

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: IMMIGRANT SELF-REPRESENTATION:
CHINESE AMERICAN IMMIGRANT
WRITERS HA JIN AND YIYUN LI IN THE
INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

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In this thesis, I talk about how first-generation Chinese immigrant writers contribute to Chinese American literature through their unique representations of immigrant life. Due to language barriers and other historical reasons, a majority of representations of immigrant life in Chinese American literature have been written by the descendants of immigrants, second-generation writers. Now, there are more Chinese immigrant writers who write immigrant stories in America. To some extent, immigrant writers' representation of immigrant life is a "self-representation," since they are writing their own stories. By comparing immigrant writers' works to those from second-generation writers, I argue that Ha Jin and Yiyun Li are immigrant writers who have contributed to Chinese American literature in three aspects: genre, theme, and language.

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by

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Chapter 1 Introduction: A Survey of Chinese American Immigrant Writing

Section 1 Definitions: Chinese immigrant literature and Chinese American literature

In the broadest sense, Chinese American immigrant literature consists of writing about Chinese immigrant life in the U.S. and the writing by Chinese American immigrants.¹ That is to say, there are two basic factors—the subject matter and the writer’s origin, and any writing that satisfies either of the two requirements should be considered as Chinese immigrant writing. However, in practice, we usually talk about Chinese immigrant literature in a much narrower sense, especially within the context of Chinese American literature.

For many people, Chinese American Literature equates with Chinese American immigrant literature, not only because the United States is a “nation of immigrants,” but also because Chinese Americans are seen as “perpetual foreigners”: they’re defined as immigrants regardless of their actual citizenship, birth, or length of residency. In reaction to this perception, Chinese American literature was constructed as an ethnic American literature, largely exclusive of immigrant voices, in *Aiiieeeee!* (1974), the first influential Asian American anthology by Frank Chin, Jeffrey Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Jeffrey Paul Chan. This book, which helped establish Asian American Literature as a field, distinguished between “a U.S.-born Asian American subjectivity and a foreign-born immigrant Asian subjectivity, and argued for separatist politics” (Lim 6). The anthology’s aim was to construct an authentic Asian American literary tradition which included Japanese and Filipino American writers; yet, we can still perceive that its understanding of Chinese American literature is based on the authors’

¹ Since my topic is about Chinese immigrant writings within Chinese American literature context, here the term “Chinese immigrant” is exchangeable with “Chinese American Immigrant”.

Chinese American subjectivity. According to *Aiiieeeee!*, Chinese American literature was the body of literature about Chinese immigrant life written in English by U.S.-born Chinese Americans.² By this token, Chinese American literature was not simply a narrowed version of Chinese immigrant literature. It also added two other requirements: exclusively U.S.-born writers and written in English. This anti-immigrant, Anglophone definition has been controversial; yet, it offers us three directions to understand what constitutes Chinese immigrant literature.

The first direction offered by *Aiiieeeee!* is an effective way to narrow down Chinese immigrant literature—replacing the “either subject matter or writer’s origin” with a “both...and.” It is problematic to focus merely on the subject matter, as we can see in the writings about Chinese immigrants by non-Chinese writers. To borrow Frank Chin’s words, the image of Chinese immigrants in a non-Chinese writer’s writing often lacks “authenticity.” The insidious Dr. Fu Manchu and the heathen detective Charlie Chan are two notorious examples.³ As Elaine H. Kim notes in her 1982 work *Asian American Literature*: “Anglo-American literature does not tell us about Asians. It tells us about Anglos’ opinion of themselves, in relation to their opinions of Asians” (20).

In the same vein, focusing only on the writer’s origin also has its problems, especially for those who set their writings only in China and write exclusively about non-American

² Although this definition has been challenged after the change in Asian American demographics in the 1980s, when scholars like Sheng-mei Ma and Xiao-huang Yin argued for including Chinese language and immigrant writers into consideration, it still has considerable influence, since Chinese American literature is still English dominant and mostly written by U.S.-born writers. Furthermore, immigrant writers have been marginalized even after they have been included in the Chinese American literary community, due to language barriers and other reasons.

³ Dr. Fu Manchu is a fictional villain introduced by British author Sax Rohmer. Charlie Chan is a fictional character created by Caucasian American writer Earl Derr Biggers.

experience. I admit that an immigrant's experience before his migration is undoubtedly important, since it is part of the immigrant identity. Moreover, many, perhaps most, immigrant writers have established reputations by writing exclusively about life in their countries of origin, due to their first-hand experiences. For example, Aravind Adiga, an Indian Australian writer and journalist, won the 40th Man Booker Prize in 2008 with his debut novel *The White Tiger*, which is set exclusively in India; Filipino American writer Jessica Hagedorn's 1990 novel *Dogeaters*, one of the most influential Filipino American novels, which earned a 1990 National Book Award nomination, is set in Philippines; Yutang Lin, a Chinese immigrant writer's nonfiction texts, *My Country and My People* (1935) and *The Importance of Living* (1937), which were bestsellers in the 1940s, also represent life exclusively in China. Although experiences before migration are very important to both immigrants and immigrant writers, I myself prefer to emphasize the American experience and the transnational experience in Chinese immigrant literature for the following reasons.

First of all, travel and migration are at the core of immigrant experience. Indeed, the experience in the country of origin is part of the immigrant identity. However, it is the experience of traveling and migration that makes an immigrant come into being. Writings exclusively set in China would be no different from Chinese historical writings. Thus, in my opinion, immigrant writing could include experience in the country of origin but should not only focus on experience in the country of origin. A case in point is *Krik? Krak!*, a short story collection by Haitian-American writer Edwidge Danticat, which includes stories taking place in both Port-au-Prince and New York. Secondly, the "immigrant self-representation" in the thesis's title is meant to focus on writings about immigrant experience by immigrant writers.

As I mentioned above, what lies at the core of immigrant identity is the action of border crossing, which involves both physical migration and cultural adaptation. In other words, new life experiences are indispensable to the construction of the immigrant identity. So, writings exclusively set in China are excluded under the topic of immigrant self-representation, since they lack an indispensable part of the immigrant experience. My third reason is a practical one. I believe writings set in China by immigrant writers have its irreplaceable literary value, but space limitations and my own interests lead me to privilege the representation of American experience for this MA thesis.

The second inspiring direction offered by *Aiiieeeee!* is its perception of the difference between Chinese immigrant subjectivity and U.S.-born Chinese American subjectivity. The differentiation between U.S.-born Chinese Americans and Chinese immigrants has always been ignored by white nativists, and so Chin took aim at the common perception of second-, third, and fourth-generation Chinese American as foreigners in his anthology. Frank Chin believed that being linked to Chinese and Chinese immigrants was the reason why Chinese Americans were treated as aliens and faced with racism, since “whites from Europe are not linked with Americans of European descent” (cited. in Kim 176). Thus, Chin aimed to prevent racism and open a way for Chinese Americans to assimilate into American society and claim Americanness by distinguishing Chinese Americans from Chinese immigrants. Chin may have meant well; yet, scholars remain frustrated by Chin’s differentiation and his apparent contempt for foreign-born Chinese.⁴ In other words, Chin’s assertion of distinctions between Chinese

⁴ Frank Chin denies the accusation and argues that he just “calls things by their right names.” However, his equation of Chinese immigrants with animals or stigmatized person betrays him: “I am not shunning immigrants. I’m stating a fact that I am not Chinese. I am not shunning Albinos, elephants, dwarves, and midgets either” (cited. in Kim 176).

Americans and Chinese immigrants places more value on the former and devalues and excludes the latter.

One critic who contests Chin's anti-immigrant narrative is Sheng-mei Ma, who in *Immigrant Subjectivities*, argues for an inclusive narrative. Ma wisely points out the contradiction within Chin's separatist politics: "Its [Aiiieeee!] editors...in various prefaces sharply demarcate themselves from Asians, while empowering themselves in the midst of a white society through immigrant memories and the mythic Asian past" (12). Furthermore, he highly praises immigrant writing for its irreplaceable value of self-representation:

Barred by linguistic, cultural, and other barriers, these Asian immigrants rarely tell their stories firsthand in what is known today as Asian American literature; their stories are told, instead, by their children or their grandchildren...while these alien(s') stories contribute to rendering Asian American texts highly marketable, immigrants remain largely a blank, an absence—the voiceless, plastic other waiting to be born by their children.

(11)

As we can see here, Ma argues for including immigrant writings in Chinese American literature, which is opposite to Chin's exclusion narrative. However, he is similar to Chin in the sense that he also hierarchizes the difference between Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans. In order to value immigrant literature, Ma to some extent has devaluated Chinese American literature by asserting, "in most Asian American texts...Asian American raconteurs and the

American market actively woo each other in appropriating alien(s') stories, the surest sign of ethnicity, as commodity" (11).

Thus, both Chin and Ma differentiate between Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans. But, they also hierarchize one over another based on that difference, so as to invest one or the other with either political value or literary value. In my opinion, difference doesn't necessarily mean a disparity of literary value. First-generation immigrants and U.S.-born Chinese Americans are indeed different. There is no harm in pointing out the difference and evaluating that differentiation as long as we don't hierarchize one over another. Chinese immigrant writing has its own characteristics, and it is an integral part of Chinese American literature. We can think of immigrant writers' writings as complementary to their non-immigrant contemporaries.

Whereas I don't agree with either Chin or Ma's generational hierarchies, we can learn from their definitions of Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans. In both cases the birthplace is a watershed: foreign-born are immigrants, and U.S.-born are Chinese Americans. However, in our time birthplace is not as reliable an indicator of cultural orientation as it might once have been in Chin's time due to globalization. Usually, if one is born in the U.S. he or she is a U.S. citizen, not an immigrant, by law and by common usage. However, there are many U.S.-born Chinese who are mainly raised and educated in China. They are closer to the immigrants than to the Chinese Americans, if they come to the U.S. after adulthood. In my opinion, what lies at the core of immigrant identity is the physical and cultural travel, with which the immigrants experience a new social and cultural system that is different from the system in which they were born and educated. Thus, I argue that one should focus on cultural border crossing instead

of birthplace to define immigrant identity. In my thesis, I refer to immigrant writers who have their identities shaped in their countries of origin before coming to the new land as first-generation writers and refer to Chinese American writers who were born or socialized in the U.S. as second-generation writers.⁵ Immigrants who arrive in the U.S. as children and adolescents are sometimes called 1.5 generation writers. Their experience is a unique one in the sense that unlike their first-generation parents or U.S.-born siblings, their identity is split. I prefer to classify the 1.5 generation as “second generation,” especially those who come to the U.S. under the age of 14.⁶ In my thesis, I will focus only on first-generation writers.

The third direction offered by *Aiiiiieee!* is the language issue. The field of Chinese American literature is English dominated. English has often been taken to be definitive of “Americanness” and American identity, while Chinese and pidgin English have been regarded as the indicators of the immigrants’ alienness since the field was initially constructed. Recently, Sinophone writings (i.e. Chinese-language writings), especially writings in the early 19th century, have gained more attention.⁷ However, Sinophone writing is still marginalized in the field of Asian American literature, since the majority of the critics do not speak or read Chinese. By contrast, the field of Chinese immigrant literature is Sinophone dominated due to the language barrier of English and its historical background.⁸ According to my definition, immigrant writers or first-generation writers usually take Chinese as their first language and

⁵ The “second” in the term “second-generation” here is not a specific number, and the term refers to second-, third-, fourth and up-generation as well.

⁶ According to research on the effect of age on acquisition of a second language, it is rare for a second language learner to reach the native speaker’s level when he is more than 14 years old. For more information see, Lenneberg’s *Biological Foundations of Language*.

⁷ For instance, see the Gold Mountain poetry.

⁸ Before the 1960s, most of the Chinese immigrants were labor workers who had few opportunities for education, let alone a western education, thus it is rare for Chinese immigrant writers to write in English.

acquire English as a second language. Naturally, they may predominantly use Chinese as their preferred literary language. Of course, there are also writers who publish in both English and Chinese. To distinguish them, I will refer to Chinese immigrant writers who write in Chinese as Sinophone writers, and those who write in English as Anglophone writers. It seems that critics often pay more attention to Sinophone writings in the field of Chinese immigrant literature either due to the dearth of Anglophone writings or by academic choice.

For instance, the immigrant writing Sheng-mei Ma talks about in his *Immigrant Subjectivities* (1998) are “Liuxuesheng wenxue” (overseas student literature), which are written exclusively in Chinese by international students from Taiwan in the 1980s.⁹ He sees overseas student literature as an “immigrant self-representation” in which immigrant stories are written by immigrants themselves. More importantly, Ma argues that overseas student literature has created different immigrant subjectivities compared to those created by second-generation writers like Kingston and others in their autobiographies. In his *Chinese American Literature since the 1850s* (2000), Xiao-huang Yin has included both Sinophone writers and Anglophone writers. He points out that Sinophone writings are usually more straightforward and critical about American society, because “Chinese-language writers seek affirmation and recognition only from readers in their own community and do not worry about the response of the general reading public” (7).

The phenomenon of emphasizing immigrant writings in their native languages rather than the adopted languages is very common. One example out of Chinese immigrant literature is

⁹ Ma didn't mention any Immigrant writers who write immigrant life (self-representation in Ma's word) in English. One example is Yutang Lin's *Chinatown Family*.

how Hispanic immigrant literature was defined.¹⁰ Nicolás Kanellos, a Hispanics studies professor who makes U.S. Hispanic literature available to the world, defines immigrant literature as literature written by immigrants in their native language. He praises Spanish-language immigrant literature for its historical authenticity, and clearly excludes writings written in English:

Spanish-language immigrant novels are written by the immigrants themselves, not by their children... their texts thereby take on additional historical authenticity... Spanish-language immigrant literature opposes and deconstructs the myth of the American Dream, as opposed to the reinforcement and celebration of the American dream that usually appears in the English-language ethnic autobiography written by the children of immigrants. (3)

Whereas critics like Ma and Kanellos have paid more attention to immigrant literature written in the immigrants' native languages, there are also other voices.

David Cowart in his *Trailing Clouds: Immigrant Fiction in Contemporary America* (2006) emphasizes the significance of writing in English, pointing out that: “The immigrant must deal with prejudice and homesickness but eventually becomes empowered by a new American identity” (7). In a similar vein, Don DeLillo also claims that to write in an adopted language is to transcend the limitations of one’s background, to “write into the larger world” (DeLillo 126). I

¹⁰ I prefer to choose Latina/o immigrant literature rather than South Asian immigrant literature as a reference for Chinese immigrant literature. Although South Asian Americans and Chinese Americans are under the same umbrella of Asian American, I think Chinese immigrants are more similar to Hispanic immigrants from the perspective of language—they have not been influenced by English culture as much as the South Asians.

follow Cowart and Delillo and focus on writings in the adopted language--that is, Anglophone Chinese immigrant writings--for the following reasons.

Sinophone immigrant writing undoubtedly has significance, but I choose to study Anglophone writing because it engages more fully with second-generation writing and other ethnic writing in the U.S., where English is the common language. In addition, my focus on Anglophone literature avoids the “fissure between language and subject matter” in Ha Jin’s words:

At the time, China was my only subject matter, and I assumed I would spend the rest of my life translating Chinese historical experiences into literature. I didn’t pay much attention to a fissure in my conception—the contradiction between my subject matter and the language I used, a language by nature alien to my subject matter. As I continued writing in English, I began to feel this alienation widening and taking place inside myself as well, and gradually I grew less and less interested in China. I realized that I wanted to write about something else, especially the American immigrant experience, which was closer to my heart.¹¹ (120)

In conclusion, I narrow my definition of Chinese immigrant literature by adding three limitations: representation of immigrant life as the subject matter, writers’ origins as first-generation immigrants, and English as the language requirement.

¹¹ Ha Jin. "Exiled to English." *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader*, Shih, Shu-Mei, et al., editors; Columbia University Press, 2013, pp118-130.

Section 2 A Brief Survey of Chinese American Immigrant Literature

The first wave of Chinese immigrants came to the U.S. in the mid-19th century when the majority of Chinese immigrants were male manual laborers hoping to return to their homeland with a fortune. Later, the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act put a stop to the immigration of Chinese workers and formalized legal discrimination against Chinese immigrants.

At this point, although most Chinese immigrants were not able to write in English due to language barriers and the heavy daily workload, some immigrants did manage to acquire a good command of English.¹² However, early immigrants wrote in English, often out of practical imperatives. For example, one typical form of the earliest English writings by immigrants was the open letter aiming to negotiate with the white society. “Letter of the Chinamen to His Excellency Governor Bigler” (by merchant leaders Hab Wa, and Tong K. Achick) is among the most representative ones.¹³ In 1852, governor John Bigler launched an anti-Chinese campaign, in which he strongly denounced “the present wholesale importation to this country of immigrants from the Asiatic quarter of the Globe” (qtd. in Yin 18) and labeled the Chinese as unlawful coolies. In order to fight against the anti-Chinese racism and to self-defend, Hab Wa, and Tong K. Achick published their “Letter of the Chinamen to His Excellency Governor Bigler” in San Francisco’s two mainstream newspapers, the *Daily Alta*

¹² According to Yin’s *Chinese American Literature since the 1850s*, some Chinese of the merchant class had the opportunity to go to English schools set by American missionaries. American missionaries themselves also offered English education to Chinese youths (such as Wong Chin Foo and Yung Wing) in the hope of converting them to Christianity. The students of the Chinese Educational Mission sponsored by the Chinese government (such as Lee Yan Phou), or sponsored by wealthy families, could also receive a good education in the U.S.

¹³ Whereas there is not much information exist about Hab Wa, we know that Tong K. Achick attended an English language school founded by American missionaries in Macao when he was a child.

California and *San Francisco Herald*. In a similar vein, the Chinese-American activist and journalist, Wong Chin Foo's writings were also intended to fight for the equal rights of Chinese-Americans.¹⁴ Besides political imperatives, early immigrant writers also wrote out of an elite sense of obligation to improve the image of Chinese in American society, since they were the only ones who could speak for their voiceless countrymen in the language of power—English. Yung Wing's autobiography *My Life in China and in the America* (1909) is of this kind.¹⁵ In conclusion, early Anglophone immigrant writers cannot be viewed as representatives of the Chinese immigrants at their time, since a few elites cannot represent the vast majority of manual laborers. Their writings are often derived from practical imperatives, as Yin points out: "While its [early immigrant writing] value as literary production is immense, its significance as a sociohistorical document of the Chinese American experience is even greater" (11).

The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed in 1943, since China was an ally of the U.S. during the WW II. Still, few Chinese could migrate to the U.S. due to other restrictions. However, Chinese immigrant writers at this time were more visible, due to social progress and a growing interest in multiculturalism. For instance, Chiang Yee's *The Silent Traveler* series (New York, Boston, and San Francisco) and Yutang Lin's *Chinatown Family* were published around the 1950s.¹⁶

¹⁴ Wong was born in 1847 in China. In 1861, he was taken in by a missionary couple, and then came to the United States in 1867.

¹⁵ Although a similar work to Yung Wing's, Lee Yan Phou's *When I Was a Boy in China* is not included due to its setting in China. Yung Wing was born in 1828 in China. He attended the Morrison School in Macao in 1835 and went to the U.S. in 1847.

¹⁶ Lin's *Chinatown Family* was published in 1948. Although his 1937 book *My Country and My People* is more famous, I don't include it because it is only about China.

Born in China in 1903, Yee went to England by 1933 and started his travel narrative series, “The Silent Traveler.” He then moved to the U.S. in 1955. Yee was one of the so called “alien observers” who wrote about America from an Asian’s perspective (Ling 18). Like Yutang Lin, Yee was well-educated and wrote well in standard English. Elaine H. Kim has argued that whereas Yee's social-economic status enabled him to attain the means for Anglophone writing and publishing, it also estranged him from the majority of immigrants in his time: “[Yee was] an educated Asian aristocrat... who did not spend his life among other Asians in a basement laundry or laboring on a California farm” (Kim 32) . Yutang Lin was born in 1895 in China and lived mainly in the U.S. after 1935. Lin’s *Chinatown Family* is set in New York Chinatown and represents a laundryman’s family life. Elaine H. Kim points out that Lin’s portrait of the family is “highly idealized” (105). Indeed, as a privileged scholar, Yutang Lin’s own life experience is too far away from a laundryman’s in Chinatown. To some extent, Lin’s government ties and his anti-communist perspective may also account for his over idealization of U.S. society.¹⁷ Although I agree with Kim that neither Lin nor Lee was representative of the Chinese population in the U.S. in their time, I think their works are still worthy of additional study, since they were among the earliest Anglophone immigrant writers and their reception could offer information about the literary environment at that time.

H. T. Tsiang’s *And China Has Hands* (1937) also represents a laundryman’s life in Chinatown, but from a different perspective compared to Lin’s writing. Tsiang was born in 1899 in China and fled to the U.S. in the late 1920s. He is a prolific writer in various genres:

¹⁷ C. Y. Lee’s *Flower Drum Song* (1957) also represents life experience in Chinatown. Similarly, Kim argues: “In *Flower Drum Song*, Chinese are portrayed as comical, unmanly, and unreasonable. Chinatown is depicted as a playground for wealthy exiles” (107).

poetry, fiction, and drama. However, as an activist, Tsiang often incorporates too much political consciousness into his work, which may account for his long obscurity. Although he has appropriated many literary strategies from both traditional Chinese and Western literatures, his overt political consciousness may have negatively impacted the literary value of his works.¹⁸ In conclusion, during this period, these cultivated Anglophone immigrant writers like Lin and Yee's writings are far from the real immigrant life. Tsiang's writing is more representative yet tinged with political consciousness.

The second wave of Chinese immigration came after the 1960s, especially after the 1980s. The 1965 Immigration Act reopened migration pathways and brought a dramatic change in Asian American demography.¹⁹ Asian Americans now make up about 6% of the nation's population, up from just 1% in 1965.²⁰ However, Chinese immigrants came to the U.S. in large numbers much later than 1965, due to the poor relations then between China and the U.S.²¹ Unlike their 19th-century predecessors, Chinese immigrants arriving since 1965 are predominantly skilled and have a better command of English. Before the mid-20th century, a western education in China was a privilege that was only available to a few people who came from relatively rich families, had connections to the government, or were adopted by western missionaries. As a result, it was not common for early Chinese immigrants to write in English. Compared to their predecessors, contemporary immigrants have more opportunities to learn

¹⁸ For his appropriation of Chinese and Western literary skills, see Cheung, Floyd. "H. T. Tsiang: Literary Innovator and Activist." *Asian American Literature: Discourse & Pedagogies*, vol. 2, 2011, pp. 57-76.

¹⁹ Data from the 2007 American Community Survey indicate that fully 67% of Asian Americans were born outside the United States, which means that over half of the Asian American population are first-generation immigrants. For more information, see Janelle Wong's *Asian American Political Participation: Emerging Constituents and Their Political Identities*. Russell Sage Foundation, 2011: p 34.

²⁰ Data are from U.S. Census Bureau: <https://www.census.gov/about/partners/cic/resources/data-links/asian.html>

²¹ Basically, China loosened its emigration controls in 1978. China and the U.S. restored normal diplomatic relations in 1979.

English in their original country due to globalization and China's modernization, which makes the emergence of first-generation immigrant Anglophone writers a more common phenomenon.²²

While there are many Anglophone immigrant writers in this period, most of them write stories exclusively set in China. I will introduce here only Ha Jin and Yiyun Li, two contemporary Chinese immigrant writers, who also write stories about American experiences with a transpacific approach. Both Jin and Li received college educations in China and came to the U. S. after adulthood as international graduate students. They reside in the U.S. and write in English, but they are quite different from their predecessors. Generally speaking, they are freer to write about what they want.

First of all, they are emancipated from ambassadorship—they have neither the obligation nor the need to explain Chinese culture due to the change in atmosphere. They no longer have to function as cultural bridges between China and the U.S., since there are now many Chinese American immigrant writers and second-generation writers. Furthermore, Chinese history and culture are far better understood in the global era. In addition, there is no political imperative for them to function as spokesmen for their countrymen due to the progress of American society, Asian American activists' endeavors, and maybe also the model minority myth, all of which leave them more space for art. Thirdly, compared to their predecessors who were often too privileged to be regarded as common immigrants, Jin and Li are more representative of

²² Indeed, during China's Cultural Revolution (roughly 1966 through 1977), it was very dangerous to have any foreign connection. Proficiency in English or even any interest in a foreign language would bring people a lot of trouble. However, learning English became very popular in the 1980s, and English education was included in China's nine-year compulsory education in the 1990s. Moreover, in the college entrance exams in China, English had been given the same weight as Chinese for more than one decade.

their generation of immigrants.²³ Given these differences, Jin's and Li's works have also changed the landscape of the traditional Chinese immigrant literature by rewriting the immigrant life and the self.

Both Ha Jin and Yiyun Li are prolific writers, and many of their stories are set in China. As I have made clear, this essay only addresses their writings on immigrant experiences, which include Ha Jin's *A Free Life* (2007) and *A Good Fall* (2009) and Yiyun Li's *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers: Stories* (2005) and *Gold Boy, Emerald Girl* (2010).²⁴

Section 3 A Review of Ha Jin and Yiyun Li's Immigrant Writing

Ha Jin started publishing in English in the early 1990s. Like many other Chinese immigrant writers, Ha Jin initially set most of his stories in China. The 2007 novel *A Free Life* is Ha Jin's first novel set in the U.S. that also discusses immigrant life. Since that first novel, his subject matter has shifted from discussing life in China to that in the U.S. Many critics have noticed this significant shift in Ha Jin's career and paid considerable scholarly attention to it.

I find that most of the existing research notices this new characteristic in contemporary immigrant writer Jin's immigrant writing. For example, Melody Yunzi Li, in "Home and Identity en Route in Chinese Diaspora: Reading Ha Jin's *A Free Life*," argues that Jin challenges the limits of identity labels like Chinese, American, and Chinese-American by providing a new type of diasporic identity: "the old world (China) and the new world (America)

²³ Indeed, we still have Chinese immigrants who work as manual laborers now. But, there are now more educated Chinese immigrants here, so at least writers like Jin and Li are representative of this now expanded class of immigrants.

²⁴ Ha Jin's *A Map of Betrayal* (2014) and *The Boat Rocker* (2016) also involve some immigrant elements, but are excluded due to political sensitivities in China. So does Li's *Kinder than Solitude* (2014), which I also omit for political reasons. These stories either involves Tiananmen Square event or Chinese spies in the U.S., which are forbidden topics in China.

pushing and pulling diasporas constantly, forcing them to be always en route between the two” (203). In a similar vein, K. Cheung sees *A Free Life* as a challenge to older conceptions of Asian-American identity and points out that the novel is “neither entirely immigrant nor entirely diasporic, but something in between”(229).²⁵ Melissa Lam also focuses on the identity issue, but from a different perspective—language.²⁶ Lam notes that the protagonist in *A Free Life* often uses Chinese and English in different situations and claims that the mixture of Chinese and English phrases in the text opens the borders between China and the U.S.. As we can see, these scholars adopt a vertical perspective by comparing *A Free Life* to Jin’s predecessors or to Jin’s earlier novels and writing about non-immigrant experiences. There is a dearth of scholarship that uses a horizontal perspective that explores the relationship between Chinese immigrant writers and contemporary second-generation writers.

Critics also have paid attention to the western influences on Jin’s works. For instance, Bettina Hofmann says that Jin appropriates and reforms the western literary genre “Künstlerroman” (artist's novel), a subgenre of Bildungsroman, to represent the realization of the American Dream.²⁷ Besides identity and genre, there are also discussions on the concept of freedom and the representation of racism in the novel.²⁸ However, there is a dearth of scholarship on how these Asian immigrant writers contribute to Asian American literature.

²⁵ K. Cheung, *Chinese American Literature without Borders*, p. 229

²⁶ "Diasporic Literature: The Politics of Identity and Language." *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2011, pp. 309-318.

²⁷ Hofmann, Bettina. "Ha Jin's a Free Life: Revisiting the Künstlerroman." *Moving Migration: Narrative Transformations in Asian American Literature*, Johanna C. (ed. and intro.), 2010, pp. 199-212

²⁸ See Zhou, Yupei’s dissertation: "The Conceptions of Freedom in Contemporary Chinese and Chinese American Fiction: Gish Jen, Yan Geling, Ha Jin, Maureen F. McHugh."

Jin's and Li's short story collections face a similar—or perhaps worse—reception; there is not much critical scholarship available.

Jin's short story collection *A Good Fall* (2009) is set in New York Chinatown. Some of the stories are based on real newspaper stories.²⁹ Unlike *A Good Fall* which focuses solely on Chinese immigrants in New York Chinatown, Yiyun Li's *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* (2005) and *Gold Boy, Emerald Girl* (2010) include both stories set in China and stories set in the U.S. Some of Li's stories are very difficult to categorize due to her transnational approaches, which feature highly mobile protagonists.³⁰ Compared to the novel *A Free Life*, Jin's and Li's short story collections have received far less critical attention. The main reason may be the unfamiliar genre—short story. Although there is a close relation between immigrants and short fiction, readers and critics are more familiar with the autobiographical long fiction in Chinese immigrant narratives.³¹

There are not many articles on *A Good Fall*, and most scholarly attention has focused on the new characteristics of Jin's immigrant writing. For example, Clara Juncker points out that the image of immigrants in Jin's stories is very new, and the collection is a timely representation of the Chinese immigrant life.³² Holly E. Martin, on the other hand, indicates

²⁹ In the preface of its Chinese edition, Ha Jin says that his adaptation of these news stories is in order to gain them long-lasting values.

³⁰ I have picked four short stories that could be categorized as immigrant writings from *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* (2005): "The Princess of Nebraska", "Love in the Marketplace", "Son", and the title story "A Thousand Year of Good Prayers." Her second collection *Gold Boy, Emerald Girl* (2010) is of similar condition, from which I choose two stories: "Prison" and the title story "Gold Boy, Emerald Girl."

³¹ Natalie Friedman argues that short fiction's traits of brevity and possibilities for complexity have been idea forms for immigrant writers. See, Friedman's "On Contemporary Immigrant Short Fiction," *Contemporary Immigrant Short Fiction*, Robert C. (ed. and introd.) Evans, Salem; Grey House, 2015, pp.xiii.

³² Juncker Clara. *The New Americans: Ha Jin's Immigration Stories. Positioning the New: Chinese American Literature and the Changing Image of the American Literary Canon*. Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars; 2010:216-228.

that besides the middle-class immigrant life, Jin's stories also reveal the struggling side of Chinese immigrant life in the new land.³³ Te-hsing Shan makes a comparison between *A Good Fall* and Jin's earlier short story collection *Under the Red Flag*, which is about communist China, and scrutinizes the changes and continuities in Jin's writings.³⁴ Following Juncker and Martin, I discuss the new characteristics in Jin's immigrant writing, but focus on a different theme: the new family formations of in Jin's short stories.

There are not many essays on Li's immigrant narratives, and I only found three relevant articles. Graham J. Matthews compares the conceptions of risk in Chinese society and in American society represented in Li's stories.³⁵ Matthew argues that the conceptions of risk from the West are subtly altering conceptions of fragility and uncertainty in China. Still, there is a lack of scholarship exploring how Li's work contributes to western literature. King-kok Cheung's "Somewhat Queer Triangles" is an interesting article about Chinese gays and lesbians represented in Li's "The Princess of Nebraska" and "Gold Boy, Emerald Girl."³⁶ Cheung argues that although the U.S. seems to provide a refuge for LGBTs, "a heterosexual union is assumed to be the only solution to an unconventional love triangle both in China and the U.S." (88). The homosexual narrative in Li's short stories is different from the typical autobiographical family narrative by second-generation writers, and it requires new critical approaches, which may result in its marginalization. Yi-Jou Lo analyzes closely the recipes that

³³ Martin, Holly E. "Falling into America: The Downside of Transnational Identities in Ha Jin's *A Good Fall*." *Transnational Literature*, vol. 4, no. 1, Nov. 2011.

³⁴ Shan, Te-hsing. "The Migrant Writes: A Reading of Ha Jin's Short Fiction Collections under the Red Flag and *A Good Fall*." *Contemporary Immigrant Short Fiction*, Robert C. (ed. and intro.) Evans, Salem; Grey House, 2015, pp. 104-119.

³⁵ Matthews, Graham J. "Framing Risk in China: Precarity and Instability in the Stories of Li Yiyun." *Textual Practice*, vol. 31, no. 3, May 2017, pp. 505-521.

³⁶ Cheung, King-kok. "Somewhat Queer Triangles: Yiyun Li's 'The Princess of Nebraska' and 'Gold Boy, Emerald Girl'." *Contemporary Immigrant Short Fiction*, Robert C. (ed. and intro.) Evans, Salem; Grey House, 2015, pp. 88-103.

appears in “A Thousand Year of Good Prayers” and argues that: “the daughter refuses to take the food made by her father demonstrates her refusal to communicate” (68).³⁷ Lo’s article draws our attention to a new method of communication—food rather than language, which I think is very important. Following Lo, I address the topic of communication in my thesis and further explore how it complicates our understanding of language and identity.

In conclusion, Jin and Li’s short story collections haven’t received enough critical attention due to the unfamiliar genre and the new topics. Furthermore, there is a dearth of scholarship on how Asian immigrant writers contribute to Asian American literature, especially work exploring the relationship between Chinese immigrant writers and second-generation writers. Thus, my thesis will take a horizontal perspective by comparing their representations of immigrant life to those found in the works of contemporary second-generation writers to gauge their contributions to Asian American literature. I argue that Ha Jin and Yiyun Li are immigrant writers who have contributed to Chinese American literature in three aspects: genre, theme, and language. First of all, they have created a “*midlife perspective*” narrative compared to the prevailing second-generation perspective in Chinese American literature. Secondly, they have offered a new representation of immigrant life by focusing on those new family formations. Thirdly, they complicate our understanding of language and identity in Chinese American literature.

³⁷ Lo, Yi-Jou. "From What We Eat to How We Are: Food and the Father-Daughter Relationship in Yiyun Li's 'A Thousand Years of Good Prayers'." *Explicator*, vol. 73, no. 1, Jan. 2015, pp. 65-68.

Chapter 2 The Midlife Perspective in Ha Jin's and Yiyun Li's Writing

Section 1 Second-generation Perspective in Chinese American literature

Due to language barriers and other historical reasons, a majority of representations of immigrant life in Chinese American literature have been written by the descendants of immigrants, second-generation writers. Among their representations, autobiography, the family memoir, and the bildungsroman are three very popular genres.³⁸ For instance, popular Asian American texts Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1950), Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976), Gish Jen's *Typical American* (1992) and *Mona in the Promised Land* (1997) all fit in well with at least one of these genres.

In *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature*, King-kok Cheung points out that there is "a preponderance of autobiographical works by Asian Americans" (17). She further argues that this phenomenon is caused by the commercial publishing market and other "invisible limits" placed on Asian American writers (18). Indeed, as a more individualistic genre, the autobiography and fictionalized autobiography are often less concerned with collective identity and racial politics thus are more acceptable to the mainstream culture.

The family memoir is another popular subgenre of the autobiographical category of "life writing,": in this subgenre, autobiographical narrators set their stories firmly in the context of family relationships. Like autobiographical works, the family memoir is a relatively private narrative, but it can offer more space for the author to "engage the history of immigration, adaptation, and presence in American society" (Davis 1). As stated by Rocio G. Davis in

³⁸ As with all forms of literature, there are no definitive barriers between these three genres. The three popular narratives are meant to review the genre studies in Chinese American literature rather than to establish prescriptive groupings.

Relative Histories: Mediating History in Asian American Family Memoirs, another reason for the popularity of family narratives is “the imperative to explain or understand immigrant cultures (for oneself and mainstream America)” (2). Certainly, the representation of generational conflicts in family stories is a very common and efficient way to address cultural issues. As most of the generational conflicts stem from a central dilemma that the younger generation wants to assimilate into American culture but has to negotiate with the original culture of their parents, the bildungsroman with an “assimilating subject” (Chu 12) is also a very popular genre in Chinese American literature.

The bildungsroman has been considered as an exclusively European American genre, and the study of bildungsroman in Asian American literature was initially targeted to address “how Asian American writers appropriate and transform this genre” (Zhou 4). In her influential work *Immigrant Acts*, Lisa Lowe notices that Carlos Bulosan’s *America Is in the Heart* uses the form of a bildungsroman but undermines its ideological function of constituting “an idealized national form of subjectivity” at the same time (98). Lowe argues that the subject of the novel is estrangement from, rather than identification with, the “American nationalist formations” (48). Following Lowe, Patricia P. Chu in *Assimilating Asians* further answers why Asian American writers choose this genre and then rewrite it. According to Chu, the imperative of constructing Asian American subjects, i.e. “the central ideological task of Asian American literary texts,” makes the bildungsroman a favored genre since it is “a site for imaginatively transforming readers and protagonists into national subjects” (3-6).³⁹ Chu also notes that Asian American writers “rewrite the genre to register their vexed and unstable positions in America,” since the

³⁹ Also, to reach mainstream readers, Asian American writers have to choose a familiar genre, and the mastery of this American genre further indicates the authors’ Americanness.

“the Asian American subject’s relation to the social order” differs from that of the “genre’s original European subjects” (12). Stella Bolaki in her *Unsettling the Bildungsroman* notes that ethnic fictions have transformed the genre by inserting “life-writing forms and narratives that seem unable to coexist harmoniously with it” (13).

In conclusion, each of the three popular genres mentioned above has a specific reason for its popularity, either due to market demand, or thematic convenience, or ideological need. However, what interests me most is a shared characteristic in all of the three popular narratives: the “child perspective.” Autobiography as a personal history narrative usually begins with childhood. The bildungsroman is also known as “the coming of age narrative,” which often includes childhood stories. Similarly, the narrators or the protagonists in the family memoirs are usually the younger generation, i.e. the children of their immigrant parents. Hence, I propose that “a child perspective” is a shared characteristic of all the three popular genres. Here, the child perspective does not literally mean a purely underage perspective. As Alicia Otano points out in *Speaking the Past: Child Perspective in the Asian American Bildungsroman*, it is often a “dual child/adult perspective” in ethnic writing about the children (1). In my opinion, the child perspective is the surface of the “dual child/adult perspective.” Second-generation writers use “child perspective” for convenience because their representations of immigrants’ early life often come from stories, imagination, or childhood memories. What lies at the core of this dual perspective is that adult perspective, which I call a *second-generation perspective*. The most prominent trait of *second-generation perspective* is their negative attitude to first-generation immigrants’ culture. American education and life experiences estrange

second-generation Asian Americans from their parents' culture, toward which they often hold a negative attitude.

By contrast, immigrant writers like Jin and Li can be regarded as a new generation of contemporary writers who are writing "the self" in English with a direct experience of the former homeland. Both Jin and Li were educated in China and migrated to the U.S. after adulthood. Their adult consciousness also brings a new perspective, which I call a *midlife perspective*. Different from the psychological midlife crisis which is a transition of identity and self-confidence caused by aging, the *midlife perspective* emphasizes how middle-aged immigrants perceive and negotiate with the environment around them. For example, the protagonists in Jin's and Li's stories are usually the "middle generation" who must negotiate with both the older generation and the younger generation, and their midlife perspective enables them to understand both the parents and children better, since the protagonists are both children (with respect to their parents) and parents. Like the dual-vision "child perspective," the *midlife perspective* does not emphasize the immigrants' actual age. What lies at the core of *midlife perspective* is the immigrant writers' or the immigrant protagonists' familiarity with Chinese culture and a relatively positive attitude to it.

Section 2 The Midlife Perspective in Immigrant Writers' Works

As discussed above, immigrant writers often show more of an interest in midlife stories than in coming of age stories. In their representations of immigrant life, we can see a more positive image of the immigrants, which is different from the typically backward immigrant image in

second-generation writers' works. There are two reasons that account for this change: the higher social-economic status of the new immigrants and the new perspective of the immigrant writers. First of all, a high proportion of Asian immigrants after the 1965s are skilled professionals. According to the Pew Research Center's survey in 2015, about 69 percent of Chinese Americans (of those ages 25 and older) have a college education.⁴⁰ Chinese Americans also have relatively higher median household incomes (about \$65,000), which is 30% higher than the national average.⁴¹ The higher socio-economic class status of newer Asian immigrants not only allows them to acclimate to U.S. life more easily than for working-class immigrants it also changes the image of Chinese immigrants. In the 19th century, the image of Asian Americans in public media was "coolies"; now they are depicted as a "model minority." Thus, it is not strange that we can see a positive image of Chinese immigrants in contemporary writing. In addition to the higher socioeconomic status of the new immigrants, the immigrant writers also account for the relatively positive image of Chinese immigrants in contemporary writing. As immigrants themselves, to some extent, the immigrant writers are representing the self. Piercing the model minority myth, which emphasizes Asian Americans' economic and educational achievements, immigrant writers reveal the daily life of the new immigrants and represent them as human beings rather than as purely economic agents. Furthermore, immigrant writers speak both Chinese and English and know both Chinese culture and American culture. They usually understand the immigrants' situation better than the second-generation writers. All these facts contribute to the positive image of immigrants in

⁴⁰ The Pew Research Center, "Chinese in the U.S. Fact Sheet."

www.pewsocialtrends.org/fact-sheet/asian-americans-chinese-in-the-u-s/

⁴¹ "American Fact Finder." United States Census Bureau. 2010. Retrieved 11 March 2012.

https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_10_1YR_S0201&prodType=table

their works. In conclusion, the relatively positive image of immigrants in immigrant writer's works is a combined consequence of the fact that new immigrants have a higher socioeconomic status and the new perspectives of the immigrant writers who understand Chinese culture and Chinese immigrants better. In this thesis, I want to emphasize the writer's side for the following reasons.

First, all literary works are fictional representations of reality. Hence, the higher socioeconomic status of the new immigrants cannot guarantee a positive image of immigrants in a fictional work. For example, there are not many representations of new immigrants in second-generation writers' works, let alone positive images. Celeste Ng, born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1980, is among the youngest second-generation Asian American writers who is familiar with Chinese new immigrants. In fact, Ng's parents, who migrated to the U.S. in the later 1960s, are typical new Chinese immigrants: her father was a physicist who worked for NASA at the Glenn Research Center and her mother was a chemist who taught at Cleveland State University.⁴² However, there is no positive image of the new immigrants in Ng's debut novel *Everything I Never Told You*, which topped Amazon's Best Books of the Year list for 2014. All the major characters in her novel were born in America. The only new immigrant figure is the supporting character Louisa Chen, who is an international student and has an affair with her married professor James, far from a positive image.

By contrast, in Li's and Jin's works the protagonists are usually the first-generation immigrants. Furthermore, working-class immigrants in Jin's works are also positive figures,

⁴² See, Connors, Joanna (July 9, 2014). "Writer Celeste Ng talks about growing up in Shaker Heights and her buzz novel of the summer, *Everything I Never Told You*". The Plain Dealer. Cleveland.com.
http://www.cleveland.com/books/index.ssf/2014/07/writer_celeste_ng_talks_about.html

such as the domestic worker in “A Pension Plan,” and the sex workers in “The House Behind a Weeping Cherry.” Thus, I think the writer’s perspective is a more important factor accounting for the positive image of immigrants. In this chapter, I read the immigrant writers’ new perspectives as *midlife perspectives*, since they focus on how middle-aged immigrants perceive and negotiate with the environment around them. I argue that their midlife perspective has brought new characteristics into representations of immigrant life: the new image of the mother figure and the rewriting of generational conflicts.

NEW CHARACTERISTICS IN THE MOTHER FIGURE

As Chu notes in *Assimilating Asians*, the female figures from the protagonist’s country of origin often “embody that which the immigrant author must forget and repress, must contain within narrative, in order to construct his American self” (48). Indeed, in second-generation writers’ works, the older generation is usually depicted as traditional, backward, and incompatible with the new world. Two cases in point are the mother figures in Sui Sin Far’s short story “The Wisdom of the New” and Frank Chin’s play *The Year of the Dragon*. By contrast, in new immigrant writings, Ha Jin and Li Yiyun show more sympathy to the older generation and create a new image of the mother figure. Here, I’d like to compare Li’s short story “Son” with David Wong Louie’s short story, “Pangs of Love.” Both stories are about a son’s negotiation with his conservative Chinese or Chinese immigrant mother, but they present two different mother figures. In Louie’s story, the sons are antagonistic to their mother, who typically hurts and pressures them. In Li’s story, while the mother figure gives the son worries, she offers more support and understanding.

Ah Vee, the protagonist and narrator in “Pangs of Love,” has lived with his widowed mother for nine months to keep her company. In his view, everything his mother does is annoyingly intolerant: she doesn’t understand English but loves to listen to Johnny Carson; she only worries about “[her] next bowl of rice” when “the world’s going through its usual contortions”; and she keeps urging him to marry his ex-girlfriend, who has already dumped him for a new lover (78). Ah Vee tries to explain his own life to his mother but fails, because his Chinese is no better than a five-year-old’s and his mother, despite living in New York for forty years, only speaks Chinese. Frustrated by all these misunderstandings and conflicts between him and his mother, the son even imagines his mother hit by a bomb explosion in the building: “she’s thrown back, the net on her hair, her pajamas, her beaded slippers on fire, and she hasn’t a clue how such a thing can happen in this world...I’ll never see her again” (77). In Ah Vee’s case, the language barrier deepens the gap between him and his mother. The mother doesn’t speak English, so she is not able to join in her son’s world which is English dominated. Hence, she physically lives in his son’s world, but is psychologically estranged from him.

The mother’s estrangement from her youngest son Bagel, who lives an openly gay life, is more stunning. During a visit, she sits with Bagel and his male friends uncomprehendingly, discussing the ideal family she has in her mind, namely a traditional Chinese male married to a traditional Chinese woman. She offers to take him to Hong Kong so to find him a Chinese bride. Bagel refuses and says he is married to his cat. She later complains to Ah Vee: “all the men [Bagel and his gay friends] in this house have good jobs, they have money, why don’t they have women? Why is your brother [Bagel] that way? What does he tell you? I don’t understand” (97). Ah Vee does not know to answer the question. He believes his mother would never

understand Bagel's situation even if he could speak in his mother's language. At the end of the story, the narrator passes everyone a tablet that can disguise the sourness and bitterness in one's mouth, so "our words will come out sweet" (98). However, the bitterness and estrangement between the mother and her sons can never be disguised due to their linguistic and cultural barriers, and the mother's insistence on gender norms the sons cannot fulfill. The mother cares about her sons' lives, but constantly expresses burdensome and hurtful expectations. Thus, she becomes an embarrassment to her modern Chinese American children; she elicits in them only rage and bitterness. By contrast, the mother figure in Yiyun Li's "Son" is a relatively positive image.

Han, the protagonist in Li's "Son," is a "diamond bachelor" and gay (111).⁴³ He has recently become a naturalized U.S. citizen, and his mother still lives in China. Han's mother, like the mother in "Pangs of Love," urges him to find a girlfriend and get married every time he comes back. Similarly, for the son, visiting his mother is torture. At the very beginning of the story, even before he sees her, Han imagines that she has arranged blind dates for him and waits for him "at the terminal with an album of pictures, girls smiling at him out of the plastic holders" (111). However, unlike the mother figure in Louie's story, Han's mother is not the burden the son imagines she will be.

Han believes his mother will be shocked by his coming out declaration. To his surprise, his mother replies that she has already guessed it all, and stops trying to make matches for him. She is very calm and does not blame him at all. Han does not expect such an understanding reaction,

⁴³ "diamond bachelor" basically means eligible bachelor, but with an extra emphasis on the outstanding socioeconomic status. It is translated from Chinese slang "钻石王老五" (zuanshi wanglaowu), which literally means "diamond" and "the fifth child of Wang's family," the latter meaning that the person is from a family of higher social standing.

since the environment around his mother is so hostile to homosexuality. He then confronts his mother, claiming that her religion will not accept him. To his surprise again, his mother answers: “God loves you for who you are, not what others expect you to be...God sees everything and understands everything” (126). It seems that what the mother learns from her *fake religion* (in China, all the state-licensed churches recognize the Communist Party as their only leader)” makes her more openminded to homosexuality than the religious people Han meets in the US. Han finally figures out that “her god is just like a Chinese parent, never running out of excuses to love a son” (126). Thus, he knows that the real “god” who can accept him and love him unconditionally is his mother.

Of course, not all the mothers in China have such an open attitude to homosexuality. But such a figure in a literary text still shows something. The mother in “Son” is not like the traditional and backward mother in “Pangs of Love”; she has the strength to learn, to understand, and to accept new things. She had burned her son’s Bible during the Cultural Revolution, but now she learns to turn to the Bible for help in the new era when China is more open to western ideas. Her love for her son is empowering, not hurtful. Finally, there is a reconciliation between son and mother, which is also very rare in works by second-generation writers. I think this reconciliation happens because, besides a mother’s unconditional love, both the mother and the son can understand each other better. Whereas Mrs. Pang, the mother in “Pangs of Love,” clings to the past and does not speak English after living for forty years in New York, the mother in Li’s story is westernized and not a solid symbol of traditional Chinese values. She turns to a western religion and accepts the values of western individualism, as she often tells her neighbors: “Han says we should live for our own comforts, not others’ opinions”

(113). The fact that Mrs. Pang is working-class, while the mother in Li's story is from a middle-class family, may partly account for their different attitudes to Western values.

However, I think their sons' attitude to them is more crucial to the mother-son relationship. As an immigrant who grew up and was educated in China, the son in Li's story understands both Chinese values and his mother's love better. He cares about his mother's psychological world and tries to build real communication even if he must confront her. Thus, he finally confesses to his mother that he is gay. By contrast, the sons in "Pangs of Love" only blame their mother for her ignorance of the English language and American society, but never blame themselves for their ignorance of Chinese or their own inability to make their English world easier for the mother to understand. In addition, the immigrant writer's *midlife perspective* also accounts for the relatively positive image of the mother figure in Li's story. Louie's "Pangs of Love" is narrated from the second-generation son's first-person perspective. Biologically, it is not a typical child perspective given that the narrator is an adult. However, the fact that the son is culturally estranged from his mother and apparently privileges American culture makes the story a typical *second-generation perspective* narrative. Li's "Son" is a third-person narrative, which gives the writer more freedom to depict the mother figure directly. Biologically, the protagonist Han is not a parent, yet culturally he is close to his parent. Furthermore, as a middle-aged man, Han has to face the reality that his mother is getting old and he as the only son has the obligation to protect her. The sympathy and obligation drive him to communicate with his mother. Thus, the relatively positive mother figure which is different from the typically backward figure is a result of the time: the immigrants who write understand better

Chinese values; Chinese living in the era of globalization understand better Western values, too.

In conclusion, compared to the second-generation Chinese Americans, the first-generation immigrants are the ones who are really caught in between two worlds, as Han simultaneously possesses “a brand-new American passport and an old Chinese worry” (111). Immigrant writers grew up in China and bear the impacts of both Chinese culture and American culture. They can get power from Chinese culture. Thus, they create a new image of mother figures, who bring the immigrants not only worries and but also strength even when faced with sensitive issues like homosexuality. Their relatively positive attitude toward Chinese culture brings new characteristics in their representation of generational conflicts too. Sometimes, as we shall see, the immigrant protagonists understand Chinese culture so well that they refuse to make a choice when they are faced with the issue of cultural difference.

NEW CHARACTERISTICS IN THE REPRESENTATION OF GENERATIONAL CONFLICTS

In second-generation writers' works, a frequently addressed theme is the assimilating subject's struggle to enter the larger society and find a place in American life. Moreover, this struggle is often expressed in generational conflicts, which is usually caused by the cultural differences between first-generation immigrants and their American-educated kids. It is worth noticing that the core of the conflicts is cultural difference. Thus, the conflict itself is not necessarily a generational one. For example, the conflict in Sui Sin Far's “Mrs. Spring Fragrance,” is between the same generation: the more Americanized wife and the less assimilated husband. In their representation of cultural conflicts, the protagonists usually criticize their parents' culture

and prefer American culture. By contrast, Jin's and Li's immigrant writing represents the family narrative and generational conflicts in a new way.

First of all, the image of first-generation immigrants in Jin's and Li's works is a new one. In second-generational writers' works, the immigrant parents represent the traditional Chinese values. The second-generation writers often overlook the fact that their parents become westernized over the course of living in the U.S. It is impossible for the immigrant parents to stay a solid, unchangeable symbol of Chinese values. Jin and Li must realize this change. Hence, in their works, there is no representation of generational conflicts between the first-generation immigrants and their American-born children. On the contrary, immigrants are usually criticized for taking sides with the second generation, especially in their Chinese parents' eyes.

Secondly, Jin and Li offer two new patterns of generational conflict. In second-generation writers' works, the only form of generational conflict is between the American-born children and their immigrant parents. They rarely talk about their grandparents, whom they do not even have the chance to meet. Like the early immigrants, the new immigrants in Jin's and Li's works have their American-born children with them. Most importantly, they also bring their Chinese parents to the U.S., which is totally a new thing.⁴⁴ Thus, there will be three generations living under the same roof. This phenomenon is very rare in second-generation writers' works.

⁴⁴ Due to the Chinese Exclusion Acts and other historical reasons, early Chinese immigrants were mainly laborers who barely had the chance to start a family in the U.S., let alone bringing their parents to the new country. Thanks to the new immigration policy of family reunification, new immigrants after the 1980s can bring their parents to the U.S. Moreover, the one-child policy was put in practice in China in the later 1970s. Now, the parents of the first generation of "only children" are over 60 years old. If the only child is an immigrant in the U.S., his parents will migrate at an old age (usually after retirement) to live close to him or her. In this thesis, I refer to first-generation immigrants who migrate willingly as primary immigrants; I refer to their parents, who usually follow their offspring to the U.S. out of necessity (due to the one-child policy and their advancing age) as chain migrants.

Naturally, in Jin's and Li's works, we see two new patterns of generational conflicts: conflicts between the first-generation immigrants and their parents—the chain immigrants living in the U.S. or Chinese citizen in China; and conflicts between the second-generation and their chain-immigrant grandparents.

Thirdly, these new patterns also bring new characteristics in the representation of generational conflicts. In Jin's and Li's works, the conflicts are usually not much concerned with cultural difference. Furthermore, the older generation is worthy of more sympathy. The immigrant protagonist, instead of acting as a guard of Chinese culture or a westernized individualist, becomes a third-party character who refuses to take sides. He tries to bridge the gap between the two cultures, since he understands both sides. Here, I compare Jin's "Children as Enemies" to Gish Jen's "Who's Irish?" to illustrate these new characteristics in new immigrant writing. Both Jen's and Jin's stories use a first-person narrative and talk about the conflicts between grandparents and the second-generation kids. I argue that the conflict in Jen's story still fits the old pattern--a cultural difference conflict--whereas Jin's story is concerned with more than just cultural difference.

Gish Jen's short story, "Who's Irish?" is an atypical second-generation text. The narrator-protagonist is a first-generation immigrant, which is different from the typical second-generation protagonist or narrator. She lives in her daughter's house to babysit her biracial granddaughter Sophie. On the surface, the story is about the conflicts between the immigrant grandma and her granddaughter. In fact, the grandma's complaints about the granddaughter are expressed to her own daughter. Hence, it is still a presentation of old generational conflicts, i.e. conflicts caused by cultural differences between the immigrants and

their American-born children, but from the immigrant mother's perspective. It is worth noticing that the immigrant perspective is tinged by the writer's *second-generation perspective* which is sympathetic to the adult daughter. For instance, compared to the adult daughter's modern idea, the grandma's critique of American culture is very old-fashioned: she insists that spanking is better than talking when educating the child. Thus, I argue that it is still a *second-generation perspective narrative*, since it clearly privileges the American way of thinking and holds a stereotypically negative opinion of Chinese values.

As in the old formula of generational conflict, the immigrant grandmother represents the Chinese culture. From her complaints, we learn that she somehow “ha[d] to escape from China” and came to the U.S., where she has been living for decades (14). However, the way she thinks and behaves is very Chinese, or more precisely, *supposed* to be very Chinese. As a Chinese myself, I would not say what the grandma says or does is typically Chinese, but in the text the grandma herself alleges clearly that she does everything in a Chinese way. For instance, when she complains of babysitting Sophie in her old age, she says: “I am sixty-eight, Chinese age almost seventy. Still, I try. In China, daughter take care of mother. Here it is the other way around” (5).⁴⁵ Moreover, she believes all the bad habits of her biracial granddaughter come from her father's side—the Irish side: “millions of Children in China, not one act like this” (12). If the girl behaves well, she would be “like a nice Chinese girl” in the grandma's eyes. Besides her “China this... China that...” monologue, the grandma also sees everything that is against her will as “American way,” such as “a Chinese mother would help, but American mothers,

⁴⁵ The story is a first-person narrative by the immigrant grandmother. For authenticity effects, Jen deliberately includes some grammatical mistakes in her writing. Thus, the word “take” in the quotation is not a typo.

they look at you, they shake their head, they go home” (12). Here, we can see clearly that the grandmother makes American values the antithesis of Chinese values.

On first glance, the narrator’s critique of America is quite different from the typical critique of Chinese culture in second-generation writers’ works. We can see that Jen tries to show the inner side of immigrants and gives them voices to criticize the American culture. She chooses to tell the story from immigrant mother’s perspective and offers the reader more space to sympathize with the grandmother. This immigrant perspective sometimes makes the grandma an adorable character, which is quite different from the old fashioned Chinese American immigrant trope. For example, when she complains of the efficiency of using words rather than spanking when teaching a kid, she says: “My daughter is fierce like me, but she and John think it is better to explain to Sophie that clothes are a good idea. This is not so hard in the cold weather. In the warm weather, it is very hard” (9). The humorous effect of the grandma’s monologue mitigates readers’ aversion to her idea of using spanking when educating the child, and furthermore destabilizes the familiar Asian American tropes. However, the humorous effect cannot hide the fact that the Chinese values the grandma holds onto are indeed backward: spanking the child, disdaining creative thinking, and so on. Thus, her critique of American culture indirectly expresses the author’s praise of it. Moreover, the logic under the two seemingly different critiques (critique of American culture in Jen’s “Who’s Irish?” and critique of Chinese culture in works by other second-generation writers) are identical—these two cultures are antagonists to each other: if one is good then the other must be bad. Hence, I argue that Jen’s “Who’s Irish?” represents generational conflicts in a way that is different from other second-generation writers due to the immigrant’s first-person narrative, but it still fits into the

old pattern of generational conflicts due to its *second-generation perspective* that clearly privileges an American way of thinking and presents a stereotypically negative view of Chinese culture.

In second-generation writers' representations of generational conflicts, Chinese culture is usually divided into two parts. The bad part, ranging from the devaluation of females, overemphasis on family ties, and lack of individual freedom to other backward feudal values, is attributed to immigrant parents and portrayed as Chinese culture, against which the second generation has to fight in order to survive in American society. The good part, including hard work, and enthusiasm for knowledge, caring for the next generation, is usually neglected by the second generation. By contrast, the immigrant writers can see both the bad part and the good part as integral to each other; thus, they offer a different perspective on the generational conflict.

Ha Jin's short story, "Children as Enemies" tells a similar story to Jen's "Who's Irish?". Both stories are narrated from the grandparent's first-person perspective, including conflicts between grandparents and grandchildren and critiques of the American way of education. However, in Jin's story, the grandparents are in a more vulnerable situation, and the generational conflicts are not only caused by cultural difference.

The grandma in "Who's Irish?" is fierce and full of agency. She can speak back to anyone who irritates her. For instance, Sophie's skin color is darker than those of her father John (White Irish) and her mother (Chinese American). John's relatives repeatedly express surprise about Sophie's brown skin in front of the grandma. The grandma then talks back, saying, "maybe John is not her father"; she ends the brown skin issue once and for all: "[N]one of the

brothers ever say the word brown to me again” (6-7). When her daughter asks her not to spank the girl, she talks back immediately: “[D]on’t tell me what to do, I am not your servant, don’t you dare talk to me like that” (9). The grandma can talk back to anyone, mainly because she doesn’t rely on her daughter. She comes to babysit the child, to help the daughter who cannot afford a babysitter. Although she may feel sad about being rejected when moving out from her daughter’s house, the moving out itself is not a disaster for her: “I can cook, I can clean, there’s no reason I cannot live by myself, all I need is a telephone” (14). In addition, Jen’s humorous writing style even makes the moving out a happy ending—the Chinese grandma surprisingly moves in with the Irish grandma and lives a happy life. Most importantly, it is the writer’s and the adult daughter’s *second-generation perspective* that makes the grandma’s moving out more acceptable. In her *Tiger Writing*, Gish Jen argues that American culture advocates the “independent,” individualistic self and Chinese culture advocates the “interdependent,” collective self (7). By this token, the grandma’s moving out is undoubtedly acceptable to her American adult daughter, since everyone should be independent and individualistic.

By contrast, the grandparents in Jin’s story are more helpless and lack agency. They first have to make a choice between becoming old and lonely in China and migrating to a country at old age, since their only child has migrated to the US. They choose the latter and become "chain migrants" who join their immigrant son’s family not as helpers but as followers. It is too late when they realize the difficulty of living in the new country:

If only we hadn’t sold everything in Dalian City and come here to join our son’s family.

Gubin is our only child, so we’d thought it would be good to stay with him. Now I wish

we hadn’t moved. At our ages—my wife is sixty-three and I’m sixty-seven—and at this

time it's hard to adjust to life here. In America it feels as if the older you are, the more inferior you grow. (80)

The grandparents here are very vulnerable. As new immigrants in their old age, they can hardly adjust to the American society, and they cannot live independently either. As followers, or more precisely, dependents of their son, they don't have the agency to fight back like the grandma from Jen's story. Therefore, we see a lot of self-restraint and tolerance in the grandparents' narrative: "My wife and I were unhappy about that, but we didn't make a serious effort to stop them," "I would have to force down my temper," "wordless, I...went out...on the balcony," and so on (78-80). Even when they move out at the end, they still have to rely on their son: "if we were not so old and in poor health, we'd live far away from them, completely on our own, but they [the son's family] are the only family we have in this country, so we could move only to a nearby place" (85). Here, their moving out is not a happy ending: they do not feel free but abandoned. Thus, their declaration of independence: "this is America, where we must learn self-reliance and mind our own business" is just another form of self-restraint and concession (86). Hence, compared to the grandma in Jen's story, the chain-immigrant grandparents are more vulnerable because they lack the ability to live in the new land independently. Most importantly, I think it is the writer's and the son's *midlife perspective* that sensitizes them to the misery of the grandparents' moving out. The immigrant writer Jin knows that Chinese culture stresses interdependence and appreciates family ties: it tends to see an extended family in a big house as a sign of prosperity and harmony. The middle-aged son in the story knows that his old parents have migrated to America for him, and he has the obligation to take care of them. Thus, from a *midlife perspective*, the grandparents' moving out is clearly understood to be a source of

misery. Jin offers many details of the chain immigrants' vulnerable situation and rewrites the image of immigrants, eliciting sympathy from his readers. Furthermore, by depicting their vulnerable situation, Jin rewrites the generational conflicts and encourages readers to rethink cultural difference issues by asking: is there a bottom line for cultural assimilation?

In Jin's representation, cultural difference is less likely to cause conflicts because, first of all, the grandparents are westernized. As recent chain migrants, the grandparents in Jin's story no longer function as stable symbols of Chinese culture. As mentioned above, their living with the son is not from an adherence to traditional Chinese ethics and morality, but from practical needs: they are getting old and their only son is on the other side of the Pacific Ocean. Moreover, they are open to western values like individualism, as we can see in their confession: "[B]oth my wife and I understand we shouldn't meddle with our grandchildren's lives, but sometimes I simply couldn't help offering them a bit of advice" (80). This "couldn't help" happens, because the question (change or not change the kid's name) they are faced with is more serious than the question (take off or put on the kid's clothes) the grandma is faced with in Jen's "Who's Irish?"

The conflict begins when their grandson wants to change his first name, since "his schoolmates couldn't pronounce his name" (77). The grandparents' first reaction is to ask the boy to "teach them how to pronounce your [name]" (77). The boy refuses immediately, and his mother also thinks having an English name is better for his future. The grandpa is not happy because the child's Chinese name "Qigan" means "amazing bravery," and it is impossible to find an English name that "combines the import and the resonance of that" (78). However, he finally gives in, and the boy has an English name "Matty." Here we see that in order for the

children to get along well with their peers, the grandparents give up their idea of a Chinese name and learn to understand their daughter-in-law's decision. In turn, their son also tries to include the original Chinese meaning in the new name: "Matty is short for Mathilde, which is from Old German and means 'powerful in battle'" (79). By doing so, he is not only trying to please his father; he must understand the best wishes in the original Chinese name and may not want to abandon this connotation himself. Here, we also see how the immigrant writer's *midlife perspective* is expressed in the representation of cultural conflicts. Whereas the story is narrated from the chain-immigrant grandfather's perspective, the real decision-maker is his middle-aged immigrant son, who is biologically and culturally in both a parent's position and a son's position. Cultural differences do not cause a serious conflict, because the immigrant son in the middle understands both his son's situation and his father's good intention. Thus, he finds a compromised way to help his son avoid being made fun of and keep the father's good wishes at the same time. The grandpa's complaints about American education and the grandson's hatred of Chinese Sunday School can be regarded as aspects of cultural difference, but these are not serious issues, either. The immigrant son with his *midlife perspective*, acting as a third party, refuses to favor either his parents or his son but tries his best to keep a balance, so different opinions can exist under the same roof. Put in another way, if the conflict is caused by cultural difference, it definitely can be solved.

What causes the real conflict is when the kid wants to change his last name Xi, "because a substitute teacher had mispronounced 'Xi' as 'Eleven'" (84).⁴⁶ As a kid, the grandson reacts

⁴⁶ This mispronunciation is not Jin's fictional creation. It happened in reality to Jinping Xi, the president of China, in 2014 when he was paying a state visit to India. An Indian TV newsreader addressed "Jinping Xi" as "Jinping Eleven," and she was fired immediately due to this mistake. For more information, see BBC news (19 September 2014): "'Eleven Jinping': Indian TV fires anchor over blooper" <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-29274792>

out of instinct to the information he receives from the outside world. Classmates don't know how to pronounce his first name; he must change it. If they mispronounce his last name, he will change it again. To him, the most efficient way is to change according to the environment. In other words, what he does in face of cultural difference is to redouble his efforts to assimilate, so as to make himself more acceptable to the dominant race. However, as adults, the grandparents know there must be a bottom line—one should not abandon one's entire Chinese heritage. The grandpa points out that “[the] last name belongs to the family, and you can't cut yourselves off from your ancestors” (84). This time, the son cannot figure out a compromise solution, and the grandparents move out from his house.

This is a real conflict, but is it caused by cultural difference? I don't think so. If this is a cultural difference issue that can be solved by making a change, then one day the grandson may have to change his skin color or destroy himself in order to be accepted. This is not a simple cultural difference between Chinese family ties and western individualism. Individualism is to give one the freedom to be oneself, not to give one the right to change oneself fundamentally to be accepted by other people. Moreover, assimilation doesn't mean adapting to the environment without limitation. Although Jin doesn't offer a solution to the conflict, he does push us to rethink the cultural difference issues in Asian American literature by depicting the new image of chain immigrants. The grandpa knows how to behave in the U.S.: he criticizes the American way of thinking but knows when and how to give ground. Most importantly, his critique of America is not ridiculous at all—no one can say his wish that his grandson retains the family's last name is backward. But, no matter how much they are westernized, how much they have given up, the environment is still very hostile to them. For the grandparents, their regrets over

migrating to the U.S. is not so much an expression of nostalgia for China or Chinese culture, as an accusation of the American environment where “[their] grandchildren can act like [their] enemies” (85).

Like the mother figure, this new representation of generational conflicts also comes from this specific period, when the immigrant protagonist with a *midlife perspective* can understand the integrity of Chinese culture, and in turn, the older generation also understands western culture better due to globalization and China’s modernization.

Chapter 3 New Family Formations in Ha Jin's and Yiyun Li's Works

Section 1 New Family Formations

As the most important attachment in life, a family is usually defined as: “two or more people who are related by blood, marriage, or adoption and are living together” (Coles 10).⁴⁷ In the minds of many, the nuclear family, i.e. father, mother, and children living together, is the most basic family formation. However, in the age of globalization, it is also common for members of the same family to be living in different countries, continents, and cultures. Such long-distance families are possible mainly because of the vast advances in both transportation and communication technologies that “shrink the world into a ‘global village’” (Cao 127). The transportation technologies enable family members to travel long distances, stretching the once local family to a global scale. However, the geographic distance also threatens the stability of a family, since living long distance usually means losing a close “family connection” (Neustaedter 2). In the introduction of *Connecting Families: The Impact of New Communication Technologies on Domestic Life*, Carman Neustaedter argues that the core of all family activities is “family connection”: “how families not just communicate with each other, but how they share their lives and routines, how they engage in social touch, and how they negotiate being together, or being apart” (2). Neustaedter points out that communication technologies such as email, telephone, and the internet have enormous impact on the interaction among family members by helping distant family members keep in touch with each

⁴⁷ Roberta Coles is a professor in Marquette University. She studies social and cultural sciences and focuses on family and ethnicity issues.

other on a daily basis. Thus, communication technologies preserve family ties over long distances.

German sociologists Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim named these new family formations (family members in long-distance relationships) “world families” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 3). According to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, world families are families that “live together across (national, religious, cultural or ethnic) frontiers” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 20). There are two basic types of world families: couples or families (sharing the same culture or nationality) that remain together despite living in different countries, and couples or families that live in the same place with members from different ethnicities, races, countries or cultures. Following Neustaedter’s conception of “family connection” and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's idea of “world families,” in this chapter, I discuss the representations of new family formations in Chinese immigrant literature.

Section 2 New Family Formations in Chinese Immigrant Literature

The birth of a child is often a sign that the immigrant family has settled down in the new country. As children of immigrants who have settled down in the U.S., the second generation usually is more familiar with the traditional and local families than with long-distance transnational families.⁴⁸ They may at most have the experiences of maintaining intermediate-distance relationships—spouses who choose to live in different cities for better

⁴⁸ In this thesis, “second generation” means “all offspring of immigrants and the generations that follow.” The second-generation may have grandparents living far away in a different country. But, grandparents are extended family members, who are their kin, yet don't belong to the same household. The long distance-relationships discussed in my thesis are those between parents and children and husbands and wives (including homosexual couples).

individual development, but they rarely have direct experiences of world families—family members living in different countries or cultures for a lengthy period. Put in another way, world families are not unfamiliar to them; but many second-generation texts are informed by, and primarily focused on, the authors' experiences with family members and others within America. Moreover, the imperative of assimilation makes the second generation more sensitive to the pains caused by the closeness among family members rather than the hurt caused by distance, as we can see in their representation of cultural conflicts in Chinese American literature.

First-generation Chinese immigrants usually migrate to a new country alone, and they bring other family members once they are economically or legally settled.⁴⁹ Hence, a long-distance relationship (either romantic or parental) certainly has existed, and may still exist, in their lives. Immigrant writers are naturally more sensitive to the phenomenon of world families, which becomes a common topic in their writing. Representations of world families are not new. For example, Betty Mahmoody and William Hoffer's *Not Without My Daughter*, Jennifer E. Smith's *The Geography of You and Me*, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* are all narratives about world families. However, Jin's and Li's works are still worthy of critical attention, because their representations of long-distance relationships in Chinese immigrant families contribute to this topic and add to these voices. Furthermore, many Chinese immigrants find it important to have their own experiences represented in literary

⁴⁹ Before an immigrant gets a green card, his or her family members can come to the U.S. for a visit but are not able to work legally or live permanently. Usually, the documented immigrants will bring their spouses to the U.S. after they get green cards or U.S. citizenship, so that their spouses can work legally in the US. It usually takes an immigrant about ten years to get U.S. citizenship. During this time, family members can visit each other, but, the costs are high--a short visit is not worth the airplane ticket, yet a long visit is not worth the risk of losing one's job-- especially for those who have come to the U.S. for economic reasons. As for undocumented immigrants, they have no way to bring a family member legally; even their own presence in the U.S. is precarious.

works. Most importantly, their representations of Chinese immigrant families, especially these new family formations, include the writers' unique understanding of family, migration, and the relationship between China and the U.S. in the era of globalization. In this chapter, I choose Chinese immigrant writers Ha Jin's and Yiyun Li's short stories to discuss three new family formations in Chinese American literature: the long-distance relationship in a transnational family, surrogate motherhood in the reconstruction of a nuclear family, and the American dream in the imagination of a queer family.

THE LONG-DISTANCE RELATIONSHIP IN A TRANSNATIONAL FAMILY

The transnational family is not new in Chinese immigrant writings.⁵⁰ In fact, a "split household," in which the wife stays in China and the sojourning husband leaves for the United States after impregnating the wife, was the most common family formation among early Chinese immigrants due to the restrictions of immigration laws (Coles 212). However, in narratives by second-generation writers, representations of long-distance relationships emphasize not the hurt of geographic distance, but the pains of cultural differences. For instance, the reunion of the Chinese wife and her immigrant husband in Sui Sin Far's short story "The Wisdom of the New," is not a celebration of the normalization of long-distance relationship but a prelude to cultural conflict. Furthermore, second-generation writers often mention family members who live in a different country in their works, but their points usually are not to represent a long-distance relationship or a split family. For example, Brave Orchid, the mother figure in Kingston's *Woman Warrior*, hasn't seen her immigrant husband for years

⁵⁰ Transnational family here refers to a split household whose family members live in different countries, not a household that includes family members (usually husband or wife) who come from different countries.

before her own migration. In Kingston's narrative, we can see how the mother goes to a medical school in China during her husband's absence; yet, the text lacks direct representation of how the geographic distance impacts the emotional connection between the couple.

By contrast, immigrant writers Jin and Li depict elaborately how geographic distance affects the relationship among family members, especially husband and wife, in transnational families. In Jin's "Temporary Love," we see that the geographic distance between China and the U.S. is too far for husbands and wives to maintain their relationship. The protagonists Lina and Panbin, two Chinese immigrants living together in New York Chinatown, form a "wartime couple." A "wartime couple" usually consists of a man and a woman "who, unable to bring their spouses to America, cohabit for the time being to comfort each other and also to reduce living expenses" (175). Both Lina and Panbin have migrated to America for economic gains and been separated from their legal spouses for years. (Lina hasn't seen her husband for four years). Their legal spouses are still in China, dutifully taking care of other family members. Sometimes, they also take care of the in-laws on their absent spouses' behalf. For three months, until his recovery, Lina's husband Zuming has taken care of Lina's elderly father who had a stroke. Panbin's wife also stays in China to raise their son alone.

With their spouses' help, Lina and Panbin do not need to worry about things in China. They call their spouses by telephone to keep in touch. But, their loneliness and other practical needs in the U.S. cannot be appeased by the telephone. Put in another way, the communication through telephone cannot replace the physical and psychological intimacy they expect from their spouses. In Lina's confession to Zuming on why she had moved into Panbin's house: "You've seen how hard life is in this place where everyone's busy and treats others like

strangers. I was so miserable and so lonely that I often thought I was losing my mind...I wanted to live! To have a normal life,” we can see that long-distance love for a lengthy period is not normal between husband and wife, no matter how advanced the communication technologies are (185). The geographic distance between immigrants and their spouses makes it difficult for them to remain faithful over long periods, so Lina and Panbin have agreed to live together like other “wartime couples.”

The “wartime couple” live together like husband and wife; they are not a legal but a de facto family. Neustaedter defines family connection as “how families not just communicate with each other, but how they share their lives and routines, how they engage in social touch, and how they negotiate being together, or being apart” (Neustaedter 2). Put in other way, the family connection is the emotional connection among the family members that drives them to communicate with each other and share their lives and routines with each other. In the “wartime couple’s” case, their relationship is based on an agreement that they both privilege their original families and they only live with each other temporarily for convenience. This temporary-love contract between a “wartime couple” contradicts Neustaedter’s family connection theory: there are family connections between a “wartime couple,” yet they purposely agree that they are not a family. Certainly, family connection is at the core of a family. However, for immigrants whose parents or children remain in their country of origin, family duty, such as taking care of the old parents and bringing up the young, is also very important. Without their left-at-home spouses’ help, it is not possible for them to migrate to the new country in the first place.

In traditional families, family duty and family connection are entangled with each other: one's family connection to one's spouse makes that person willing to take care of the in-laws (family duty); the family duty one undertakes also helps to maintain the family connection. By contrast, in Lina and Panbin's case, family connection and family duty are split. Lina and Panbin live together like husband and wife. There is family connection between them, which drives them to communicate and share lives and routines with each other. However, there is no family duty between them. They each share family duties with their own left-at-China spouses. As a result, we see two types of family formations—the transnational family (the original family) and the temporary family (wartime couple). In the transnational family, family duty can be heavy, but there are decreasing family connections between husband and wife due to the barrier of geographic distance. On the contrary, there is increasingly strong family connection in the temporary family, but almost no family duty. To avoid potential family duty caused by the increasing family connection, the “wartime couple” makes an agreement that “the moment one's spouse [comes]; their partnership [will] end” (176).

Through these two unusual family formations, we can see that the geographic distance between China and the U.S. is far enough to cause problems in their old relationships, yet not far enough to allow them to start a new one. First of all, they will not get rid of the family duties they owe to their original families. Lina will bring her parents humiliation in China if she divorces Zuming, who is a filial son-in-law. Panbin loves Lina more than he loves his own wife, but he is afraid to lose his son if he were to divorce. Furthermore, communication technologies may exacerbate the disastrous effects of a new relationship, since anyone who knows them can inform the left-at-home spouses about their unfaithful behavior through a transnational phone

call. Hence, the geographic distance is not far enough for a married immigrant to start a new relationship, because the communication technologies have shortened the geographic distance to such an extent that it leaves no space for privacy.

The geographic distance is too far for them to find support from China but not far enough for married immigrants to abandon their responsibilities in China. Thus, Lina and Panbin have to maintain simultaneously two split families, i.e. the transnational family in China out of family duty and the temporary family in the U.S. for intimacy. However, the two split families do not make a whole one. In addition, Jin represents the immigrants' desperation by depicting how a split family cannot be converted to a whole family. In Lina's case, geographic distance has brought damage to the intimacy between her and Zuming. However, her long-distance relationship with her husband Zuming cannot go back to normal immediately, even when the geographic distance disappears, because the intimacy and trust have already been broken. Lina doesn't want to abandon her old relationship with Zuming. She moves out from Panbin's house and rents an apartment by herself before her husband Zuming comes to America. She wants to "become a faithful wife again" (177). However, it is easy for a contract or agreement to have an abrupt end, but not for feelings. She cannot help comparing Zuming to Panbin, and her preference for Panbin is apparent. Zuming somehow knows about her affair with Panbin and blackmails her for all her savings, so he can pay the tuition for his MBA classes. Later, Zuming moves to New Orleans for study and implicitly ends his relationship with Lina. Similarly, Panbin's wife also learns of his affair and asks for a divorce. Thus, the transnational family cannot go back to normal (a whole family) because the damage caused by the long distance

cannot be reversed. On the other hand, it is not possible for the temporary family to be converted to a whole family.

Lina wants to make up with Panbin after they both lose their original families. However, Panbin has changed his mind—he is now dating a Ukrainian woman, so as to get rid of the past.

[Panbin explains,] “From now on I won’t date a Chinese woman again. Just sick of it—every Chinese has so much baggage of the past, too heavy for me to share and carry. I want to live freely and fearlessly with nothing to do with the past.”

“Without the past [asks Lina,] how can we make sense of now?”

“I’ve come to believe that one has to get rid of the past to survive. Dump your past and don’t even think about it, as if it never existed...That’s the reason I’ve been dating a Ukrainian woman...”

“...Doesn’t she have siblings?”

“She has a younger brother, she told me.”

“Doesn’t she have parents?”

“She does, and grandparents.”

“see, are those not a kind of baggage? The same sort of past as we have?”

(193)

The duty and the burden of the past are so heavy that Panbin gives up the idea of dating Chinese women. Lina points out that the burden of the past is not a unique thing in China: it is not a result of cultural difference, but a result of immigrants’ eternal emotional ties to those—usually

parents or children—left in their country of origin. The immigrants will forever bear the burden of the past unless they can bring their loved ones with them to the new country, which is of course not practical. By depicting these two split families, Jin reveals the dilemma faced by first-generation immigrants who can neither fully possess nor fully abandon their past.

SURROGATE MOTHERHOOD

Whereas the long distance between China and U.S. brings troubles to the long-distance couples, it seems to bring hope to others: those who live in the U.S. but have a surrogate mother in China to bear them a child, or those who live in China, but yearn to migrate to the U.S., where they hope to start a queer family. In “Prison,” Yiyun Li tells a story of the reconstruction of a nuclear family and explores how the geographic distance may benefit a Chinese emigrant family.

Four years prior to the start of the story, Yilan and her husband Luo gave up their prestigious careers in China and migrated to the U.S. so that their only daughter Jade could get a better education. Unfortunately, Jade has died in a car accident in America. In the U.S., Yilan and Luo are nobodies; their daughter’s death makes their sacrifice, migration, and lives meaningless. The unbearable grief almost kills the immigrant couple, until the idea of having another child comes to their mind. They need a baby to reconstruct their family; unconsciously, they are using the baby to make their migration meaningful again and to reconstruct themselves as well: “there’s nothing else to live for but a child” (115). At forty-seven, Yilan cannot give birth to another kid herself. She thinks about adopting a baby girl from China or letting Luo marry a younger wife. However, her husband Luo insists on a baby of their own and suggests finding a surrogate mother in China for their fertilized egg.

The fact that they choose China as the promised land has nothing to do with culture or nostalgia; it is purely a commercial endeavor based on convenience and economy. According to the text, the practice of surrogacy “[has] been banned [in China] since 2001” and might cause “potential legal problems” in America (104). They choose China mainly because they have enough money to execute the practice there: “[their] income, forty thousand dollars a year, while insufficient for carrying out the plan in America, [is] rich for the standard in China” (104). Indeed, the twenty thousand yuan (about 3,000 dollars) they offer for the surrogacy is an astronomical number to people in the rural mountain town of southwest China; eligible women even have to bribe the matchmaker to get a chance for the interview. As a woman and a mother, Yilan doubts the morality of engaging a surrogate mother. Yilan’s aunt, the local resident who helps her to find a surrogate mother, persuades her to give up this moral burden, saying, “[The woman] that gets picked must have done a thousand good deeds in her last life to deserve such good fortune” (108). The surrogacy is construed as an opportunity rather than an exploitation, since destitution has made local people privilege money over almost everything. Yilan’s husband Luo also keeps telling her that this is a commercial business based on the mutual consent of two parties. “[W]e’re buying a service,” he says. “[I]t’s not up to us to worry about it if someone is willing” (107). This commercial logic appeases the buyers’ guilt. Finally, as if picking a commodity, Yilan chooses Fusang, who is twenty-two years old and has had a child before, to gestate her fertilized egg. Yilan will live with Fusang in China as a supervisor and a caretaker until she gets the product. Luo will go back to America to earn enough money to sustain the procedure. Here, besides the long-distance relationship in an international family, Li represents a new family formation: a reconstructing family with a surrogate mother.

The surrogate mother destabilizes our understanding of motherhood and family. On one hand, the surrogate mother is at the core of the family—she physically owns the baby, which is the sole hope for the family’s reconstruction. On the other hand, a surrogate mother must be excluded from the family, as she is not a family member. She functions as a mother who has strong connection with the family through the baby she nurtures inside her body; yet, she is also estranged from the family, because she is merely a service provider according to the contract. The duality and ambiguity of surrogate motherhood—a mother and a stranger, a family member and a service provider simultaneously—is subversive to the family reconstruction. To manage this subversive ambiguity, the biological parents try to use a contract to emphasize the commercial part and cut off any potential family connection between the surrogate mother and the new family. The contract says it clearly: they will take the baby to America and give Fusang money for her labor. A commercial contract can be clear, yet the emotional connection is not under control. Yilan and Luo have anticipated the potential emotional connection between the surrogate mother and the baby she nurtures. They choose a surrogate mother far from America. They hope the geographic distance between China and America can function as a barrier that protects the baby from the surrogate mother’s emotional connection. However, the intervention between commercial contract and emotional connection is too complicated to predict or prevent, as we can see in how Yilan and Fusang change their attitudes toward each other.

At first, Yilan treats Fusang only as a biological incubator. As if buying a service, Yilan picks Fusang because she makes an ideal carrier for her fertilized egg (which later turns out to be a twins): young, healthy, and energetic. Later, Yilan only worries about the babies’ nutritional condition when Fusang suffers from vomiting during the pregnancy. She also fills

Fusang's life with tasks: watching famous paintings, listening to classic music, and reading poems, so the babies inside her body will get a good fetal education. All Yilan does is for the babies' sakes; she never considers Fusang's point of view. However, as they live together for a longer time, Yilan starts to understand Fusang better and treats her more like a friend instead of a biological incubator, especially after she learns about Fusang's previous life. Fusang was adopted by a beggar couple at the age of eight. After the beggar couple died, Fusang went to a mountain village with a man who promised to find her a job. The man turned out to be a human trafficker and sold her to her dimwit husband. Fusang once had a child, but she gave the child to a trader to offer her son a better life, because she thought "people who wanted to buy a boy from a trader would treat him as their own son" (127). Now she plans to use the money she will get from the surrogacy to start a new life, getting rid of her husband. Being a woman and a mother, Yilan becomes sympathetic to Fusang, who is almost the same age as her late daughter. Her emotional connection with Fusang makes her care about Fusang's situation for Fusang's own sake: in her imagination, she makes a match between Fusang and a widowed friend in America, although she knows it would contradict their original intention of separating the surrogate mother from the babies by vast geographic distance. Later, she even imagines pairing Fusang with her own husband Luo, since Fusang, who is "young, beautiful, and pregnant with Luo's children," is the best choice to replace herself as a wife (123). Put in another way, Yilan treats Fusang more like a family member, sometimes a substitute for her lost daughter, sometimes even a substitute of herself. Thus, the commercial connection and emotional connection blend with each other. Most importantly, Yilan's emotional connection to

Fusang—her fantasy of pairing her with a friend or with her husband—may destroy the new family she and her husband intended to reconstruct.

As for Fusang, she first just wants the money to start a new life. However, her love for the twins grows during her pregnancy. Initially, she has only a physical connection to the twins, yet later she starts to care about the twins sincerely. She likes spicy food, but she restricts herself to bland food because she does not want “the twins to get too hot” (121). Her emotional connection to the babies makes her more like a real mother. The connection between Fusang and the twins does not hurt the contract, because she is willing to give the babies to Yilan since she knows the babies will live a better life in Yilan’s family. In other words, she will give the twins to Yilan for the twins’ better life rather than out of commercial duty. Here, her commercial duty and the emotional connection also blend with each other. The increasing family connection among Yilan, Fusang, and the twins makes them like a family. However, this kind of family connection contradicts the original aim of the family reconstruction. Furthermore, the family connection among them is fragile because it still contains commercial elements: the family connection can cover up the commercial connection; yet, it is not able to eliminate it. The commercial connection still has the potential to overturn the family connection and turn the seeming family members into enemies, as we can see when Fusang finds out that her own son in fact does not live a better life.

Fusang sees a child beggar, whom she insists is the son she had given away, and has physical conflicts with the middle-aged beggar, who claims to be the father of the child beggar. During the conflict, the man almost hurts Fusang. In Yilan’s view, the man almost hurts her twins. At that moment, Yilan once again sees Fusang as a biological bearer rather than a person

who has her own free will. At such critical moments, her family connection to Fusang is replaced by the commercial connection. Similarly, in order to rescue her son, Fusang asks Yilan to give her half of the money for surrogacy, so she can buy her son back: “[I]f [the man] only bought the boy from a trader," she reasons, "he'll sell the boy" (128). When Fusang interprets Yilan's hesitation as a rejection, she threatens to hurt the twins and destroy Yilan's hope of reconstructing her family: “I can jump and jump and jump and make them fall out of my body now” (130). Here, Fusang also sees the twins she carries as commercial products rather than human beings. The family connection between Yilan and Fusang, and that between Fusang and the babies break down, as both Yilan and Fusang find their real family connection: Yilan with her twins and Fusang with her own son.

One's real family connection matters because it reflects the way in which one constructs one's identity. It is a better education for the next generation that lures Yilan and Luo to migrate to America. They will offer the twins a better education in America. The twins are substitutes for their lost daughter. Yilan and Luo need the twins to reconstruct their family. Most importantly, they need the twins to make their migration meaningful, further to reconstruct their immigrant identity. Similarly, Fusang's buying her son back from the beggar is also to reconstruct her self-image as a good mother. When she gave him up to a trader earlier, she had expected her son to live a better life as a result of her sacrifice. However, when she finds out that her son was sold to a beggar and lives as bitter a life as she does, she needs to buy him back to reconstruct her identity as a good mother. Ironically, neither Yilan nor Fusang is able to realize the reconstruction of their ideal identities. During the surrogacy, the twins that Yilan needs are biologically Yilan's yet physically Fusang's. The money that Fusang needs belongs

to Yilan at the present yet might belong to Fusang in the future. Put in another way, Yilan has the money Fusang needs to reconstruct her family and a good-mother identity; Fusang has the fertility that Yilan needs to reconstruct her family and an immigrant identity. They each own the most precious thing for the other in the world, which turns out to be nonessential to themselves. Finally, Yilan and Fusang become each other's prisoners because "the world of trust and love they [have] built together [is] crushed," and they are back to merely a commercial connection again (130). The story ends here, and we do not know whether Yilan and Fusang finally get what they are eager for.

By depicting a Chinese surrogate mother, Li explores the role China plays in the reconstruction of an American family. To Yilan and her husband, China is the place where they expect to reconstruct their nuclear family for both economic (surrogacy is much cheaper in China) and geographic reasons (the long-distance between China and the U.S. may cut off any potential connection between the surrogate mother and the new family). In the era of globalization, Yilan and her husband can migrate easily from one country to another. In fact, migration is a convenient way for them to find the best resource: they migrate to the U.S. for a better educational opportunity and then migrate to China for cheaper surrogate service. Thus, Yilan's family is like a transnational factory, moving around the world to maximize its profit.

A QUEER FAMILY IMAGINATION

In "The Princess of Nebraska," Yiyun Li tells a story exploring the role the U.S. plays in the construction of a Chinese queer family. Unlike the typical immigrant narrative that depicts the U.S. primarily as a land for economic gains, this story presents the U.S. as a refuge for

homosexuals. Li's story depicts a romantic triangle between Sasha, a Chinese graduate student living in Nebraska; Boshen, a gay Chinese activist in Chicago, and Yang, a former Peking Opera star in Beijing. Yang is a Nan Dan (a male actor who plays female roles in Peking Opera) in Beijing but was expelled from the opera school after being seen with his male lover. Later, Yang falls into prostitution and refuses to establish any stable relationship; rumors are that "[he is] interested only in selling [himself] after his first lover abandoned him" (72). He almost becomes a nihilist and cares about nothing except Peking Opera. However, both Boshen and Sasha fell in love with Yang when they were in Beijing.

Boshen lived an openly gay life in Beijing and worked as an activist for gay rights and AIDS awareness. He first met Yang as his customer and later successfully persuaded Yang to live with him by promising that "Someday, I'll make you go back on the stage" (73). Yang loved opera more than Boshen. He started to query Boshen's promise and "show signs of restlessness" after living with Boshen for two months (74). He also went out more often to parties where he met Sasha. It is not clear whether Yang's relationship with Sasha is out of love or merely a form of revenge against Boshen. Shortly, Boshen was put under home arrest in his hometown for "his correspondence with a Western reporter regarding a potential AIDS epidemic in a central province" (69) In order to escape persecution from the Chinese government, Boshen went to America via a false marriage.

After Boshen left for America, Yang often went out with Sasha. Sasha had heard about Yang's story before; her friendship to him was "a convenience for the empty days immediately before graduating from college" (81). However, she underestimated Yang's charm. She fell in love with Yang and became pregnant with his baby. Here, Yang's sexual orientation is

questionable. All the information we can get about Yang is from two unreliable narrators Boshen's and Sasha's flashbacks. In Boshen's narrative, Yang is gay. Boshen doesn't understand why Yang goes out with a girl and is more confused about Sasha's pregnancy. In Sasha's narrative, Yang is bisexual; and it is Yang who brings up the idea of spending a night together a few days before Sasha's flight to America. According to Sasha, Yang even refuses to use a rubber because "a rubber [is] for people who [touch] without loving each other" (88). Both Boshen and Sasha may lie about Yang's sexual orientation in their narrative in order to fulfill their own imagination for the future. Boshen needs to make a difference in a homosexual's (Yang) life to fulfill his identity as a gay activist. Sasha, who is a straight woman, needs Yang to be bisexual, so she can start a heterosexual family in America.

Now, both Boshen and Sasha live in the U.S., while Yang still lives in China. Sasha is going to have an abortion. Boshen tries to persuade Sasha to keep the baby and marry Yang in order to bring him out of China to America. To him, America is the only place where Yang can be protected and saved, given the more progressive environment for homosexuality. He does not know that Sasha has already tried to lure Yang to the U.S. but failed. Sasha is a straight woman who considers homosexuality to be a deviation that can be "corrected." After falling in love with Yang, she tries to persuade him to come with her to America several times. To Sasha, Yang was born in the "wrong place," and migrating to a right place can solve all his problems (85). In her mind, China is the "wrong place" where the Peking Opera and people who love Peking Opera have "distorted" Yang's sexual orientation: "why was there Nan Dan in the Peking Opera in the first place? Men loved him because he was playing a woman; women loved him because he was a man playing" (89). As a Nan Dan, Yang is trained to play

princesses and prostitutes on the stage. Sasha believes that Yang's performance on the stage has corrupted him and made him "live with the painted mask and the silk costume" in his real life (86). America will be the "right place" where Yang can give up Peking Opera and Sasha can "correct" Yang's sexual orientation, as she says to Yang after they watch the American movie *Pretty Women*: "America is a good place. Everything could happen there. A prostitute becomes a princess; a crow turns into a swan overnight" (81). Put in another way, Sasha's American dream is to "cure" Yang's "stubbornness" by taking him to America where everything could happen. She believes that in the good place Yang can live a brand-new life and get rid of his corrupt life in the wrong place—China.

However, Sasha's plan for Yang is not without selfishness. Sasha was born in a small town in the Inner Mongolia, which is also "a wrong place" (90). During the Cultural Revolution, Sasha's mother, a high school student from Beijing, went to Inner Mongolia for labor reeducation and married a Mongolian herdsman. She has lived a miserable life since then. Sasha is the one that trapped her mother in the wrong place because the law at that time required that "the mother had to stay where the children belonged" (79). To Sasha, her mother "[was] born into a wrong time, lived all her adult life in a wrong place" (90). Sasha also sees Yang as the one born in a wrong place. To some extent, her plan of bringing Yang to America (the right place), is to appease her guilt for having trapped her mother in the wrong place. However, Yang refuses to migrate to America and insists: "every place is a good place, only time goes wrong." (82). Every time Sasha asks him to migrate to America, Yang answers with questions like "Who am I to follow you?" or "What am I going to do in America?" (85, 88) Sasha's answers are quite disappointing to Yang, who must either give up his gay life or Peking

Opera. Yang accepts neither. Peking Opera for him is not a way to make money but a way to live his life. Like his sexual orientation, without his Opera performance, he is not the self he wants to be. So, he refuses to migrate to the U.S. with Sasha.

Boshen comes to America via a false marriage to a lesbian friend. To him, China is also a wrong place where the conservative people cannot accept homosexuality. America is the right place where Yang could be saved, since people here are more tolerant of homosexuality. Furthermore, he understands how important Peking Opera is to Yang and tries to contact a Nan Dan master in New York who might help Yang to return to the stage. However, he does not have the means to get Yang out.⁵¹ So, he hopes, yet does not have the right to ask Sasha to get Yang out through marriage. He imagines that they three could cohabit and raise the child together. At the end of the story, there is still no sense of whether Yang decides to migrate, yet it seems that Sasha has made up her mind to keep the baby.

Boshen's plan for Yang would be better than Sasha's, since he allows Yang to perform Peking Opera and be the self he wants to be. However, this plan would be unfair to Sasha, who is straight. Sasha could marry Yang and bring him from China, but she has no reason to lock herself into a fake marriage. Furthermore, even if Boshen manages to carry his plan out, Yang's migration may not fulfill his wish, given how Boshen lives his life in America. America does protect Boshen from the persecution of the Chinese government. Unfortunately, this protection can keep him alive, but it can't guarantee the meaning of his life. In China, he worked as a doctor at a private clinic and an activist for gay rights and for AIDs awareness. Although his human rights activities make Boshen the target of pressure, misunderstanding, and danger due

⁵¹ In 2005 when the story was published, only one state (Massachusetts) in the U.S. recognized same-sex marriage.

to China's conservative environment, his life in China was meaningful. In the U.S., Boshen is free in principle to do whatever he wants, yet what he does in practice is to serve as a sous chef at a Sichuan Chinese restaurant. Here, Boshen is not able to change the world either as a doctor or an activist as he did in China. In this sense, America saves his life but deprives his life of meaning. The only chance for him to make his life meaningful is to bring Yang to America—he fails to “[bring] an end to injustice and [build] a more tolerant world” for all the homosexuals in China; at least, he would make a difference in his gay lover, Yang's life. He hopes that “Yang would remain the princess, exiled, yes but a true princess, beautiful in a foreign land” (90). However, this could only happen in Boshen's imagination. I doubt the possibility of Yang's coming back to the opera stage in America. Though America might not bar a gay actor from the stage, yet the viability of a Beijing Opera career in America is dubious. Boshen might end up saving Yang's gay life, but ruining his opera life, by bringing him to America. Thus, his plan of a queer family in America might not be as desirable as he has imagined. To immigrants Sasha and Boshen, the American dream is in fact their own dream that they hope America can help them to realize.

In the era of globalization, it has become convenient to transport people from one place to another. People, especially immigrants, often cherish unrealistic hopes for lives in new destinations, where they hope to make economic gains, reconstruct what they have lost, or gain more freedom. The fact, however, is that migration may not realize what immigrants hoped it would promise to them, at least in Jin's and Li's representations of immigrant families. On the contrary, migration usually causes new problems, since it brings the immigrants the challenge of reconstructing their social connections in a total new place. Jin's and Li's representations of

new family formations explore immigrants' vexed relationships with their new locations. Immigrants are people who want to reconstruct their ideal selves in a new place, to be the ideal selves they cannot be in the old place or culture. However, the construction of a new identity often goes along with unexpected pains of losing old attachment and being faced with new challenges. As Geoffrey Kain points out in his introduction to *Ideas of Home*: "the experience...of leaving home and arriving in a new place...always encourages or demands some degree of self-redefinition...a complex of factors have always had to be resolved...before the new place...may be sincerely embraced as 'home'" (1). In a similar vein, these new formations of families reflect the pains before the birth of the new identities, and the price immigrants have to pay before they can call the new place home. Regardless of whether the wishes that first triggered their migration are fulfilled or not, immigrants have to reconstruct their selves in ways that they may not expect.

It is worth noting that not every immigrant character in Jin's and Li's stories wants to call the new place home. Some immigrants choose to go back, and some others refuse to migrate in the first place. For instance, in Li's "Prison," Yilan initially wants to divorce her husband and goes back to China instead of hiring a surrogate mother to reconstruct the family in America. In Li's "Gold Boy, Emerald Girl," the protagonist Hanfeng also goes back to China after living in America more than twenty years. Moreover, Yang in Li's "Princess of Nebraska," and Panbin's wife in Jin's "Temporary Love" refusing to migrate to America even if they have the chances to. The rise of China and the increasingly strict immigration policies in the U.S. make America lose its charm for pulling emigrants out of China. Besides the immigrants, there are also Chinese sojourns and cosmopolitans, who try to maximize their profit by travelling but refuse

to stick to a particular place. Like an actuary, Chinese emigrants calculate the pains and the gains of migration before they make the decision. In this vein, the “split-household” in Jin’s and Li’s works also reveals that in the era of globalization, members from the same family may hold opposite opinions on migration: whereas some prefer to enjoy the benefit of migration, others may prefer to stay in the place where they feel most comfortable.

Chapter 4 Language and Identity: A reading of Ha Jin's "An English Professor" and David Henry Hwang's *Chinglish*

Section 1 Language and Identity Issues in Asian American Literature

One of the issues immigrants face in the new country is that of language. The dilemma of individuals being plagued by identity issues is also a common theme in Asian American literature. In this chapter, I try to explore identity through an analysis of language representations in Chinese American writings. By drawing a comparison between first-generation immigrant writer Ha Jin's short story, "An English Professor" and a second-generation writer David Henry Hwang's play *Chinglish*, I'd like to examine the two authors' different understanding of the purity of language and its relationship to identity. In my viewpoint, Hwang holds a resigned recognition of the hybrid language "Chinglish" and prefers to guard the purity of English, while Jin appears more sympathetic to Rusheng's struggle and tries to challenge the boundary of a particular language. As a Chinese American writer, Hwang is writing on the margin. As a Chinese immigrant writer, Jin is writing on the margin of the margin. I argue that Ha Jin's "An English Professor" complicates our understanding of language and identity by providing a perspective different from that of second-generation writers.⁵² In Jin's short story, the tension between the purity of language and the hybridity of identity elicits rethinking about the boundary of a particular language from its readers.

⁵² In this thesis, "second generation" means all offspring of immigrants and the generations that follow.

According to Saussure, language is an arbitrary system of signs which is used by speakers of a specific culture to construct meaning. Catherine Belsey also notes in *Critical Practice* that “language is a system which pre-exists the individual and in which the individual produces meaning” (Belsey 44). Both Saussure and Belsey indicate that language is a set of established codes of a particular culture for a particular community. People in the same community learn and internalize its established codes so that they can exchange and interpret ideas with others through language communication. Thus, language plays a significant role in the construction of identity, as Belsey says: “language in an important sense speaks us” (Belsey 44).

Language and identity issues are common topics in Asian American literature. First, the corpus of Asian American literature is English dominated. In 1974, the first influential Asian American anthology, *Aiiieeeee!* identified the theme of Asian American literature as “claiming Americanness.” By distinguishing between a legitimate U.S.-born Asian American subject and a foreign-born immigrant Asian subjectivity, it “valorized a cultural nationalism and argued for separatist politics,” as Shirley Lim has argued (Lim 6). As a result, the prevailing representation of language and identity in second-generation writings is that speaking standard English equates with authentic Asian American identity. For instance, the “FOBs” (fresh off the boat)—new Asian immigrants who speak English with heavy accents become a foil for the real Asian Americans. Also, in Maxine Kingston’s *Woman Warrior*, a canonical text of Asian American literature, the young Maxine has a tough time at school due to her inability to speak English, which later leads her to conclude that “talking and not talking made the difference between sanity and insanity. Insane people were the ones who couldn’t explain” (186). Here, the ability to speak English is regarded as a sign of sanity and normalcy. In other words, the

literary representation of language and identity issues usually sees competence in English as an indispensable aspect of Asian American identity.

Section 2 *Chinglish*: The Authority of Language and the Dilemma of Translation

Recently, within the context of globalization, second-generation writers have started to pay attention to issues of bilingualism and transnationalism, transforming our old understanding of language and identity. For example, David Henry Hwang's play *Chinglish* is about the issue of translation and the hybridity of language. *Chinglish* has been regarded as a major shift in the direction of Hwang's writing, since he "pursued an international perspective on the ways of the world" (Boles 113). Esther Kim Lee also sees *Chinglish* as the turning point where Hwang "became interested in international issues beyond American identity politics" (Lee 116). Indeed, its bilingual script (English, Chinese and pinyin), bilingual characters like Peter and Xi, and its theme of translation and cultural difference make *Chinglish* quite a different text from Hwang's previous plays. Despite those obvious international traits, I argue that *Chinglish* is not a real transnational text due to its conventional approach to the issues of language and identity.

THE PURITY OF LANGUAGE AND THE LINGUISTIC HIERARCHY

The play *Chinglish* was inspired by Hwang's increasing awareness of the phenomenon of "Chinglish," Chinese people speaking and using English in an awkward and ridiculous way during his numerous visits to China.⁵³ In the very first scene, several examples of Chinglish style mistranslations are presented to the audience through Daniel, a white American. Here,

⁵³ For instance, the Chinglish version of "Handicapped Restrooms" is "Deformed Man's Toilet".

Chinglish is both laughable and profitable. Firstly, Chinglish functions as a laughable foil to the authority of the authentic, standard American English. Secondly, the ridiculousness of Chinglish makes standard American English a profitable tool, with which the American businessman can earn money through correcting the funny Chinglish.

To some extent, the phenomena of Chinglish can be regarded as an international version of mimicry. Homi K. Bhabha talks about mimicry in the postcolonial discourse, and it refers to the cultural ambivalence with which the colonized people often end up mimicking their colonizers. In fact, Chinglish is Chinese people's mimicry of English during the country's modernization. To Bhabha, mimicry is unintentionally subversive:

The menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority...A desire, through the repetition of partial presence, which is the basis of mimicry, articulates those disturbances of cultural, racial, and historical difference that menace the narcissistic demand of colonial authority. (88)

When the colonizers gaze in the mirror of the colonized's mimicry, the repetition and the difference in the mimicry can threaten their sense of their own power and superiority. In order to guard their superiority and authority, the colonizers have to emphasize the difference between mimicry and their authenticity. By distinguishing the awkward Chinglish from the standard English, it protects the purity of English, and at the same time defends the authority of English. In the same vein, all the ridiculousness and the awkwardness of Chinglish are derived

from that difference, which further sets the foundation for a linguistic hierarchy that Chinglish is shameful, and only standard English is respectful.

Furthermore, the linguistic hierarchy here then extends to the hierarchy of people's identity. The three Chinese translators Qian, Bing, and Zhao's are typical examples of people who speak Chinglish. They are like clowns in the play. By contrast, Daniel, a white male who comes from the mid-west U.S., represents the authority of English language, and makes a profit by correcting "Chinglish." Daniel is fully aware of the authority and profit his white American identity brings to him. We can see this in his instruction on doing business in China: "The first rule of doing business in China is also the last. Assuming you are an American. Because, if you are American, it is also safe to assume that you do not speak a single fucking foreign language" (8). At first glance, Daniel's words are funny and backward, and he fits in well with the common stereotype of Americans from the Midwest who are parochial and monolingual. However, Daniel is a cosmopolitan, a successful transnational businessman. His words are not meant to be funny. On the contrary, it is this principle that makes him rich and successful. Here, holding onto American identity is the first rule of doing business in China. The purity of language and the authority of identity blends with each other: one is the authority because one speaks standard English, or pure English compared to the pidgin Chinglish. Not speaking any foreign languages is also important because otherwise it can risk one's authority by putting one in the same situation where Chinese people are with their awkward Chinglish. Thus, to protect the authority of one's identity and to avoid becoming a laughingstock, one must protect the purity and the uniqueness of one's language, which means laughing at pidgin, but never trying to speak a foreign language. Indeed, one can efficiently guard the authority of one's identity by

protecting the purity of one's language. But, this is not without question in the globalization era.

THE DILEMMA OF TRANSLATION

Language is experienced as natural and given, while in fact it functions through division and difference, as Saussure notes: "signs function, then, not through their intrinsic value but through their relative position" (118). In a particular language, the relative positions among words have long been established, and then learned and memorized by its native speakers. So, it is very easy for native speakers to perceive any mistake that breaks the relative position. That's why Chinglish is laughable and awkward to Daniel. However, even native speakers may face problems when it comes to translation, since it involves at least two languages. Each language has its own particular relative position system, which makes word-to-word translation both impossible and ridiculous. For instance, despite the authority of his English, Daniel also faces problems: he finds English inadequate for the translation of certain Chinese words like "guan xi" and "qing yi." This realization indicates that one language is not enough in the transnational era (we can also take into consideration the fact that *Chinglish* includes three different languages: English, traditional Chinese, and pinyin). Here we see the dilemma: how can we stick to the purity of the language when a single language is obviously not adequate for translating another language?

Daniel's attitude, which I also assume is close to Hwang's attitude, to this dilemma is revealed to us in the last scene of the play: "It's our job to make sure our translations are correct. Maybe one day, all the signs will be fixed. But the funny thing is, I've sorta come to love the

mistakes. There, in black and white, you can see that we really don't understand each other too well. So, for the foreseeable future, we'll all have to keep struggling—with Chinglish” (123). Daniel avoids facing the inadequacy of English by focusing on the signage translation which is less challenging than translating word like “qing yi.” It is reasonable that he has “come to love the mistakes,” since it is these Chinglish mistakes that make his lucrative business possible. By emphasizing the cultural difference, he is deeply pessimistic about the possibility of a good understanding among people from different languages and cultures. However, what Hwang fails to notice is that the English language can expand its vocabulary by including “qing yi” as a new word and thus make communication easier.

In conclusion, although Hwang tries to include international elements in his play, he still holds a resigned recognition of Chinglish and protects the purity of English even when faced with the fact that one pure language is not enough within the context of globalization.

Section 3 An English Professor: Question the Purity of Language

By contrast, Ha Jin's “An English Professor” also involves the topic of language and authority, but it tells a different story and questions the purity of language. Rusheng Tang, the protagonist of Ha Jin's short story “An English professor,” is an assistant professor who has just submitted his application for tenure. The narrator doesn't tell the reader about Rusheng's identity directly, but we can speculate that Rusheng is a Chinese immigrant from the details that he has a degree from Beijing University and speaks English with a heavy accent.⁵⁴ Rusheng's story is a

⁵⁴ Ha Jin has translated the whole collection *A Good Fall*, including “An English Professor”, to Chinese singlehandedly. In the Chinese version, Rusheng is translated to “陆生” which literally means “born in the mainland”.

mixture of the 19th century Russian writer Anton Chekhov's "The Death of a Government Clerk" and the 18th century Chinese writer Wu Jingzi's "Fan Jin Passes the Juren Examination," which is an excerpt from a famous satirical novel *Rulin Waishi* (*External History of Confucian School*), known in English as *The Scholars*.

Like Ivan Chervyakov in "The Death of a Government Clerk," Rusheng Tang also makes a small mistake. It is worth noting that the small mistake that brings endless psychic torture to Rusheng is in fact a misuse of an English word: Rusheng uses a non-existing word "respectly" instead of the correct "respectfully" in his application materials. Rusheng's nervousness over the error nearly causes his death, since he is afraid that his mistake will be regarded as evidence of his lack of English proficiency, affirming that he, as a Chinese immigrant, could never be an English professor. Following our topic of language and identity, we can say that Rusheng's misuse of language (English) causes him an identity crisis (English professor).

Unlike Ivan Chervyakov, Rusheng finally gets the tenured position rather than dying from stress and horror. Here, the promotion to the tenured position can be seen as a sign that Rusheng has successfully gotten through his identity crisis. However, the long wished-for tenure position is no better than death, since the ending of the story implies that Rusheng might become a lunatic from the rapture of hearing the good news, just as Fan Jin does when he passes the Juren examination. Thus, Rusheng can be regarded as a modern version of Wu Jingzi's ridiculous but pathetic character Fan Jin. Now, the question remains: does Rusheng really get through his identity crisis or does he actually become a victim of society. In one word, by mixing these two stories, "An English Professor" becomes a hybrid and ambiguous text that makes multiple readings possible.

READ IT AS A COMEDY

If we see Rusheng as Ivan Chervyakov, the short story becomes a comedy: the protagonist is a paranoid tortured by his over-sensitiveness but realizes his American dream in the end.

In this vein, it is Rusheng's ridiculous personality that should be blamed since all his anxiety and uncertainty come from his sensitivity. For instance, he doesn't dare to tell Nikki about his mistake, even though Nikki had stuck up for him at his fourth-year review and later advocated for his promotion to a tenured position. Instead of seeing Nikki as his most trustworthy colleague and asking for help, Rusheng believes that telling Nikki the truth "would amount to advertising his stupidity and ineptitude" (14). One may argue that Rusheng doesn't tell Nikki about his mistake because he doesn't want to lose face in front of her, which is an issue of dignity and masculinity rather than an issue of paranoid personality. However, Rusheng's overreaction and his interpretation of chairman Peter Johnson's behavior reveals that he is as paranoid as Ivan Chervyakov. Rusheng comes to the office very early in the following morning, hoping that he can take his application material back and correct the mistake before anyone sees it. But he arrives late and the secretary has already made copies of his material for the senior faculty. At this point Rusheng encounters Peter Johnson, the chairman:

[Johnson] was a Victorianist...He greeted Rusheng and winked quizzically, but before the junior professor could say anything, the Chairman was already out the door with a thick anthology tucked under his arm. Apparently, he was

heading for a class, yet his odd manner unnerved Rusheng... Rusheng's stomach fluttered. Why wouldn't Johnson speak to him? The Chairman must have noticed his use of "respectly"! (143)

This is a seemingly neutral third-person narrative that is in fact tinged by Rusheng's anxieties and worries. Johnson greeted Rusheng but "winked quizzically." The greeting might be neutral, and chances are that the quizzical wink is simply Rusheng's over-interpretation. Also, in Rusheng's viewpoint, the thick anthology must be his application material. However, it may just be the material for his class. Rusheng then sees Johnson's not speaking to him as an indication that Johnson has already noticed his mistake, and he almost dies from stress and horror. However, it later turns out that Johnson is in fact supportive of Rusheng's promotion. Thus, Rusheng's interpretation of Johnson's behavior is totally wrong, and all his worries and anxieties are pointless. Rusheng finally gets tenured. On one hand, his tenured position reflects the ridiculousness of Rusheng's over-sensitiveness. On the other hand, it may also cure his insecurity once for all, as Rusheng claims "I'm tenured. Wow, I don't have to worry about being fired anymore I'm a real professor now! This can happen only in America!" (153). A tenured position also means he gets through his identity crisis by earning recognition from authority.

However, a tenured position can't guarantee a happy ending, as Rusheng goes hysterical from rapture upon hearing the good news. Ha Jin offers his readers an open ending:

“What should I do if he goes hysterical again? Take him to the hospital?”

She asked Molin.

“Wait and see. He may become himself again tomorrow.”

“I hope so,” she sighed. (154)

We don't know if Rusheng returns to normal. If he does, Rusheng will be a lucky version of Ivan Chervyakov. If he doesn't, he becomes the modern version of Fan Jin.

READ IT AS A TRAGEDY

If we see Rusheng as Fan Jin, the same story becomes a tragedy: Rusheng becomes a lunatic and a victim of society. In this vein, the process of getting the tenured position is simultaneously a process where he loses himself—there is not even room for Rusheng's double consciousness. Double Consciousness is a term coined by W. E. B. Du Bois in 1903 publication, “The Souls of Black Folk”: “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (2). It describes the individual sensation of feeling as though your identity is divided into several parts, making it difficult or impossible to have one unified identity. We can see that at the very beginning of the short story, Rusheng has already showed a tendency toward double consciousness—he is used to “looking at one's self through the eyes of others,” but he at least knows his real feeling. As a junior assistant professor, Rusheng is very cautious of students' course evaluations. Although he felt “as frustrated as if he were singing to the deaf,” he “refrained from chucking in front of his class” (139). He looks

at himself from the eyes of his students and is very careful of his behavior. But in his heart, he knows he is just pleasing the students for practical reasons. It's worth noting that this happens before Rusheng realizes his mistake in his application material.

Rusheng's double consciousness begins when he starts self-surveillance. After he realizes his mistake, Rusheng becomes introspective and seriously looks at himself from others' eyes. He remembers that he "had once offended Gary Kalbfelt, the Melville expert in the department, by saying *Moby-Dick* was as clumsy as a deformed whale," because he "didn't know how to praise a book or an author that he didn't like" (141). Here, Rusheng sincerely regrets offending the Melville expert, and sees his own honesty as shameful. He must like *Moby-Dick* because Gary, the expert, loves it. In other words, under Rusheng's self-surveillance, he doesn't have the right to like or dislike a particular thing, since he has to see things from others' perspective. This self-surveillance and his double consciousness originate from his lack of confidence in English, which causes him an identity crisis. Rusheng is a Chinese immigrant who speaks English with a heavy accent, while Gary, the Melville expert, represents the authority of English (as does the Victorianist chairman, Peter Johnson). Thus, Rusheng's self-surveillance is actually a double consciousness, which made him look at himself from the eyes of the authorities of English: "[Rusheng's mistake] was a glaring solecism that indicated his incompetence in English...this was unforgivable, regardless of his sophisticated use of various methodologies to analyze a literary text. People would shake their heads and say that an English professor must at least be able to write decent English" (140). Rusheng actually functions as a guard who defends the purity of English by disdaining people who are incompetent in English, like himself.

To some extent, part of Rusheng has died long before he gets the tenured position, as we can see in his reaction to Alex's words. Alex is a salesman who likes Steinbeck. However, Alex's enthusiasm discomfits Rusheng because he "[knows] that most modernists disliked Steinbeck" (148). Rusheng's uncomfortable feeling means that he not only sees things through other people's (the modernists) eyes but loses his own eyes—he can only feel through others' feeling. Thus, the later moment when Rusheng becomes a lunatic from the rapture of hearing the good news is quite reasonable—he lost his own independent consciousness a long time ago but didn't realize it, since he perceives things through others' consciousness. The tenured position is like an interpellation that wakes him up and shows him the hollowness of his own consciousness. In this vein, Rusheng will never return to normal again.

THE LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY ISSUE

Now, we have two opposite readings of the short story. On one hand, it's a comedy in which an immigrant gets recognition from authorities and realizes his American dream. On the other hand, it is a tragedy in which the immigrant is psychologically torn apart by his double consciousness. In my opinion, the point is not to argue which reading is the correct approach to the story, but to focus on what makes the two opposite readings possible. An obvious answer is the hybridity of the text and the ambiguity of its narrative. Another answer is that the seemingly incompatible readings are actually two sides of the same question: what is the relationship between language and identity? Traditional Asian American literature tells us that the purity of language is equal to the authority of Asian American identity. Immigrants have a hybrid identity, as they speak both their native language and the language of their host country. It

could be read as a comedy because the immigrant professor has been accepted by the authority and becomes an authority of English himself. His over-sensitiveness marks his endeavor to purge the hybridity from himself. To read it as a comedy is to celebrate the rebirth after Nirvana. To read it as a tragedy, on the other hand, is to emphasize the cruelty of the rebirth by focusing on the death of the cursed part of the self. In other words, to get the authority's recognition, the immigrant professor must purge the cursed hybridity from himself.

It is the tension between the rebirth and the Nirvana that makes the reader rethink the issue of language and identity. By exaggerating Rusheng's sensitiveness, double consciousness, and his lack of security, Ha Jin elicits his readers' sympathy for Rusheng. Ha Jin himself also questions the strict boundary of language. He argues in his "In Defense of Foreignness" that "pure English" is inadequate to represent the immigrants' experience⁵⁵. Writers have to include some new expressions to represent the real immigrant life. These new expressions might be awkward and break the purity of English to native speakers, yet they are what immigrant writers contribute to the host language.

As we can see, the similarity between Ha Jin and David Henry Hwang is that they both express their concerns regarding the purity of language. Hwang seems to be resigned to "Chinglish" given the exigencies of communication between Chinese and a monolingual western man in the context of economic globalization. However, Ha Jin appears more sympathetic to Rusheng's struggle. It is not wrong for Hwang or anyone else to guard the purity of language. Ha Jin's story draws people's attention to the immigrants' struggle, to make them rethink what they usually take for granted. This is not to say that Ha Jin's representation is

⁵⁵ Compared to the original version of *The Writer As Migrant*, there is an additional chapter "In Defense of Foreignness" in the Chinese version. I couldn't find the English version, so I just summarize his arguments.

better than Hwang, or vice versa. Each of them tells part of the story from their own standpoint.

We can have the whole story only by reading both their writings. I suggest that we think of immigrant writer Ha Jin's writing as complementary to David Henry Hwang, his non-immigrant counterpart.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

In this thesis, I talk about how first-generation immigrant writers contribute to Chinese American literature through their unique representations of immigrant life. Due to language barriers and other historical reasons, a majority of representations of immigrant life in Chinese American literature have been written by the descendants of immigrants, second-generation writers. Educated in the U.S., the second-generation writers are usually unfamiliar with Chinese culture; their representations of first-generation immigrant parents' early life usually come from stories, imagination, or childhood memories. Now, in the U.S., there are more first-generation Chinese immigrant writers who write immigrant stories in English. First-generation immigrants are familiar with Chinese culture and their representations of immigrant life usually come from direct experiences. To some extent, immigrant writers' representation of immigrant life is a "self-representation," since they are writing their own stories.

By comparing immigrant writers' works to those from second-generation writers, I argue that Ha Jin and Yiyun Li are immigrant writers who have contributed to Chinese American literature in three aspects: genre, theme, and language. First of all, they have created a "midlife perspective" narrative compared to the prevailing *second-generation perspective* in Chinese American literature and represented a relatively positive image of the new immigrants. Secondly, their representation of the new family formations reveals immigrants' vexed relationships with their new locations. Thirdly, they complicate our understanding of language and identity and challenge the purity of a particular language.

By comparing immigrant writers to second-generation writers, I am not trying to offer a better or a truer representation of immigrant life in Chinese American literature. Instead, I suggest that we think of immigrant writers Jin's and Li's writings as complementary to their non-immigrant contemporaries. In other words, Jin and Li offer a new perspective and help to make the representation of immigrant life a dialogue rather than a monologue. In addition, both immigrant writers and second-generation writers have their advantages and disadvantages. Immigrant writers Jin and Li are more familiar with Chinese culture and immigrant life, yet their representation of race issues and other problems in America is not impressive at all, especially compared to their poignant critique of China. By contrast, the representation of racial struggle is very common in second-generation writers' works. Thus, it is necessary to include both immigrant writers' work and second-generation writer's works when talking about Chinese American literature.

In this thesis, I mainly focus on the difference between second-generation writers and immigrant writers. However, I also want to point out that the difference is now getting smaller within the international context, where both immigrant writers and second-generation writers are turning to an international approach. For instance, the immigrant writer Jin started his career by writing Chinese stories in English, but now he is more interested in writing immigrant stories, which is usually regarded as second-generation writers' field. In a similar vein, Gish Jen, a second-generation writer, in her recent non-fictional works *Tiger Writing: Art, Culture, and the Interdependent Self* (2013) and *The girl at the baggage claim: explaining the East-West culture gap* (2017), turns to cultural examination and explores how Chinese culture distinguishes from and interacts with Western culture. Hence, the subject

matter cannot be used as a touchstone to differentiate between immigrant writers and second-generation writers. Maybe one day in the future, we will talk about personal writing style difference instead of generational difference.

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