



**Ambivalence & Ambiguity:  
Chinese-American Literature Beyond  
Politics and Ethnography**

矛盾情结与艺术模糊性：  
超越政治和族裔的美国华裔文学

● 张 琼 著





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# Abbreviations

|     |                           |
|-----|---------------------------|
| BD  | The Bonesetter's Daughter |
| FCD | Fifth Chinese Daughter    |
| HSS | The Hundred Secret Senses |
| JLC | The Joy Luck Club         |
| KGW | The Kitchen God's Wife    |
| MPL | Mona in the Promised Land |
| TA  | Typical American          |
| WI  | Who's Irish?              |

# Abstract

The present work is based upon my Ph.D. dissertation, a thematic study of Chinese-American literature, responding to the recent critical trends of denationalization. Contriving to induce the prefiguration of a different cultural regulating code that views ethnic works in a more universalized and comprehensive way, it points out that many Chinese-American writers have achieved their literary success beyond the bounds of ethnic politics and ethnography. My study starts from and centers on ambivalence and ambiguity, the two literary idiosyncrasies from the perspective of both authors and readers, and attempts to point out that they are among the more intricate elements that enable the literary works to transcend their ethnic boundary.

The study begins with an in-depth analysis of the ambivalence and ambiguity in domestic sphere in the first chapter. As a unique site to transform transnational object into national subject, family is an institution in which national and international interests intersect. Also, for postmodern and diasporic communities "home" stands for a nostalgic ideal, and serves as the primary and restricted domain for women's identity. In this chapter, mother and daughter's metaphorical relation in the Chinese-American fictions is firstly explored. Since that



relation involves cultural conflicts and images, marginal experience, Chinese culture in collective unconsciousness and intuition in female discourse, the particular cultural context represented by these works could reveal the attitudes of alienation, reconciliation, rejection, etc. in literary creation. In Amy Tan's works, the mother-daughter motif gives readers a distinct perspective to explore the hidden and subtle information between cultures and artistic creation. Besides, Jade Snow Wong's and Gish Jen's ways of dealing with mother-daughter relation reveal an unending and ambivalent creative quest in literature. Though mother-daughter relation is a universalized subject in literary writing, the special attitude and cultural approaches in these works engender special literary spell with its uniqueness. Then, literary ambivalence in interracial family found in Chinese-American novels is analyzed. The ethnic elements and cultural contradictions revealed in the works bring forward the question of cultural assimilation and declining sense of ascription. Some works entangle the ambivalent view of cultural evaluation, life attitude and also diasporic tradition, and they reveal the general concern of cultural orientation for every modern human too. Thus, by exploring the couples as an enduring paradigm of human relationships, the study shows that the changes in ideology and views of life in society enrich the content of Chinese-American literature.

Chapter 2 investigates the ambivalence and ambiguity of quest within and beyond ethnic boundary. It begins with an analysis of the double and racial shadow hidden in many related works, trying to present the alter ego and ambivalence variously known in different

terms in different literary creations as particular yet universal things in Chinese-American literature. Confronting the ambivalent and ambiguous effect of the texts with the double and racial shadow, we need a mobilization of the knowledge of American realities in historical, racial, economic and other aspects, while prolonging the process of the distinctively aesthetic perception of life. The second part of the chapter mainly introduces and analyzes Gish Jen's novel *Mona in the Promised Land* (1996). Pondering on the author and the characters' cultural quests within and beyond the boundary of ethnicity, it discusses the features of diasporic literature, philosophical fusions of visions and self-certainty between cultures. Besides, the identity quest and the relation between homeland and hostland in the new perspective of diasporic criticism are reconsidered, which offers an insight into the expectation of Chinese-American literature's creation and criticism. In this chapter, the ambivalence and ambiguity in cultural and literary code-switch have brought attention to the implication of self-other and cross-cultural relations different from that of the past purity of European (or Western) culture. Therefore, in literary creation and criticism of Chinese-American literature, a complex "hermeneutics of difference" beyond traditional conceptions of identity and dialectics would be explored. From Jen's works, as well as other Chinese-American writers' creation, we would probably feel that we are in a dynamic process of dispersion and migration textually and metaphorically, which, to some extent, is the resource for polyphony in literature.

Chapter 3 portrays the ambivalence and ambiguity in cultures in

different borderlands such as those between post-Orientalism and commercialism, neo-primitivism and modernism, recollection and expectation, as well as cultures between homeland and hostland. Successful literary transplantation, especially for the prosperity of Chinese-American literature within the last fifty years, could by no means be achieved in the neglect of the philosophical ideology, particularly that of Orientalism. Also, the Chinese-Americans' relation to the rest of the world that contains their native land and immigrated one appears intensively subtle. In order to construct their identity, their writings appear as unending efforts to wrest out of Orientalist grips an autonomous ethnic self and to deconstruct what is falsely constructed as Chinese culture. Therefore, the "distribution", the "elaboration" and the "will" to power and to clear identity are shared by their minority subjects, while simultaneously changing the Orientalist misrepresentation into self-representations. Furthermore, this success seems a little bit sarcastic today because many of these writers once or perhaps still in present days unconsciously collaborated with distortions of the East. Another ingenious way of integration applied by some Chinese-American writers is their narrow focus on self-realization that belongs naturally to American individualism and American dream. In Chinese-American literature's embrace with Orientalism and integration with the mainstream, it turns from its early task of objectively revealing a once stereotyped and prejudiced minority group to the freedom of expressing itself and emerging in American literature with its own distinctive voice.

The second part of this chapter analyzes the tints of neo-

primitivism and Amy Tan's works, with the purpose of revealing the relation between the literary creation, especially that of ethnic female writings, and the mythically primitive elements. In Amy Tan's works, the culturally ambivalent attitude emerges and the new American myths are reconstructed with the ambiguously aesthetic effects, while simultaneously the works have to some extent brought forward some thought-provoking yet confusing questions for modern readers.

The third part deals with the dual sides of recollection and expectation, which explores the myth and specter in literary narratives, and the special narrative rhythm as the result of these elements. With further analysis, we would know that some fantastic stories are made or chosen by the authors to form a unique type of speech, and many ethnic stories in recollection could take us far beyond the historical and cultural realm of the ethnic writings by giving us aesthetic bliss.

Consequently, the immediate question that follows is the cultural heritage standing at a nonplus, because of which the literary tensions within and beyond the works are extending the profundity of Chinese-American literature. So the fourth part of this chapter would make a chronologically comparative analysis on Jade Snow Wong's works and those of Gish Jen's. Apart from the particularly intricate relation of cultures between homeland and hostland, the singular culture in borderland reflected in Chinese-American writings offers a research potential with a special spectrum of diverse elements.

The last chapter is on ambivalence and ambiguity as generalized yet particularized literary enigma and aesthetic charm. By revealing

the shift of canonization strategies in literature and the latest trends of this intricate evaluation, the exploration would then make an expectation on Chinese-American literature's research and creation. During the process of consolidating an existing sanctioned repertoire of canon, the optimal reorganization of the cultural field is never ending, which simultaneously never equals to canon expansion. Departure from ambivalence and ambiguity is just an attempt to show that there are many cryptic elements within and beyond literary creation. Besides cultural and social ones, language, poetics and other intrinsic things relating to the genre of novel should be taken into account. In this case, we could never take the mere optimistic view for granted on Chinese-American literature or feel satisfied in the convenient condition of globalization.

Though there is not a transcanonical ground for us to analyze the acceptability of ethnic literature, Chinese-American literature, to sum up, should be treated firstly and primarily as a literary and aesthetic object. There are surely intrinsic cultural and social tensions within literary works, but in a more profound yet foundational sense, ambivalence and ambiguity are among the particular essences that form the enigma of the literary charm and success of Chinese-American literature.

# 内 容 提 要

本书以作者的博士学位论文为基础,旨在对美国华裔文学进行专题性研究,以此回应目前少数族裔文学研究中的“去族裔化”趋势,力图引发和预示与以往对美国华裔文学作品的研究与文化调整方法不同的方式与建议,从更普遍与综合的角度来看待首先身为文学作品的美国华裔文学。书中提出许多美国华裔作家的成功已经超越了族裔政治和民族学的范畴。此外,从作者创作和读者欣赏的角度,本书的主体叙述由华裔美国文学的两个独特内涵——矛盾情结和艺术模糊性——入手,并始终围绕着这两个方面,指出它们是众多复杂因素中促成作品超越族裔边界、充满文学魅力的原因。

第一章从分析作品中家庭范围内的矛盾情结和艺术模糊性入手。作为一个特殊的场所,族裔家庭见证了跨种族转变和民族根源的冲突,并且是民族性和国际性发生微妙交锋之地。同时,“家”对于后现代和散居族裔群体而言,正日益成为一种寄托乡愁的理想性意象,它也是形成女性自我认同意识的重要而有限的空间。在这一章里,美国华裔作品中母女间的隐喻性关系首先成为分析的焦点。由于这种关系涉及文化冲突、文化意象、边缘体验、集体无意识中的中国文化以及女性话语中的直觉性等,在作品中这种特殊的文化语境便能揭示出作家在创作中与民族文化疏远、和解、抵抗等的微妙态度。在谭恩美(Amy Tan)的作品中,母女关

系的主题就为读者提供了一个探索文化和艺术创造之间潜在与含蓄信息的视点。同时,黄玉雪(Jade Snow Wong)和任璧莲(Gish Jen)作品中处理母女关系的方式也揭示了文学中永恒而矛盾的创作追索。尽管母女关系在文学写作中是一个普遍化的主题,但是在这些作品中,特殊的文化态度和处理途径使作品产生了特有的文学魅力。此外,本章还分析了华裔小说中异族通婚家庭所体现的矛盾情结和艺术模糊性。在此类家庭中,族裔因素和文化冲突带来了文化同化和归属感消退等问题。一些作品将充满矛盾情结的文化价值观、生活态度以及散居族裔传统等纠结在一起,反映了每个现代人在文化适应上的共同关注点。因此,通过研究人类关系中作为永恒范式的夫妻关系,论文表明人们意识形态和生活观念的转变丰富了美国华裔文学的内涵。

第二章研究了华裔作品中矛盾情结和艺术模糊性在族裔内外追索上的体现。首先,作者分析了许多相应作品中潜在的双重性和族裔之影,试图揭示出在美国华裔文学中,存在着既具有普遍性又具有特殊性的第二自我和矛盾情结。在面对文本中的矛盾情结和模糊性的艺术效果时,读者需要动用更综合的知识,如历史、经济以及其他众多方面的美国现实状况,以此延长对于生活的美学感受过程。本章的第二部分主要介绍和分析了任璧莲的小说《应许之地的梦娜》(*Mona in the Promised Land*) (1996)。在探究作家和文学人物在族裔内外的文化追索的同时,文章阐述了散居族裔文学的特征、哲学意义上的视域融合以及差异文化之间的自我确立。此外,从评论散居族裔的全新角度入手,身份追寻和祖国与归化国之间的关系也得到了重新思考。在这一章中,矛盾情结和艺术模糊性在文化与文学中的代码转化分析也促成了人们更多地思考自我与他者的关系以及跨文化关系,明白以往纯欧洲(或西方)

的文化版式已经一去不再。因此,在美国华裔文学的创作和评论中,一种复杂的、超越了传统身份概念和辩证法的“差异现象学”将得到进一步地研究。在任璧莲及其他一些华裔作家的作品中,无论是从实际的文本还是从隐喻的角度,我们都能感受到自己正处于一个动态的散播和移动的过程。这种过程,从一定程度来看,也是文学复调性取之不竭的资源。

第三章强调并分析了不同边界地带中文化的矛盾情结和艺术模糊性,例如在后东方主义和商业主义,在新原始主义和现代主义,在回忆和展望以及在祖国文化和归化国文化之间的边界地带。

成功的文学移植,特别是最近五十余年美国华裔文学的繁荣,是不能忽略哲学意义上的意识形态尤其是东方主义的影响的。同时,美国华裔与来源国和归化国的关系也在作品中显得极富微妙性。为了建构自身身份,美国华裔作家的创作中体现了其无尽的努力,他们试图从东方主义的桎梏中挣脱出一个自觉的自我,并解构被误解的中国文化。因此,他们的“煞费苦心”、“自我推销”、“积聚权力和获取明确身份”的努力都在创作中得到了潜在或显在的体现,这同时也使东方主义的误传转变成了自我再现。这些作家的成功在今天看来具有些微的讽刺效果,因为他们中的许多人曾经或者依然在无意识中促成了对东方的歪曲。美国华裔作家另外一种与主流文学融合的巧妙途径是他们沿袭了美国的个人主义和美国梦想,将创作努力融汇于自我实现中。在华裔文学与东方主义的矛盾结合中,在它与主流文化的融合中,美国华裔文学从早期真实客观地阐释被套式化和歧视化的族裔文化,变成了自由抒发自我,力争从美国文学中发出自己独特的声音。

该章的第二部分分析了新原始主义色彩和谭恩美的作品,以揭示文学创作——尤其是族裔女性写作——和神秘原始元素之间



的关系。在谭恩美的作品中,作家的文化矛盾情结得以凸显,新的美国神话在艺术模糊性的效果中被重构。同时,作品在一定程度上为现代读者带来了一些值得深思而复杂的问题。

第三部分围绕着回忆和展望之间的边界,分析了文学叙述中的神话和幽灵因素以及这些因素所形成的独特叙述节奏。在进一步的阐述中,文章提出一些奇异的故事被作家选择或创造出来,形成了一种特殊的叙述类型,而许多回忆中的族裔故事也超越了族裔历史和文化的范畴,为读者带来了审美愉悦。

随之而来的困惑是,由于作品内外的张力扩展了美国华裔作品的深度,此间的文化继承问题便处于一种进退维谷之境地。因此,此章的第四部分自然引出了祖国和归化国文化间的复杂关系,从沿袭历史的角度来比较黄玉雪和任璧莲作品在这方面的体现。边界地带的文化反映出:美国华裔作品提供了一个具有潜力的分析领域,其中充满了各种相互排斥、融合、作用的因素。

在矛盾情结和艺术模糊性作为美国华裔文学普遍而特殊的文学与美学特征的前提下,本书的最后一章探讨并揭示了文学研究中经典化策略的转变以及这一复杂评估的最新趋势。该章的分析还对美国华裔文学的研究和创作进行了展望,并认为人们在巩固已有经典的过程中,历来从未停止过对文化领域作出恰当的重组,而此过程并不与经典的扩展相一致。在此,作者从矛盾情结和艺术模糊性的角度进行分析尝试,目的是为了说明在文学创作内外存在着众多神秘而潜在的因素,除了文化和社会因素外,语言、诗性以及其他与小说形式相关的固有元素也应该得到重视。由此,我们不能对美国华裔文学持想当然的乐观态度,或是在全球化的有利环境下一味感到满足。

尽管我们没有一个跨经典的前提来分析族裔文学的被接受