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性别与种族政治

华裔美国女性文学
作品研究

*GENDER & RACIAL POLITICS IN THE WORKS OF
CHINESE AMERICAN WOMEN WRITERS*



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of Chinese American Women Writers**

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Chapter One

Introduction

The aim of this book is to explore the issues of gender and racial politics mainly in the works of three Chinese American women writers, Sui Sin Far¹, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Amy Tan. Their works include Far's *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (1912), Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (1976) and *China Men*² (1980), and Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989). This book demonstrates how these writers reconstruct Chinese American women's self-consciousness through their demand for freedom from the sexual oppressions of patriarchy of both American and Chinese cultures, their resistance against racial domination, and their demand for power both as females and as Asian Americans. The book examines the issue of the mother-daughter bond from the perspectives of balance between conflict and reconciliation in a contemporary Chinese American context, explores how Chinese male immigrants were historically feminized and how they resisted racial castration and reconstructed their racial/gender identities in the context of dominant American society, and challenges the practice of strict male-female or masculinity-femininity binary oppositions by demonstrating the possibility and importance of gender deconstruction in Asian American literature.

This book is somewhat inspired by Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1977). In her book, Millett explains,

Sexual politics obtains consent through the "socialization" of both sexes to basic patriarchal politics with regard to temperament, role, and status. As to status, a pervasive assent

to the prejudice of male superiority guarantees superior status in the male, inferior in the female. The first item, temperament, involves the formation of human personality along stereotyped lines of sex category ("masculine" and "feminine"), based on the needs and values of the dominant group [. . .]; aggression, intelligence, force, and efficacy in the male; passivity, ignorance, docility, "virtue," and ineffectuality in the female. This is complemented by a second factor, sex role, which decrees a consonant and highly elaborate code of conduct, gesture and attitude for each sex. In terms of activity, sex role assigns domestic service and attendance upon infants to the female, the rest of human achievement, interest, and ambition to the male [. . .] Those awarded higher status tend to adopt roles of mastery, largely because they are first encouraged to develop temperaments of dominance. (26)

Millett's definition of "sexual politics" is explained from a feminist point of view, which suggests that the "sexual politics" practiced in the society are patriarchal politics of dominant males, who have a stereotyped sex category for the purpose of sexual hierarchy. As a result, men enjoy the privileges guaranteed by these patriarchal politics, and, at the same time, deprive women of rights for equality with men by reinforcing the sex category, according to which women are expected to play their social roles as submissive, silent, and domestic daughters, wives, and mothers. In this way men take women as their opposites or the Other. Millett's definition of "sexual politics" reveals women's low social status and explains patriarchal politics as the cause of the practice of sexual hierarchy. Millett's "sexual politics" will enable women to be aware of their situation both in the society and at home, to form their self-consciousness as women, to demand their equality with men, and to obtain their autonomy.

The term "sexual politics" that Millett defines may highlight the target of the three Chinese American women writers in their works, in which we can easily notice the sufferings of women under the domination of patriarchy. However, it is not limited by Millett's definition. Rather, it not only goes beyond the binary opposition between the sexes defined by Millett, but also crosses the borderline between gender and race. This book includes the issues of feminism in the context of Chinese America, the interrelatedness

between gender and race in Asian American literature, the tension between Chinese American women and Chinese American men, and the relationship between women and men in general.

This book focuses on the three Chinese American women writers and the four works mentioned above, and deals with the issues of gender and racial politics in the context of Asian America. These three particular Chinese American women writers and these four literary works are chosen not only because these writers have gained important positions in Asian American literature and their works have led to critical debates, but also because they can best demonstrate the central theses of the book.

Sui Sin Far's work, according to Amy Ling and Annette White-Parks, is "the first expression of the Chinese experience in the United States and Canada and the first fiction in English by any Asian North American" (*Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Other Writings* 2). Her first short story on Chinese North American subjects, "The Gamblers," which appeared in the February 1896 issue of a journal called *Fly Leaf*, according to Guy Beauregard, "has become significant as a possible starting point for Asian American literature" ("Reclaiming Sui Sin Far" 341). Her *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* tells the stories of Chinese immigrants in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries of the United States. This book, a collection of short stories, presents portraits of North American Chinatowns "not in the mode of the 'yellow peril' but with well-intentioned and sincere empathy" and "give[s] voice and protagonist roles to Chinese and Chinese North American women [. . .] thus breaking the stereotypes of silence, invisibility, and 'bachelor societies' that have ignored small but present female populations" (Ling and White-Parks 6). Frank Chin et al., the editors of *Aiiieeeee !*, mention Sui Sin Far as "one of the first to speak for Asian American sensibility that was neither Asian nor white American" (xxi), though, unfortunately, they did not include any of her work in their anthology.

Maxine Hong Kingston, about seventy years after Sui Sin Far, has appeared as a significant Chinese American woman writer. The publication

of Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* has been so successful that since its publication the "writing produced by Asian Americans [has] entered the mainstream of twentieth-century American literature, achieving—with one book—both popular acclaim and a solid position in the canon of American literature" (Huntley, *Maxine Hong Kingston* 39). However, the publication of this book has provoked "a long and heated debate in the Asian ethnic community in the United States" (Ahokas, "Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*" 3). The debate has centered on what Pirjo Ahokas has called "questions of 'authentic' ethnic representation" ("Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*" 3) between Frank Chin and his supporters and Kingston's defenders. Frank Chin, Jeffrey Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Hsu Wong, for example, accuse Kingston, in their anthology *Aiiieeeee!*, of misrepresenting Chinese Americans and of her "betrayal" of her community by her resistance to and criticism of patriarchy in Asian cultures, which is used by American Orientalism to stereotype Asian Americans in general and by American feminism to critique Asian American males in particular. However, the debate over "authentic"/"non-authentic" representation of Asian Americans is not the concern of this book. Rather, it is more concerned about exploring this debate from the perspective of gender and race though the two issues are related. On the one hand, the Asian American nationalist writers/critics, to resist racial stereotypes of Asian American males, focus their writings/criticism on the reconstruction of masculinity by simply copying the Western masculine codes. They stress the importance of critique on racial domination and on Orientalist discourse of Asian America without giving any concern of their own domination over Asian American women. On the other hand, such Asian American women writers as Kingston not only resist racial domination but also critique Asian American patriarchy. However, the efforts of these women writers are strongly accused by these Asian American male writers of helping create the stereotypes of Asian American men, and these men believe that they are racially discriminated due to these women writers'

stereotyping them. To these men, the Asian American women writers are partly responsible for the emasculation of Asian men. For this reason, these Asian American male writers refuse to include these Asian American women writers in Asian American literature and place them in a difficult situation. They refuse to see the fact that these women writers are their allies when they fight against racial domination and Orientalist stereotyping.

About ten years after Kingston's success, Amy Tan became famous because, as Wendy Ho concludes, Tan, like Kingston, "captured the attention of not only a mainstream audience but also an Asian American female readership" (*In Her Mother's House* 44). Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* was a great success, according to the information offered by Ho: it was the longest running hardcover on *The New York Times* bestseller list, totaling 34 weeks; it gained several awards (the Commonwealth Club Gold Award, the Bay Area Book Critics Circle Award, *Los Angeles Times* Book Award, etc.). This novel "represents one aspect of feminism—that of the possibility of women's empowerment through the affirmation of a woman-to-woman bond" (Bow, "Cultural Conflict/Feminist Resolution" 236). Thus, the mother-daughter relationship becomes central in this novel. This subject matter, as Sau-ling Cynthia Wong claims in "'Sugar Sisterhood': Situating the Amy Tan Phenomenon," places the novel "in a traditional matrilineal discourse that has, as a part of the feminist movement, been gathering momentum in the United States over the last ten to fifteen years" (85). Taking the success of Tan's fiction as a testimony to the strength of the feminist movement, Wong argues, "Identifying a matrilineal Asian American tradition is important in terms of not only racial politics within feminism, but also gender politics within cultural nationalism" (88).

This book places the works of these three Chinese American women writers in the context of Asian American literature because the social context of Asian America can highlight those issues it explores. And thus it is necessary to have a brief review on Asian American literature concerning the issues of gender and race. In "Gender and Sexuality in Asian American

Literature,” Sau-ling C. Wong and Jeffrey J. Danta Ana divide Asian American literature into three periods: 1850s to 1950s, 1960s to 1980s, and late 1980s to the present. Though their division may not be necessarily the only correct way, it will facilitate us obtaining a general panorama of Asian American literature. In the first period, according to Wong and Danta Ana, Asian American gender and sexuality were understood by the dominant society as exotic or freakish (178). The U. S. immigration laws, they argue, “have been responsible for many of the stereotypes that distort the gender and sexuality of Asian American men” (178). Since Asian women were barred from immigrating into North America, early male immigrants, they believe, often sought relationships with white women, “even though they were legally barred from marrying whites” (179). Wong and Danta Ana maintain that the writings of early Asian immigrant men represent these relationships and their desire for white women because “white women often represent American ideals of ‘freedom,’ ‘Western culture,’ and ‘civilization’” and “embody immigrant men’s dreams of assimilation to an American society” (179, 180). Wong and Danta Ana argue that these may “affect their representations of Asian masculinity and relations among Asian American males” (179), for example, Carlos Bulosan’s *America Is in the Heart* (1946) and John Okada’s *No-No Boy* (1957). Some male writers are affected by racial stereotypes of Asians, for example, Lin Yutang’s *My Country and My People* (1937) and Chin-Yang Lee’s *The Flower Drum Song* (1957).

In this period, according to Wong and Danta Ana, it was difficult for Asian American women to create literature owing to a number of factors: “patriarchal values in the Asian countries that militated against women’s literacy and self-expression” and “the harsh lives of Asian American women as prostitutes, wives, mothers, and/or co-laborers with the men” that “made the time and energy needed to write a luxury” (184). Furthermore, the images of Asian American women, for Anglo-Americans, were “exotic, alluring sex objects, depraved prostitutes, or victims of Asian patriarchy in

need of rescue" (185). This stereotyping became "not only a rationale for legislative discrimination but also a means of cultural management of otherness" (185). For this reason, Asian American women writers "had to battle both racism and patriarchy from the start" (178). Among these women writers is Sui Sin Far, a British-Chinese or "Eurasian" in Amy Ling's term, the "foremother of Asian American literature" (185). Another woman writer is Jade Snow Wong, who wrote *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1945).

The second period (1960s to 1980s), which began with the Civil Rights Movement, the Asian American Movement, and the Feminist Movement, was dominated by a debate between Asian men and women (Wong and Danta Ana 189). Concerned with "overcoming emasculating distortions of Asian men's gender and sexuality" and "affected by white patriarchal norms and regulations," many male writers denounced "oppressive American practices that 'emasculate[d]' Asian men" and upheld "a system of racial gendering as a paradigm for claiming their own manhood" (Wong and Danta Ana 189-90). This view reinforced racist stereotypes that linked "violence and aggression with the sexuality and gender of other ethnic minority men" (Wong and Danta Ana 190). Their writing is mainly about "the quest for an authentic Asian American masculinity" (Wong and Danta Ana 191). Frank Chin's *Donald Duk* (1991) and Louis Chu's *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (1961) are good examples of this kind. On the other hand, women writers were engaged in a project, which protested against Eastern and Western patriarchy as well as racism (Wong and Danta Ana 193). Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976) "captures this spirit" (Wong and Danta Ana 194). Another important woman writer of this kind is Joy Kogawa, the author of *Obasan* (1981).

Asian American literature in the third period (late 1980s to the present), according to Wong and Danta Ana, is more varied in that it treats issues of gender and sexuality "in the context of poststructuralism-inflected treatments of subjectivities" and stresses "heterogeneity and diaspora"

(197). Asian American writers, they maintain, “have been engaging in bold explorations of gender and sexuality:” gender and sexual transgressiveness, homosexuality, bisexuality, and incest (197, 198, 202, and 206). The representations of issues of gender and sexuality in variety can be found in such writings as David Henry Hwang’s *M. Butterfly* (1986), Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) and *The Kitchen God’s Wife* (1991), Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine* (1989), Fae Myenne Ng’s *Bone* (1993), and Patricia Chao’s *Monkey King* (1997).

This book relies mainly on two theoretical frameworks—theories on gender and on race. First, the racial/sexual theories of Asian American critics such as Lisa Lowe are used to demonstrate the necessity of intertwining gender with race in the studies of Asian American literature, to deal with the issues of emasculation of Chinese American men, and to explore their demand for emancipation from racial oppression. Edward W. Said’s criticism on Orientalism is also used to explore the issues of racial stereotypes of Chinese immigrants/Chinese Americans and their struggle against racial domination. Second, Western feminist theories of Kate Millett and Asian American feminist theories of King-Kok Cheung are used to deal with the issues of Chinese American women and their demand for freedom from sexual oppression and for their rights as both Asian Americans and as women. Relying on these feminist theories, this book also explores mother-daughter relationship, a feminist issue that Chinese American women writers deal with. Judith Butler’s theory on gender is used to study the efforts that Asian American women writers, such as Kingston and Far, have made to problematize the gender definition and gender division in their works.

This book includes theories on race because it is intertwined with the sexual politics in Chinese American women’s literature in the context of Asian immigrants’/Asian Americans’ experiences in the United States. In *Immigrant Acts*, Lisa Lowe defines racial and gender formations and the relation between the two. As for racial formation, Lowe claims:

In the last century and a half, the American *citizen* has been defined over against the Asian *immigrant*, legally, economically, and culturally. These definitions have cast Asian immigrants both as persons and populations to be integrated into the national political sphere and as the contradictory, confusing, unintelligible elements to be marginalized and returned to their alien origins. (4)

Racial formation, thus, is defined by Lowe respectively in three fields: laws, economy, and culture. This racial formation, according to Lowe, is contradictory by nature: "on the one hand, Asian states have become prominent as external rivals in overseas imperial war and in the global economy, and on the other, Asian immigrants are still a necessary racialized labor force within the domestic national economy" (5). Owing to this contradictory racial formation, Asian immigrants in the United States, Lowe maintains, have still been considered as "foreign" or "Other" although they have played "absolutely crucial roles in the building and the sustaining of America" and have been "fundamental to the construction of the nation" (5). The racial formation for Asian Americans, according to Lowe, is defined "not primarily in terms of biological racialism but in terms of institutionalized, legal definitions of race and national origin" (10). As for the relation between racial and gender formations, Lowe concludes that the history of the two formations for Asian immigrants and Asian Americans has always intersected; the racial formation of Chinese Americans "has likewise been a gendered formation" (14, 11) because immigration regulations and the restrictions on naturalization and citizenship have both racialized and gendered Asian Americans (12). For example, the 1943 enfranchisement of the Chinese American into citizenship "constituted the Chinese immigrant subject as male," and the Chinese wives of the U. S. citizens "were exempted from the permitted annual quota" for the purpose of "preventing the formation of families and generations among Chinese immigrants" (11). Furthermore, the 1924 Immigration Act claims that "[a]ny Chinese man who married an American woman caused her to lose her citizenship" (*China Men* 156). As a result, "bachelor" communities became typical of

Chinatowns in the United States before World War II.

Similarly, in *Racial Castration*, David Eng argues that it is impossible to think of racism and sexism “as separate discourses” (2). He claims that “the Asian American male is both materially and psychically feminized within the context of a larger U. S. cultural imaginary,” and thus the “conceptions of Asian American masculinity are historically and psychically bound by the particularities of race, ethnicity, national origin, sexuality, gender, class, and age” (2,4). He insists that “Asian American male identity is historically and increasingly characterized by critical intersections in which racial, gendered, and economic contradictions are inseparable” (17). From his deconstructing the photo of the “Golden Spike” ceremony taken on May 10, 1869 (37-39) we can conclude that Chinese immigrant laborers are not only sexually castrated as Lowe suggests but also racially castrated because the contributions of these Chinese immigrant laborers to the building of transcontinental railroads have simply been “erased” by the photographer. They are “feminized” owing to their “historical absence” as Frank Chin et al., the *Aiiieeeee!* editors, claim that “America does not recognize Asian America as a presence, though Asian-Americans have been here for seven generations. For seven generations we have been aware of that refusal, and internalized it, with disastrous effects” (ix). This photo epitomizes the situation of Chinese immigrant males at the end of the nineteenth century: absence/invisibility, as Lowe points out: “U. S. national culture—the collectively forged images, histories, and narratives that place, displace, and replace individuals in relation to the national polity—powerfully shapes who the citizenry is, where they dwell, what they remember, and what they forget” (*Immigrant Acts* 2). Both Eng and Chin critique the U. S. nation-state’s historical erasure of Asian Americans.

Edward Said’s criticism of Orientalism is used because it can help explain how and why the racial stereotypes of Chinese immigrants/Chinese Americans were created in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries in the United States. Said briefly defines the meaning of

Orientalism as

a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and (most of time) “the Occident.” Thus a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, “mind,” destiny, and so on [. . .] in short, Orientalism [can be discussed and analyzed] as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. (*Orientalism* 2-3)

“Oriental,” according to what Said defines in *Orientalism*, means Western knowledge about the Orient and the knowledge of Orientals; their race, culture, history, traditions, and society (38). The identity of these Orientals, as Said believes, is not created by Orientals themselves, but by the West through “knowledgeable manipulations” (40). Said suggests that the West does not receive other cultures as they are, “but as, for the benefit of the receiver, they ought to be” (67). Said believes that Orientalism is a historically defined cultural and political fact (3, 13). It is “a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with ‘our’ world” (12). Thus, the relationship between West and East is a relationship of Western power, domination, superiority, and writing over Eastern powerlessness, submission, inferiority, and silence (5, 6, 12, 42, 45, and 94).

The U. S. nation-state once considered Asian countries as “exotic, barbaric, and alien,” and Asian immigrants in the United States as “a ‘yellow peril’ threatening to displace white European immigrants” (Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* 4). And Asian Americans were defined by the U. S. cultural imaginary as alien non-citizen, racial enemy, and colonized national (Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* 8). The Asian males were seen as devious, timid, shrewd, and inscrutable while the Asian females were thought to be mysterious, docile, submissive, and obedient, worthy of the label “model minority” (Cheung,

Articulate Silences 2). The Asian men were coded as having no sexuality while the Asian women had nothing else (Kim, "Such Opposite Creatures" 69). They were defined by the U. S. nation-state "as the contradictory, confusing, unintelligible elements to be marginalized and returned to their alien origins" (Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* 4). The history of Asian immigration to the United States since the mid-nineteenth century, as Lowe concludes, witnessed the laws of immigrant exclusion acts such as the exclusion of Chinese in 1882, of Asian Indians in 1917, of Koreans and Japanese in 1924, and of Philippine immigrants in 1943 and 1952 (Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* 6-7). And "Asian populations in the United States were managed by exclusion acts, bars from citizenship, quotas, and internment, all of which made use of racist constructions of Asian-origin groups as homogeneous" (Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* 68). The exclusion laws of the U. S. nation-state were made partly because of these stereotypes of Asian Americans. It is these legal exclusions, antimiscegenation laws, detention, and naturalization that, in history, have constructed the Asian American male subjectivity as a particular racial and gender formation (Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* 11-12). In other words, it is partially those exclusion laws that castrated Chinese immigrants' manhood (Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* 12) and "feminized" them. Said reveals the situation of the Western domination versus the Eastern submission. And Lowe critiques the contradictory nature of the policies of the U. S. nation-state toward Asian immigrants that racialized and alienated Asian Americans.

Frank Chin et al. declare that the racial stereotype "is a low-maintenance engine of white supremacy," which "conditions the mass society's perceptions," and expectations and a society "is conditioned to accept the given minority only within the bounds of the stereotype" (*Aiiieeeee!* xxvii). They argue that the function of this racial stereotype is "to establish and preserve order between different elements of society, maintain the continuity and growth of Western civilization, and enforce white supremacy" (*Aiiieeeee!* xxvi-xxvii). In this case, "the subject minority is conditioned to