

关合凤 著

# 东西方文化碰撞中的身份寻求 ——美国华裔女性文学研究

*Seeking Identity Between Worlds:*

*A Study of Chinese American Women's Literature*

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Figure 1. A schematic diagram of the experimental design.

[illegible]

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## 前 言

人生在世,总要努力构建与众不同的身份。因而,寻求身份便成为当代文学热衷的一个主题。处于种族和性别双重边缘的美国华裔妇女如何探寻她们的族裔身份和性别身份自然成为美国华裔女作家关注的对象。本书以“文化批评”为理论先导,旨在解读美国华裔女性作家的作品,着重探讨身份寻求这一主题以及为此主题服务的艺术手段。通过对汤亭亭、谭恩美早期作品的细读,笔者试图揭示出深嵌于美国华裔女性作家作品之中的社会及文化结构,以理解将这些作品塑造成型的叙事和艺术实践,并最终阐明美国华裔女性作家笔下的身份寻求过程之中的混同与融合趋势。

在 20 世纪 60 年代美国民权运动以及女权运动大潮的猛烈冲击之下,美国华裔女性文学得到了蓬勃发展。以汤亭亭、谭恩美为首的美国华裔女性作家已在美国文坛崛起,她们试图通过记载和再创自己及父辈们的生活,反映和探讨种族历史与传统文化,将华裔美国人定位为一种新的文化身份,并努力修改柔弱女子的性别身份。在这些作家中间,汤亭亭最具影响力。她的所有著作——《女勇士》、《中国佬》以及《孙行者》均有一个共同的核心主题:试图通过描述她作为在美国诞生成长的华人移民后代的亲身经历,来探讨身为华裔美国人的意义。谭恩美善于通过母女关系来描述美国华裔妇女的身份困惑,探讨其文化身份的转变过程。在她的作品中,母女之间矛盾的最终和解象征着东西方文化融合的必然趋

势。美国华裔女作家的祖母——水仙花、美国华裔文学之母——王玉雪、华裔文坛的后起之秀——任碧莲、伍慧明等人也都探讨了身份寻求的问题。由于时间和篇幅所限,本书将主要以汤亭亭及谭恩美的作品为分析材料,间或提及其他作家的作品。

第一章分析种种对美国华裔妇女的“消音”势力,并阐述华裔女作家打破沉默、构筑新身份的内外动因及破除沉默的具体方法。书中指出,华人在美国属于少数民族,被推向远离主流文化中心的边缘。而作为少数民族的女性,美国华裔妇女更是不幸地集三种“弱点”于一身:首先,她们是欧美世界中的华人;其次,她们是东方男性世界中的妇女;再次,她们还是西方男性世界中的华人女性。她们不仅要因此遭受普遍存在的种族歧视,而且还要经历来自东西两个世界男性优越感对她们的冲击。欧美话语和男性话语以势不可挡之势将她们淹没,她们要从巨大的强势话语中突围出来,找回失落的女性本真的存在,探寻和确认女性的自我意识,这是一个极为艰难的过程。然而,在美洲大陆上出生长大的华裔女性作家们,受到民权运动和女权运动的激励,不甘于沉默和被“消音”,毅然在这种逆境中勃发出来,勇敢地喊出了争取平等与发展的最强音。美国华裔女作家不仅站在女性的立场上,以女性为主体,以妇女生活为题材,创作出了许多有强烈性别意识的作品,而且将对妇女命运的思考和对华人移民历史的反思紧紧地结合在一起。她们的作品在凸显女性自我意识的同时,注重对美国华人移民历史的重审,表现出处于双重边缘的华裔女性对东西方父权统治和美国种族歧视政策的悖逆与抗争。美国华裔女性作家以不可抗拒的意志和不可动摇的自信,抗议美国人构建的有关华裔美国人的刻板印象,重写美籍华人的历史,深入挖掘和重塑了一批新型的华裔美国人形象,并极力凸显出她们自己创造的“女性特质”与“华裔人性”等概念。

第二章详细探讨了汤亭亭与谭恩美作品中映射出来的美国华裔妇女不断变化的自我形象与自我意识。美国华裔妇女身为女

性,诞生于由两个种族的男性主导的世界之中,无法就族裔及性别身份给出一个简单的答案。为了找到本真的自我,美国华裔妇女势必努力消除这两个世界和两种文化间的种种矛盾。置身于两个世界的诸多感受,使得美国华裔妇女极难确立她们自己的文化身份。在她们对族裔身份的寻求过程之中,美国华裔妇女同她们的男性同胞一样,一般要经历三个阶段——留守家园、脱离家园及返回家园。在经历了东西方文化冲突之后,美国华裔妇女最终认识到,和谐、融合与渗透应该是其指导原则。因此,她们极力寻觅并加强同那双重世界的有效联系。在跨越了先将自身认同为中国人,然后又将自己辨识为美国人这两个阶段之后,她们将自身定位为华裔美国人——一种文化混合体,表达出新一代华裔包容中美两种文化,使其取长补短、达到和谐统一的美好愿望。

在多元文化环境之中,美国华裔妇女在构建新型性别身份方面的努力更是举步维艰。在寻求个性化的性别身份过程中,美国华裔妇女同样要经历上述三个阶段的历程。由于她们置身其间的社会结构总是硬性地为她们厘定“应该如此”之类的形象,所以在第一阶段,她们往往内化父权传统有关女性特质的假论,天真地接受父权社会配置给她们的性别角色,并且因循守旧地恪守着被视为理想女性所应有的那些美德与行为规范。但是,一旦认识到父权话语将她们界定为男性主人软弱无力的奴仆,她们就开始奋起反抗,脱开“家园”,以弃绝她们与被社会贬损之物的联系。她们鄙弃父权话语界定的种种“女性特质”,勇于经受寂寞、恐惧之煎熬,大胆面对被孤立的困境,努力创获自身的精神独立。但是,她们最终还是希望为社会所接受,在实现自己身为女性之价值的同时赢得家庭与社会的爱戴和尊重。在最后一个阶段,她们树立起了新的性别身份——一种融男女性格优势为一体的自我形象。

这种融合趋势不仅体现于文本的主题,而且也合乎这些作品的形式。本书第三章描述了美国华裔女作家独特而有效的书写文体——讲故事。这是美国华裔女作家接受双重文化遗产的结果,

也是将西方写作技巧与中国民间故事的讲述形式相结合的产物。为了在书面叙事中传达出口述文化的即兴性和直接性,美国华裔女性作家运用了“含混”这种策略作为折中手段,以推动词句在纸面移位变化。在中国传统的说书艺术中,说书人在不同场合,面对不同听众,以不同方式讲述同一个故事。美国华裔女作家结合这种传统,书写着同一个故事的多重版本。正如说书艺人利用话本,但不受制于话本一样,汤亭亭和谭恩美用美国式的独创精神,大胆改编中西文学名著与神话传说,创造出新的主题和新的神话,使美国华裔文学成为带有 20 世纪文学特色的拼贴画,力图在美国多元文化并存的社会中确立华裔文学的基本格局。通过讲故事,美国华裔女性作家在东西方世界之间架起了沟通的桥梁,将神秘的往昔与平俗的现世联系起来,把“女性特质”与“男性特质”结合在一起。

综观美国华裔女性作家的作品,我们不难发现混同、融会原则弥漫于其文学主题及艺术形式之中。这毕竟是她们接受双重文化遗产的结果,也是她们所置身其间的时代产物。这一融合过程,既具有中国文化的特色,又体现美国文化的性质。黑格尔所说的逐渐上升的诸阶段,由命题走向反命题,最终导向合题。同样,阴阳的概念也从对立走向融合。当代多元文化格局和全球化语境又为美国华裔女性作家从边缘走向中心提供了有利的外部环境。借助文化研究的理论指导,通过对汤亭亭和谭恩美作品的细读,本书以期能够说明美国华裔女性文学作品昭示出 21 世纪世界文化发展的总体趋势——从男女两性的对立到性别的整合,东西方文化经过冲突和磨合之后亦达到新的层面上的融合。

关合凤

· 2006 年 12 月



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## Introduction

### Development of Chinese American Literature

Although Chinese Americans can boast a long and impressive literary history dating back to the mid-nineteenth century, Chinese American literature, like other ethnic literatures, has long been discriminated against by the American literary canon. Literary works have been defined as great art, as “universal”, according to the Eurocentric definition of universalism. Only those works that reflect white male American experience and conform to the style and subject matter of the white male American literary tradition are deemed “great” and included in the American literary canon. As a result, until recently, anthologies of American literature were confined largely to the work of white male writers. The literary canon has thus been used to maintain white cultural hegemony. This situation has

begun to change, although the change is coming rather slowly.

Early Chinese American writings appeared soon after the large-scale immigration of the mid-nineteenth century when numerous Chinese laborers were recruited from villages and towns in southern China to build railroads and work in mines on the west coast of the United States. Responding to an unfriendly environment, early Chinese immigrants managed to express their protests and complaints in various written forms. A case in point is "A Letter to San Francisco Board of Education" written by a Chinese individual in 1885 to protest educational segregation. But the early Chinese American writers were mostly an elite group. Lee Yan Phou (1861 — 1938?), a student sent to the United States by the Chinese Educational Mission, attempted to elucidate misunderstandings about China through his life story, *When I Was a Boy in China* (1887). Court official Yung Wing's *My Life in China and America* (1909) and diplomat Wu Ting Fang's *America Through the Spectacles of an Oriental Diplomat* (1914) also made comment on the social inequalities existing in American society, including those inflicted on Chinese immigrants<sup>①</sup>. However, for the most part, these writers used charming superficialities of food and dress, or ceremonies and customs, to appeal to the benign curiosity of Western readers, as they wrote during a period of severe discrimination. Generally speaking, these early books disclosed a marked dissociation between their authors and the common people. With few

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① Information about early Chinese American writing is mainly obtained from Xiao-huang Yin's *Chinese American Literature since the 1850s* published in 2000.

exceptions, these works ignored the large numbers of laborers recruited for agricultural and construction work in the United States. They ignored the everyday life-and-death struggles of Chinese Americans under American domination.

Writers who portrayed Chinese immigrants sympathetically include Edith Eaton, whose pen name was Sui Sin Far. Considered the first Chinese American writer in English, Edith enriched Chinese American literature through her autobiographical account "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian" (1909) and her short-story collection *Mrs Spring Fragrance* (1912). In these works, Sui Sin Far exposes the wrongs done to the Chinese in America. Her writings, which consistently mirrored her developing identification with her Chinese roots, probe the humanity of working-class women, the bond of friendship between women against the backdrop of gender-based exclusion laws and fractured families, and many other topics. Sui Sin Far's legacy lies in being "a bridge between two worlds". Her works anticipate the post-World War II works of other Chinese American authors such as Louis Chu's *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (1961), Frank Chin's *Chickencoop Chinaman* (1972) and *The Year of the Dragon* (1974), Laurence Yep's *Dragonwings* (1975), *The Serpent's Children* (1984) and *Dragon's Gate* (1993), which expose the false nature of the canonized picture of Chinese American history and the distorted images of the Chinese. The same means of self-defense and self-affirmation employed by Edith Eaton can also be found in Virginia Lee's *The House That Tai Ming Built* (1963), in which Virginia Lee insisted on the long and glorious tradition of Chinese arts and culture to counter prejudice.

When the Chinese Exclusion Act<sup>①</sup> was finally repealed in 1943, the increased number of Chinese emigrating to the United States included significant numbers of women, and, as a result, the number of Chinese American women writers increased. Despite the growing numbers of writers, Chinese Americans' novels continued for a time to cater to the tastes of a predominantly white readership, looking with polite disfavor on Chinese culture and enthusiastically embracing the American lifestyle. Pardee Lowe's *Father and Glorious Descendant* (1942) and Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1945) are considered to be among books seeking to satisfy an American audience's curiosity about the strangers in their midst. Similar works include Lin Yutang's *Chinatown Family* (1948) and Chin Yan Lee's *Flower Drum Song* (1957).

During the Second World War, when China and the United States were fellow victims of Japan's aggression, several Chinese American women wrote novels and personal accounts about the devastating effects of the war on China, and the strength and resilience of the Chinese people in order to demonstrate to the United States that China was a worthy ally. Among these writers were Han Suyin, Mai-mai Sze, Helen Kuo, and the three daughters of Lin Yutang—Adet, Anor, and Mei-mei. However,

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① In 1882, the American Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which stopped the entry of all Chinese except five classes of people who were admitted in small regulated numbers. These five classes termed as "the exempt classes" were scholars, students, merchants, officials, and tourists. The Act suspended immigration of Chinese laborers and barred reentry of all Chinese laborers who departed and did not return before the passage of the Act (Lisa Lowe, 1996, 180).

their works received little attention from common readers. The only work that garnered popularity and wide readership in those years was Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter*. Chinese Americans did not begin publishing imaginative literature until the 1950s. Diana Chang's *The Frontiers of Love* is one among such books that received critical notice in 1956.

It was after the awards garnered by Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* that much Asian American writing began to receive critical acclaim. But for this book of 243 pages published in 1976, the explosion of Chinese American writing would not have occurred in the 1980s and 1990s. *The Woman Warrior* made the first significant impact of Chinese American literature on the popular American consciousness, and paved the way for young writers of the next decade to prove conclusively that the Chinese American voice had a powerful resonance far beyond Chinatown. In the 1980s, Chinese American writers first earned recognition for the excellence and importance of their work. In addition to Kingston's *China Men*, the year 1980 saw the publication of *Island: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island 1910 - 1940* edited by Him Mark Lai, Genny Lim, and Judy Yung. This book demonstrates that the literary impulse among Chinese in America has a tradition and a history.

Two books by Chinese American women appeared in 1981. One was Ruthann Lum McCunn's *A Thousand Pieces of Gold*, a fictionalized biography of the eventful life of a Chinese woman in America. The other was Bette Bao Lord's *Spring Moon*, which tells about a Chinese woman's eventful life in China. In the same year, the Obie Award for the Best New Play went to David

Henry Hwang's *F. O. B.*, and his *M. Butterfly* won the Tony Award for Best New Dramatic Play on Broadway in 1988. In 1989, Frank Chin's collection of stories, *The Chinaman Pacific and Frisco Railroad Co.* won the American Book Awards from the Before Columbus Foundation. To top it all; the appearance of Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) on national best-seller lists helped to project Chinese American literature into the literary mainstream.

The continuous growth of Chinese American literature in the 1990s can be seen from the success of Amy Tan, Gus Lee, David Wong Louie, Gish Jen, Fae Myenne Ng and many others. The year 1991 saw a bumper harvest of Chinese American literature. Four books were published, greatly attracting American readers' attention to Chinese Americans. They are Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife*, Gus Lee's *China Boy*, David Wong Louie's *Pang of Love*, and Gish Jen's *Typical American*. Besides his *China Boy*, Gus Lee has had three other novels published—*Honor and Duty* (1994), *Tiger's Tail* (1996) and *No Physical Evidence* (1998). Together with two other books of hers—*Mona in the Promised Land* (1996), and *Who's Irish?* (1999), Gish Jen has also taken a very significant position in the Chinese American literary field. With her *Bone* published in 1993, Fae Myenne Ng, a beautiful girl born in 1957, has also attracted a lot of public attention. Amy Tan is by far the most popular and prolific Chinese American writer. Besides *The Joy Luck Club*, she has published three other novels—*The Kitchen God's Wife*, *The Hundred Secret Senses* and *The Bonesetter's Daughter*—as well as two children's tales—*The Moon Lady* (1992) and *The Chinese Siamese Cat* (1994).



This brief review of Chinese American literary history might have revealed that the new and sudden popularity of Chinese American writing owes a great deal to Chinese American women writers. Considering that Chinese women were an almost invisible minority in American society until the early 1950s, this development appears more surprising. When comparing books written by men of Chinese ancestry and those written by women, Amy Ling discovered three startling facts: "... first, women writers have been more numerous; second, women have written more books; and third, women's books have been more authentic." (Amy Ling, 1990: 15) We dare not accept Amy Ling's idea completely, because it is beyond our ability to count the exact numbers of writers and their books, since the definition of Chinese American literature itself is controversial. Yet we feel a strong empathy with her in saying that Chinese American women writers have made a greater contribution than their male counterparts. We build our assumption on the evidence that Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan are the most successful writers in this field. Remarking on the Chinese American Literary War, Yvonne Walter says:

Until now, Chinese American literature has largely been dominated by women writers. Authors like Jade Snow Wong, Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan or Gish Jen are not only familiar to a literary audience inside Asian America, but have gained fame within a wider American society. Certainly, there is also a growing number of male authors in the Chinese American communities, however with a few exceptions, such as David Henry Hwang or Lawson Inada, hardly any of them has exceeded local recognition. Frank Chin, one of the better known writers, has not so much been recognized for his literary