

論伍慧明《骨》與譚恩美《喜福會》中亞裔美國之再現

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摘 要

本論文以伍慧明《骨》與譚恩美《喜福會》為文本，探討兩位作者如何透過「隱無的敘事」(narrative of absence)來再現於美國歷史中那段被消音的、屬於亞裔美國的歷史。本文從亞美族裔的身份議題開始著手，藉由克里斯蒂娃 (Julia Kristeva) 所提出的「賤斥」(the abject) 與弗洛伊德「弔詭」(uncanny) 兩個概念的運用來闡釋亞美族裔於美國歷史中所遭遇之困境，並賦予亞美族裔一更具流動性之身分定位。除此之外，最重要的是亞裔美國歷史之再現。不管是《骨》或者是《喜福會》，這兩本小說的內容皆是以故事主角們的家族史以及家中所發生的種種事件所構成，伍慧明的《骨》以一種近似倒敘的手法來呈現一勞工階級家庭—梁氏的家族歷史，故事主要圍繞在梁家二女兒安娜自殺的這個事件上，而安娜自殺理由的「空缺」(absence) 成了整個故事的核心，也成了讀者探求亞裔美國歷史的切入點。文中梁氏三代各代表了亞美族裔移民史中三個不同的時期：由移民潮早期的「金山」時期，到移民潮晚期，一直到「美籍華人」(American-born Chinese) 的出現，由這三個世代所發生的大小事件構建了於美國歷史中被遺忘的亞裔美國史。譚恩美的《喜福會》則依時間的先後順序來呈現四對亞美族裔母女的情感糾葛，不僅對於母女關係有深刻的描寫，更具體呈現了亞美族裔女性於美國社會所遭受到的父權社會中「陽具唯物中心主義」的宰制，由母親們在中國所遭遇的點點滴滴，到她們早期在美國社會中的處境，一直到女兒們在美國社會中成長的過程，《喜福會》呈現了屬於中產階級亞美女性的歷史。而透過此二文本之結合探討，本文企圖去呈現一個全面性的屬於亞裔美國的歷史。

Representing Chinese America in Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone* and Amy Tan's
The Joy Luck Club

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ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with the two novelistic works of Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone* and Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*. Both of the two authors aim at representing the neglected Chinese American history. In this thesis, I appropriate Kristeva's "abject" and Freud's "uncanny" to discuss and illuminate the issue of Chinese American identity in the American society. My argument is that in the formation of American citizenship, Chinese American community has always been positioned as the silenced, and by way of a "narrative of absence," Tan and Ng are able to present the neglected history of Chinese America to the readers. Embedded in the seemingly personal and familial life sequences are the life struggles and sufferings of the Chinese American community. As Ping-chia Feng argues, a "narrative of absence" defamiliarizes and denaturalizes the reading of texts and thus propels the readers to see clearly those which are seemingly absent yet actually in existence. As the readers try to fill in the absence in the texts, they would discover this seeming absent Chinese American history.

In the first chapter, I make a retrospect on the transformation of American citizenship in relation to the Chinese American identity to illuminate the predicament of Chinese American community based on Davis Leiwei Li's *Imaging the Nation : Asian American Literature and Cultural Consent*. By virtue of the history of the Asian exclusion, it discloses the inextricable but often repressed relationship between the acts of Asian exclusion and American national formation.

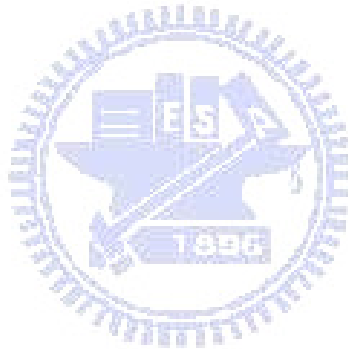
In the second chapter, Ng presents us a working-class family—the Leongs. The three generations of the Leong family represent the three different stages in the Chinese American immigrant history. From the gold mountain history, to the period of Asian abjection, and to the American-born generation, Ng envisions the readers the history of the working-class Chinese American community through the life sequences of each family member of the Leongs. The death of Ona ties up the whole story, and the definite answer of Ona's suicide becomes the most prominent absence in *Bone*. While the readers try to fill in this absence, they are led to discover the miserable family history of the Leongs and to the history of the working-class Chinese Americans.

In the third chapter, we see another page of Chinese American history—it is the history of the middle-class Chinese American community. Under the seemingly oriental appearance, *Joy Luck Club* leads to see the core of the sufferings of the middle-class Chinese American women, especially within their heterosexual love relationship with their boyfriends and husbands. The novel consists of four sections, and each section stands for a different life stage of these Chinese American women. From the immigrant mothers' Chinese past, to their early lives in America, and to the present lives of these American-born daughters, the chronological order of the story makes evident of the predicaments of these Chinese American

women. In this chapter, I appropriate Irigaray's interpretation of Lacan's "phallogocentrism" to demonstrate the exploitation suffered by these Chinese American women under the dominancy of the western phallogocentrism.

As Leila states, "Family exists only because somebody has a story, and knowing the story connects us to a history" (36). The personal memories in both *The Joy Luck Club* and *Bone* are in fact the history of Chinese America. In the final chapter, I further appropriate the concept of "counter-memory" to stress the importance of the history of Chinese America. Unlike historical narratives, counter-memory pays attention to "the local, the immediate, and the personal," and delves into those absent in the dominant narratives (Lipstiz 213). Instead of the accentuated oriental imagination of Chinatown, the Chinatown in both novels is presented as a lived space as well as a gendered space, as Feng argues. From the gold mountain history to the difficult situation of the American-born Chinese American women, I dedicate to present a panorama of Chinese American history, which belongs to not only the Chinese American heroes but also the Chinese American heroines.

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Chapter 1

The Silenced Chinese America

1.1 Introduction

The legitimacy of Chinese American identity is one of the thematic issues of Chinese American literature. While some critics assert the assimilation of Chinese America into the American society, some affirm the segregation of Chinese America from the American society. In Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* and Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone*, both of the novelists aim at presenting the silenced history of Chinese America. Embedded in the seemingly personal and familial life sequences are the life struggles and sufferings of Chinese America. While in *Bone*, Ng endeavors to envision the readers a working-class Chinese America through the family history of the Leongs, Tan presents a Chinese America of the middle class, especially middle-class women, in *Joy Luck Club*. The class differences of the two novels contribute to the different layers of the entity of Chinese America. And through the presented personal and familial histories, the "neglected" Chinese American history is made accessible to the readers. In the following, I would examine how both Tan and Ng present us this hidden Chinese American history from the perspectives of class, gender, and national diversities by employing the "narrative of absence." In light of the Chinese American history, I would like to explore how this silenced history of Chinese America redefines the dominant discourse in the American society.

Upon its publication, *The Joy Luck Club* becomes influential not only for the popular readership but also in the literary arena: it is one of the *New York Times*' best-sellers for nine months, and it contributes to the overwhelming "Amy Tan phenomenon" ("Sugar Sisterhood" 174) within the academic discourse. While some readers are eager to recognize the "authentic" portrayals within the novel, some question the "authenticity" of the representation of Chinese and Chinese American communities in the novel. Both Sau-ling Wong and Patricia P. Chu have provided us

insightful readings of the novel, and they all focus on the culturally mediated discourse Tan has adopted in the novel. In Wong's "Sugar Sisterhood," she points out that Tan's insertions of "Chinese" cultural presence and the pidginized "Asian English" function as markers of authenticity provide the non-Chinese readers an access to "Chinese" culture. These presumably "authentic" details are the comforting presence which satisfies their preconception for the "mainstream" reader. Later in "'That Was China, That Was Their Fate': Ethnicity and Agency in *The Joy Luck Club*," Chu indicates that Tan's gesture of temporal distancing in the immigrant mothers' voices when recounting their Chinese past is indirectly othering these Chinese women and serves to confirm the American preconception of what the Orient is/should be.¹ Rey Chow further argues that this "casting of the other in another time" in Chinese area studies serves as, on the one hand, a way of reverence-contribution for classical China, and on the other hand, an attitude of "realpolitik contempt" toward modern China, without paying attention to the full complexity of modernity in the Chinese. Although both Wong and Chu also recognize Tan's anti-orientalist stance in the novel, one cannot deny the fact that Tan has adopted a culturally mediated discourse in her portrayal of China-related themes.

Yet whether these "Chinese" segments are authentic or not is not my main focus, what concerns me is what we, as non-western readers, could get from these "convincing" details. In Te-hsing Shan's "Imagined Homelands,"² he mentions that Tan's motivation in writing *Joy Luck Club* is for the preservation of her mother's memory and her memory of China. Yet memory of either an individual or a community is not something happened to be memorized, but a reliving and a reconstruction of the original memory. As Ranjanna Khanna suggests, "remembering—that is remembering to forget—is as a process of incorporating the past

¹ Both Sau-ling Wong and Patricia P. Chu have drawn upon the concept of temporal distancing in their essays in the discussion of Tan's representation of China. The temporal distancing gesture adopted by Tan, both Wong and Chu argue, positions China in an inferior, static and "backward" status and helps to define American modernity and progressiveness, and the Chinese mothers are represented as belonging to the stereotypically mythical and static time which is favored by the non-Chinese readers.

² The original text of Te-hsing Shan's work is written in Chinese. The title "Imagined Homelands" is my own translation.

into the symbolic of national history”(12). The memory of the national history is always selective, consisting of that which provides ideological support for the nation. While the American history “remembers” only a highly selected part of history, the history of Chinese American community more often than not is neglected and therefore needs to be remembered to forget. Under the seeming mother-daughter conflicts, *Joy Luck Club* delves into the exploitation the Chinese American women suffer, especially in their love relationships with their boyfriends or husbands, under the dominancy of the western phallogocentrism. In terms of Irigaray’s interpretation “phallogocentrism,” Tan discloses the cultural exploitation suffered by Chinese American women. In this seemingly sentimental novel, I argue Tan has embedded within these apparent markers of authenticity her hidden text, which is the neglected history of Chinese America.

Interestingly, in Ng’s *Bone*, we observe the same intention of presenting the “forgotten” part of the national history. In “Narrative of Absence: the Representation of History of *Bone*,” Pin-chia Feng points out that Ng employs a centrifugal narratology, and the whole story evolves from a personal narrative, family incidents into a panorama of the history of Chinese Americans (144). Based on the readers’ perspective, a “narrative of absence” defamiliarizes and denaturalizes the reading of texts and thus propels the readers to see clearly those which are seemingly absent yet actually in existence (138).³ From the presented family life, the narrator helps readers delve into the causes of those familial misery and then discover the absent Chinese American history. Moreover, in “Melancholic Remains: Domestic and National Secrets in Fae Myenne Ng’s *Bone*,” Juliana Chang suggests that Ng tries to reveal the fissure of the modern notions of subjectivity and history through her portrayal of the melancholic subject, the Leong family. Chang explains, “while the proper subject of the modern nation-state must remember the past, assimilating it into the national symbolic, the phantomatic subject embodies the past, improperly keeping alive that which has not been symbolized” (112). The melancholic subject “subtracted to enable national

³ The original text of Pin-chia Feng’s work is written in Chinese, and the excerpt parts of her essay in my paper are my own translations.

subjectivity and history” thus becomes an encrypted secret within the trajectories of the development and progress of modernity; at the same time, the melancholic subject as unresolved loss makes visible the fissure of the national history and keeps on haunting it. While both Feng and Chang have paid attention to the “absence” of Chinese American history for the national history, I would like to try to approach this neglected and unsymbolized history from another perspective: rather than the result, I would like to investigate the process through which Chinese American history is gradually “forgotten” by the national history. And it is closely related to the process of the formation of American citizenship. Before giving an analysis on how Tan and Ng present the neglected Chinese American history, we first need to have a basic understanding of the sociohistorical background of the Chinese in America.

1.2 The Abjection of Chinese America

According to David Leiwei Li's *Imaging the Nation: Asian American Literature and Cultural Consent*, within the process of the formation of American citizenship, the Chinese American community is forever kept external of the American society and history—ultimately, they become the social abjects within America. In the early period of immigration, the Chinese community is actually warmly welcomed since they agree to do even the most unpleasant work and have made great contributions to the social constructions of the United States, such as building the Central Pacific Railroad. Yet while the great influx of Asian/Chinese immigrants seem to threaten the job opportunities of the native-born Americans, especially at the periods of business recession and the periods of depression, the Chinese immigrants become intolerable by the white majority and are discriminated against. We could detect this dramatic change from the attitude of the leading newspaper of San Francisco—the *Daily Alta California*. As Xiao-huang Yin asserted in “Plea and Protest: The Voices of Early Chinese Immigrants,” in the spring of 1851, the *Alta* informed readers that “they [Chinese immigrants] are amongst the most industrious, quiet, patient people among us.... They seem to live under our laws as if born and bred under them” (17). Yet later

on May 21, 1853, it declared that “the Chinese are morally a far worse class to have among us than the Negro...they are not of that kind that Americans can ever associate or sympathize with. They are not our people and never will be” (17).⁴ Between 1860 and 1880, the Chinese constitute one fourth of the foreign-born population of California, and the presence of such a large number of Chinese attracts attention and invariably creates tension (Kung 68). From the second half of the eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, the Chinese American community is excluded as the social alien. During this period, marked as “Oriental alienation” (Li 4), the anti-Chinese movement is prevalent in the United States, especially in California. The term “alienation” refers to the ways in which the “Oriental” is constructed as “foreign” to the “nation.” It indicates the political exclusion and disenfranchisement and the psychological estrangement of the Asian/Chinese Americans.

Finally in 1943, the Chinese Exclusion Act which of 1882, was repealed, and the Chinese American community is legally eligible for immigration and naturalization. Yet the Asian/Chinese immigration is still under the restriction of the quota system. The small racial quotas assigned to the Asian countries make evident the unequal treatment of Asian and European immigrants; at the same time, this inequality makes the racial problem conspicuous. After the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act, the Chinese Americans are granted with legitimate citizenships, yet their “cultural competence” is still questioned by the American society. In place of the question of economic gains, the problem of assimilation becomes a prime factor of prejudice during this period. Historically, Chinese immigrants are often seen as being “unassimilable” because they refuse to discard their heritage. While the cultural differences between western and eastern Europeans are viewed as natural and acceptable, the differences between Occidentals and Orientals become unnatural and unassimilated. Yet as one Chinese American historian argues, “Assimilation does not depend solely on the predilections of the newcomers. It can only occur when members of the host society

⁴ See also Gunther Barth’s *Bitter Strength: A Study of the Chinese in the United States, 1850-1870*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1964. 158-59.

give immigrants a chance to become equal partners” to share in shaping the world which they live (Chan xiv). This second period, from 1943/65 to the present, is labeled by Leiwei Li as “Asian abjection” (5). The most obvious difference between the two periods can be observed in the subject positions and citizenship status of Asian/Chinese Americans. Li points out that while in the first period the “Oriental” is legally constructed “as difference, as the Other to the American self, and as the object of national prohibition”(5), in the second period, the Asian/Chinese Americans have been transformed “into an “abject,” into that which is neither radical enough for institutional enjoyment of the kind in period I nor competent enough to enjoy the subject status of citizens in a registered and recognized participation of American democracy”(6). Within the “process” of the formation of American citizenship, in fact the predicament of Asian/Chinese Americans has never changed. The American national community’s power refusing to grant membership to those who would arguably disrupt their necessary homogeneity “is ever seriously questioned (Li 3). By virtue of the history of the Asian exclusion, it discloses the inextricable but often repressed relationship between the acts of Asian exclusion and American national formation.

1.3 “Narrative of Absence”

After the examination of the process of the transformation of American citizenship in relation to the Chinese American community, we come to a further understanding of how Chinese America becomes the absent part of American history. Yet I do not mean that the history of Chinese America has disappeared. It does exist; it exists with its own “tactic.” While the national history consists of that which provides an ideological support for the nation, the Chinese American history which is unqualified to enter the symbolic order of the nation becomes a kind of “hidden text” of the American history. The application of “narrative of absence” could be a “tactic” in the highly selective historical discourse. A “tactic” is a way of “making do,” as De Certeau argues, an art of survival for the weak (37). He defines a tactic as such, “it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and recognized by the law of a foreign power.... It must play

vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers” (37). A tactic, rather than a way of defiance, is more a way of live-and-let-live with the dominant order, but it does not totally yield to the national order. It draws out a trajectory which is similar to but not identical with the national order. It is to live inside the dominant order in order to keep a difference. This “keeping a difference” is quite significant, and it points out two important truths of Chinese America: first, to keep a difference is necessary for Chinese America to exist within the dominant order, and second, Chinese America still keeps certain mobility in related to the American self. This keeping a difference makes evident that Chinese America is not totally determined by the American dominancy. Moreover, I argue that Chinese America actually has a certain influence on the “American self.” I term it as the American self for its presumed absolute dominancy while Chinese America is assumed to be absorbed into this integrity. Yet interestingly, it seems that Chinese America turns out to be neither an object nor a subject of the American self on account of its sociohistorical status. In the following, I would like to reexamine the relationship between the American self and Chinese America.

1.4 The Chinese America as the Social Abject or the “Uncanny” Subject

Leiwei Li has suggested that the abjection of Chinese America is the “strategy” (De Certeau xix) of the American self over the “inassimilatable” Chinese American community.⁵ According to Kristeva’s “Approaching Abjection,” an abject which is neither an object nor a subject is what the subject has to exclude in order to establish the self. The idea of abject is originally used to illustrate an infant’s separation from the mother. During the process of an infant’s developing into a subject which means its entrance into the symbolic order, he should first forsake the mother-child symbiosis and

⁵ In contrast with the “tactic” of Chinese America, the way of manipulation of the American self is “a strategy.” As De Certeau defines, a strategy is “the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a place that can be delimited as its own and serve as the base from which relations with an exteriority composed of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives and objects of research, etc.) can be managed (35-36).

accept the law of the Father. Nevertheless, while a subject enters successfully into the symbolic order, he is still subjected to the influence of the never satisfied desire which could be termed as *object α* . The forms of *object α* might be various, yet they share something in common, that is, it could never be fulfilled. The cause of this endless pursuit of the *object α* is the inaugural loss, the separation from the mother. The abjection makes the subject keep a distance from the chaotic order and non-self status in the mother-child symbiosis and protects the validity of the subject since the subject's return into the symbiosis means the annihilation of the subject. One thing to be noticed is that an abject represents those which the subject has to forsake, like the body waste, in order to keep the subject intact. Intriguingly, the abject does not aim at destroying the subject. It might gradually infiltrate into the borderline of the subject. The abject smudges the subject; it makes the subject as foul as itself (Kristeva 1-14). Strictly speaking, a subject which is infiltrated by an abject has lost its subjectivity and is hardly a subject any more. As for the *object α* , it is like a never fulfilled want since what the subject has got would never be what the subject really wants.

Li's application of the idea of an abject focuses on the American self's antagonism toward the Chinese American abject in order to maintain the homogeneity and supremacy of American citizenry. He argues that the abjection of Chinese America is one way to justify the American citizenship, and at the same time to immobilize this group. In other words, Li fixes his eyes on the influence of American self's abjection over Chinese America. Of course it is insightful for him to alert us to pay attention to the contradiction within the American citizenship, yet he overlooks one significant point, that is, the reaction of Chinese America toward the way in which they are abjected. The whole process of the abjection of Chinese America actually should be an unstable process rather than a fixed situation. In the following, I would try to reexamine the position of Chinese America with regard to the American self in terms of Sigmund Freud's "uncanny." Instead of a social abject, I propose that the Chinese America could be recognized as the uncanny subject within the dominancy of American subject.

Through the combination of Kristeva's "abject" and Freud's "uncanny," I intend to redefine this Chinese American abject as being mobile and flexible in relation to the dominance of the American subject.

As Sigmund Freud suggests, the "uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (217). In "The Uncanny," he has divided the uncanny experiences in real life into two categories: one is an affair of "reality-testing," and the other is the repressed infantile complexes. The feeling of the uncanny of the "reality-testing" experiences is related to the return of discarded and surmounted beliefs such as the omnipotence of thoughts, the prompt fulfillment of wishes, the secret injurious powers, and the return of the dead. These possibilities are once believed by our forefathers as realities, and they are convinced that these have actually happened. As time goes by, we no longer believe in them; in other words, we have surmounted these old modes of thinking. Yet we might not feel quite sure of our new beliefs while the old ones still exist within our consciousness, ready to seize upon any confirmation from us. As soon as something happened in our life which seems to confirm the old and discarded beliefs, it leads to the rise of a feeling of the uncanny within us. The uncanny proceeds from repressed infantile complexes, on the other hand, is quite different from the previous experiences and turns out to be stronger and more irresistible. In contrast to the first category, the uncanny resulted by repressed infantile complexes deals with the psychological reality instead of the material one. We might say what had been repressed, in one case, is a particular ideational content, and in the other the belief resides in its (material) reality. Freud thus comes to his conclusion—an uncanny experience occurs either when infantile complexes which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs which have been surmounted seem once more to be confirmed. And he further argues that the two categories of uncanny experiences are not always distinguishable but often mutually connected.

In the case of the identity issue of Chinese American community, both of the two categories could be employed to explain the situation of Chinese American community as an uncanny subject within America, especially taking into account the abjection of Chinese Americans in the American society. For Chinese Americans, their specific identity as legal nationals yet cultural aliens make them neglected and silenced within the national history and American society. Nevertheless, if we recognize the neglect as a static result, we may fail to see the significance of the abjection of Chinese American community in relation to the American self. In the early descriptions of Asian Americans in Anglo-American literature, according to Elaine H. Kim, the Asian Americans often fall into several stereotypical images: from brute hordes and sinister villains to the unassimilable aliens, and from the objected aliens to the “good” Asians. Yet both the sinister Fu Manchu and the amiable Charlie Chan serves to make a contrast with the mainstream Americans. The result is that the Asian being is marked as “not-Anglo.” However, after the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act, especially after World War II, the Chinese American community is eligible to become American citizens, and they deserve to enjoy rights equal to that of the native-born Americans. And this legal recognition of the legitimacy of Chinese American identity endangers the absolute supremacy of American self, disturbs its original boundary, and stimulates a feeling of the uncanny in the American self. The American self, though granting the Chinese American community legitimacy, still calls into question the cultural competence of this minority group. The repressed belief in the imagined homogeneity of American self comes back to seize on itself. Troubled by such an uncanny feeling, the American self determines to abject the Chinese American community in order to maintain its original boundary. However, the existence of Chinese America makes the American self keep confronting with the truth of its identity which is nothing but an imagined purity.

On the other hand, if we proceed from the repressed infantile complexes, the relationship between the American self and the uncanny Chinese American community would turn out to be more complicated. The American colonists composed of various

European origins chiefly come from England. There were only a few hundreds of American colonists setting out from England to America in the initial period, and later millions upon millions of Europeans immigrated to America under various incentives. Ultimately in 1776 the American colonies declared the Thirteen Colonies in North America's separation from and independence of the British Empire. Originating from the genealogy of British culture, the United States goes through a great ordeal to develop its own culture. Regarding America's separation from the British, the whole process could be recognized as an infant's separation from the mother in order to independently develop his subjectivity. The American self has to abject the "self" existed in the mother-child symbiosis, in order to enter into the symbolic system of the Father and develop its own subjectivity. This abjection of self is the way for the subject to constitute its own territory, edged by the law of the Father which keeps the abject from destabilizing the subject. Nevertheless, while the Chinese American community is abjected for the sake of racial integrity for the American self, it also forces the American subject to confront the "truth" of itself—the validity of the supreme American self which actually originates from the British. Kristeva has suggested that "the abjection of self would be the culminating form of that experience of the subject to which it is revealed that all its objects are based merely on the inaugural *loss* that laid the foundations of its being. There is nothing like the abjection of self to show that all abjection is in fact a recognition of the *want* on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded"(5). The abjection of Chinese America, on the surface, is a way of maintenance of the wholeness of the American self; but the abjection instead reveals the inaugural loss of the American self at heart. The integrity and the supremacy of the American self are lost from the very beginning of its separation from the British. It is from this aspect that the Chinese American community turns out to be an uncanny subject which keeps reminding the American self of its never fulfilled *want*—the integrity of the self. One thing to be noticed, the application of the idea of "uncanny" reinforces the opposition between the American self and the Chinese America.

In Lacanian terms, this uncanny subject should be ascribed to the real. This encountering with the real makes the subject experience the jouissance which is unbearable for the subject since this jouissance actually leads to its demise. Indeed, for the American self, the Chinese America represents the intolerable which might keep endangering its totality, homogeneity and supremacy and even lead to its collapse, and thus the Chinese America must be abjected. Just like the gaze of the “burning child,” it is intolerable for the father—within the gaze of the burning child, it lays the truth of the father’s identity. In other words, this gaze, the recognizing gaze of the child is the *object a* of the father. It is an encounter with the real, the real of his being a failed father. And how can a father bear such a truth? If the father embraces the recognizing gaze of the burning child, he might fulfill his identity as a father yet at the same time lose his subjectivity. There is no more subjectivity but only jouissance. The symbolic castration is what keeps sustaining the validity of the subject—that is why the father “woke up” from the burning child dream yet kept sleeping in his consciousness (Lacan 59-60). In the gaze of Chinese America, the American self detects the reality of its identity, and that is why Chinese America has to be abjected. Within both cases, the abjected Chinese American community disturbs the boundary of the American self and makes evident the “reality” of the American self.

In *The Joy Luck Club* and *Bone*, we could observe both Amy Tan and Fae Myenne Ng try to represent the history of Chinese America, this uncanny subject in the American society, with their novels. From either the working-class Leong family or the middle-class Joy Luck families, we detect the unrepresented reality in American history. It is not just the history of Chinese America but the “forgotten” part of history of America. Rather than an abjected minority, I would define Chinese America as the uncanny subject in relation to the American self. Instead of passive victims, I suggest that the two groups of families as the indicators which present us the unrepresented part in the national discourse. It is the history of how Chinese Americans are exploited on both mental and physical aspects under the sophisticated American society and how

they write down their own history with their lives. In the following, I would try to explore how this hidden text of American history is made present through a “narrative of absence” within the two novels and what exactly this neglected history is.

In *Joy Luck Club*, the seemingly dominant plot presented is the generational conflict between the Chinese immigrant mothers and their American daughters. The climax of the story turns out to be the ultimate reconciliation between the two generations: June’s final return to China to unite with the twin sisters to accomplish her mother’s lifelong wish represents the climax of this mother-daughter reconciliation, on the one hand, and the reconciliation between Chinese and American culture, on the other hand. Patricia P. Chu argues that the text serves a reconciling function which mold the four pairs of mothers and daughters into exemplary immigrants and citizens since the class of these mothers and daughters renders them readily assimilable into middle-class American lives, while their gender somewhat distances them from the negative images of Asian males (166). In other words, the process of assimilation for both the immigrant mothers and the American daughters into American society are made unproblematic, and the generational conflict is seemingly resulted from the American daughters’ misunderstanding of their mothers. Chu’s interpretation, which seems to put an equation between economic situation and assimilating ability, is questionable. I do not think Amy Tan aims to present us images of exemplary immigrant families but tries to question this exemplary model instead—the affluent lives of these Joy Luck families makes the abjection of Chinese America more obvious. As to the family conflict in *Bone*, Ng develops the whole story based on a sequence of familial miseries. The separation of the parents, the suicide of the second daughter, the extramarital affair of the mother with her boss, the unfulfilled wish of Grandpa Leong and the alienation of family members—these might be viewed as nothing more than the familial incidents or maybe another vivid picture of the generational conflict of Chinatown families. Yet this conclusion is oversimplistic and in fact quite misleading. As Lisa Lowe points out, “interpreting Asian American culture exclusively in terms of

the master narratives of generational conflict and filial relation essentializes Asian American culture, obscuring the particularities and incommensurabilities of class, gender, and national diversities among Asians”(63). The presented texts within the two novels are actually the camouflage of a hidden historical text. In chapter two, I focus on the sufferings of the working-class family in *Bone*. With the familial incidents, Ng presents not only the miserable lives of the Leong family but also the immigrant history of the working class. Each incident Leila narrated presents the reader different stages of the working-class immigrants. If Chinese America represents the other of the American society, then the working-class Chinese American community could be termed as the other of the other. From the history of the early immigrants to the first American-born generation, Ng demonstrates for us not only the economic exploitation but also the cultural deprivation suffered by the Leong family. This is the hidden text of American history; this is the history of the other of the other. In chapter three, I explore the history of middle-class Chinese American community. In *Joy Luck Club*, we can observe the predicaments encountered by middle-class Chinese American women through the apparent generational conflicts between mothers and daughters. Free from economic difficulties, these Chinese American women still could not escape from the cultural deprivation in the American society. These middle-class families develop a unique lifestyle which is quite different from the working-class one, and the “club” gathering is one of its characteristics. From the immigrant mothers’ Chinese past to their American present, and to their daughters’ American present, Tan not only presents us the emotional conflicts of these middle-class Chinese American women but also envisions us a unique way of “making do” of them. Through the thematic of love between mother-daughter and husband-wife, Tan presents another hidden text of American history which belongs to the middle-class Chinese American women.

Chapter 2

“Life was work and death the dream”—The History of Working-Class Chinese America

Just like the protagonists in her novel, Fae Myenne Ng was born in 1957 and grew up in San Francisco Chinatown. Her father immigrated to America in 1940, and worked as a cook on a university campus in California. Ng was quite close to her mother. She helped her mother, a sewing lady who made brightly colored fashion outfits, and saw everything from mini-skirts in bright floral prints to “Purple T-shirts with smiley faces on them” (Ng). Ng attended the Columbia University School of Arts and received her Master Degree in Liberal Arts in 1984. Her parents supported her and her brother. Since 1989, she lived in Brooklyn, New York, and worked as a waitress to support herself while writing the many drafts of *Bone* at the same time. Roughly speaking, we could say Ng composes her work partially based on her own lived experiences. Growing up in a working class family, Ng is familiar with the hardship the immigrants have gone through. Without the aura of oriental exoticism, Ng tries to present a Chinatown life as she knows them. Her inspiration for *Bone* comes from her witnessing the hardships that the “old-timers” faced in their lives, and she creates a “fictional landscape” to show her “sadness at their passing” (Draper 88). Besides the “old-timers,” the American-born generation, like Ng herself, is the other focus of the novel (Draper 88). The limited social mobility and the inescapable life hardship are not just something Ng has heard of but lived through herself, and this may explain the overall tone of mellow sadness in the whole story. Following the story of *Bone*, we come to a close look at the toils of Chinatown families of the working class.

The narrator Leila calls her family “a failed family” at the opening of the story, and sets a tragic tone for the story. Indeed the atmosphere of melancholy pervades the whole novel. It is based on the chaotic retrospection of Leila that the family history of the Leong family is unfolded before us. On the surface, this is nothing more than a collection of incidents about a Chinatown family; however, these familial miseries have

embodied the unrecognized history of the working-class Chinese America. The three generations within the novel represent three different stages of Chinese American immigrants: Grandpa Leong is one of the early immigrants who go to America to make money and wish to return home to unite with the family after all; Leon and Mah belong to another generation who work hard for limited earnings and gradually understand the impossibility of a triumphant homecoming; Leila and Nina represent people of the first American-born generation who leave Chinatown for better opportunities. Except for the differentiations among generations, the issue of gender is also prominent within the novel and also in Chinese American history, and Ng pays great attention to this issue in her novel. Therefore, in what follows, I would like to explore the forgotten Chinese American history by examining the issues of gender and nation in *Bone*.

In the first chapter, Leila offers us the present situation of the Leong family which is actually on the edge of falling apart: Leon, the father, has separated with Mah and lives in an old-man hotel, the San Fran; Mah owns the Baby store and lives with Leila, the eldest daughter there; Leila, who just gets married with Mason, a car mechanic, in New York, works as the community relations specialist at school; Ona, the second daughter, who has committed suicide, used to be a hostess; Nina, the youngest, who used to be a flight attendant, now leads some tours to China and lives in New York. Leila is not only the narrator of the whole story but also the one who connects the whole family while the family members gradually alienate from each other. And it is under her semi-chaotic retrospection that we enter into the secrets of family history and Chinese American history under the guise of narrative of absence. Based on the three generations of the Leong family, I would like to divide them into three groups of which each represents one stage of the immigrant history of Chinese America.

Grandpa Leong represents the early immigrants. Though Ng does not give clear background information of him, we could reconstruct it from the socio-historical background at the time. As Elaine Kim suggests, the majority of Chinese in America before 1949 are “married bachelors” who have wives in China whom they see once

every ten or twenty years if they are fortunate (97). A number of the Chinese would travel back and forth between China and America, hence a pattern has been established, according to which a man would labor in the U.S. for a decade or more, return home to visit his family, deplete his savings, hopefully father a son, and return to America to work for another decade or two. But most overseas Chinese could not travel back to China easily. Only citizens and legally admitted aliens could obtain return permits, and many Chinese fear that they would be barred from re-entry if they left. Besides, the trip is costly, not only in terms of passage fare but also because each returning Chinese is expected to distribute gifts and money in the villages. Moreover, Chinese fathers in America are usually eager to bring their sons to work with them, because they need assistance; the more family members a man has with him in America the stronger his social and economics influence would be, both in the village and in Chinese American community. The return of the overseas Chinese to the villages with money to spend helps reinforce a chain migration of sons and “paper sons.” As Kim further indicates, the “paper son” phenomenon begins from the early period of twentieth century after the San Francisco earthquake. The Chinese, who have been able to establish their American citizenship before 1924, perhaps because their papers have been destroyed during the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, could invite their sons or sell their rights to sponsor sons to other non-citizens or ineligible Chinese. Young men sponsored under the “slot racket” are called “paper sons” (Kim 297). Based on Leila’s narration, we come to know that Leon becomes Grandpa Leong’s “paper son” at the cost of five thousand dollars and a promise to send back Grandpa Leong’s bone backs to China after his death. Grandpa Leong might sell off the paper identity to Leon during his previous trip back to China because he himself might have no sons. Even though Ng does not point out this historical background in the novel, careful readers can discover the lost history, the hidden text, within the narration after ruminating over the plot. In light of Grandpa Leong’s situation, we come to a close look at the predicament of the early Chinese American immigrants: the abnormal lifestyles in

Chinatown and the loneliness of these immigrants.

The phenomenon of the bachelor society within Chinatown stands out in the early immigrant history. The early immigrants are mostly male because they have the responsibility of supporting the family and at the same time the strict immigration laws forbid the immigration of women. The prohibition of the immigration of women prevents them from settling down in America, on the one hand, and results in the reduction of the Chinese population in America, on the other hand. During this period, the majority of the female populations of the Chinese immigrants are prostitutes. Most of these “old-timers” devote the prime time of their lives to work overtime, and the abnormal social structure and limited social environment also lead to the prosperity of gambling houses and brothels in Chinatown. While the mainstream society pertains prejudices toward these Chinese immigrants whom are preconceived as gangsters, they fail to understand the real causes of the poor situation of Chinese Americans. The ends of their devotions are the bleak cemetery, the improperly buried bones and the forgotten dead. Based on the Chinese tradition, the souls of these improperly buried dead would become spiteful spirits that kept wandering and are unable to go to Heaven. They would become the lost spirits of the American society and American history since they would not be “remembered” and no descendants would pay homage to them. The death of Grandpa Leong becomes an indirect accusation of the strict immigration laws—for the United States, these immigrations would become useless after their labor power get exhausted.

In comparison with the early immigrants, the predicament of the later immigrants gets even worse. Since the anti-Chinese movements become more prevalent after the mid-nineteenth century, the situation of the Chinese American community also gets more difficult: they are over-exploited workers and socially excluded aliens. As we can infer from Leon’s date of birth on his affidavit of identification, he enters America around the year 1943 when the Chinese Exclusion Act is repealed and the naturalization of the Chinese immigrants is again legalized. But this period is also that of the period

of “Asian Abjection.” Actually the immigration laws get even stricter during this time. While the Chinese immigrants are eligible for naturalization again, it actually gets harder to get the legal permission for entrance. Besides, the external exclusion of the Chinese is turned inwardly, and the social ghettos become more observable rather than disappeared. The legitimate identity does not bring a promising future and the social equality for the Chinese Americans but makes evident of the state of social inequality instead. We can detect this phenomenon from the limited working opportunities for the Chinese Americans from *Bone*. Most of the Chinese are employed in the service industry— in grocery and supply stores, in garment work and in domestic service, as well as in restaurants and laundries. By 1950 the majority of Chinese in America are concentrated in half a dozen occupations, and laundry work is seventy-four times as numerous as any other occupation (Kim 99). According to Paul C. P. Siu’s interview of the white workers, “Chinese laundry work, which has been a strictly American phenomenon, was permitted because whites did not want to do laundry work themselves and because it was clearly acceptable as menial work for a despised people” (271). Although Ng does not specify these social injustices in her novel, the life stories of Leon and Mah have showed it all.

Just like what Leon says near the end of the story, “life was work and death the dream” (181). This statement points out the truth of each coolie’s life in America. Prompted by the gold mountain dream just like all the early immigrants, Leon immigrates to America under the influence of his American dream. Yet it “costs” Leon a lot more than he has imagined in order to get the legal permission. On the one hand, Leon becomes the “paper son” of Grandpa Leong at the price of five thousand American dollars which is really a great amount of money; on the other hand, he acquires this identity at the cost of his personal identity. When he first reaches the shore of the United States, he has become someone else and has to memorize someone else’s life history—“Leon was the fourth son of a farm worker in the Sacramento valley, his mother had bound feet, her family was from Hoiping”(Ng 9). And this “paper son”

phenomenon indirectly makes evident the problem of the immigration laws. The legal naturalization is only allowed for those could “acquire” the legal affidavit, either by “blood” or with money, even after the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Law, except for the specific groups such like the merchants. A coolie like Leon has to pay dearly for his identity affidavit and thus results in his strenuous working record in America. This new identity, for Leon, should be the opportunity of realizing his American dream, yet this beautiful dream turns out to be his nightmare. It is not until Leila opens Leon’s suitcase and discovers all those rejection letters that the truth of this American dream is completely disclosed. Through the excavation of Leon’s past, we come to a close look at the discrepancy between the personal memory and the memory of national history. In his personal memory, as Leila narrates, “The army wanted him but the war ended. He had job skills and experience: welding, construction and electrical work, but no English. The apartment was the right size but the wrong neighborhood” (58). These rejection letters, which represent the power of social apparatuses, mark Leon as being unfit for the army and unskilled for the job and the apartment is unavailable for him. This fissure between personal memory and national memory makes the hidden text perceptible for the readers. We could detect Leon’s talent and interest in electronic works, but we do not see the process how Leon is barred from the opportunity of the technical jobs which are regarded as unsuitable for Chinese Americans. “We don’t want you” was the only answer Leon or the other Chinese Americans would get. The economic hardships do make the Chinese Americans suffer, and it also indirectly results in their abnormal family life. Since he could only get some odd jobs on shore, he lives a life which keeps separating him from his family. While the temporal separation gradually becomes a common life style of the Leong family, the position of Leon as the man in the family seems to be destabilized and his absence has become a fixed.

Furthermore, the desperate feeling Leon get when he knows about Ona’s death from Leila expresses a sorrow of losing his dear daughter but at the same time a despair of being a failed father. Yet how could a father bear such a fact that he has failed?

Therefore, just like the father in Freud's "burning child dream," he has to escape from "the real" and wakes up in order to sleep in the consciousness. He has to find someone or something to take the blame for it. As Leila narrates,

Leon was looking for someone to blame. All his old bosses. Every coworker that betrayed him. He blamed the whole maritime industry for keeping him out at sea for half his life. Finally he blamed all of America for making big promises and breaking every one. 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's worked hard. Two jobs, three. Day and night. Overtime. Assistant laundry presser. Prep cook. Busboy. Waiter. Porter. But where was his happiness? "America," he ranted, "this lie of a country!" (Ng 103)

This passage tells us not only the desperate feeling of a father but also the miserable life of an exploited coolie. From the reactions of this heartbroken father, readers gradually come to the hidden text within American society; it is not only about the economic exploitation but also the social deprivation that the Chinese Americans have suffered—the deprived working abilities, the deprived domestic bliss, the deprived life and the deprived dream. After all, what are the remains of Leon's exhausted life? Nothing but a suitcase filled with lies and sorrow: the rejection letters, the affidavit of his "paper identity," the certificate of Mah's ex-marriage, and old photos and selections from newspaper. Leila wonders why does Leon keep all these old documents, and a simple answer is given—"For a paper son, paper is blood" (61). Being a paper son and losing his real identity, there is nothing left for Leon except for his identity as Grandpa Leong's "paper son." In America, said Leon, "paper is more precious than blood" (9); the documents he has preserved represent his history, the history of this paper son. These letters, official documents, pictures, and old newspaper clippings prove Leon's existence, something that has left no traces in the national discourse. That simple sentence has brought out the truth of Leon's life and the dominance of

national discourse.

Nonetheless, during the same period of time, women are positioned in an even more difficult situation. Going through the records of various Chinese American historical texts such as Sucheng Chan's *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1883-1943*, we observe one prominent characteristic of the Chinese American population before World War II is a shortage of women. Various explanations have been provided to explain for this phenomenon. Some claim that it is because of the Chinese tradition of filial piety in which married women are obligated to bear children and take care of parents-in-law. Some argue that since most of the Chinese in America are sojourners, they have no reasons to bring their wives. Besides, the main purpose of their sojourning is to earn money; it would be more economical to send money home instead of having the family reside in America. As Sucheng Chan observes, "Consequently, only girls from poor families left their homes to earn a living elsewhere as prostitutes or as servants" (95). The primary reason for the shortage of women in Chinatowns is that the restrictive immigration laws keep Chinese women out, and, as Chan further argues, this reason should be the prime factor from the early 1870s onward. The primary target of this restriction of the immigration of Chinese women is the prostitutes instead of the laborers, yet laws against the former affect other groups of Chinese women who seek admission into the country as well. The 1875 Page Law forbid the entry of Chinese, Japanese, and "Mongolian" contract laborers, women for the purpose of prostitution, and felons. In 1890s, "no woman married to a Chinese laborer could come into the United States, unless she herself could prove prior residence here and she had obtained the same kind of certificate required of her husband" (Chan 112). The only women specifically mentioned by the law as admissible are the wives of clergymen, professors, and government officials. By implications, female clerics, professors, students, officials, tourists, persons in transit, sailors, and merchants could also enter. Take Mah for example, she marries Lyman Fu and then immigrates to America. The novel does not give an account of the process of how both of them get

into America. However, based on the immigration law concerning wives of the Chinese laborers, a wife's status should follow that of her husband, though it has been debated in many legal precedents. Even though Lyman Fu marries her, Mah still could not acquire the certificate. Thus she has to depart after Lyman Fu's leaving for Australia. In order to stay, she chooses to marry Leon, an always-absent husband, for the green card. And she chooses Leon because of his job; since as a sailor as Leon is, he is more likely to be not at home. She thinks that this would be more convenient for her life. She does not need a husband, what she needs is the qualification to stay. The restrictive immigration laws lead to great pressure and sufferings not only on the physical aspect but also on the mental aspect to the women; what they are exploited are not only economic values but also human rights. Actually, during this period, women are only the appendage of their husbands or fathers; they are individuals without individuality.

Due to Leon's periodical absence, Mah turns out to be more like a father figure in the Leong family, and she has to take charge of all the family affairs. She does the housework, takes care of the children, and she is a seamstress. She also seems to be the one who is in charge of disciplining the children. When Ona is caught by the store manager for stealing a lipstick, Leon is the one to pick her up. Yet instead of chiding her for the misbehavior, he treats Ona to ice cream and wants to conceal the whole thing from Mah. This is quite an unusual behavior for a father. Besides, she is also the one who arranges the funeral for Grandpa Leong while Leon is away. She is the one who first discovers the miserable death of Grandpa Leong. Being a wife of his "paper son," Mah actually has no obligations to Grandpa Leong. Yet she takes the responsibility to arrange the ceremony in place of Leon. From various perspectives, it is Mah who is more like the "paper daughter" to Grandpa Leong.

Another obvious example is Mah's extramarital affair with Tommie Hom. Unlike the stereotypical female image of Chinese women as obedient and submissive, Ng allows this mother character to violate the code of chastity, which is greatly significant

for Chinese women. This reminds us of Maxine Hong Kingston's "No Name Woman," and of how Kingston reinterprets the story of her "forgotten" aunt and molds her into a woman with individuality and subjectivity. In Kingston's story, the aunt is someone who has a free will. Her aunt's pregnancy, for Kingston, is the demonstration of her subjectivity, which is against the Chinese tradition. In *Bone*, it seems that Ng also tries to grant Mah with female individuality and subjectivity. We can see this point in the way in which Ng offers us an intriguing interpretation of Mah's affair with Tommie in the novel. When Leila witnesses that Mah flies into Tommie Hom's arms for being overly stressed by the duty to take care of Grandpa's funeral, Leila's considerate attitude toward Mah's behavior is more likely to be Ng's perspective instead of hers. As Leila argues, "Seeing Mah in Tommie Hom's arms, I knew there was more to it than just finding Grandpa Leong. It had to do with Leon being gone so much, it had to do with the monotony of her own life. It wasn't just death that upset Mah, it was life, too" (Ng 82). Leila's reaction is indeed unusual for a daughter at such a young age. The narrating voice here seems to become an omniscient third-person narrative instead of a first-person one. In other words, we might suggest that this interpretation is actually the author's judgment toward Mah. This interpretation also demonstrates Ng's indirect criticism of the American society—it is not the death which makes Mah break down; it is the deprived husband, the deprived family and the deprived life. Besides, her affair with the boss tells us not only about her loneliness but also about her insubordination to the tradition. While Ng tries to present the social injustice and inequality in the American society, she also delivers us an untraditional image of Chinese woman who is not weak and unbounded by Confucian morality.

The problems which the American-born generation encounters seem to be more complicated than their predecessors'. We can divide the three daughters of the Leong family into two categories. Leila and Nina stand for those who choose to leave the Chinatown while Ona belongs to those who have stayed. And the death of Ona makes a judgment toward the choices they have made. Throughout the whole story, Ona's

suicide is never clearly explained. This lack of an answer, this absence, makes the hidden text more obvious. Among the three daughters, Ona is the one most involved with Chinatown life. Unlike Leila, the community relations specialist at school, and Nina, a flight attendant, Ona works as a hostess in The Traders for limited earnings just like her parents. She is also the one who is closest to Leon. As Leila narrates,

She was too sensitive, too close to Leon. When she was little, she'd be weepy for days after Leon left on a voyage, and she'd wait for him, shadowy and pensive, counting off the days till he came home. Every time he lost a job, she went into a depression with him. When he got high on some scheme, she was drunk on it, too. Mah said she was like Leon that way: Ona had no skin. (Ng 172)

Among the three of them, Ona is the only one who has really accepted Leon's lifestyle and the Chinatown life. When Leon moves into the San Fran after discovering Mah's extramarital affair, Ona works the hardest at getting him back. And based on what Ona has done, we could see how much she enjoys Leon's lifestyle. She keeps company with Leon at the union hall on Townsend Street while waiting for the opportunity of taking some odd jobs. She loves fooling around with Leon, and she enjoys the old-style movies quite a lot. She knows Leon's temper, as Leila points out, "Ona had stamina—his stamina—and she'd let him run his steam, and when he was done, she'd work on getting him come home" (Ng 158). Unlike Leila, Ona never is never critical toward Leon's life. She loves Chinatown life just like she loves Leon. She is not only the heir of Leon and Mah but also the heir of Chinatown. Yet the failure of the Ong & Leong laundry brings this intimacy into an abrupt end. Leong gets angry with Ona for her relationship with Osvaldo, and Ona feels betrayed that no one comes to her rescue about this. After Ona's death, the whole family could not help but keeps on asking why. Leon blames himself for the unburied bones of Grandpa Leong, and Mah thinks that it is her fault and she is paying the price for her affair with Tommie. Leila suggests that Ona gets stuck in the family and in Chinatown—"Ona

was the middle daughter and she felt struck in the middle of all the trouble”(Ng 139).

In fact, I would argue that Ona is another victim of the American society. She never has a chance for her life or her love, just like her parents; the American society never leaves an opportunity for them. Ona never has a chance with Osvaldo, because their relationship is too tied up with the Ong & Leong laundry, and with Chinatown life. The laundry business not only represents the dream-fulfillment of Leon but also symbolizes the Chinatown lifestyle which Leon has relied on for his whole life. Besides, the laundry business is also the evidence of the social exploitation: Leon never has a chance with his work; either the grocery store or the laundry is never what Leon wants to do. But the choices are never what he likes to do but what he “can” do. He takes the rough part in their laundry business: Luciano is the talker while Leon the worker. Leon is so devoted to this job, and so do the other family members. So when the business goes bust, it is hard for Leon to accept. Trust, the old-world way, the Chinatown way, have broken into pieces, and so does Leon’s American dream. He has to find someone to blame for this failure, so Ona becomes his target because of Osvaldo. The failure of laundry business disappoints Leon, and Leon and Mah disappoint Ona. Maybe the Chinatown way also disappoints her. Whom should she find to take the blame? It is as if she is imprisoned within Chinatown, yet she does not and could not flee from it. As Leila has mentioned, “I worried about her. Not only because she was Leon’s target, but also because she didn’t have an out. The thing that stuck in my mind was what Ona told me about how she felt outside Chinatown. She never felt comfortable, even with the Chinese crowd that Osvaldo hung around with; she never felt like she fit in”(Ng 173). The Chinatown is all she has. After getting disappointed by everything in Chinatown, including her parents, perhaps death is an exit for her life. Moreover, Ona’s death leads the readers into the core of life of the working-class Chinese Americans born in America. The Chinatown life is not so different from their predecessors’, and the social mobility is still limited. A girl like Ona who grows up in Chinatown and has stayed there for most of her life felt unfit and

uncomfortable outside Chinatown. Ng has indirectly indicated that Chinatown is still a ghettoized place that would appear on the tour pamphlet, and the Chinese American community is still the social subjects with legitimate citizenships.

Nevertheless, Leila and Nina seem to be the opposite of Ona, especially Nina. In contrast with Ona, Leila and Nina do not like Chinatown life. Both of them try to keep a distance with Chinatown, and Nina even chooses to flee away from it. While Ona spends all her life in Chinatown, Nina chooses to move to New York by herself. As a matter of fact, for Leila and Nina, Chinatown is something more than a residence but a place obscured by the miserable past of the family. As Leila ruminates over Nina's moving out, she suggests, "I think Nina had the best attitude. Leon's problems were his and Mah's were hers, and she hated Chinatown and she was getting out" (172). The history of the predecessors depresses Nina, and Nina knows that she has to find an exit for herself. And interestingly, Ng assigns Nina a place which is totally different from that of the Chinatown—the city of New York. In contrast with the ghettoized Chinatown life, New York is a melting pot composed of various cultures and races. And Nina seems to do well in this environment on account of her occupation as a flight attendant. Ona's suffering and Nina's liberty become contrasts. Among the family members of the Leongs, Nina is absolutely the most Americanized. Except for her family, she seems to have no Chinese characteristics. She lives an American life and acts like an American. As Nina confesses to Leila during their dinner in New York, "It's funny, but you know I hardly use chopsticks anymore. At home I eat my rice on a plate, with a fork. I only use chopsticks to hold my hair up" (27). Leila has sensed Nina's transformation, and she is even somewhat angry at Nina's behavior. Ng is presenting Nina as a fully Americanized example who can successfully survive in the American society and get rid of the Chinatown past. As Nina tries to talk Leila into having her own life, she suggests that her parents belongs to the other world which is different from hers. She thinks that Leila should not be dominated by the old world anymore. As Nina says, "Look, you've always been on standby for them. Waiting

and doing things their way. Think about it, they have no idea what our lives are about. They don't want to come into our worlds. We keep on having to live in their world. They won't move one bit" (Ng 33). Here Nina makes a clarification of her difference from her parents, and it is the parents' world she tries to flee from.

But if we conclude that Nina's flee as her free choice, we have misunderstood her and the author. What Nina actually tries to run away from? Indeed, Nina does try hard to flee Chinatown, and tries hard not to follow her parents' old disastrous road. But most important of all, she tries to flee the social exploitation in Chinatown. She knows that she has to find the exit for herself before she becomes another victim. As Nina argues, "I know about it, too. I helped fill out those forms at the Chinatown employment agencies; I went to the Seaman's Union, too; I listened and hoped for those calls: 'Busboy! Presser! Prep man!' And I know about *should*. I know about *have to*. We should. We want to do more, we want to do everything. But I've learned this: *I can't*" (33). This is the moment when the American-born generation voices out their helplessness and the poor situation of their parents and of themselves. The parents are passive to the dominancy of American society while the children could do nothing for them. The three auxiliary verbs reinforce the involuntarity of the American-born generation. They should, they have to help their parents, but they can't. The word "should" implies what is right or correct, and the phrase "have to" implies an obligation or responsibility. And the word "can" refers to the ability or means to do something. Although to help their parents are the right thing to do and also their obligation, they just "can't." She can't do anything but watches her parents suffered. After all, Nina is just another victim of the American society. Her extrinsic Americanized behaviors thus become ironic. The truth is, as Leila narrates, "Being alone and so far away wasn't easy on Nina" (25). Her living away from home and her seeming self-independence are what she is forced into in order to survive. Nina's change of occupation makes us see clearly the implication: the miserable history of their parents and the antecedents still inflict the following generation, and the seeming

accommodation of these American-born Chinese is but the disguised social and cultural deprivation.

Throughout the whole story, we follow Leila's narration to get to know all the sufferings of the Leong family. In other words, we come to understand the whole story through Leila's point of view, which also represents Ng's viewpoint to a certain aspect. It is through Leila's eyes that the panorama of Chinatown life is presented. Unlike Nina's avoidance, Leila is the one who faces the reality, a reality of their parents' lives and of their own lives. If Ona is the one most involved with Chinatown life, Leila is the one best understands Chinatown life. Though written in the first person, we can detect two kinds of narrating voices in Leila's narration: while most of the time Leila narrates the story based on her own interpretation, sometimes Leila's narration is transformed into the author's voice, which is omniscient and more critical. Being not only the eldest but also the half daughter of the Leong family, she has shared more responsibilities than her two younger sisters. Instead of Ona, Leila is truly the one who gets stuck of everything, especially after Ona's death. She is locked between her mother's first marriage and her present life, stuck between Leon and Mah, and burdened by Ona's death and Nina's seemingly indifference. Leila suffers. As Leila says,

I had my own resentments. I resented Nina her fast move, her safe distance; I resented her three thousand miles. I resented Leon's madness, his blind lamenting to Confucius, his whole hocus-pocus view of the world. I resented Mah her stubborn one-track moaning—crying over Ona who was dead, crying Nina who was gone. Crying over her two lost daughters. I wanted to shake her and ask, What about me? Don't I count? Don't I matter? There I was, the living present daughter, and Mah was hung up on the other two

I wasn't dead. I wasn't gone. (91)

The last two sentences are not only the lament of a heartbroken daughter, yearning for her parents' attention but also a desperate protest for the poor situation of Chinese

Americans. Here again Ng tries to visualize the “absence” through this absence. As Leila tries to cry for her aliveness, her presence, the “life” of the other family members becomes ironic. The fact is all of the Leong family have been trapped in Ona’s death, except for Leila. Ever since Ona has committed suicide, the linear time of the Leong family has stopped to move forward. Mom’s incessant lamenting, Leon’s hocus-pocus living attitude, and Nina’s fleeing from home are all ways of avoid direct confrontation with the familial miseries.

Nonetheless, while one is tempted to conclude that the novel is a tragedy of a specific family, s/he would discover later the Leongs is just one of the numerous tragic families within Chinatown. It is through Leila’s job that we can observe the Chinese American families suffer as much as the Leongs. As the community relations specialist at school, Leila is the connection between the school and the parents. Every time when she takes home-visit to the students who have difficulties in learning, she finds they have many in common with her—the same messed-up houses and the hard-working parents. For the working-class families, while the parents are deprived of better working opportunities, the chances for better education also become inaccessible for their children. The economic hardship of Chinese American community directly results in their social difficulties. Yet Leila knows that she can do nothing to change the social reality, just like she cannot save her sister. Her discontent here can be regarded as a direct accusation of the American society: “Don’t I count? Don’t I matter?”—are questions not only for her family members but also the American society. Don’t Chinese Americans count? Don’t we matter? We are not dead. Within Leila’s narration, we can detect the discontent of the working class of Chinese Americans for their deprived lives, and they are the passive victims and the objects of capitalistic American society.

However, we can detect a different tone in the narration which is more optimistic and omniscient; it can be the combination of the author and the narrator. In terms of the following narration voice, we would see Chinese America is no more the passive

abject but the uncanny subject which makes America face its reality. As Leila argues, Looking out, I thought, so this is what Chinatown looks like from inside those dark Greyhound buses; this slow view, this strange color combinations, this narrow streets, this is what tourists come to see. I felt a small lightening up inside, because I knew, no matter what people saw, no matter how close they looked, our inside story is something entirely different. (145)

For the American self, Chinese America represents the odd part; just like the crooked streets and the light of blended color, Chinatown is discordant with the modernity of American society. What the tourists “look” from inside the buses are something they want to see: the exotic Chinatown; Chinatown, for them, is the image appearing on their little tourist pamphlets. Yet, as Leila argues that she knows inside her heart that Chinese Americans have a different story which is different from the memory of the national discourse. Chinese Americans are not the abjects; they are legal citizens who devote their lives to build up this country. As America keeps abjecting Chinese America in order to maintain its integrity, readers also detect an entirely different story which is composed of an optimistic attitude toward the difficult situation of Chinese America. Even though the whole novel has been spun around the family guilt about Ona’s death, Ng finally offers an exit at the end of the novel—the personal memory. “I believe that the secrets we hold in our hearts are our anchors, that even the unspoken between us is a measure of our every promise to the living and to the dead. And all our promises, like all our hopes, move us through life with the power of an ocean liner pushing through the sea,” said Leila (193). Ona’s death, Leon’s lost old suitcase or Grandpa Leong’s bones represent part of the traces of the living Chinese Americans and the dead, and it would become the sustaining power for the later generations of Chinese Americans. These social aliens compose their life history with their lives instead of words, and they have written down the unrepresented in the national discourse. In short, their life stories are the hidden text of the American history.

Chapter 3
Becoming a Chinese American—
The Redefinition of Chinese American Identity in *The Joy Luck Club*

In comparison with Fae Myenne Ng, Amy Tan grew up in a relatively well-off family. Yet the economic affluence did not bring her a happy life but a sorrowful one instead. Amy Tan's father, John Tan, was an electrical engineer and Baptist minister. He came to America in order to escape the Chinese Civil War in 1947. Her mother, Daisy, divorced her first abusive husband and flew to America in 1949 just before the Communist takeover at the cost of leaving behind her three daughters. Amy Tan, born in Oakland, was the middle child of Daisy's second marriage, and she had two brothers. Later, after both her father and her elder brother, Peter, died of brain tumors in 1967, Daisy decided to take Amy and her younger brother, John, to Europe. They settle down in Montreux, Switzerland, where Amy Tan finished high school. By this time, she often had quarrels with her mother. Tan feels herself an outsider at the school, and the pressures had reinforced the anger in her mind. Since her good behavior could not win her father and brother back, she decided not to keep on the right tract. She even got arrested at the age of sixteen.

Ultimately, the Tans moved back to America, and Amy Tan was enrolled at Linfield College by her mother and majored in premed, as expected by her mother. Yet she transferred to San Jose City College, where her boyfriend DiMattei was a law student, and studied English and Linguistics instead. Later, she earned her Bachelor's degree in both English and Linguistics, and, in 1974, she married DiMattei who was a tax attorney now, and they settle down in San Francisco. She began her first work as a language-development specialist for disabled children, and then she became a technical writer specializing in corporate business proposals which had turned her into a workaholic. She began to write her first novel at a writing community which she joined in order to cure herself after an unsuccessful counseling cure. She later realized

that writing about her life could be therapeutic though she first began to write on a non-Chinese perspective. In 1987 G. P. Putnam bought her short story "Rules of the Game" and the outline of a novel. Within four months she finished the rest of the stories, which turned into *The Joy Luck Club*.

Actually, many parts of *Joy Luck Club* are based on Amy Tan's life experiences, just like Ng's *Bone*. The mother-daughter generational conflicts and love in *Joy Luck Club* are what Tan and her mother have been through. June, who is expected to be a talented pianist, June, who fails her mother's expectations, Waverly, who always feels inadequate in the face of her mother, and Waverly, who is pressured by her mother's high expectation—these are partially based on Tan's life experiences. The turmoil of life indeed greatly influences Tan and her writing, yet as a matter of fact, she has hardly experienced the economic hardships which are common in Ng's life. Therefore, their different economic situations lead to the different tones in their works. While Fae Myenne Ng gives words to the working-class family, Amy Tan stands for the middle class in *Joy Luck Club*. The social mobility is easier in *Joy Luck Club* than in *Bone*. But I do not mean to conclude that the middle-class Chinese Americans do not suffer or encounter no difficulties during their process of Americanization. Instead of the economic hardship, what is evident in Tan's novel is the social and cultural hardships existed in Chinese American community's life. Under the seemingly "oriental" appearance, *Joy Luck Club* has led us to the core of the sufferings of the middle-class Chinese American women, especially within their heterosexual love relationships with their boyfriends or husbands. And it was within this novel that Tan has recorded the forgotten history of these Chinese American women, including her mother and herself.

As Huping Ling argues,

As Chinese and other Asian Americans made socioeconomic progress in the recent decades, they continued to suffer different forms of discrimination and prejudice. The model minority stereotype misrepresented their socioeconomic reality and prevented their further advancement.... However,

Chinese American women still subjected to racism and sexism in interracial dating and other aspects of their lives. (178)

Within this statement, Ling makes two significant points about the situations of the recent Chinese or Asian Americans, especially women: one is their socioeconomic progress while the other is their limited social mobility.⁶ According to Ling, the transformation of the socioeconomic situation of Chinese American women is closely related to the political situations both in China and in America. World War II is regarded as a turning point for Chinese American women since China has become a member of the Grand Alliance and public images of the Chinese has gradually changed. As Ling points out, “The repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943 helped increase a more family-oriented Chinese American population by allowing more Chinese women to enter the United States under such special laws as the War Bride Act and the G.I. Fiancées Act” (113). Moreover, many postwar Chinese immigrant women are pushed to emigrate by dramatic political change in China while the majority of early immigrant women are driven by the lack of economic opportunities in China. In other words, among the great amount of recent Chinese American immigrant women, there are quite a few who do not emigrate for the sake of economic necessity since they belong to the middle or upper class. Indeed, the characteristics of the postwar Chinese immigrant women, as Ling proposes, have partially explained the occupational change and upper social mobility at the time (115). And the degree of their assimilation does differ from that of the working class. All of these contribute to “the model minority discourse⁷” of Chinese American. Nevertheless, through this novel, what Amy Tan tries to envision

⁶ Huping Ling’s book, *Surviving on the Gold Mountain: A History of Chinese American Women and Their Lives*, deals with the socioeconomic situation of Chinese American women from the gold mountain era to the recent period.

⁷ Gen Fan Li points out in her “Canon Formation and the Model Minority” that “under the umbrella of the ‘Model Minority’, Asian Americans (Chinese Americans are the main constituency in the North American context) are integrated and assimilated into the mainstream late capitalist American society. Firstly, this term suggests how a minority (though covering people across gender, sexual orientation, class, and national origin), seen as tamed, hard-working, co-operative and unthreatening by comparison to other ‘more threatening’ minorities, say, black people (Chin, 1972/1998: 71-4), fits the American capitalist logic. The mainstream popular ideology appropriates the voice of Asian Americans and stresses the achievements of Asian Americans as a successful example of such assimilation”.

for the readers is the other side of this model minority discourse—without the relatively free social mobility and economic advancement, the model minority discourse has become but the other invisible prison which not only defines Chinese American as “the model” but also confines them to be forever “the minor” in the American society. As theorists point out, the implication of the “model minority” is to hold the individual from failing to find a job, get education or fit into the mainstream American society and to underplay issues of social justices and the necessity of affirmative action.⁸ Within the portrayal of the subtle tension between either mother and daughter or men and women, Tan presents us how these Chinese immigrant women retrieve their voices and “learn to shout” under the oppressive discourse structure in the American society.

Different from Ng’s chaotic retrospective narration, Tan composes *Joy Luck Club* in a chronological order, and it contains seven characters who narrate their own stories respectively. The split narrating voices force the readers to make the connection among the various stories, and ultimately the separated stories would be united into an integrity which is the history of Chinese American women. The novel commences with the intriguing prologue “The Feather Came from Thousand Li Away” which indirectly discloses the past of the Chinese American immigrants. The feather came from thousand li away carried with it not only the mother’s long cherished wish but also her expectations. As what Suyuan says, during her journey to America, in the prologue,

In America I will have a daughter just like me. But over there nobody will say her worth is measured by the loudness of her husband’s belch. Over there nobody will look down on her, because I will make her speak only perfect America English. And over there she will always be too full to swallow any sorrow! She will know my meaning, because I will give her this swan—a creature that became more than what was hoped for. (3)

Although Suyuan immigrates to America because of the Chinese Civil War, she is also

⁸ See the section on the 'Model Minority' in E. Kim's *Asian American Literature* (1982), 177-80, 306-07.

one of those immigrants who carry with them the America dream. Through this quotation, the ambition of their American dream is made evident—what they pursue is not only a happier and wealthier life but also a life with female subjectivity. Although many immigrant women are confined in menial jobs because of their limited English speaking abilities and marketable skills, they hope their children would have educational and occupational opportunities. No matter how hard their life is, they never neglect child-raising (Ling130). Even though the four immigrant mothers move to America under different situations, they share this same wish for their American-born daughters.

However, these American daughters seem to fail to recognize the real face of their mothers, and this is what these immigrant mothers always worry about. When June is asked to take the place of Suyuan not only at the mah jong table but also in the Joy Luck Club, she suddenly realizes she does not understand her own mother. When she is informed by the other three aunts about her mother's twin babies being found, she points out the most significant issue in the novel:

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

(31)

This passage has demonstrated the alienation between the two generations and at the same time points out that the history of these immigrant mothers is gradually forgotten. This forgotten history can be divided into two parts—one refers to their previous history in China, and the other represents their present history in America. In the following

chapters, Tan tries to demonstrate us these “forgotten” histories through an overview of lives of these characters.

The novel is divided into four sections, each section consists of four chapters in which each immigrant mother or one of their American daughters accounts her own stories, except for Suyuan Woo, whose stories are narrated by her daughter, June Jing-mei Woo. The novel opens with the four immigrant mothers’ stories in China which give the readers a basic understanding of their background, and at the same time provides a base for comparison with their daughters’ present lives. In “Scar,” we have a glimpse of the image of An-mei’s disgraced mother who is chased out of the family and forced to remarry as a concubine of Wu-xing. The name of An-mei’s mother is a taboo in the family, and Popo even curses her as a ghost, just like Kingston’s “no name woman.” Later in Lindo Jong’s story, “The Red Candle,” we come to see how Lindo has once sacrificed her own life to keep her parents’ promise. She is betrothed to Huang Tyan-yu at her young age, and the reason why she is chosen is because of her expected “productivity.” She is instructed to do all kinds of housework and to serve her parents-in-law, and is also anticipated to have as more sons as possible to carry on the family name. Under Huang Taitai’s training, she is expected to be an obedient wife who treats her husband as god and absolutely obeys her mother-in-law, and she almost loses herself. Under Huang Taitai’s discipline, Lindo is nearly brainwashed:

After a while, I didn’t think it a terrible life, no, not really. After a while, I hurt so much I didn’t feel any difference....

Can you see how the Huangs almost washed their thinking into my skin? I came to think of Tyan-yu as a god, someone whose opinions were worth much more than my own life. I came to think of Huang Taitai as my real mother, someone I wanted to please, someone I should follow and obey without question. (51)

From both An-mei’s and Lindo’s stories, we observe the difficult situation of women in traditional Chinese society—a wife or woman is regarded as a property rather

an individual. The unconditional supremacy of patriarchy is taken for granted in Chinese tradition, and women are anticipated and instructed to exist without subjectivity. A woman should obey her parents; a wife should be submissive to her husband. In the traditional Chinese society, a woman is unable to live independently without the protection of the family or the husband. The ideological apparatuses of the country, including the family, the society and the school, keep instilling these “ethics” into women. Thus An-mei’s mother is left no other choices except for remarrying with Wu-xing after being chased out of the family since she has violated the law of “female chastity”; Lindo could not flee from her marriage at the cost of her parents’ reputation since her family would not accept her after all. Women are absolutely dependent on and controlled by the father, the husband, and any other persons representing the patriarchal power. These oppressing principles are what these immigrant mothers try to leave behind, and they have expected a better world in America that will bring happiness for the next generation. Nevertheless, while these American daughters have grown into someone who speaks only “perfect English” and “drink more Coca-cola than sorrow,” they seem to forget their own mothers and further involuntarily follow the same old disastrous road of their predecessors.

In section two—“The Twenty-six Malignant Gates,” we catch a glimpse of the early stage of these Chinese mothers’ American lives through their daughters’ voices, and at the same time, we also detect a distance between the mother-daughter relationships. While some critics try to interpret it as the class-consciousness of the American daughters, I try to examine this issue from the cultural aspect. Based on these American daughters’ memories of their mothers, their Chinese mothers turn out to be whom they felt ashamed of or what they cannot understand. From their perspectives, their Chinese immigrant mothers are incompatible with the American lives represented by the American-born generation. Waverly Jong is embarrassed when Lindo shows her off to the passers on the street; Lena regards Ying-ying as witch-like with all those magical power; Rose chooses to discuss her divorce with a psychiatrist

instead of her mother because she thinks that An-mei would not understand; June blames Suyuan for asking her to be what she is not and thus makes her become a disappointment in her mother's life.

Nonetheless, from the readers' perspectives, we come to realize how much these American daughters have misunderstood their own mothers and how they judge their "Chinese" mothers through their "American" eyes. While Waverly is ashamed of Lindo's behavior, she fails to understand how Americanized Lindo has become and how much her mother has helped to advance her competence in playing chess. Unlike the principles in traditional Chinese family, Waverly is granted the privilege for not doing housework since she has to have more practice to win. So Waverly's brothers have to take over all the housework. The details here allows us detect how "unconventional" Lindo is, and at the same time, this would be an evidence of Lindo's Americanization. Lena believes she could foresee the terrible things because she has inherited her mother's Chinese eyes; however, she never tries to understand her mother except to see her as a crazy woman, a ghost. As Lena stated, "Because, even as a young child, I could sense the unspoken terrors that surrounded our house, the ones that chased my mother until she hid in a secret dark corner of her mind. And still they found her. I watched, over the years, as they devoured her, piece by piece, until she disappeared and became a ghost" (105). Lena is unmindful of Ying-ying's tragic past; thus, after Ying-ying loses her second baby due to the abortion, she concludes that her mother is too sad to lose her mind. Her way of protecting of her mother is actually a way of indifference. As much as she envies the girl next door and wants to be seen by her mother, yet she fails to realize that she is the one who fails to see her mother.

June blames Suyuan for forcing her to be what she is not; she regards herself as a failure in her mother's life. For June, America is her mother's dream land where anything is possible, yet she turns out to be a disappointment instead of a prodigy. She does not become another Shirley Temple; she does not know the capitals of all the American states; she is not a talented pianist. While June blames her mother for all her

failures, she fails to understand that it is herself who has given herself up from the very beginning. Just like the disastrous piano recital in her childhood, she has been waiting her mother to start shouting so that she could shout back and cry and blame her mother for all her misery. Actually, Suyuan has never regarded June as a failure, and it is June herself who keeps evaluating herself by the “American” standard. As June argues,

It was not the only disappointment my mother felt in me. In the years that followed, I failed her so many times, each time asserting my own will, my right to fall short of expectations. I didn’t get straight As. I didn’t become class president. I didn’t get into Stanford. I dropped out of college.

For unlike my mother, I did not believe I could be anything I wanted to be. I could only be me. (153-54)

Suyuan has never asked June to be what she is not, and what she really hopes is that June will do her best. While June criticizes her mother for pressuring her with over-expectation, she is actually judging herself by her own “Americanized” eyes: the straight As, being a class president, getting into Stanford and winning a Bachelor degree—these are the norms according to which one is judged in the American society instead of Suyuan’s “over-expectation.” What June keeps pursuing is not to fulfill Suyuan’s expectations but that of the society. Among stories in section two, we gradually understand that while these American daughters try to judge their Chinese mothers through their American eyes, they are judged at the same time.

Like a typical female *Bildungsroman*, the female protagonist has to overcome various obstacles in her process of maturation. In section three, “American Translation,” all of the four American daughters have encountered their greatest turning points in lives, which contribute to their completion of the maturing process and their reconciliation with their Chinese mothers. Besides, through their marital difficulties or psychological struggles, the difficult situations of these Chinese American women are presented before us. Through the love problems between these American daughters

and their American husbands, for instance, Tan leads the readers to probe into the sufferings of these Chinese American women under the dominance of western phallogocentrism,⁹ and at the same time she makes us reexamine the “Americanization” of these American-born protagonists. In this section, Tan makes a delicate arrangement in which the immigrant mothers’ Chinese past become a base for comparison with the American daughters’ present lives. To one’s surprise, these immigrant mothers turn out to be the savior of their American-born daughters who are afflicted with the supreme dominance of the patriarchy. Under their Chinese mothers’ guidance, the American daughters finally retrieve their voices. In the following paragraphs, I would specify the phallogocentric dominance in the American daughters’ stories, and re-present the process of the American daughters’ awakening through the application of Lacan and Irigaray’s interpretation of phallogocentrism. And this leads us to further examine the position of these Chinese American women in the American society.

According to Lacan, subjectivity requires language, and language is masculine, grounded in the Phallus as universal signifier. When women speak and take up subject positions, it is not as women, but as imitation males (qtd. in Verhaeghe). For Lacan, men and women exist only in language. Within the phallic definition, the woman is constituted as ‘not all.’ As Juliet Mitchell also explains, ‘Woman’ is excluded by the nature of words, meaning that the definition poses her as exclusion (49). Law, religion, science, and civilization are structured by the masculine symbolic. The feminine is figured as an absence within the real as well as the imaginary and symbolic orders. Thus, women have been excluded from symbolic order, yet becoming a subject involves entry into the symbolic. Thus, the language and the whole symbolic order are

⁹ This term evolved from deconstructionists, mainly Derrida, who questioned the “logocentrism” of Western literature and thought, i.e. the belief in the centrality of logos, understood as cosmic reason (affirmed in ancient Greek philosophy as the source of world order and intelligibility) or, in the Christian version, the self-revealing thought and will of God. The term is also associated with Lacanian psychoanalysis, which understands the entrance of subjects into language as a negotiation of the phallus and the Name of the Father. Feminist theorists such as Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous illustrate how all Western languages, in all their features, are utterly and irredeemably male-engendered, male-constituted, and male-dominated. (Grosz 174-80)

masculine, so one can only enter into it as male. Discourse is “phallogocentric,” as Irigaray asserts, because it is centered and organized throughout by implicit recourse to the phallus both as its supposed ground (or logos) and as its prime signifier and power source; and not only in its vocabulary and syntax, but also in its rigorous rules of logic, its proclivity for fixed classifications and oppositions, and its criteria for what we take to be valid evidence and objective knowledge. As she further suggests, “phallogocentrism treats the two sexes as if they are two variations of the one sex” (Grosz 174). And whenever two sexual symmetries are represented by one, phallogocentrism occurs. It occurs when the not necessarily comparable differences between them are reduced to a similarity, which renders them commensurable, and, not surprisingly, positions woman as man’s inferior, the “castrated sex.” She further associates the phallogocentrism with the pre-oedipal mother-daughter relation which leaves woman without a pre-history and a positive indentificatory model; it places social constraints and systems of meaning on women’s behavior, through intimidation, threats, inscription, barriers—materially imposed on women which may drive many to a possibly self-destructive hysteria (Grosz 174). Women cannot speak but be spoken by the phallogocentric language.

“Discourse,” the language system, refuse to acknowledge that their partiality, their own perspectivity, their own interests and values, implicitly rely upon conceptions of women and femininity in order to maintain their ‘objectivity,’ ‘scienticity,’ or ‘truth’—that is, their veiled masculinity (Grosz 180). In front of their husbands, these American daughters in *Joy Luck Club* are confined to be “a substratum.” Their voices are never heard by their husbands, and their husbands’ “misunderstanding” is but a disguise of the pre-dominancy of masculinity. Based on Lena’s memory, she believes that Ying-ying has the mysterious power to see things before they have happened; thus she worries about what her mother would see in their house and between Harold and her during her visit. Lena and her husband used to have a marital life based on the principle of equality—they would divide the bill, and keep everything separated. During the

honeymoon, Lena thinks everything goes well between Harold and her, and everything is acceptable to her—they split the tab after the date; she moves in with Harold but pays him the rent; she enjoys being Harold's Muse; she tries hard to be the extraordinary girl in Harold's eyes. However, after they get married, Lena starts to be bothered by all of these. Yet she still tries to persuade herself that Harold and she are equal. Actually she knows that her position is never equivalent to Harold's, and it is always she who has to accommodate to Harold's standard of equality. In other words, the rule of equality is actually the disguise of Harold's patriarchal dominancy over Lena. In the so-called equal relationship between Harold and Lena, Lena is still positioned as the oppressed who has to be submissive to the patriarchy. From the beginning of their relationship, Lena has positioned herself as the inferior one, and she involuntarily answers to the phallogocentric ideology. She has no confidence in herself. Even though she is mad at Harold's behavior, she still thinks that Harold is too good to be hers—

Now that I'm angry at Harold, it's hard to remember what was so remarkable about him. And I know they're there, the good qualities, because I wasn't that stupid to fall in love with him, to marry him. All I can remember is how awfully lucky I felt, and consequently how worried I was that all this undeserved good fortune would someday slip away....

And I think that feeling of fear never left me, that I would be caught someday, exposed of a sham of a woman. (169)

Her sense of insecurity and inferiority prove not only the supreme dominancy of Harold's patriarchal power but also the invisible confinement of female subject. Lena is so obsessed with her love for Harold that she imagines herself as a lack, a sham. Under the superficial feeling related to Lena's anxiety, it is Lena's inner struggle toward her identity. On the one hand, she submits to the manipulative control of the knowing subject, the masculine, and on the other hand, she is conscious of her masquerade, her being a sham. She does not yield absolutely to the dominant patriarchy.

As for Harold, he keeps putting Lena up to his phallogocentric ideology by way of

his counterfeit equality. He takes Lena's devotions for granted, and he makes all these inequality "equal." He offers Lena to move in with him and pays him the rent as an indirect way of helping him without knowing that it costs more than Lena's original studio; he takes over Lena's ideas of thematic restaurant design without noticing that it is Lena's; he decides to divide the bill right in the middle without paying attention to Lena's abhorrence for ice cream; he does not give Lena a promotion because "it would be not fair" to the other employees. Harold's excuse is that he doesn't want to contaminate their relationship with money; he explains that, "as long as we keep the money thing separate, we'll always be sure of our love for each other" (171). How come the split of tag could guarantee the love relationship since the equality between husband and wife never depends solely on the economic aspect. Apparently, Harold still holds a sense of superiority over Lena, and the norm of equality becomes a way of making justifiable to his exploitation over Lena.

Just like Lena, Rose has positioned herself as a victim from the very beginning of her marriage. Just like what An-mei has told her, she bents too easily to other people's opinions. While being whole-heartedly devoted to Ted, she also gradually loses her subjectivity. Even though Ted does not give up their love under Mrs. Jordan's opposition, Ted never makes his parents truly accept Rose. And even Ted himself has never really understood Rose. As Rose says, "I was victim to his hero"(125). Rose plays the role of the weak "Asian woman" while Ted her white savior. After they get married, Ted has dominated the whole family and made decisions for their lives. Day after day, Rose gradually loses her subjectivity until nothing left except for her T-square, her X-acto knife, and her blue pencil. It is not until Ted has lost the malpractice lawsuit that Rose is conscious of her difficult situation. While Ted no longer wants to take charge of everything, she suddenly finds out that she does not know how to satisfy Ted's wish. Here we observe the reality of Rose's marriage—Rose just tries hard to be Ted's Miss Right, just like Lena, by conforming to Ted's patriarchal power. While Ted accuses Rose's submission to his mother, he seems to be ignorant of his dominancy over

Rose.. Ted's setting up a studio at home for Rose indirectly limits Rose's social environment, and his pushing Rose to make decisions is out of irresponsibility rather than the respect of Rose's subjectivity. As Rose argues, "I thought about things, the pros and the cons. But in the end I would be so confused, because I never believed there were ever any one right answer, yet there were many wrong ones"(126). Indeed, there are no right answers because what is "right" is based on Ted's phallogocentric ideology. Probing into both Lena's and Rose's marriages, the most significant problem is the cognitive chasm between husbands and wives. Competent and independent as Lena and Rose are, they still involuntarily have to submit themselves to the western phallogocentrism. In the love relationship, they are still destined to be the oppressed. How could a woman be submissive yet individualistic at the same time? Women are always left with no other choices. The arbitrariness of the western phallogocentrism is exposed to us. Comparing with the disastrous experiences of their Chinese mothers, the lives of these American daughters have made no difference with their mothers'. Ying-ying's first marriage in China is absolutely a catastrophe which takes away her son and her spirit at the same time. Yet what has driven her crazy is not only her womanizer husband but the solid patriarchal power which leaves no choices for women. However, does Ying-ying's second marriage really save her? What has supported Ying-ying after her husband's leave is her hate, and she has been "waited between the trees" the moment she gets released. Indeed the death of her first husband has brought her a new beginning, yet her lost spirit is never saved. Although Mr. St. Clair does love Ying-ying very much, he never tries to understand her, neither her past nor her present. When she becomes Betty St. Clair instead of Gu Ying-ying, she has forever lost her Tiger spirit and her past history. It seems that she just escapes the Chinese patriarchal power system and enters into the western phallogocentrism. Her scared eyes in their wedding picture, her changing the arrangement of the house, and her hysterical reaction to the "second" abortion— he makes all things reasonable and acceptable in favors of his own thinking. The woman he married is never Gu

Ying-ying but Betty St. Clair, the identity which he gives her. In Ying-ying's two marriages, she suffers from the oppression of the patriarchal dominancy, and so do Lena and Rose. The American dream of these immigrant mothers does bring them a legal identity but not an equal identity--this is the truth of Chinese American history.

In addition to the love issue, Tan also fixes her eyes upon the "Americanization" issue of these Chinese American women. The antagonism between mothers and daughters within *Joy Luck Club* is resulted from not only the generation gap but also the difference of cultural milieu. From the very beginning of the novel, June has pointed out the great worry of these immigrant mothers—being forgotten by their daughters. They are afraid that their American-born daughters would grow up to be someone who could not remember their own mothers and their cherished wishes; they see daughters who are gradually alienated from them and judge them from their "American" eyes. While the American society regards Chinese America as the culturally incompetent, these Chinese immigrant mothers seem to turn out to be the most incompetent in the eyes of these American-born daughters. In the stories which the American daughters narrate about their mothers, they keep connecting their mothers with the Chinese legends, the fractured English and their strange dialect, and molding their mothers into "unamericanized" image. Take Waverly's story for example, ever since her childhood, she sees her mother as a mean spirit which keeps torturing her. "It is not so easy any more," said Lindo after Waverly's show of rebellion, and it works like a spell and takes away Waverly's victory. Ever since she has the quarrel with her mother, her magic armor in playing chess is lost. The truth is that Waverly spoiled her own talent, but she tries to have Lindo take the blame. As for her first marriage with Marvin, Waverly even wonders if her mother has poisoned her marriage. She can not stand that her "Mr. Perfect" becomes worthless in front of her mother's eyes. But after reexamining Waverly's and Lindo's evaluation of Marvin, we come to see clear how obsessed Waverly is with the American norms. As Waverly argues,

When I was in love with Marvin, he was neatly perfect. He graduated third

in his class at Lowell and got a full scholarship to Stanford. He played tennis. He had bulging calf muscles and one forty straight black hairs on his chest. He made everyone laugh and his own laugh was deep, sonorous, masculinely sexy.... (192)

Waverly's idea of perfection is mainly based on Marvin's external appearance. It seems that Waverly is fascinated with his physical masculinity while paying no attention to the mental aspects. It is not until Lindo disillusiones Waverly's phantasy does she see the real Marvin. As Waverly further suggests,

But by the time my mother had had her say about him, I saw his brain had shrunk from laziness, so that now it was good only for thinking up excuses. He chased golf and tennis balls to run away from family responsibilities. His eyes wandered up and down other girls' legs, so he didn't know how to drive straight home anymore. He liked to tell big jokes to make other people feel little. He made a loud show of leaving ten-dollar tips to strangers but was stingy with presents to family. He thought waxing his red sports car all afternoon was more important than taking his wife somewhere in it. (192)

Judging from what Waverly has said, Lindo does not poison her marriage but prevents her from being poisoned by her own illusions. All those good qualities which used to charm Waverly now turns out to be worthless. Her husband's high education does not bring her a promise future, and his external masculinity is not equal to his inward irresponsibility. The marriage should be a disaster for Waverly, but she concludes that she never hates Marvin. She has Lindo to take the blame. Is it just because that Lindo has prejudices against Marvin? The question is more complicated. Instead of Lindo's disapproval of Marvin, what disturbs Waverly shall be her questioned "Americanization." Marvin's appreciation of her, for Waverly, stands for, the recognition of her personality and at the same time the recognition of her "Americanization." Lindo's criticism of Marvin indirectly denies his recognition of Waverly. This has threatened to

destabilize her identical legitimacy. In Waverly's narration, we could detect that she tries to keep a distance with her mother—she aims to emphasize the difference between Lindo and herself. For Waverly, Lindo's ignorance of fashion, her inadequate table manners and her criticism of the gift indicate Lindo's "cultural incompetence" within American society. She is so afraid that Lindo would make her feel bad about Rich and at the same time feel bad about herself. This anxiety has illuminated the inward uncertainty of Waverly for her identity. June shares this same complex toward Suyuan. Within June's endless quarrels with her mother, we see how June struggles to define her own position. Ever since her childhood, June has no confidence in herself, and she keeps battling with the imagined "ideal daughter" identity. In the face of Waverly, June always feels defeated since she is not as "successful" as she does. Actually June's accusing Suyuan of forcing her to be what she is not is a way to justify herself—she refuses to be seen as a failure and instead positions herself as a victim of misunderstanding. In "Best Quality," June feels she is defeated again by Waverly not only because of her unaccepted work but also Suyuan's "humiliating" words. On the one hand, what is made evident in this chapter is the dominating capitalistic ideology in American society. If Waverly stands for an image of the "competent" in American society, June would be classified as the incompetent. In the argument between June and Waverly over June's work, Waverly states blankly the reality of the capitalistic society. She argues that maybe what June has offered her other clients is wonderful, but what a big firm wants is something "more sophisticated." The quality of one's work depends on its "value"—how many profits and how many incomes it would bring; as for one's passion and efforts, that would not count. Everyone is evaluated by his/her "value" in the capitalistic society. On the other hand, it is the moment when June is forced to face the reality of her position: she is not styled like Waverly, and not as culturally competent as Waverly is. This time she could no longer make her mother take the blame. For June, the humiliation is

worst not only because of Waverly's criticism but also Suyuan's attitude. As Suyuan suggested, "True, cannot teach style. June not sophisticate like you. Must be born this way" (232). June interprets this statement as a repudiation of the position that she tries hard to maintain, and Suyuan's denial has totally destroyed June's false confidence. It seems that even in the eyes of her culturally incompetent mother, she also turns out to be one of the culturally incompetent. Even though they are "born" to be Americans, they still dedicate to consolidate their identity. Their mothers' have embodied the idea of the "unamericanized," which they try to avoid. However, the truth was no matter how "Americanized" they are on the outside, they still feel anxious about their present identity. They anticipate the recognition of the society and of their mothers. The renunciation of Chinese heritage could not be the access to a justifiable identity. Moreover, it is not until they could honestly face the "unamericanized" aspects of themselves, could they justify their American identity; that is to say, whom the Chinese Americans shall make convince of their cultural competence and identical legitimacy are themselves instead of the Americans.

In the last section, Tan delivers us the ultimate reconciliation between mother-daughter relationships, and at the same time the final stage of the Americanization of Chinese American women. The American-born daughters regain their subjectivity through the assistance of their mothers, and the American daughters also attain a deeper understanding of their mothers. What the "joy luck" mothers want to pass on to their daughters are not only the courage of living but also the dignity. In each chapter, Tan tries to demonstrate the other side of the characteristics of these "Chinese" mothers, and further makes adjustment to their position in the "American" society. In "Magpies," An-mei delivers us the process of how she has learned to shout because of her mother's suicide. More than the courage to shout, what An-mei has presented is the truth of life, of her life and of Rose's life. As An-mei states,

I know how it is to live your life like a dream. To listen and watch, to wake up and try to understand what has already happened....

My mother, she suffered. She lost her face and tried to hide it. She found only greater misery and finally could not hide that. There is nothing more to understand. That was China. That was what people did back then. They had no choice. They could not speak up. They could not run away. That was their fate.

But now they can do something else. Now they no longer have to swallow their own tears or suffer the taunts of magpies.... (272)

People in the old China are made to believe that they are left no choices, and they could do nothing but suffer—that is their “fate.” But it is different now. It is not their fate to suffer; they can make their own decisions. It is different for An-mei and shall be different for Rose. Even people in China now would do something for their lives, how could Rose just let the things happened and swallows up her own misery? And so do the other American daughters. In this passage, again we see Tan’s criticism of the American society. While Rose’s grandmother’s miserable past happened in the old China, Rose’s suffering is embedded in the modern American society. Besides, this passage also demonstrates the “Americanized” aspect of An-mei. She does not take Rose’s submission as what a wife deserves but urges her to fight for her own marriage. She pushes Rose to win back not only her marriage but also her self-esteem. An-mei is no more the obedient girl who would accept the suppressing patriarchal power; she is a woman of subjectivity now. Even though their past histories are deeply rooted in China, the lives in American also bring them great changes. I think Tan does give recognition to the “Americanization” of these immigrant mothers.

Furthermore, in the last chapter of this section, “A Pair of Tickets,” Tan presents us June’s voyage back to China to reunite with the lost twin sisters. This journey back to China signifies the ceremony of the ultimate reconciliation of the mother-daughter conflicts. Just before she is united with her lost sisters, they meet her father’s Aiyi in

Guangzhou, which is a big surprise. What is more surprising is that they discover the real China is totally different from that of their imagination. There are no more poor relatives who yearn for salvations from “rich” immigrant family members. As Aiyi says,

So it is shame you can't see our village, our house. My sons have been quite successful, selling our vegetables in the free market. We had enough these last few years to build a big house, three stories, all of new brick, big enough for our whole family and then some. And every year, the money is even better. You Americans aren't the only one who know how to get rich.”

(317-18)

In this segment, Tan seems to deliberately present a quite advanced image of China. Both the substantial relatives and the magnificent hotel are all different from the stereotypical image of a China in poverty. This seems to imply that China has undergone great economic progress and is as compatible as the American society now. No wonder June can't help but doubting, “This is communist China?” (318). Later June's reunion with the twin sisters further symbolizes the reconciliation between Chinese culture and American cultures. The reunion scene is quite symbolic. When June first sees the twin sisters from the gate of the airport, she sees her mother's face in the twin sisters. “Her short hair. Her small body. And that same look on her face” (331). Later when June runs toward them and has a close look at them after embracing with each other, she suddenly sees no traces of her mother in them. But she still feels familiar with them though they have never met. Then June has finally realized, “And now I also see what part of me is Chinese. It is so obvious. It is my family. It is in my blood. After all these years, it can finally be let go” (331). This moment is significant because it is the first time that the American-born daughter confesses the “Chinese” part in her. She has inherited the Chinese part in her blood. And now she can set free this part of herself. In other words, the Chineseness in her had been repressed for the past thirty years.

Here, I am not suggesting the ultimate return into “Chineseness” of these Chinese American women is the essence of Chinese American identity. This would oversimplify the question. What I try to point out is the discrepancy of Chinese American identity under the norms of American identity. For these American-born daughters, relegated as the culturally incompetent, the Chinese culture might be an amendment for their American identity. Hence they try to secure the legitimacy of their American identity at the cost of the Chinese inheritance symbolized by the Chinese immigrant mothers in the story. Yet based on the sufferings and frustrations which the American daughters have encountered in the American society, we come close to the truth that the legitimacy of Chinese American identity is never guaranteed. The burial of the Chinese inheritance never promise an American future for Chinese America. As Tan has implied through this reunion, it is only by way of recognition of the Chinese inheritance in one’s blood that the development of Chinese American identity is possible. While Tan leads us to see a touching scene of the mother-daughter reconciliation and further the reconciliation between Chinese and American cultures, she also makes evident the essence of Chinese American identity. Not until one let go of the Chinese part in one’s heart can one become a real Chinese American who is not only an American but also a Chinese.

With *Joy Luck Club*, Tan tries to present the forgotten history of Chinese America from the conflicts between the Chinese immigrant mothers and the American daughters. From the immigrant mother’s past history and the American daughter’s present lives, we could observe the sufferings of both the immigrant mothers and the American daughters in both the Chinese society and the American society. The middle-class women, though independent economically, are still under the dominancy of the patriarchal system. While being regarded as the subordinate of men, women are also deprived of the female subjectivity in America. Tan delves into the hypocritically American society through the familial or marital love issues of these Chinese American women and illustrates for us the cultural exploitation suffered by them under the dominating

western phallogocentric ideology.



Chapter 4
Conclusion—Being Chinese, Becoming Chinese American

“Family exists only because somebody has a story, and knowing the story connects us to a history,” Leila states (Bone 36). Both Tan and Ng construct their stories by using the personal stories of these Chinese American immigrants and aim to restore Chinese American history in order to commemorate the old timers and at the same time to build the resources for the later generations. Just as Feng suggests, Ng’s narrative strategy in *Bone* actually constructs a kind of counter-memory which is the opposite of official historical narratives, Tan, I propose, does the same thing in her *Joy Luck Club* (“Representing Chinatown: space and memory in Fae Myenne Ng’s *Bone*” 21-22).¹⁰ Unlike historical narratives, counter-memory pays attention to “the local, the immediate and the personal,” and delves into the absence in dominant narratives (Lipstiz 213). For the native-born Americans, the history of these early immigrants is about how they acquire their legal identity through illegal ways and how they try to adulterate the homogeneity of American society. Chinese America symbolizes the shadow of the mainstream America, what is deemed the negative and that of the un-Americanized part. Take Chinatown for example, it is recognized as a place full of exotic atmosphere where many tourists come to visit. Ironically, it is actually reconstructed based on the orientalist imagination of an American-born Chinese businessman and white architects.

¹¹ The reconstructed “new” Chinatown embellished with the “theatrical chinoiserie”

¹⁰ As George Lipsitz contends, “Counter-memory is a way of remembering and forgetting that starts with the local, the immediate, the personal. Unlike historical narratives that begin with the totality of human existence and then locate specific actions and events within that totality, counter-memory starts with the particular and the specific and then builds outward a total story. Counter-memory looks to the past for the hidden stories excluded from dominant narratives. But unlike myths that seeks to detach events and actions from the fabric of any larger history, counter-memory forces revision of existing histories by supplying new perspectives about the past. Counter-memory embodies aspects of myth, and aspects of history, but it retains an enduring suspicion of both categories. Counter-memory focuses on localized experiences of oppression, using them to reframe and refocus dominant narratives purporting to represent universal experiences.”

¹¹ According to Elaine Joe, “The city father had no intention of allowing Chinatown to be rebuilt in its own neighborhood, on valuable land next to the Financial District. While they were deciding where to relocate the Chinese, a wealthy businessman named Look Tin Eli developed a plan to rebuild Chinatown to its original location. He obtained a loan from Hong Kong and designed the new Chinatown to be

serves to satisfy the oriental imagination of the whites, and at the same time constructs the ghettoized Chinatown as the unamalgamated in the American society. Thus we see how the whites try to consume Chinese culture at the expense of “forgetting” the real Chinese America. And it is under this sense of urgency that both Tan and Ng try to preserve the disappearing life history of Chinese Americans in their works. By contrast, in Ng’s *Bone* and Tan’s *Joy Luck Club*, Chinatown is by no means the exotic area that only exists to satisfy the scopophilic pleasure of the mainstream Americans. Instead of the accentuated oriental imagination of Chinatown, the Chinatown in the two novelistic works is presented as a lived space as well as a gendered space, as Feng argues. Without the stage-set exotic atmosphere, Chinatown life is presented to the readers. And these life experiences of Chinese Americans represent the personal memory of Chinese America and the counter-memory of American history as well.

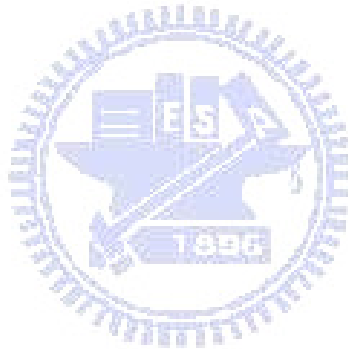
From the bleak cemetery where Grandpa Leong is buried to the fashionable salon where Waverly Jong has her hair cut, the two novels include Chinese American lives of both the working class and the middle class. Each space involves a specific life history of them. Chinatown composed of these various spaces thus becomes the site of memory for the community. In *Bone*, the bleak cemetery where Gin Shan Men are buried contains the arduous lives of the early immigrants. The Portsmouth Square marks not only lives of the vagrant but also the excluded Chinese Americans. Goodwill satisfies Leon’s need and at the same time fulfills Leon’s wish on electronic works. The sewing factory represents Mom’s hard working for the family as well as the exploitative capitalistic society. Nam Ping Yuan turns out to be the tomb of Ona instead of a resting place of the family. In *Joy Luck Club*, the spaces concerned in Chinatown are limited yet significant—mainly the homes of the four immigrant mothers and those of their American daughters. Unlike the American-born daughters, housekeeping is of foremost importance for these Chinese immigrant mothers, and the

more emphatically ‘Oriental’ to draw tourists. The old Italian buildings were replaced by Edwardian architecture embellished with theatrical chinoiserie. Chinatown, like phoenix, rose from the ashes with a new façade, dreamed up by an American-born Chinese man, built by white architects, looking like a stage-set China that does not exist.

kitchen becomes where they show their subjectivity. This can explain why Lindo asks Waverly to bring Rich home for dinner after Waverly and Rich visit Suyuan. Cooking is regarded as one of the necessary accomplishments of women in Chinese tradition—it is said, “The way to a man’s heart is through his stomach.” In this way, cooking means more than satisfying one’s appetite and at the same time a way of managing the family. It is how a woman presents her subjectivity in the family. And this is why Waverly feels stressed since what Rich has criticized is not only the dish but also Lindo’s subjectivity. As for the American-born generation, their homes turn out to be a place of exploitation instead of a haven, especially for Rose and Lena. Both of them have surrendered under the western phallogocentrism. These lived spaces of Chinese Americans of either the Chinese immigrants or the American-born generation thus frame the structure of Chinese American history. Together with the tactical “narrative of absence,” Tan and Ng envision the readers the blankness in American national discourse.

Given that the pass of Assembly Concurrent Resolution 42, the government of the state of California finally apologizes for the exclusion of Chinese American community one and half centuries ago and gives recognition to the “indelible” contribution done by the Chinese Americans. The early Chinese American immigrants not only satisfy the urgent need of labor for cultivation, mining and railroad building but also transplants new seeds in the soil which benefits the local agriculture. The pass of ACR42 does symbolize a progress of the Chinese American identity. From the Gold Mountain history, the bachelor society, to the American-born generation, the two novels contribute to the project of creating a panorama of Chinese American history. Among the various issues mentioned, the most significant is the gender issue. Since the Chinese Americans are discriminated against for their Chinese ancestry, Chinese American women suffer even more due to their gender status. While the Gold Mountain and the bachelor society are part of the history of early Chinese American immigrants, the voices of Chinese American women are absent. I believe that is why it is important

that we study the two groups of female protagonists in the two novels—what both Tan and Ng endeavor to rehabilitate is the history which belongs not only to Chinese American heroes but also Chinese American heroines. Since the collecting and forming of the history is one thing that would never end, we anticipate the future efforts of Chinese American writers to contribute more to this absent history.



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