

南开21世纪华人文学丛书

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中的文学：

美国华裔女性文学中跨文化的变迁

唐蔚明 著

Emergent Literature:

Transcultural Metamorphosis in Chinese American

Women's Writings

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For
Barbara Barnett
and
Waltraud and Wolfgang
Jammers

Preface

From the perspective of the majority culture, Asian Americans may very well be constructed as different from, and other than, Euro-Americans. But from the perspectives of Asian Americans, we are perhaps even more different, more diverse, among ourselves: being men and women at different distances and generations from our “original” Asian cultures—cultures as different as Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Indian, and Vietnamese—Asian Americans are born in the United States and born in Asia; of exclusively Asian parents and of mixed race; urban and rural; refugee and nonrefugee; communist-identified and anticommunist; fluent in English and non-English speaking; educated and working class. As with other diasporas in the United States, the Asian immigrant collectivity is unstable and changeable, with its cohesion complicated by intergenerationality, by various degrees of identification and relation to “homeland,” and by different extents of assimilation to and distinction from “majority culture” in the United States.

—Lisa Lowe, “Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Asian American Difference”^①

^① Lisa Lowe, “Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Asian American Difference,” *Diaspora* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 27.

Correlating with Lowe's heterogeneous, hybrid and multiple differences within the umbrella term of "Asian American," Henrietta Moore, writing a couple of years later, evokes the "divisions" and the difficulty of what she terms "the question of positionality" within the feminist world.^① Moore describes as follows a commonly felt experience for postmodern-day feminists:

[T]he powerful, sometimes acrimonious debates within the feminist community itself have demanded that one own up as to where one locates oneself in terms of a variety of carefully demarcated internal divisions: radical feminist or social feminist, for example? These divisions are important because they have guided the political programmes proposed by different groups of feminists, and because they bring already politicised identities into play. They raise, therefore...the problem of representativity.... The question of who speaks for whom and on what basis has given rise in feminist debate to a number of very significant divisions, one of which is the split of between theory and practice....Feminist theory has seemed to many not only arcane, but elitist, racist and/or patriarchal.^②

The challenge of the "internal divisions" is further augmented by postmodernist feminist deconstruction of the universal category of "woman," which becomes increasingly unattainable as a shared basis for feminism in terms of its intersection with other determining elements such as race, class and sexual preference.^③ However, this is not mentioned as a way of undervaluing the validity of feminism in general. Nor is it intended

① Henrietta L. Moore, *A Passion for Difference* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994), 8.

② Ibid., 9.

③ Ibid., 8.

to throw into doubt my personal commitment to the feminist cause. What I intend to convey here is that, with a full awareness of the problematic category of "woman" itself, this book, whilst focusing on a rereading of writings by a group of Chinese American women writers, is not concerned with exploring any essentialising gendered patterns in order to mark the categorical difference of ethnic Chinese American women's writings from their male counterparts or writings from other minority groups. Instead, my focus on a rereading of primarily the writings by Diana Chang, Chuang Hua, Jade Snow Wong, Gish Jen, Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan, by unravelling a full complexity and fluidity that refuses easy demarcation, serves the purposes of the book's trajectory set to transcend a dichotomous thinking implicitly governing Asian and Chinese American literary-cultural discourse. It is for this purpose that the book will argue for a new integrated critical perspective by drawing on interdisciplinary theories, from which it will transformatively reread Chinese American cultural identity and literature as representing a negotiatory process, enunciating a multifaceted position of *neither one nor the other yet both* that defies binary fixity. Within this endeavour, gender issues, which undoubtedly constitute an important aspect of this study with a focus on Chinese American women's writings, are dealt with more in the specific forms as they idiosyncratically occur in the individual texts by these women writers, especially in terms of the intersection of gender, race, class, spatiotemporality and culture. Correspondingly, while a brief overview of Chinese American women's writings is offered in Part III of Chapter Two, different feminist viewpoints and approaches are invoked in the individual chapters of the book devoted to textual rereadings, such as the transformative rereading of the masculine colonial subject's subjugation of the racialised feminine body in Chapter Three into the agential search of the schizophrenic émigrés' deracinated self for a homeplace, the exposure of ethnic Chinese women's doubled

genderedness and exclusion and the gendered code of the American myth of self-making in Chapter Four; whereas a thorough feminist rereading of Kingston's and Tan's works in terms of Habermasian feminist intersubjective theory of the self in relation to the other will be offered in Chapter Five.

Equally in need of an explanation is the term "Chinese American" whose definition may not be as straightforwardly clear as it appears to be. Although the term may be generally used to refer to people of Chinese descent within the boundaries of the United States, the criteria according to which the term is defined have undergone many changes over the decades. While, for some, geographical location, language, and a Chineseness by blood constitute the decisive factors for defining the term, for others, such as the early Asian American cultural nationalists, the definition relies on distinctive cultural "sensibilities" that may be even more ambiguous and problematic. More recent theoretical interests in transnational immigration and diaspora have prompted attempts to include translated literary texts produced in their original languages in the U.S., such as the folk rhymes written in Cantonese in the early decades of the twentieth century. Indeed, as Sau-ling Wong rightly points out, referring to the categorisation of "Chinese American literature," such a definition "is itself a product of a specific historical moment" and therefore has "fluctuated with changing historical conditions."^① In this book, by Chinese American women's writings I refer specifically to the literary texts written in English by women writers of Chinese ancestry in a general sense, thus including such writers as Diana Chang who is of mixed blood, Chuang Hua who was born in China, and Jade Snow Wong, Gish Jen, Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan who are second-generation Chinese

^① See Sau-ling C. Wong, "Chinese American Literature," in *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature*, ed. King-kok Cheung (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 39.

Americans.

Although this book is conscientiously devoted to a theoretical reconfiguration and textual rereading of the full complexity of specifically Chinese American cultural identity as well as its literature as represented in the writings by the Chinese American women writers, the inextricably shared history of socio-economic and cultural struggles of Chinese Americans and other Asian American groups and, in particular, the fact that the rise of the Asian American academy is associated with the pan-Asian American cultural nationalism in the early 1970s, make it impossible to a certain extent to separate Chinese American literary-cultural studies from Asian American discourse in general. Therefore, the expression "Asian and Chinese American" is used at places where the two are inseparable, while more light will be shed on the intermingled conditions of Asian and Chinese Americans by the historical survey of Asian and Chinese American migration and cultural struggles provided in Chapter One. Despite the socio-historical, demographical changes and theoretical shifts that have taken place over the past decades, the umbrella term "Asian America(n)," which Sau-ling Wong describes as "a quasi-geographical term...with no territorial sovereignty/integrity to underwrite it,"^① remains the most frequently used term since its coinage in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement. In spite of the call for respect for intra-ethnic diversities and differences issued from critics such as Lisa Lowe (as quoted above) and Shirley Geok-lin Lim in the early 1990s,^② most book-length works on Asian American literary-cultural studies adopt the umbrella term in their titles. As a matter of fact, there are only a

① See Sau-ling C. Wong, "Denationalization Reconsidered: Asian American Cultural Criticism at a Theoretical Crossroads," *Amerasia Journal* 21, nos. 1 & 2 (1995): 4.

② See Lowe, "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Asian American Difference," 24-44; Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "Assaying the Gold: Or, Contesting the Ground of Asian American Literature," *New Literary History*, 24 (1993): 147-169.

handful of books written in English devoted exclusively to the theoretical and textual studies of Chinese American literature, each with a different research focus and scale.^① It is with this observation and a conscious avoidance of the overinclusive umbrella term “Asian America(n),” subject to accusations of intellectual and ethnic domination and a glossing over of intra-ethnic differences within what Yen Le Espiritu calls the “panethnic entrepreneurship,”^② that this book makes an earnest attempt to present an integrated theoretical and textual study focusing specifically on a group of Chinese American women writers’ writings extending across the time span of a half-century.

The writing of this book would have been impossible without the foundations laid by all the scholarly efforts in the field of Asian and Chinese American literary-cultural studies. In many ways, the book follows and pays tribute to the existing scholarship in the field by engaging in dialogues with many Asian and Chinese American critics and

① See Karin Meissenburg, *The Writing on the Wall: Socio-historical Aspects of Chinese-American Literature 1900-1980* (Frankfurt/M: Verlag für interkulturelle Kommunikation, 1987); Amy Ling, *Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1990); Xiao-huang Yin, *Chinese American Literature Since the 1850s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000); Joan Chiung-huei Chang, *Transforming Chinese American Literature: A Study of History, Sexuality, and Ethnicity* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000); Deborah L. Madsen, *Chinese American Writers* (Detroit: Gale Group, 2001); Jachinson Chan, *Chinese American Masculinities: From Fu Manchu to Bruce Lee* (New York: Routledge, 2001). While Meissenburg’s, Chan’s and Chang’s studies differ in their respective research foci, Ling, Yin and Madsen offer in their respective studies a general introductory history of Chinese American literature from different perspectives.

② Yen Le Espiritu, *Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities*, ed. Suchen Chang (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 166, quoted in Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Race & Resistance: Literature & Politics in Asian America* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002), 4. By the accusation of intra-ethnic domination I refer to the criticism uttered by Nguyen in his study. Nguyen points particularly to Filipino and South Asian American intellectuals’ “intellectual and ethnic exclusion from an ethnic coalition whose concerns and priorities have been shaped by the historical domination of intellectuals who come primarily, although not exclusively, from Japanese and Chinese American backgrounds.” See Nguyen, *Race & Resistance*, 11.

their works. At the same time, it also makes fresh contributions to the field by providing nuanced textual rereadings of Chinese American women's writings from an interdisciplinary approach drawing on theories both from within and outside of Asian and Chinese American literary-cultural studies, covering the terrains of Asian and Chinese American immigration history, ethnic and postcolonial literary-cultural studies, theories of cultural translation, psychoanalysis and feminism. In addition, with a divergent theoretical approach and textual focus, the book is an original attempt at a coherent theoretical and textual study devoted to tackling the specific issue of a double-bind situation in which Asian and Chinese American literary-cultural discourse is perceived to be caught, namely, the very struggle to resist the dominant binary fixation becomes complicit with the dichotomous logic to which it is opposed. It begins by revealing how the predicament of Asian and Chinese American literary-cultural discourse is embedded in its material history of racialisation, historically reduced to being either the irreducible *alien* Other or the so-called assimilable "model minority" subject. It is by taking as its point of departure precisely that specific material history that the book argues for a new critical perspective, enabling the transcendence of the predicament and the move towards a transformative rereading of Chinese American cultural identity and literature as representing an ongoing process of contestation, negotiation and transformation.

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Chapter One

The Predicament of Culture: An Introductory Survey of the History of Asian and Chinese American Migration and Cultural Struggles

The condition of the colonized can lead to a reduction in the humanization of the universe, so that any solution that is sought will be a solution on the scale of the individual and the restricted family, with, by way of consequence, an extreme anarchy or disorder at the level of the collective: an anarchy whose victim will always be the individual—with the exception of those who occupy the key positions in such a system, namely the colonizers, who, during this same period when the colonized reduce the universe, will tend to extend it.

—Robert Jaulin, *La paix blanche: introduction à l'ethnocide*^①

A people may be colonized on the very territory which they have lived for generations *or* they may be forcibly uprooted by colonial power from their traditional territory and colonized in a

① Robert Jaulin, *La paix blanche: introduction à l'ethnocide* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970), 309. quoted in Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism & Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (1984; repr., London: The Athlone Press, 2000), 169.