is made when Jade Snow “who had never cooked string beans more than seven or eight minutes” discovers ten pounds of beans cooking through their second hour on Mr Jefferson’s stove (105). When she asks why, she learns that in the South where Mr Jefferson comes from a bean is not “tender until it has been cooked at least two hours” (105).

Moreover, Chinese food can be said to be Jade Snow’s acceptance ticket into the American society; two episodes substantiate this contention, and both of them take place at Mills College. Firstly we learn that the dean asks Jade Snow to invite some friends for dinner,

whereupon Jade Snow invites her five newly acquired friends, only one of them being Caucasian. However, Jade Snow's cooking was a great success, and she "found that the girls were perpetually curious about her Chinese background and Chinese ideologies" (161). The second episode is when the dean wants to arrange a party for some world-famous musicians and Jade Snow is asked to be the cook because the musicians were extremely fond of Chinese food. The whole Wong family participates in making the meal a success, and when the party starts the musicians "fitted into the party as modest, good-natured, warm, informal human beings, all deeply interested in Chinese food and the cooks, the Wong sisters" (172). The reader also learns that the subject discussed that night was not music but Chinese food and that due to this Jade Snow felt more like a hostess than a cook. Jade Snow summarizes her experience with famous people with the following thoughts: "[...] the great people of any race are unpretentious, genuinely honest, and non patronizing in their interest in other human beings" (173).

By having the protagonist ask questions about old rituals Jade Snow assures the reader that the second generation Chinese immigrants think differently than the first and do not follow traditions blindly. In Fourth Older Sister's wedding Jade Snow notices that, "The bride was merely a sort of decorative, noneating, nondrinking, nonspeaking accessory" (144), and when she asks her father to explain he says:

Chinese legendary symbolism has been passed on by word of mouth from generation to generation until the origins and true meanings have become lost. Superstition combined with economic reasons account for many of the formalities you witnessed today, but because most Chinese do not analyze or question symbols, they are blind followers of tradition. Only those who have become Christians have the courage to question forms of action. (144)

In other words, the text conveys the idea that a blend of Chinese tradition and Christian belief is what is needed to survive as a Chinese American.

Jade Snow's grandmother was not a Christian, and in the book she is one of the characters who is described as representing China and Chinese traditions; her grandmother was the one who told "delightful stories from another world — the world she called 'back home in China'" (29). Even though Jade Snow thought in Chinese when she attended junior college, by using these words the narrator makes it clear to the reader that China is nothing more to the second generation Chinese immigrant than an image made visible through the stories told by their ancestors. In other words, it is not somewhere they can go back to in the same way as a first generation immigrant can; Jade Snow's father wanted her to go to China after she had finished high school because he thought it the only place where "a Chinese could realize his optimum achievement" (95). The fact that the grandmother always wore Chinese clothing and her room was furnished in the Chinese fashion including an ancestral worship table made the image of a different country more alive. Her grandmother practiced old rituals and when Jade Snow became sick of scare her grandmother cured her with burning Bok Fong, chants, and a flaming hot and bitter tea. However, she was also the one who told Jade Snow to study hard because "the ones who do not try are left behind" (36).

Xiao-huang Yin says about the second generation immigrants that "the struggle to enter the larger society and the quest for a place in American life are the dominant themes of their writings" (119). One way of achieving acceptance is to demonstrate loyalty to the American society. Jade Snow is eager to show the reader that her Chinese upbringing has taught her manners and ideals which qualify her minority group for being called a model minority. Hence, when during the depression years her family had economic problems the solution was never government relief because her mother believed that only through hard

work could her children learn “to cope with the world” (54). As a consequence Jade Snow had to take responsibility for the housework in the Wong family when she was eleven years old. Moreover, when her applications for scholarships were turned down, and her father denied to pay for her college education because she had “been given an above average Chinese education for an American-born Chinese girl [and] an average education for an American girl,” and her brother needed money for his studies, she had to work outside the home in order to obtain money for her education (109). Yet, she was always among the top ten at the different schools she attended, and later when she was asked to Christen a ship and both Chinese and American newspapers recorded the merit, she had not only fulfilled her grandmother’s request, but also proved to her Chinese community as well as the American society that she was a worthy citizen of both.

The protagonist’s growing consciousness of the divergence between the American and the Chinese ways of handling miscellaneous issues is a theme throughout the book. Already at the age of seven Jade Snow started comparing the two, and she realized that “[...] the specific differences would involve a choice of action,” and that “[...] the comparison made her uncomfortable” (21). When she hurt herself during a sport’s lesson she was comforted by her teacher who put her arms around her, an action which astonished Jade Snow because in her environment physical affection was nonexistent. Furthermore, when she tried to teach her parents that children in America were looked upon as individuals and as such had the right to be heard, hence it was wrong of parents to demand unquestioning obedience, her father scolded her, whereupon Jade Snow started wondering:

Could it be that Daddy and Mama, although they were living in San Francisco in the year 1938, actually had not left the Chinese world of thirty years ago? Could it

be that they were forgetting that Jade Snow would soon become a woman in a new America, not a woman in old China? (125)

However, throughout the years Jade Snow grows to learn that the American way has its faults as well, and that instead of rejecting one culture totally, the right thing for her to do is to find a balance between the two. Thus the picture of Jade Snow as an artist in Chinatown functions as a symbol of this “dispersing and coming together”: Firstly, she has chosen Chinatown to be the setting for her new life; secondly, the Chinese people watching her are sure she is a first generation immigrant because of the way she keeps her hair in two braids around her head and the pottery she makes is similar to the hand made Chinese stoneware. On the other hand her ways are American because whoever heard of a Chinese woman working with clay in a window display, or having her own business? Even her father realizes that Jade Snow by finding her own way has fulfilled his dream, “[...] that by my stand I have washed away the former disgraces suffered by the women of our family” (246).

As mentioned above, in the early 1950s it was important to show gratitude to the USA for the opportunities she presented to her immigrants; on the other hand it was also important for America to show the world that the American Dream was a real choice for Chinese immigrants as well as for Americans. *Fifth Chinese Daughter* includes both these tasks, firstly by its content and secondly by being translated by the U.S. State Department into many different Asian languages. In addition Jade Snow Wong was sent on a grant to different Asian countries in 1953 in order to make them believe that “a female born to poor Chinese immigrants could gain a toehold among prejudiced Americans” (ix).

In spite of the accommodationist tone *Fifth Chinese Daughter* has had an immense impact on writers emerging in the 1970s; Maxine Hong Kingston, who had tried to write stories about girls with blond curly hair in her youth, is one of them. In two different

interviews reprinted in *Conversations with Maxine Hong Kingston* (“Talking with the Woman Warrior” and “To Be Able to See the Tao”) Maxine is asked what kind of books she read as a child, and in both of them she mentions *Fifth Chinese Daughter*:

I must have read *Fifth Chinese Daughter* when I was in 6th or 7th grade, and it was really, really important because, up to that moment, I had not encountered a Chinese character in a book, let alone a writer. It made me realize we were left out. [...] There were such wonderful illustrations of little kids that looked like me, and most importantly, written by a Chinese American woman. So, she gave me this great welcome and send-off, so I continued writing. (“Talking with the Woman Warrior” 83)

In my opinion there is a clear connection between what Jade Snow Wong’s father says about legends and traditions quoted above and what Maxine Hong Kingston in fact does in *The Woman Warrior*, namely change the traditional myths. As Kingston says herself: “The way I keep the old Chinese myths alive is by telling them in a new American way” (qtd. in Skenazy and Martin xiii).

Another author who is clearly influenced by *Fifth Chinese Daughter* is M. Elaine Mar. As we will see, she is even more concerned than Jade Snow Wong about gender and Confucianism being the source of traditional Chinese conventions concerning the differences between the two sexes, and in my discussion of this aspect of her *Paper Daughter: A Memoir*, I will have occasion also to make references to *Fifth Chinese Daughter*.



## Chapter 2

### Contemporary Voices

#### 1965-2002: Speaking Back

Since the mid-1960, an abundance of Chinese American voices are heard, and the majority of them are female. Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts*, published in 1976, is reckoned by most critics to be the milestone that really changed the image of the silenced Other. Followed in 1989 by Amy Tan and her *Joy Luck Club*, one might say that these two authors were the pathfinders that showed new authors such as for instance Gish Jen, Fae Myenne Ng, and M. Elaine Mar the way. According to Sau-ling Cynthia Wong 1991 is looked upon as the year when the production of literary works by Chinese American as well as other Asian American female authors really took off, and due to this I have chosen to let two of the newcomers in addition to Amy Tan speak in this chapter.

#### *Paper Daughter: A Memoir*

*Paper Daughter: A Memoir* by M. Elaine Mar, which appeared in 1999, is written in the first person point of view, and by choosing the genre of memoir the author has clearly broken with the Chinese literary tradition and decorum as discussed above. However, both *Fifth Chinese Daughter* and *Paper Daughter: A Memoir* describe the protagonist's growth, education, and

struggle to find an identity through childhood to adolescence, and have similarities with another genre, the Bildungsroman. Moreover, some critics would suggest that the latter text could be read as an Immigrant Novel because it offers an immigrant protagonist representing an ethnic world view who comes to America with great expectations and who through a series of trials is led to consider them in terms of his or her final status, which according to William Q. Boelhover is what it takes to be defined as belonging to the genre (5). However, in my opinion it is better to read it as a memoir because in spite of offering an immigrant protagonist in Man Yee, the main character seems too young to represent an ethnic worldview when entering the USA. Hence I choose to read it as a memoir, and as such it needs a closer definition. Even though M.H. Abrams asserts that there is a distinction between autobiography and memoir, Smith and Watson point to the fact that today the two technical terms are used interchangeably. However, critics tend to agree that there are some differences which are worth paying attention to; in a memoir the “I” person is described more by the actions and utterances of other persons than by inner revelations from him- or her-self. In other words, what different persons in the text say or do may reveal more about the protagonist or the narrated “I” than the narrating “I” tells us directly about him- or her-self.

M. Elaine Mar is a first generation immigrant who came to the USA at the age of five together with her mother on April 17, 1972. Her father had immigrated in December 1969, and accordingly it took him more than two years to earn enough money to send for his family. Even though they lived in Hong Kong at the time Elaine was born they originally came from Toishan, “a small rural district [...] in the southeastern Chinese province of Guandong” (Mar x), and their language was a local dialect of Cantonese or Guangdonghua called Toishanese. In the book Elaine uses the name Man Yee which is the name her parents gave her. Man means intelligence, expressing the hope that she would be smart, and Yee means righteousness, commemorating Mao’s Cultural Revolution. However, the book is not signed

by Man Yee but by M. Elaine Mar, which, according to the writer, is the name of “who I’ve become – the self expressed in English” (xii). Hence, already in the introduction we are made aware of the different identities working in the text and how identity is not fixed but always in process.

The story is set both in China, Hong Kong, and in the USA and covers a time span of 58 years, from China in 1930 to Hong Kong in the late 1950s, and finally in America from 1972 to 1988. When living in Hong Kong Man Yee is a happy child in spite of her family’s lack of affluence: “Safely nestled between my parents, I believed, as Mother did, that we were the luckiest people on earth” (9). Her father, who had come to Hong Kong in 1957 at the age of twenty-seven, worked as a carpenter in the building construction trade; still, he did not earn much because the well paid jobs were reserved for those who could speak English. Man Yee’s mother had the same experience when she arrived in Hong Kong at the age of seventeen; even though she spoke three different Chinese dialects she could not obtain a job because she did not understand English, and “frustrated by rejection, thought herself too old to learn” (7). Luckily both of Man Yee’s parents were used to being economical with their slender means from the time they lived in China where they experienced war and widespread famine, and in Hong Kong as well as in Denver they were content to live with their small family in a tiny room of ten feet by ten. In Hong Kong Man Yee was described as a clever and well-behaved little girl, which in Chinese meant that she listened to instructions and did what the grown up people told her to do. When she attended school at the age of three she won the “neatest work” award for two years, and when she left for the USA two years later she “knew multiplication tables up to nine-times-nine, wrote one hundred Chinese characters, and spoke five words in English - cap, ball, hello, yes, no” (21). In other words, she was reckoned to be an intelligent child; hence it was a shock for her to learn that in the US she was looked upon as something quite the contrary, that is, stupid.

What met Man Yee in Virginia Vale, Denver, was “A confusion of old and new worlds: Two fat Buddhas on top of a huge television set. TV English competing with my aunt’s Toishanese” (39). In addition Yee soon learned that she could not trust her mother’s judgments as valid in the US, and what she had taught Yee in Hong Kong was not up to standard in America. For instance in Hong Kong Yee was told not to take off her shoes anywhere whereas in America she was scolded by her aunt Becky because she wore shoes inside. When Yee’s mother tries to explain she is cut off by the following answer, ”You’re not in Hong Kong anymore. [...] In America things are different. In America people have carpets” (43). The impression that Yee’s mother knew little about American life and conventions was reinforced when she told Yee to use nail polish remover as perfume.

During daytime the first five months in America Yee stayed at home with her mother in their room in the basement of aunt Becky’s house and due to this none of them spoke any English. The consequences of this inability were above comprehension for both of them. However, Yee starts to realize when she is given her American name in order to register for school that neither she nor her mother will understand her English name: “A horrible thought struck me: ‘I don’t know English, either. How will I know my name?’” (61). Since Chinese names always mean something, and Yee’s cousin’s name San, who lived in the US denoted rise or upward, it was natural to ask what American names connoted as well. Finally, when she was given the name Elaine and both Yee and her mother realized that her American name did not stand for anything her “life cleaved in two” (62). In other words, she becomes conscious of her dual identity.

The first year at school Yee was thought to be stupid because she could not explain herself in English and the other children teased her because of that. In addition her schoolmates picked on her because of her looks. In the playground comments such as “Chink eyes, slant eyes, you’re so ugly, why don’t you go back to where you came from?” were

regular (117), and the other children threw pebbles at her and pulled her hair. The reaction described is that of a child: “I didn’t understand anything about America. In Hong Kong, everybody had liked me. Now no one did. I couldn’t figure it out” (45). When Yee was sent to a speech therapist during school hours she “thanked God for giving me thirty minutes away from my classmates” (118). At home Yee could not tell her mother about these incidents because she would just say that she did not send her to school to play neither with the “bok gui” nor the “hok gui” children, that is, neither the white nor the black children. Moreover, when Yee announced that she wanted to go back to Hong Kong her mother took Yee’s Hong Kong photo album away with the comment: “We live in America now, you need to stop thinking about the past if you want to succeed. [...] Study hard, learn English, be the best at school, and every-body will like you. People always like the most clever girl” (117). Every day after school Yee had to practice Chinese calligraphy in order to remember her ancestors’ names and show them respect but now suddenly her mother wanted her to do English language exercises instead; thus Yee was deprived of two important items connecting her to the past, her photo album and her Chinese calligraphy brushes.

Michael M.J. Fischer says that ethnicity can easily be made “chauvinist, sterile and superficial” when taught in institutions, and this is what often happened in the 1970s when being a minority student suddenly became popular (195). A good example is rendered in Mar’s text: Yee was asked to tell the other students about her life in Hong Kong “For Social Studies, dear, [...]. To give us an idea about the different cultures in the world” (136). When Yee felt that what she said left her fellow students with the image of the Chinese men as either sissies with ponytails and long robes, or Kung fu fighters, she says she “tried to think of something else to say. Something scary and exotic” (138). Hence, Yee told her classmates that the Chinese had firecrackers and dragon dances every week, which of course was a big lie

but neither the teacher nor anyone else corrected the picture she gave them. In other words, they got what they wanted and expected, a picture of the Chinese as the exotic Other.

Yee was also asked to tell her class about the food she usually ate at Chinese New Year. When she mentioned chicken and duck, which to some of the students were too normal, they suggested dragon meat and fried rice, to which she protested: “‘Well, no,’ I said, scorn creeping into my voice. Only the gui ate fried rice. And whoever heard of dragon meat?” (139). In other words, she felt things were going too far and had to speak back.

In the first chapter called “Chicken Bones and Mother’s Milk” the narrating “I” is descriptive in the way food is presented to the reader; just like Jade Snow Wong the narrator in *Paper Daughter* teaches us how to cook rice, and we are told that the Chinese eat chicken for good luck and therefore you should always take a little bit even if you were filled up. We are also told that because it took a long time to make soups these were only made on holidays, and that on special occasions family and friends would come together at a restaurant and yum cha, drink tea, and have “chicken feet, solid lumps of boiled cow’s blood, and sweet egg custards in flaky pastry shells” (17). Moreover, we get to know that the narrated “I” being a true Cantonese loves to suck out the marrow from the two-bone middle section of chicken wings, and we learn that this is the normal way. However, when Yee’s mother served chicken wings in America the narrating “I” has a very different tone; eating real Chinese food has become a rarity and Yee gives the reader a passionate account of the meal. She is completely absorbed in the action of devouring the bones and does not look up until she has finished. For a moment she is back in Hong Kong in her mind. But paradise does not last for long; she realizes she lives in another reality by her cousin San’s horror struck outcry: “She’s eating *bones!* Little Cousin is so hungry, she’s eating *bones!*” (49). Thus she learned that in the USA no real Cantonese who wanted to be American ate chicken bones.

Throughout the book multiple voices represent different identities: Yee's mother above all is the Chinese signifying what was attractive in the past, she makes the family remember and recollect Chinese traditions, and she makes meals that awakens Yee's memories, which is to say that the food connects Yee with her past life in Hong Kong and she becomes a whole person again. Sau-ling Cynthia Wong states in *Reading Asian American Literature* that "something about the immigrant situation [...] causes the first generation to value efficient eating unquestioningly, almost as a measure of spiritual stamina" (28). Thus, when Yee stops eating because she wants to buy modern American clothes and the only way she can achieve that is by saving her lunch money, her mother is the one who cures her with "potions that thickened your blood" and "hot rice poultices" (223).

On the other hand, Yee's mother is also the one who says that you have to forget the past in order to be successful in America, which signals that she has realized that there is a difference between being Chinese in America and Chinese American, and that if she represents the former she will never be a success. Aunt Becky is the image of the successful Chinese American with her ranch-style house with carpets and a pink toilet and her job running the restaurant kitchen. As opposed to Yee's mother, aunt Becky made sandwiches and canned spaghetti: "Foods that erased memory and leached my [Yee's] body of desire" (49). Thus we learn that Yee struggles with her identity as an American, and it is not until she finds out that her mother eats leftovers from the restaurant that she discovers that there is a way to handle the problem. Yee explains:

I grew up in the back room of a Chinese restaurant watching my family labor through thirteen-hour days, seven days a week. We served up foods defined as 'Chinese' by the restaurant owners, Annie and Casey Rosenberg, although we ourselves had never tasted egg foo yung or sweet and sour pork before. (viii)

The food being neither Chinese nor American but something in between, something invented, “transcending language and ethnicity,” built a bridge between the American waitresses and the Chinese kitchen workers as they all ate the food the customers had left untouched (178). Fischer says that ethnic identity is re-invented, and ethnicity is not something that is in our genes but something that each generation has to come to terms with in their own mode. It is the process of “inter-reference, the interweaving of cultural threads from different arenas, that give ethnicity its phoenix-like capacities for reinvigoration and reinspiration” (230). This comment on food can thus be read as a reinvention of an ethnic identity by taking the best from both cultures and swallowing it, that is, making it part of yourself.

Yee’s quote above and the statement “[...] as an American I continue to lie if I perpetuate the myth of a classless, integrated America” given in the introduction by Mar (ix), indicate that we have to concern ourselves with class when analyzing *A Paper Daughter*. Elaine Mar also says that until she became grown up she was ignorant about the existence of Chinese Americans holding an office in important positions in the American society; her Chinese American world was that of restaurant workers and seamstresses, and even though they worked hard they never earned enough money to have any luxury. In an interview with Aine Cryts, Elaine explains that she wanted to reveal her world to people who had not experienced it. Yee tells the story of how with a total annual income of \$16,000 her parents could neither afford to buy furniture nor were they happy to pay for Yee’s application fees for universities, and her mother was quick to remind Yee that in China good students do not pay anything for university education (279).

Furthermore, it is impossible to read this book without commenting on the issue of gender because right from the start we are told that to be a girl in a Chinese family is similar to being nothing, or at most a waste of money and time for the parents. Yee’s mother asserts

the Three Obediences and the Four Virtues in the Confucian ideology which says that a Chinese woman should obey her father at home, her husband after marriage, and her son if she became a widow, and she should show modesty in all her actions be it speech, appearance, and all her duties. Yee is often reminded that she is a girl and therefore ought to show respect to all family members except females younger than herself. When living in Hong Kong Yee finds these rules unproblematic but in America she discovers that there are other guidelines and she is confused about how to behave. Her first encounter with the American way is when she and her mother are picked up at the airport: “Aunt Becky led the way. In this backward country called America, she was in charge. Not my father, not Uncle Andy, my aunt. A woman. To my surprise, no one complained” (37).

As for Jade Snow Wong in *Fifth Chinese Daughter* this discrepancy between the Chinese and the American etiquette for girls grew more visible for Yee too as time went by. Four years after immigration Yee’s mother still signed her husband’s name on all papers, be it alien registration cards, school reports, or bank deposits because “It’s the only name with meaning” (160). Yee grew more and more angry because she felt that being female was as good as being male, and she began to despise her mother for not being more American. In addition Yee was clever at school and appraised by all her teachers, thus she found it even more incomprehensible that her mother said she was nothing, and she explains: “I had trouble respecting her. I grew increasingly willful, violating the most sacred of cultural tenets: absolute fealty to family and elders” (160). The conflict reached its climax when Yee was not allowed to date a “ghost” boy, firstly because she was too young, secondly because he was white, and thirdly because her father told her not to. Yee complained to her aunt Becky whom she thought was Americanized in her manners but even she gave her no support. On the contrary, she said that Yee should do what was expected of her from her family, and if she did

not obey she would shame her father's name. When Yee asks if she does not exist as an individual her aunt replies with disdain: "You're no one without your father's name" (228).

Thus it is quite understandable that Yee can't wait to move away from home, and when she receives her entry letter to Harvard University she sends her acceptance reply without asking her parents. Her mother would of course not let her go but her father allowed it because both Kennedy, and Kissinger, who even became a senator even though he was not born in the USA, went to that University. Hence Yee's father by letting her go showed his belief in the American dream.

In a way, through the different dialogues rendered in the text, the book supports Abrams's definition of a memoir: "the emphasis is not on the author's developing self but on the people and events that the author has known or witnessed" (15), and as such Elaine M. Mar has appropriated the American way of writing. Being a first generation immigrant she has also appropriated the English language and made it an important part of her identity through many years of hard work and struggle. Still, the text is marked by the cultural position of the writer because we find words written in Chinese, and there are many references to historical events in both China and the USA. However, to the extent that the text presents a social and cultural critique, it is more than just a critique of mainstream American society; in addition Elaine severely criticizes the Chinese in America for not trying hard enough to learn the English language and she feels "annoyance and guilt" when her uncle arrives from Hong Kong because he "embodied everything I hated about my family - the inertia, the displacement, the lack of hope" (278).

In the epilogue called "The Second Immigration" the narrating "I" shares with the reader the intimidating experiences she endured during Freshman Week at Harvard, and due to this experience, how she lied about her parents throughout the time she spent at university: "I didn't want to explain that over four years the distance between Denver and Cambridge had

grown until I was as far away as another country. My parents weren't able to visit. Like my grandfather, I'd immigrated with no way to send for my family" (292). In other words, she had become a paper daughter; she had traveled so far away from her parents' way of living that she could not go back, they belonged in the "old country." One might also say that she has been uprooted twice, that is, first from her Chinese environment in Hong Kong, and second from her familiar setting in Denver's Chinatown, until she finally settled down in Boston. The changing of her names from ManYee to M. Elaine Mar, the person she has become, connotes her transition to the "new country."

M. Elaine Mar has also traveled a long way from Jade Snow Wong; in its angry voice *Paper Daughter* can be said to be the 1990s answer to *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, similar in content yet very different in style we now hear the Other speaking back. Even though both texts function as cross-cultural mediations between ethnic and white audiences their message is different; whereas Jade Snow Wong tried to give the impression of the Chinese as the model minority, M. Elaine Mar reveals another reality not so idyllic nearly fifty years later. The next text, *Bone* by Fae Myenne Ng, a second generation Chinese immigrant, also written in the 1990s conveys a similar attitude but Ng' voice is more sad than angry.

## ***Bone***

Fae Mayenne Ng's first novel *Bone* was published in 1993 and soon became a bestseller. Some of the chapters in *Bone* were in print as short stories before the book was published; the most famous is "A Red Sweater" which was printed in *The American Voice* in 1986, and later included in the *Pushcart Prize Anthology*.

A biographical essay by Mercedes Leonor Arias and others, gives the basic facts of Fae Myenne Ng's life story: She was born in 1957 in San Francisco's Chinatown, where her parents settled after they had immigrated from China in 1940. Here Ng grew up together with her brother in a hard working family; like Jade Snow Wong's mother Ng's mother was a seamstress in a garment factory, and her father worked as a cook (par.1). 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. During the time she wrote the many drafts of *Bone* she worked as a waitress in order to support herself.

According to the cover of *Bone* it is "a classic of contemporary American life," hence, by now there is a possibility that America has accepted her different voices as an integral part of society. Placed in the upper right corner of the cover, which makes it stand out, is a bright yellow label that tells the reader that this book is a novel, and on the copyright page we are once more reminded that this is fiction. Due to the first person point of view in which the book is written and the accurate descriptions of San Francisco's Chinatown, Fae Myenne Ng has probably found it necessary to amplify *Bone*'s fictitious character. However, as Sau-ling Cynthia Wong says in *Reading Asian American Literature*, novels are "likely to exhibit more readily discernable linkages to the extratextual world" (12). Thus, the novel can be just as informative as an autobiography about how personal and communal identities are shaped.

Even though the story is universal, that is, about a daughter's suicide and how the other family members manage to live through their grief, it is also specifically Chinese American because of the setting in Chinatown and the Chinese American characters. In my opinion Fae Myenne Ng re-vision and re-writes the past in order to find an identity which is acceptable today; as her first-person narrator says: "Remembering the past gives power to the present [...]" (88-89). By presenting to the reader the lives of the five Leong family members and their different solution to the quest of finding completion, the narrator points to diverse ways out. In the above mentioned biographical sketch by Mercedes Leonor Arias and others, we find a quote from an article by Draper which cites Ng's own comment on the novel:

I wanted to explore the desire to escape. Suicide was another metaphor to speak about departure. My point was not why Ona [...] committed [sic] suicide. The point was that there was a way to honor her decision. I wanted to look at the courage it takes not only to leave, but to remake another world. (qtd. in Arias, par.2)

Ng's poetic language makes the setting, which, as already mentioned, is mainly in San Francisco's Chinatown, and the people portrayed come real. At first glance the words seem simple and plain without any hidden meaning, just like the clean bones in the brown bag, "no waste," but as we take a closer look we realize that bones are sweeter than we know, there is a nutritious marrow inside (31). The eldest daughter Lei is the narrator, and the other characters of importance are her two sisters, Ona, the middle one, and Nina, the youngest, Leon Leong, the head of the family, and Dulcie Fu, the mother. In addition Mason, Lei's boyfriend, and later her husband, plays an important role. Together these characters make up a symphony of voices, different yet belonging to the same course, that is, the formation of their identity. By

carefully drawing each character Ng allows the reader entrance as a spectator allowing him or her to discover what Stuart Hall has said so wisely, that “cultural identity is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’” (394).

In the first chapter we meet Leon who lives at the San Fran, an old men’s hotel in Chinatown, where he also lived when he was a bachelor, and where his paper father Leong Hai-koon had lived his last years and finally died. The narrator describes the place like this: “In this country, the San Fran is our family’s oldest place, our beginning place, our new China. The way I see it, Leon’s life’s kind of made a circle” (4). In a similar way Fae Myenne Ng has made *Bone* kind of circular, that is, the end is in the beginning and vice versa. Even some of the chapters have this circular or back and forth movement, symbolizing the different characters’ search into their past for an identity to hold on to in the present. As we will see Leon and Mah together with their old friends are the characters in the story that represent the old time, the recollection of an ancient China, old customs, and traditions. In a way they show the younger generation that there was a past which was real.

In my further discussion of the text I will try to show how each character reveals that there is no role model for becoming Chinese American, and that each in his or her individual way tries to find a style that does not violate his or her several components of identity (Fischer 196).

We learn that Leon was born November 21, 1924 and immigrated to the US fifteen years old. He traveled as a paper son to Leong Hai-koon on false documents, for which he had paid five thousand dollars. Since Leon did not know any English, he never changed his false name because he on no account trusted the government; he thought that in America “paper is more precious than blood” (9). Hence, he kept all his papers in a large suitcase maintaining the old-timers’ belief that “all writing was sacred,” and by doing this he is also able to show the narrator glimpses of a past worth remembering, because the events are important parts of

their common ancestral history. Thus the narrator finds pictures “of Confucius, a Japanese soldier with his bayonet aimed at a Chinese woman, ration lines in Canton, gold lines in Shanghai” (59). However, Leon also kept papers about Hitler, Charlie Chaplin, and the atom bomb, which symbolize that he is a part of two worlds.

More examples of this feeling of being part of two worlds are firstly Leon’s treatment of Confucianism: Leon is the one in the family who believes in Confucius and keeps an altar where he offers food and lights incense to the Eight Holy Immortals, and when Ona dies he laments to Confucius. However, he does not stick strictly to Confucianism because we also learn that one New Year he and Ona made an offering to Jesus. Furthermore, when Leon found grandpa Leong’s lost bones he made his own ritual; in addition to the traditional oranges for good luck Leon placed a package of Lucky Strike cigarettes by the gravestone. Thirdly, we learn that as an old man Leon kept some money which he called his “Going-Back-to-China” fund, even though he made clear that it was not really a choice because he had “only a bowl of bitterness to show for his life as a coolie” (148). Finally, we are told that when Leon comes back home from his sea voyages the rather strict upbringing rules, which Mah practiced, were all loosened; the narrator says: “There were nights we had to speak Chinese at the dinner table and there were other nights we could laugh and talk English all we wanted [...]” (110).

More than any other character in the novel, Leon’s story reveals Chinatown and its old men of “spitters,” “sitters,” mah-jongg players, and “drift-about” to the reader, and who by naming the grandparents is able to explain to his friends who Mason, his son-in-law, is (13). As one of the old men in Chinatown, Leon is the image of the Chinese laborer whose dreams never came true, and when Ona died he called America untruthful:

Where was the good job he'd heard about as a young man? Where was the successful business? He'd kept his end of the bargain: he'd worked hard. Two jobs, three. Day and night. Overtime. Assistant laundry presser. Prep cook. Busboy. Waiter. Porter. Where was his happiness? (103)

Furthermore, Leon had lived a seafaring life doing jobs other people did not want, even so, he never earned enough to stay at home for long. Still, going out to sea was a way of escaping the disillusionment in Chinatown, and Mah explains: "Staying on land too long made Leon feel like he was turning to stone. The ocean was his whole world: complete" (150). However, at sea is also the place where he encounters racism and he learns to be skeptical to everything outside Chinatown. When the narrator took Leon to the social security office in order to apply for support, Leon got angry and yelled: "Iiinamahnagahgoddammcocksucksonnahvabitch!" (56), which means that he replayed what he himself had been called at sea. Hence, Lei becomes bitter whenever she hears Leon talk in English.

One might say that in her description of Leon Fae Myenne Ng speaks back to majority culture; she seeks to bear witness to the first generation Chinese immigrants' struggles from their arrival until they have come of age.

Leon was also a collector and a junk inventor, always hoping to come up with the great invention which would bring money and fame, and he had several projects going at the same time. In other words, he believed in the American dream. However, when Ona jumped from the thirteenth floor of the Nam and committed suicide he stopped inventing. Leon blamed himself because he had not kept his promise, that is, to bring grandpa Leong's bones back to China, and he started to believe that "life was work and death the dream" (181). Finally, when he accepted that the only way to come to terms with his guilt and find peace was to show "the right gesture" to the communal grave where grandpa Leong's bones were

buried (78), he started afresh on his projects. Thus, the act of repairing Mah's Singer and placing the urn with Ona's ashes on a card table with offerings of rice and water next to the machine, symbolizes Leon's self coming together, "Side by side, the sad with the happy" (103). In other words, through Leon's story we learn that he has tried to become a member of majority society but been rejected. Still, like many other first generation Chinese immigrants Leon accepted his individual and communal identity as a citizen of Chinatown.

Whereas Leon had an anxiety for everything outside Chinatown, Mah was afraid of what the people inside would say because Chinatown and Hong Kong were her entire worlds; like Jade Snow Wong and Yee's mother, she was a Chinese in America, and it seems as if she never tried to become Chinese American. Mah was born in a "water-carrying village" with muddy roads somewhere in China and married to a Lyman Fu whom the villagers called a "garden stroller," and a "flower picker" (186-187). After a few years in Hong Kong they immigrated to the USA. However, things did not turn out the way Lyman Fu expected, and he left his pregnant wife in San Francisco's Chinatown and traveled to Australia, wherefrom he never returned. When Lei, their daughter, was six years old, Mah married Leon because he had a green card, and she was tired of waiting for tickets for Australia that never arrived.

Mah continued to hold on to old rituals, she smelled of bitter ginseng and honeysuckle, that is, "old world odors," and when grandpa Leong died while Leon was out at sea, she was the one who arranged the funeral in accordance with the old traditions (20). Thus she had her three daughters throw mourning paper, which everybody got in white envelopes, and she handed out red envelopes with good luck money for which people should buy candy in order to bring sweetness back to life. Mah had also made arrangements for "Hell Bank Notes," fake money that would buy grandpa free from hell (84). When she mourned, the village ladies, that is, the seamstresses, supported her and suggested that "medicinal snake gall, a temple offering, sleep" would comfort her (81). Together Mah and Leon made Lei, Ona, and Nina

remember the past when they took them to the graveyard during the Ghost Festival. Mah and Leon followed the old rituals as retold by Lei:

Mah stacked the oranges and laid out the grave food: a dried fish, a whole chicken, and some steamed sticky cakes. Leon started a fire in a large tin canister, slipping papermoney into the weak flames. When the wind snatched the dollars up, we ran to catch back the half-singed hell notes. (88)

To a certain degree one might say that Mah is the image of the Other rendered in the text.

Even by second generation Chinese immigrant she is considered to be too “old world like.”

Whenever there was a problem Mah reacted in one of two ways: either she cooked a good meal, or she closed herself in physically or psychologically. A good example of both is when Leon comes back from forty days of shipping, a passage he took after Ona’s funeral. Mah had made a welcome home dinner consisting of “Bitter melon, Buddhist vegetables, bird’s-nest soup,” and she had “[...] arranged a pagoda stack of oranges, the plate like an offering, placed right on top of the television set” (66, 67), all symbols of offering reconciliation and hope for the future.<sup>7</sup> When she learned that Leon went straight back to the San Fran, “She walked out of the kitchen, right through the bright living room down the corridor and into her room. The door shut with a bang” (68), and she would not talk to anyone. However, the food was not wasted because Lei had brought Mason and his friend Zeke along; while they were eating Zeke remarked: “This is pretty Chinesey, huh?” (69), in other words, in the eyes of the second generation this food was real “old timers’ food.” By showing the audience that some types of food and customs are “pretty Chinesey,” and maybe even “too Chinesey” for the insider, the text mediates that the first generation immigrant

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<sup>7</sup> A pagoda is a Far Eastern tower erected as a temple or memorial.

cannot only be seen as the Other by mainstream culture, but by the second generation Chinese Americans as well.

The second time Mah locked herself in her bedroom was when Ona died, and as usual she would neither eat nor talk. Once more the sewing ladies, her friends from the garment factory, saved her by using old customs and rituals from their village back home in China, and we learn that bringing the right food such as “boo soup” was just as important as calling her by her real name and singing old village ditties; they made her cry and “Talk good things and urge the sadness away” (132).

A couple of months after the funeral Mah went back to Hong Kong, and as presents to her relatives she wanted to bring old clothes. Thus the narrator shows the reader that her mother had an image of China which was outdated. Still, when Mah returned she showed by her looks that she had been comforted by her relatives. In other words, things Chinese are what make her whole or complete as a being. Hence, she wants her daughters to have Chinese boyfriends and live in Chinatown because she believes that what makes herself harmonious will have an equal effect upon them. Accordingly she cries over Nina who has moved to New York and who does not even live inside Chinatown there, and she dislikes it when Lei moves in with Mason who lives in the Mission, two bus transfers from Chinatown, because there are “No Chinese there” (191). She also warns Lei not to eat too much American food because it is not good for her, and she reminds Lei of all the Chinese dishes she used to like (48). Thus she makes it clear to the reader that she is afraid Lei will forget her ethnic traditions and identity. Lei, on the other hand, struggles with how to tell 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?” (48). In other words, the text mediates 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.

Nina, the youngest daughter in the family did what Yee in *Paper Daughter: A Memoir* did, that is, she moved east in order to find her own identity. Nina is the image of the Chinese American who wants to become American; she does not only prefer to live outside Chinatown but she would also rather eat somewhere else. For Nina Chinatown is the image of the hardships her family and her people have gone through. In addition we learn that she is not preoccupied with Chinese customs and traditions: when she takes her sister, the narrator, to an American restaurant Nina remarks that she never eats with chopsticks any more, not even at home, and after she cut her hair short she could not even use them as hairpins (27). In Chinese the color red denotes good luck and happiness, whereas white is the color for mourning and sorrow; however, when Nina came back to San Francisco in order to take part in her sister's funeral she wore a red sweater, and by doing this she shows her family and other people in Chinatown that she has taken on a new identity and seemingly forgotten her old.

When she first moved to New York Nina wanted to be free of everything Chinese, she wanted to forget about her family, and to help her forget she found a Caucasian boyfriend and a job as a flight attendant. But neither of the two made her happy; she got pregnant and had an abortion which made her parents look upon her as dead when they learned about it. By including this information in the text, Fae Myenne Ng makes the reader who knows *The Woman Warrior* compare Nina's story to the story of "No Name Woman." We realize that even though *Bone* was written nearly twenty years later the text conveys that among the first generation abortion is not accepted. It was not until Nina started guiding tours to China and met a Chinese guy who spoke Spanish that she appeared to be more in harmony with herself; her tours to China was also her entrance ticket to be accepted by Mah and Leon as part of the family again. However, by saying "I saw that Nina still suffered" (15), the narrator makes it clear that Nina has not yet found what Fischer calls "a voice or a style that does not violate

one's several components of identity" (196), and by the end of the novel, she is still searching.

The character who is not searching any more is Ona. Ona was Mah's middle daughter and Leon's first. Since she was born while Leon was out at sea Mah decided upon her name and called her Ona after Leon where the *on* part means peace (131). When Ona was twenty years old she jumped off a building called the Nam Ping Yuen, which means the peaceful garden in the south (14). She had chosen the thirteenth floor which in Chinese is a lucky number; still, her way of solving her problems indicates that she did not find peace. According to Mah Ona was too sensitive, too much like Leon, "she had no skin" (172).

Like Yee in *Paper Daughter* Ona found a boyfriend, Oswald, at her parents' workplace; even though he was half Chinese her father behaved in a similar way as Yee's father, and the narrator describes Leon's actions as "dangerously old-world" like (112). In other words, he threatened her and said she did not need to come back home if she continued her relationship with Oswald. Still, Ona stayed with her boyfriend who lived outside Chinatown but she never felt relaxed, as we learn from the narrator's comments: "even with the Chinese crowd that Oswald hung around with; she never felt like she fit in" (173). In other words, her world was not outside Chinatown, but we also learn that she felt stuck in the middle of her family and that she was on drugs; thus, she tried to find ways out, or find herself but she did not succeed.

Lei, the narrator, describes herself as the paper son's stepdaughter who has inherited his whole suitcase of lies, which she will remember all of because those memories are all that she has from a past she herself cannot remember (61). Thus, When Mah returned from Hong Kong and talked about all the relatives and old friends she had seen, the only one who really could follow her was Leon. However, Lei is the character who makes Nina remember. When the two sisters go out for a meal in New York, Lei recollects the past through talking about

the different types of food their mother had served them while Leon was out at sea. Chickens, squabs they kept as pets, and once a frog are what they remember, all images of the hardships their family had gone through; yet, they also remember having eaten the food whilst watching the “Lucie Ball” show on television (30). Thus, the past they remember is a mixture of China, represented to them by Chinatown, and America. Lei says: “We know so little of the old country. We repeat the names of grandfathers and uncles, but they have always been strangers to us. Family exists only because somebody has a story, and knowing the story connects us to a history” (36).

Through her work as a community relations specialist for the Edith Eaton school, Lei is every day reminded of what it was like growing up with first generation immigrant parents; she remembers that what she hated most “[...] was the talking for Mah and Leon, the whole translation number. Every English word counted and I was responsible” (17).<sup>8</sup> Lei also remembers the hardships she had experienced and once more food is an image of this. She recollects: “Night after night, we’d eat from the salted fish, from the silver tail on up to the yellowed head, until forty-one slivers of salted fish later Leon would come back home again” (181). Lei realizes that the situation for the first generation immigrants has not changed much over the last twenty years; the parents do in fact need more help than their children who adjust more easily to a new life.

At the age of twenty-eight Lei still needs to help her own parents, and when Ona died we learn that Lei was “worn-out from dealing with death in two languages” (15). Furthermore we are told that Lei mixes English and Chinese when she is in a stressed situation: firstly, when she told her parents about Ona’s death she said some words in English and others in Chinese, and secondly, when she told her mother that she and Mason had got married in New

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<sup>8</sup> According to Xiao-huang Yin, Edith Maude Eaton or Sui Sin Far was the first Chinese woman writer in North America; see chapter three in *Chinese American Literature since the 1850s* for more information. The reason why I have not included any of her writing is that she was Eurasian, i.e. her father was English and her mother Chinese.

York, she used both languages. In other words, her dual identity emerges when she opens up and lets her feelings out. Another image of this duality is Lei's ability to see Chinatown the way the tourists do, that is, with its eccentric color combinations, strange store signs, and the funny looking street lamps, and at the same time she is aware that the outsider will never manage to understand the real Chinatown, the one the insider sees (145). In my opinion this is another comment which may be interpreted as the Other speaking back. True, Chinatown might seem weird to majority culture but there is so much more to see and understand than what is on the surface.

Lei's boyfriend, Mason, whom she married in New York, grew up in Chinatown but he has now moved to the Mission, which, as mentioned, is situated outside Chinatown. We learn that he does not speak Lei's Chinese dialect but still he is reckoned to be one of them, and Mah loves him like a son. Mason is harmonious even though he came from a "Real messed-up family" (184), and he is the one who rescues Lei's family when they have problems: thus, when Nina and Leon were arguing about whether there should be a simple service after the cremation, or a traditional Chinese wake, Mason interfered and we learn from the narrator that, "If Mason hadn't been there, [...] we'd probably slugged it out" (125).

Mason does a lot of things which are exceptional for Lei's friends. For instance, he goes skiing and he does not gamble because he thinks "It's too Chinesey" (183). On the other hand, he is also preoccupied with Chinese traditions, and he cannot stand his cousin because he is too American and has "no home education, no manners" (183). Nor does he tolerate prejudice towards Chinese and he supports his friend Zeke's verbal attack on entertainers who tell Chinese jokes. When Lei asks if Zeke cannot even take a joke, Mason says: "How many chink jokes do you have to take?" (46). In other words, he appropriates from each culture what he finds useful; we might say, paraphrasing Fischer, that he weaves cultural threads from different arenas together and makes his self reinvigorated (230).

Thus, Mason stands out as a character who has found completion, and by showing that it is possible to survive as a Chinese American outside Chinatown, he has made a way out for Lei as well. Hence, when she finally marries him without having the traditional Chinese banquet and moves to the Mission, she mediates that she has remade another world for herself and settled as a Chinese American.

By letting multiple voices speak, Fae Myenne Ng reflects in her text what Wang calls “the Chinese American immigrants’ willingness to cross borders and to negotiate a ground on which they can create and embrace their true identity” (91). In addition to mediating the experience and difficulties encountered by Chinese immigrants and their descendants when seeking an identity with which they can feel both complete as individuals and be accepted by majority society, *Bone* also places Fae Myenne Ng in the tradition of matrilineal discourse. Especially the relationship between the narrator and Mah rendered in the text verifies this view. Expressions like the following, conveyed by Lei, are typical: “I can’t help it I just feel like I owe her [Mah]” (184), and “I just talked to Mah. She’s upset” (41), and so is Mason’s answer: “She’s always upset” (41). Another text which is concerned with the mother daughter relationship is the *Bonesetter’s Daughter* by Amy Tan.

## ***The Bonesetter's Daughter***

*The Bonesetter's Daughter* was published in 2001, and is Amy Tan's fourth novel. Her earlier novels are *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1992), and *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1997). Like Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* Amy Tan's texts have been translated into many different languages including Chinese, thus her readership is, if not universal, at least multicultural.

Amy Tan was born in 1952 in Oakland and is a descendant of first generation Chinese immigrants. Her father was an electrical engineer and a Baptist minister who left China in order to escape the havoc of the Civil War, and her mother escaped Shanghai just before the Communist takeover in 1949. There are many similarities between Amy Tan's life and the lives she describes in her novels; for instance, traces of her grandmother's suicide can be found both in *The Kitchen God's Wife* and in her latest novel *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, and her mother's difficulties living in a foreign country as a widow are also rendered in the different texts. In a way all of Tan's texts can be said to explore the complicated relationships between family generations and especially between mothers and daughters, and as such the novels have a universal theme. However, similar to Ng's, the majority of Amy Tan's characters are Chinese Americans who mediate their ethnic traditions, values and specific history. Because of this it is hard to read her novels as just being about human relationships in general, even though Amy Tan herself says: "I don't see myself, for example, writing about cultural dichotomies, but about human connections" (Tan, "The Spirit Within" 2).

According to the American Academy of Achievement Amy Tan earned an "excellent living writing speeches for business executives" as late as in 1988 "but she took no joy in her

work” (3), which is quite similar to what Ruth, the protagonist, in Tan’s latest novel also does and feels. Moreover, the episode when Ruth is abused by their neighbor Lance represents a parallel to Amy Tan’s own encounter with the youth minister of her neighborhood. As Amy Tan explains in an interview, she was very sad because her father was in hospital dying of a brain tumor and the minister was supposed to cheer her up. She says: “And he threw me on the bed and he started to tickle me. And he would not stop. I found out later that he had seduced a young girl, left his wife and ran off with a 16-year old ” (Tan, Interview, part two: 3). Like Ruth in the novel, Amy Tan tried to commit suicide by using a kitchen knife, and, similar to Ruth she stopped when it hurt (Interview, part three: 1). She also says that, “I reached a point where I had infuriated my mother so much we nearly killed each other. Literally” (Interview, part three: 2).

Furthermore, many episodes similar to those Tan’s mother has experienced in real life are rendered in the text, for instance when her mother was nine years old she witnessed her own mother kill herself. In “Writers on Writing” Tan says: “As long as she [my mother] was alive, her mother’s death was an everlasting punishment to her. Whenever bad luck visited us, she asked aloud whether her mother was angry at her. Was this a curse?” (part two: 2). Tan’s mother also made her sit by an Ouija table and ask for the spirits’ advice on the stock market. She said: “Should I buy I.B.M. or U.S. Steel?”, whereupon Tan remembers that she “would push it to whichever answer was the shortest” (part three: 1).

Finally, when Tan is asked about what books she would have read for her grandchildren she gives the titles of the texts she has written, and she adds : “It is not out of pride that these are better stories or words. These are the things that are important to me and my family. [...] so why wouldn’t I tell them the things that I thought were important to our family, that are in my books?” (Tan, Interview 25). In other words, she admits that her stories are grounded in her own life experience as a daughter of Chinese immigrant parents. If we

add to this knowledge the last paragraph of the “Acknowledgements” in *The Bonesetter’s Daughter* which says: “[...] two ghostwriters came to my assistance during the last draft. The heart of this story belongs to my grandmother, its voice to my mother,” it is impossible not to see her works as mediating both cultural dichotomies and human relationships, and not just the latter.

In “Sugar Sisterhood” Sau-ling Cynthia Wong tries to answer why Tan’s fiction has become more popular than works written by Euro-American authors with a similar theme, namely the mother–daughter relationship. She says:

I suggest it is neither literary fate nor psychological destiny that has conferred favored status on the Chinese American mother-daughter relationship, but rather a convergence of ethnic group-specific literary tradition and ideological needs by the white-dominated readership—including the feminist readership—for the Other’s presence as both mirror and differentiator. (177)

Wong elaborates her essay on the presumption that Tan’s use of what Wong calls “markers of authenticity” is made deliberately in order to give the audience what it wants and expects from a Chinese American author. Wong says: “I call these details ‘markers of authenticity,’ whose function is to create an ‘Oriental effect’ by signaling a reassuring affinity between the given work and American preconceptions of what the Orient is/should be” (187). However, with the danger of being stamped as both naïve and supporting Orientalism I will see these markers of authenticity as markers of Tan’s Chinese American ethnic identity. By writing the story of her family she seeks to find her own identity as an American of Chinese descent. Moreover, since there are so many similarities with the author’s life and the story told, and

because Ruth's mother's story is written in the first-person point of view, it is tempting to read the text as a novel with autobiographical elements.

*The Bonesetter's Daughter* is seemingly divided into three parts with the addition of a prologue and an epilogue where Ruth and her mother LuLing have been given approximately equal amount of space. However, I use the word seemingly because in my opinion the narrative structure allows for further division: First, in the prologue we hear the voice of LuLing who tells her story in the first person point of view; second, the story of Ruth, LuLing's daughter, is given in the third person point of view; third, we hear LuLing speak once more in the first person point of view. However, her story is interrupted by Precious Auntie's story which is told in the third person point of view. Finally Ruth's story is continued and allowed to close the text. The three women's stories are interwoven not only thematically but also textually in the way the novel is composed. In other words, LuLing's storytelling in the form of an autobiography is interrupted by her mother's story, whereas the former interrupts the linear story of her daughter Ruth. Thus, by breaking up the narrative structure and including storytelling Amy Tan shows she is in tune with many other ethnic novelists. According to Singh and others these novelists have recognized the importance of storytelling and use it as a tool to redefine history and culture in addition to legitimize personal and collective memory (18).

LuLing's autobiography allows multiple voices from the past to be heard, or as Sing and others comment: "It allows for a narrative exploration of the past that rejects or circumvents positivistic assumptions about truth and history" (18). This might be said not only about the assumptions about truth held by the different characters in the text, but also about American majority culture's assumptions about Chinese people in general. An example of the former would be for instance LuLing's discovery of who her real mother was, whereas

the latter could be exemplified by the text's description of Chinese men, to which I will return later.

In his review of *The Joy Luck Club* in 1989 Orville Schell said that the book's peculiar charm lay in its juxtaposition of the daughters' Americanized world and their mothers' dreamlike vanishing world in China (qtd. in S.C. Wong, "Sugar Sisterhood" 184). In my opinion he might say the same about Tan's latest novel, only now we meet one particular daughter, Ruth, or Yu Luyi as she is called in Chinese, soon to turn forty-six; her mother LuLing Liu Young who is seventy-seven; and Ruth's grandmother, the bonesetter's daughter, who died back in China in 1930. As one might guess from the foregoing, there are different settings: San Francisco in 1998, Hong Kong in the late 1940s, and China from 1916 to 1945. However, the dreamlike world is now more real because of Amy Tan's changed attitude towards history.

Amy Tan has been severely criticized for her lack of knowledge of history, and she admits that she used to hate the subject. She says: "I thought it [history] was completely a waste of time. It had absolutely no relevance." In *The Bonesetter's Daughter* however, she shows she has learned her lesson. The text is steeped in by historical references, especially references to Chinese history. Tan says: "Today, I love history. I find it is absolutely relevant to everything that is going on. It's not just some philosophical babble of how things repeat themselves" (Tan, Interview 17). For instance when the narrator says: "Those complaints came out the same year that the old Ching Dynasty fell down and the new Republic sprang up" (174), we know that the year is 1911. Later there are references to the Warlord period (209), and the dissension between the Communists and the Nationalists, which paused when they united in the war against Japan (284). We also learn that Japan has attacked America (306), and that Hong Kong is getting more crowded every day because of the civil war in China (334). In addition the text mediates that albeit LuLing and her sister GaoLing

immigrated to the USA after the Chinese Exclusion act had been nullified it was hard for them to obtain a visa (324), and that life in the USA was harsh for a Chinese immigrant at the time. GaoLing who came to America in 1945, two years before her sister, says:

Life here is not so easy. And making money is not what we imagined. All those stories of instant riches, don't believe them. As for dancing that is only in the movies. Most of the day, I clean houses. I am paid twenty-five cents. That may sound like a lot, but it costs that much to eat dinner. So it is hard to save money.  
(325)

If we compare the above mentioned historical references to the brief outline of Chinese history which are included in the introduction, we will see that the China described is consistent with historical records. However, there is no doubt that all these references make LuLing's story more real to the reader, and because of that one might ask as S.C. Wong does if the references are deliberately intended as markers of authenticity, or if including them is a conscious way of writing back to dominant culture. In my opinion the text mediates that the Chinese have a history too, not just the old exotic history of the Ming dynasty, but in fact an important recent history. The Chinese history is as central for a Chinese American as knowledge about the Civil War in the USA is for an American whose family has lived in the USA for generations.

By letting LuLing speak in the prologue Amy Tan neither starts with the beginning nor the end of the story but rather somewhere in between. However, in my analysis I will follow LuLing's advice. She says: "A mother is always the beginning. She is how things begin" (299). Hence, I will start with the character who is said to start the series of events which made things turn out the way they did, Precious Auntie, and try to reveal how she is

“different.” Precious Auntie is not the image of the female Other, at least not the Other that American majority culture might expect to find in China in the early twentieth century. However, until we hear her real story she is the “no name” and one might add “no face” woman.

As in *Bone*, the story is built around a suicide, in this case Precious Auntie’s, grief, mother daughter relationships, and some lost bones which trigger off many sad events. Similar to the lost bones in *Bone* these lost bones are blamed for all the accidents Precious Auntie’s in-laws and her family encounter afterwards. The reason is that on Precious Auntie’s wedding day part of her dowry, a jar of dragon bones, was stolen and forever lost. Later these bones turned out to be bones from her ancestors, and since they could not be returned to the ancestral grave a curse rested on the family forever after, and herein the key to understanding the plot can be found.

Strength or character is what describes Precious Auntie. The narrator says: “Too many people had already said she was too strong, accustomed to having her own way. [...] She had no fear of punishment or disgrace. She was afraid of almost nothing” (195). Her father, a famous bonesetter, raised her as a son, and thus she could both read and write and the calligraphy she produced was an artist’s work. In addition she was allowed to walk around freely on unbound feet. She was outspoken as long as she had an oral voice. For instance, when she refused Mr. Chang’s marriage proposal she said: “ You asked me to be your concubine, a servant to your wife. I’m not interested in being a slave in a feudal marriage” (194). Later, when she could make no more words come out, she used a kind of sign language or wrote her messages down, and she continued to “speak” back whenever she found anything unfair. One might say she was different from ordinary Chinese women at the time, both before and after she gave birth to LuLing. However, she did believe in ghosts and curses. But according to LuLing’s first husband, Kai Jing, that was natural because she had not had the

opportunity to go to university, she was “self-taught, exposed to only the old ideas” (294). It was not until her own daughter rejected her that she could not take it any more. However, by killing herself she saves LuLing, thus she can also be looked upon as a kind of martyr. Her action becomes heroic in that she denies submitting to the Three Obediences and the Four Virtues in the Confucian ideology. One might say that in Precious Auntie Tan has created a character that is not only strong and righteous but who also could be compared to Fa Mulan, the legendary Chinese swordswoman. In fact all the Chinese women found in the text in the Chinese setting are strong characters, and in making them so Amy Tan demonstrates her ethnic pride and speaks back to the American feminist movement whose supporters have a picture of Chinese women as the Other.

Similar to Precious Auntie, LuLing turned an orphan just before she was to be married: Precious Auntie committed suicide because LuLing’s groom was the son of the man who had stolen Precious Auntie’s dowry and caused the death of her father and coming husband. Her body was thrown into the “End of the World,” a gorge where garbage was thrown. LuLing says: “I searched for her until dusk. [...] I never found her. And as I climbed back up, I was a girl who had lost part of herself in the End of the World” (244). However, we also learn that LuLing has inherited not only Precious Auntie’s physical features but also her strong character. LuLing says: “Precious Auntie taught me to be naughty, just like her. She taught me to be curious, just like her” (188).

A short time afterwards LuLing was sent to an orphanage after having been told that she was lucky not to be sold as a whore or a slave (257). American missionaries ran the orphanage and thus LuLing learned that there were people in California, Milwaukee, and Wisconsin that sponsored them (271), and that there were many different gods. In my opinion the following episode rendered in the text does not only describe LuLing’s character, but it is

also an example of how Amy Tan allows the text to speak back to dominant culture; LuLing says:

I believed that if I was respectful to both the Chinese gods and the Christian one, neither would harm me. I reasoned that Chinese people were polite and also practical about life. The Chinese gods understood that we were living in a Western household run by Americans. If the gods could speak, they, too, would insist that the Christian deities have the better position. Chinese people, unlike foreigners, did not try to push their ideas on others. Let the foreigners follow their own ways, no matter how strange they were, that was their thinking. (274)

In addition we are told that LuLing and her husband soon to be, Kai Jing, had two types of wedding, American and Chinese (291). One of the missionaries gave her a white dress which she was supposed to get married in herself, had her beloved not died in the Great War; hence, according to LuLing's belief it was a bad luck dress. But, as she says: "How could I resist?" (291).

The text teaches us that Kai Jing was a Chinese intellectual whose father loved to play Rachmaninoff (297). As opposed to LuLing, Kai Jing did not believe in bad luck or curses, he said: "Those are superstitions, and a superstition is a needless fear. The only curses are worries you can't get rid of" (294). Furthermore, LuLing's second husband who is a Chinese American is a doctor, and her sister's spouse is a dentist. In other words, the message is clear, Chinese men who are not opium addicts, ignorant, and brutes both did and do exist.

According to S.C. Wong Tan's use of a special prose, for instance when the mothers in *The Joy Luck Club* speak, is a way of trying to convince the reader that we are dealing with genuine Chinese characters. Wong says: "The preponderance of short, choppy sentences and

the frequent omission of sentence subjects are oft used conventions whereby the Chinese can be recognized as the Other” (188-189). However, in my opinion, even though my interpretation may be called a simplification by Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, I will argue that the following four diverse voices in *the Bonesetter's Daughter* picture three Chinese immigrants belonging to three different classes in American society, whereas the fourth represents the voice of a second generation immigrant.

First there is LuLing who has been given a voice similar to those of the mothers in *The Joy Luck Club*. When she speaks English her language is that of the Other, for instance when she caught her daughter Ruth in smoking she shouts: “You smoking!” and she continues, “Why I have daughter like you? Why I live? Why I don’t die long time ‘go? You want I die?” (158). However, whenever LuLing speaks and writes in Chinese her language is fluent and complete, and her appearance is “calm, organized, and decisive” (58). LuLing says: “Writing Chinese characters is entirely different from writing English words. You think differently. You feel differently” (58), and she continues: “Each character is a thought, a feeling, meanings, history, all mixed into one” (59). When LuLing went to the Asian Art Museum with Mr. Tang she spoke in Mandarin to Art, and she said: “My mother found one of these. It was carved with words of beauty. She gave it to me when she was sure I would not forget what was important” (393). However, when she translates it into English it becomes: “I telling him, this bone my mother give me one” (394).

With the above mentioned examples in mind, one might agree with S. C. Wong in that LuLing is the image of the Other but she is, like the mother figures in the texts discussed above, also the representation of the working class immigrant who has not had the time to learn how to speak perfect English. When Ruth was ten years old and she discovered the difference between Auntie Gal’s way of living and their own, she was astonished because, “Auntie gal bought cut flowers, pink baby roses, even though nobody had died or was having

a birthday” (40). Their different housings also indicate that the two sisters belonged to two different classes; GaoLing lived in a “ranch-style home with a kidney shaped pool,” whereas LuLing bought a two-unit building where she rented out everything except the top floor (62). Before she could afford this we learn that she and Ruth lived in a bungalow with no ventilation, which earlier had been a garage and a potting shed (122). We are also told that in order to make ends meet LuLing had to have several side jobs, and she has the same attitude to welfare as Jade Snow Wong’s mother had. LuLing says: “ I come this country, I don’t get welfare. What so fair? No fair. Only make people lazy to work!” (71).

Auntie Gal, LuLing’s half sister, on the other hand, speaks *nearly* perfect English. As opposed to LuLing she can describe for instance the distinction between different types of cloth, and she can name trees and plants. To LuLing only two types of trees existed, “shady,” and “drop leaf all the time” (49). GaoLing was the lucky immigrant who married a dentist and who, as mentioned above, seemingly had no economic problems; thus she could spend more time studying the language.

Thirdly, there is Mr. Tang, who was a scholar in China. Mr. Tang, who also is a first generation immigrant, translates LuLing’s memoir, which she has written in Chinese, into English; however, now the language is fluent and complete. Mr. Tang is known by one of Art’s linguistic colleagues, and in my opinion Mr. Tang is the character who represents the immigrant who has had both the means and the time, belonging to the intellectual elite, to learn the foreign language to perfect satisfaction.

Finally there is Ruth whose prose is colloquial English; the narrator says: “By the time she was ten, Ruth was the English-speaking ‘Mrs. LuLing Young’ on the telephone, the one who made appointments for the doctor, who wrote letters to the bank” (50). Ruth reads *Jane Eyre* and *Anne Frank’s Diary*, and she says: “I am an American” (158). She is the image of the second generation immigrant who speaks fluent English and who has debates with her

mother not only on grounds of cultural difference but also on the more universal level, that is, as mother and daughter.

Ruth offers many points of resemblance with Lei, the narrator in *Bone* and with Man Yee in *Paper Daughter*. For instance when Ruth was young she had to practice Chinese calligraphy and she had to help her mother translate words into English. In other words, like Lei and Man Yee, Ruth functioned as a bridge between the old and the new world and translated not only words and their meanings but also rules and accepted conduct. When Ruth was young she too knew what it meant to be different; for instance when she was in the first grade her classmates shouted: “Is that your mother? What’s that gobbledy-gook-gook she’s saying?” (77). As with J.S. Wong and Man Yee she had few friends, and just like Man Yee (Mar 119) the only girl mentioned in the text that Ruth played with was filthy and had no manners (76).

If we continue the comparison with the characters in the earlier texts, Ruth could be said to be somewhere between Nina and Lei. She is neither Chinese American the way Lei is, nor as American as Nina wants to be; one might call her an American with a Chinese luggage she neither can nor wants to get rid of. Ruth has a Caucasian co-habit, Art, whose Ukraine ancestors have lived in the USA through six generations, and she is the bonus-mother to his two daughters. Still, traces of her Chinese ancestry are there not only in her looks but also in her thoughts and acts. Even though she counts fingers as a memory device the American way by opening up as opposed to her mother who counts the Chinese way by closing her fist, Ruth pumps the breaks of her car whenever she goes for a drive “to make sure they would hold” (21). Furthermore, when she was a child and had to “talk” to Precious Auntie by writing in sand she remembers she was not sure whether there was a ghost or not, and she recalls thinking: “Was there really a ghost in the room? What was in her hand and the chopstick? Why was her hand shaking?” (87). In addition, when she at the age of forty-six realizes that

her mother has won a fortune in the stock market due to Ruth's answers written in the sand tray, she starts wondering, "Had she also received nudges and notions from someone else?" (381). In other words, even though she thanks God that she is not like her mother (17), she has taken on some of her needless fears and worries she can't get rid of (293).

Furthermore, every year starting on August twelfth Ruth loses her voice, which is approximately around the same time that her voiceless grandmother killed herself. Art who might be described as a foil to Ruth tries to convince her that her voiceless periods are grounded in psychosomatics and have nothing to do with ghosts or curses. As did Kai Jing to LuLing, Art explains and reveals Ruth's true character to her; he says: "You're like someone who has cataracts and wants to see, but you refuse to have an operation because you're afraid you'll go blind. You'd rather go blind slowly than take a chance. And then you can't see that the answer is right in front of you" (368). Art also says that Ruth keeps everything inside, she does not reveal her feelings to him (388); like her mother she keeps her emotional life secret.

However much in dissonance with S.C. Wong I may sound, I do agree with her when she in *Reading Asian American Literature* remarks: "[...] eating practices are shaped to an extraordinary extent by culture and can thus serve as elaborate mechanisms for encoding and expressing social relationships" (18). For instance when Ruth hosts the Full Moon Festival dinner we see examples of how the food served divide the guests into two groups, that is, the Chinese and the Caucasians. The narrator says: "Ruth saw that Art was with Miriam at the other table, what was fast becoming the non-Chinese section" (98), and one of the Caucasian guests commented that she felt like being in a white ghetto. Before the dinner itself we learn that there is a discrepancy between Art and Ruth's way of valuating the event: for Art it is "just a dinner," whereas to Ruth it means something more, it is both her family's annual reunion feast and the Chinese Americans' Thanksgiving (93). When the food is served we see clearly the difference between the two groups: The Chinese "oohed," and "aahd," when the

“sweetly glazed phoenix-tail fish, vegetarian chicken made out of wrinkly tissues of tofu, and jellyfish” were served, whereas the grown up Caucasians commented upon the food by for instance asking whether it was “animal, vegetable, or mineral” (98). The Caucasian children were even worse in their remarks: “‘What’s that?’ Ruth heard Boomer ask at the other table. [...] ‘Worms!’ Dory teased. ‘Try some.’ ‘Ewww! Take it away! Take it away!’ Boomer screamed” (ibid). As more dishes arrive our attention is once more drawn towards the way the non-Chinese react, and to judge by their expression they thought each dish to be stranger than the foregoing (99). However, by letting the episode take place in a Chinese environment where the Chinese represent the majority Tan has made the non-Chinese stand out as the Other, they are the ones whose reactions are different from mainstream Chinese conduct. By reversing the roles Tan has made the text mediate to the Euro-American audience how it feels to be the Other.

Ruth works as a ghost-writer or what her mother calls a book doctor, and as such she has taken on both the profession of her great grandfather, her grandmother, and her mother. Her great grandfather worked as a bonesetter, a person who connects broken bones, and both her mother and grandmother made calligraphy at an artist’s level. In addition her grandfather’s family had been ink makers for six hundred years. As a book doctor one might say Ruth is the incarnation of all these persons and their skills because she mends or connects other people’s “bones,” or works by linking them with written words. Thus Ruth could also be said to symbolize the Chinese American author who has taken on to reinterpret the past in order to mediate that there is a modern way of living where you take from the past what is necessary for creating your own identity.

Using Fischer’s words one might say that LuLing is the person who brings “revelations of traditions,” whereas Ruth is the one who recollects the “disseminated

identities” (198). When Ruth finally learns her grandmother’s name she becomes a whole person. The narrator says:

As Ruth now stares at the photo [of her grandmother], she thinks about her mother as a little girl, about her grandmother as a young woman. These are the women who shaped her life, who are in her bones. They caused her to question whether the order and disorder of her life were due to fate or luck, self-determination or the actions of others. [...] But she has also learned that these warnings were passed down, not simply to scare her, but to force her to avoid their footsteps, to hope for something better. (402)

In other words, by looking back Ruth has “gained a vision for the future,” and as she writes the story about her mother and grandmother she reveals *her* vision as we see in some of the closing words of the novel:

And side by side, Ruth and her grandmother begin. [...] They write about what happened, why it happened, how they can make other things happen. They write stories of things that are but should not have been. They write about what could have been, what still might be. They write of a past that can be changed. [...] They can choose not to hide it, to take what’s broken, to feel the pain and know that it will heal. *They know where happiness lies, not in a cave or a country, but in love and the freedom to give and take what has been there all along.* (403; emphasis added)

In my opinion this closing expresses in condensed form Amy Tan's vision or hope for future Chinese American authors. It is not as members of a specific country they will gain happiness or fulfilment but one might rather say in a universal atmosphere where all writers are looked upon as equal no matter what their cultural identity might be.

In her article "Writers on Writing," Amy Tan comments that after her mother died she started to rewrite the novel she had been working on for the past five years. She says:

And so I rewrote, remembering what scared me: the ghost, the threats, the curse. I wrote of wrong birth dates, secret marriages, the changing place one has in a family, the names that were nearly forgotten. I wrote of pain that reaches from the past, how it can grab you, how it can also heal itself like a broken bone. And with the help of my ghostwriters, I found in memory and imagination what I had lost in grief. (part three: 2)

In the beginning of my discussion of *The Bonesetter's Daughter* I suggested that it was possible to see the text as a novel with autobiographical elements, and in my opinion we here see that the vision of Ruth in the novel converges with that of Amy Tan, the author.

## Conclusion

The word *bone* or *daughter* is repeated in all the titles of the texts, and in the last text in fact both words are included. One might ask why these simple words convey so much meaning that they deserve to be on the front page. I will let GaoLing in the *Bonesetter's Daughter* explain the importance of one of the words. When she elucidates to Ruth the meaning of her newly discovered family name she says: “[...] the way ‘bone’ is written can also stand for ‘character.’ That’s why we use that expression ‘It’s in your bones.’ It means, ‘That’s your character’” (398). In addition it also conveys a connection to the past and to ancestors who lived in another world, in this case China. Finally, the word *bone* is connected to food, and as we have seen, food is often linked to the image of the Other.

The other word, *daughter*, has a special meaning to the Chinese because, as has been referred to above, to raise daughters was looked upon as a waste of both money and time. Even today it is estimated that as many as fifty million Chinese women are not registered as citizens in China.<sup>9</sup> One might guess that the reason is due to the birth restrictions which only allow one child per married couple, thus, if the first born is a girl she is not registered because a son is what the parents want to count. Moreover, the word *daughter* also conveys the double oppression that the Chinese female immigrants in the USA have met, first as daughters in a Chinese family, and second, as a representation of the Other to mainstream society.

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<sup>9</sup> The number was mentioned on the Norwegian Broadcasting News November 13, 2002.

Thus, one might say that through the use of these simple words the different authors mediate that references to food, memories about China, instances of racism, and gender are themes and issues that are important markers of their Chinese American identity.

However, the texts discussed in the foregoing chapters mediate that Chinese women in the USA cannot be looked upon as one homogeneous group; on the contrary, a symphony of voices are heard, all re-interpreting their past in order to reinvent their ethnic identity. Still, even though their voices might sound different one might say there is a harmony between them because they accept that there are different interpretations and solutions depending on not only from where but also when in time you speak.

Elaine H. Kim says: “the terms of our cultural negotiations have changed and are changing over time because of differences in historical circumstances and needs” (qtd. in Wang 86). Even though my selections of examples are comparatively few and hence it is dangerous to draw general conclusions, I still think that the texts chosen reflect some of the changes Kim points to. One might say that albeit all the texts are Chinese in content and origin, meaning they all have Chinese characters or “I” persons with a connection to China either as first or second generation immigrants, all of them have taken on an American coat in their form. This apparent duality can be seen as an expression of their transition from being Chinese in America to becoming Americans of Chinese descent. In the early texts we discover the authors’ need to explain their traditions and values to mainstream American society, trying to convince the audience that the Chinese are not as exotic as they might seem at first glance. Contemporary voices pushed forward by multiculturalism and its repercussions sound different from earlier ones. Now we hear multiple voices all recalling a past which *is* different in order to gain a vision for their future individual and communal identity. However, all these contemporary voices signal that they have not yet reached the final stop, and thus it will be interesting to see how much further the Chinese American authors will travel on their

way to becoming Americans in the coming decades. As mentioned in the last chapter the closing remarks in Amy Tan's latest novel suggest that there is a possibility in what we might call being a member of a universal community. Another author who has a similar vision is Helen Zia, she says: "By the time I was a teenager, I imagined that I was a 'dual citizen' of both the United States and China. I had no idea what dual citizenship involved, or if it was even possible. No matter, I would be a citizen of the world. This was my fantasy, my way of soothing the hurt of being so unacceptable in the land of my birth" (139). These two authors' comments might also symbolize their hopes for the future of works written by Chinese Americans, that is, that the Chinese American literature be accepted as a natural part of American culture. In my opinion one might say that the Chinese American authors have already taken a long step towards making their vision come true. In the USA both critics and publishers have shown a growing interest in ethnic literature. The works of ethnic authors have reached the airport newsstand and as such they push it through another time zone all the time.

As a gesture toward the future and possible new projects I would like to draw the attention to Australia. An interesting further study would be to examine similar texts to the ones investigated here, written by first and second generation Chinese *Australian* immigrants and see whether there are any "cross-Pacific mediations." It is probable that one will find similarities, because even though Australia is situated in the Pacific and dependent on Asian economy, one may find expressions of anti-Asian sentiments. In *Yellow* Wu points to an important difference between the USA and Australia in the 1990s, and he says:

We [in the USA] have not seen the likes of Charles Perkins, the top-ranked aborigine in the [Australian] government who in the late 1980s argued that Australia should not allow more Asian immigrants because it already had enough

home-grown criminals and who likened Asians to a contagious disease, or Pauline Hanson, who led her “One Nation” party to its rise and fall in the 1990s. (87)

In addition, Chinese Australians have a history very similar to that of Chinese Americans: In the Chinese Museum, 22 Cohen Place, Melbourne’s Chinatown, the first immigrants’ story is taken down on wall notes which tell the onlooker that the Chinese success in late nineteenth century Australia brought fear and envy from white Australians. The newspapers led anti-Chinese campaigns and by the use of grotesque cartoons, sly inflammatory articles and mastheads such as “Australia for the White Man and China for the Chinks,” they helped racism flourish. As in America naturalization, the right to vote, and to have their wives and children come and join them were rights denied the Chinese residents. In fact it was not until 1966 that the Holt government allowed wives and families to join their Chinese men in Australia.

In Fae Myenne Ng’s *Bone* the narrator’s father travels to Australia and never returns, and by making him do so, Ng might want to call attention to Chinese Australian authors who can write his story. It was not only in the USA that new authors of Chinese descent emerged in the 1990s. According to Alison Broinowski a new type of fiction about Asia written by authors with a different background than earlier came into being in Australia during these years as well. She reports:

[...] the numbers of non-hyphenated Australians who now feel confident to write about contemporary Asia have shrunk. It’s as though they can no longer compete with today’s new, diasporic Asian Australian novelists (usually women) for grants, publishers, media attention, and invitations to writers’ festivals. This year’s [1999] Vogel winner, Hsu-Ming Teo, is a sign of the times. Few “ordinary” Australians

seem able to match these new novelists' mastery of Asian languages and English, their access to family history, mythopoeia and the supernatural, their dual familiarity with multi-ethnic Asian societies and their experience of migration to multicultural Australia. (2)

In spite of this, these new novelists are still marginal to the mainstream and their works hard to get hold of; none of the two largest bookstores in Melbourne could produce any fiction written by Chinese Australian authors when asked for in August 2002, not even when they scanned their computer entries could they come up with any titles. The question to be asked is whether this is a reflection of a white supremacist society or just an unfortunate coincidence. Only the future will show if the Chinese Australian authors will manage to cross borders and become members of the multicultural society of ethnic writers, in which the Chinese American authors play such an important part.



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