



Imagining Home: Literary Fantasy in Contemporary Chinese Diasporic Women's Literature

Fang TANG, B.A., M.A.

A thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

February 2018

Abstract

This thesis explores the use of literary fantasy in the construction of identity and ‘home’ in contemporary diasporic Chinese women’s literature. I argue that the use of fantasy acts as a way of undermining the power of patriarchal values and unsettling fixed notions of home. In each of these four texts by Chinese diasporic women authors, the authors or their protagonists describe different explorations of the search for home: a space where they can articulate their voices and desires. The notion of home for these diasporic Chinese women is much more complex than a simple feeling of nostalgia in response to a state of displacement and unhomeliness. The idea of home relates to complicated struggles to gain a sense of belonging, as experienced by marginalized subjects constructing their diasporic identities — which can best be understood as unstable, shifting, and shaped by historical conditions and power relations.

Fantasy is seen as a literary mode in the corpus of this study, as described in Rosemary Jackson’s *Fantasy: the Literature of Subversion* (1981). Literary fantasy offers a way to rework ancient myths, fairytales, ghost stories and legends; it also subverts conventional narrative representation, and challenges the restricting powers of patriarchy and other dominant ideologies. Through a critical reading of four texts written by diasporic Chinese women, namely, Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* (1976); Adeline Yen Mah’s *Falling Leaves Return to Their Roots: The True Story of an Unwanted Chinese Daughter* (1997); Ying Chen’s *Ingratitude* (1995) and Larissa Lai’s *When Fox is a Thousand* (1995), this thesis aims to offer critical insights into how these works re-imagine a ‘home’ through literary fantasy which leads beyond the nationalist and Orientalist stereotypes; and how essentialist conceptions of diasporic culture are challenged by global geopolitics and cultural interactions.

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have become a reality without the kind guidance, patience and support of my wonderful supervisors, Professor Rosemary Chapman and Dr Hongwei Bao, who not only gave critical comments and inspirational suggestions but also offered me generous help and sincere care throughout my study. Their guidance, enthusiasm and support have been invaluable and are most gratefully acknowledged here.

I would like to express my gratitude to the China Scholarship Council and the School of Cultures, Languages and Areas Studies at the University of Nottingham for funding this PhD project. I am also grateful to the School of CLAS and Asian Institute of the University of Nottingham for offering me additional travel grants to present my research at a conference in the USA. I have benefitted greatly from presenting papers at conferences and receiving inspiring comments. My gratitude is also due to all members of the Department of French and Francophone Studies at the University of Nottingham, whose support has made my diasporic study experience as an international research student wonderful.

I owe many debts to my family for providing various types of support. I would not have had the courage and freedom to come this far without the love and support of my family. I am grateful that my parents have supported me to pursue my dreams in the UK even though I understand how much they missed me over last three years. I am indebted to my brother and sister-in-law, both of whom shoulder the responsibility of looking after the whole family so that I can concentrate on my study. Moreover, it is my family who give me strength and faith during difficult days struggling alone in the

UK. I never feel lonely because I know my family is always there for me. I also appreciate the support of my partner Alex William for his love, encouragement and support.

Last but not least, various friends have made my time at Nottingham enjoyable and memorable. It is impossible to list all their names here. In particular, I would like to thank Nicola Thomas, my best friend, whose kindness, support and trust helped me adapt to the environment quickly at the beginning of my study. I have fond memories of staying with her and her family at Christmas. I am grateful to other friends, including Hongyan Bao, Isha Pearce, Sam La Vedrine, Adam Horsley, Melanie Bhend, Martina Williams, Isabel Story, Benjamin Taylor, and Sam Matuszewski, whose friendship and company have made me feel at home in the UK.

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Introduction

‘Being between worlds’, as defined by Amy Ling, diasporic Chinese women authors are in ‘a state of suspension, accepted by neither side and therefore truly belonging nowhere’.¹ Living in-between, how do these authors deal with this state of unhomeliness and where can they find a ‘home’? This thesis aims to explore ways in which a ‘journey’ home is explored in a selected corpus of works of fiction and non-fiction written by four diasporic Chinese women authors in North America from the 1970s to the 1990s.² This thesis will argue that literary fantasy is used in the corpus as a way to challenge patriarchal values and to unsettle fixed notions of home.

In this study, the term ‘literary fantasy’ is used according to Rosemary Jackson’s definition of fantasy as a literary mode – encompassing both literary styles and narrative strategies – which ‘can be traced back to ancient myths, legends, folklore, carnival art’,³ and it ‘appears to be free from the conventions and restraints of more

¹ Amy Ling, *Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1990), p. 177.

² I have chosen the 1970s as a watershed date for three reasons: first, the 1970s witnessed the beginning of an influx of immigrants from China into the West, which not only led to a flourishing of books published by immigrant authors but also profoundly altered the Chinese overseas community and contributed to an awakening of ethnic consciousness among those Chinese born in the Western countries. Second, before the 1970s, Chinese/Asian diasporic writing was more or less uniform: these works were either a response to racial discrimination or a manifestation of cultural assimilation. Third, the pattern of immigration from China created a huge gender imbalance in the early Chinese immigrant population before the 1970s, meaning that most of the writing by members of the Asian diaspora had been written by male authors primarily reflecting the male experience (prominent examples include Lin Yutang’s *My Country and My People* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1935), Younghill Kang’s *East Goes West* (New York: Kaya, 1937), and Carlos Bulosan’s *America is in the Heart* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1956)). The phenomenon of male-centred Asian American discourse remained true for the next three decades, though with the notable exceptions of Jade Snow Wang, *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (New York: Scholastic Books, 1945); Monica Sone, *Nisei Daughter* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1953); and Hua Chuang, *Crossings* (New York: A New Directions Classic, 1969), etc. For detailed research on the early Chinese diasporic writers, see Elaine H. Kim, *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and their Social Context* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982).

³ Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London and New York: Methuen, 1981), p. 95.

realistic texts'.⁴ Based on this definition, literary fantasy as used in the corpus can be seen as the revisiting of a range of cultural sources, as each text reworks myths, legends, fairy tales, and ghost stories from China. Moreover, literary fantasy in these texts also provides a particular way of telling a story by oscillating between various narrative voices, involving supernatural elements, and breaking the boundaries of time, genre, and location, as well as the line between life and death. The use of literary fantasy involves a constant negotiation between what is commonly accepted as the real and the unreal. The four works that form the corpus of this study are selected on the basis of their varied use of literary fantasy and their diverse approaches to the notion of home. The corpus includes two memoirs: Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*;⁵ Adeline Yen Mah's *Falling Leaves Return to Their Roots: The True Story of an Unwanted Chinese Daughter*;⁶ and two works of fiction - Ying Chen's *Ingratitude*;⁷ and Larissa Lai's *When Fox is a Thousand*.⁸ Autobiographical memoirs and novels alike incorporate literary fantasy into their accounts of Chinese diasporic women's experiences, and highlight socio-political issues through their use of the fantastic mode.

⁴ Jackson, p. 1.

⁵ Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976). (It was first published in Great Britain 1977 by Allen Lane, this thesis uses the Picador edition published in 1981 by Pan Books Ltd, London). All subsequent citations of this work are given parenthetically within the text.

⁶ Adeline Yen Mah, *Falling Leaves Return to Their Roots: The True Story of an Unwanted Chinese Daughter* (London: Broadway Books, 1997).

⁷ Ying Chen, *Ingratitude*, trans. by Carol Volk (Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1998). It was originally published in French as *L'Ingratitude* (Montréal/Arles: Leméac/Actes Sud, 1995). It has since been translated into several languages and quotations from this text in the present study are taken from the 1998 English translation.

⁸ Larissa Lai, *When Fox is a Thousand* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1995). It was firstly published in 1995 and out of print since 2001, the new edition was published by the same press in 2004, featuring a new foreword by the author. This study will use the first edition.

For these diasporic Chinese women living in-between countries and cultures, neither China nor the resident country offers them a fixed and rooted sense of home. As R. Radhakrishnan explains, ‘the home country is not “real” in its own terms and yet it is real enough to impede Americanization, and the “present home” is materially real and yet not real enough to feel authentic’.⁹ The lack of a sense of belonging pushes diasporic subjects into a state of unhomeliness which this often prompts a rethinking of the notion of home. In the corpus of this study, the authors and narrators, as marginalised subjects, explore various understandings of home caught between self-autonomy and parental authority, between individual and family, between the past and the present, between histories and memories, between stories of origins and narratives of diasporic lives. Amidst all these various forces, their search for a home parallels the process of their identity formation. The four literary works reveal similar patterns of the search of home, interwoven with the authors’ or narrators’ exploration of their own subjectivities. In the process, these women deal with the roots/routes dynamic, and challenge conventional understandings of home based on a fixed root and a singular geographical locality. Literary fantasy, with its ‘free-floating and escapist qualities’,¹⁰ opens up possibilities of imagining a ‘home’ for diasporic Chinese women to see the unseen cultures, to make invisible cultures visible, to break the silence for marginalised subjects, and to draw literary and cultural sources in their diasporic imaginations of home. The use of fantasy, therefore, provides them with possibilities to cross temporal and geographical boundaries within a continuing process of displacement.

⁹ R. Radhakrishnan, *Diasporic Mediations: Between Home and Location* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 207.

¹⁰ Jackson, p. 3.

The use of literary fantasy in these texts also raises the question of their works being seen as a symptom of Orientalism, as the rewriting of ancient Chinese myths and legends can function as a strategy of self-exoticisation designed to achieve success in a competitive Western publishing market. This is also a concern for all the authors selected in this study, as, for example, in the case of debates which arose around Kingston's memoir, seen by some critics as creating an Orientalist 'white fantasy'.¹¹ Larissa Lai also explains that one of the most urgent questions for her own writing is 'how to describe oneself not fitting into the commonly advertised norms of Occidental and Oriental "culture"'.¹² This thesis argues that literary fantasy offers each author in my corpus various ways to challenge Orientalist stereotypes and nationalist representations of diasporic cultural identity. All these four authors bring Chinese cultural references into diasporic contexts. They unsettle the Orientalist representation of an ancient China and a modern West. In fact, all these authors use literary fantasy to create what Hyungji Park terms a 'coeval'¹³ space of contestation, a space that contains cultural references from both China and the West without 'relative sequence, order, or priority',¹⁴ so dismantling or at least, disturbing a linear narrative of Chinese history.

This study aims to address questions such as: how can we think about the notion of home for marginalised subjects, such as members of a diaspora, women and queers,

¹¹ Frank Chin, 'The Most Popular Book in China', in *Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior: a Casebook* ed., by Sau-ling Cynthia Wong (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 23-27 (p. 27).

¹² Larissa Lai and Jean Lum, 'Neither Guests nor Strangers', in *Yellow Peril Reconsidered*, ed. by Paul Wong (Vancouver: On Edge, 2000), pp. 20-24 (p. 20).

¹³ Hyungji Park, 'Toward a Definition of Diaspora Literature', in *The Cambridge Companion to Asian American Literature*, ed. by Crystal Parikh and Daniel Y. Kim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 155-66 (p. 157).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

other than following the history of family ancestry and the route of geographical locations? What are the functions of fantasy in the construction of home in diasporic Chinese women's writing? How do these women writers of Chinese descent make use of different features of literary fantasy and explore various writing strategies in order to make their voices heard over restrictive constructions of identity and gender from the position of in-between? To explore these questions, each chapter will focus in detail on one text. This introductory chapter will provide a literary review, a theoretical discussion and an outline of the chapters. It aims to underline the intersection of literary fantasy and home in Chinese diasporic literature, and its significance in relation to discourses of gender, race and sexuality.

1. Literary Context: Scope of Research and Literary Review

This section offers a literary review of the research scope and existing research into the topics explored in this thesis. It will first define the research subject of 'Chinese diasporic women's literature', distinguishing it from other terms such as 'Asian/Chinese American literature'; 'Asian/Chinese literature', and 'immigrant writing' and provide an overall literary review. Then it will discuss such themes as 'home' and 'fantasy'. In so doing I aim to reveal some research that has been underdeveloped and/or neglected in scholarly studies, and highlight how the present thesis makes a contribution to the field of diasporic literature studies.

1.1. Identifying Chinese diasporic women's literature

Although little scholarly attention was paid to Chinese diasporic literature and criticism until the 1960s, the concept of 'diaspora' has been used for centuries. The word 'diaspora', as Avtar Brah explains, derives from the Greek – *dia*, 'through', and *speirein*, 'to scatter' – assuming a notion of an origin whence the dispersion occurs – which historically referred to the 'banishment and dispersion' of the Jewish people from their homeland.¹⁵ In modern society, the first comprehensive explanation of the term was given by William Safran in 1991; he attributes six characteristics to the meaning of 'diaspora'. These include: a geographical displacement from an original place to another; a collective memory or myth about the original homeland; a feeling of alienation in the new country of residence; a strong nostalgic longing for the ancestral homeland; a collective responsibility for the original homeland; and the self-consciousness of defining their ethnicity in terms of the existence of their homeland.¹⁶ Safran's definition emphasises the links of diaspora with homeland and the cohesiveness of ethnic communities. The link with homeland for diasporic subjects is emphasised by many scholars: Khachig Tölölyan, the founder and editor of the journal *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, further explains the way in which a diasporic subject actively maintains links with their cultural heritage rather than geographical communities. He defines 'diaspora' as 'a specific subset of ethnic minorities', which represents a culture and a collective identity that 'preserves elements of the homeland's language, or religious, social and cultural practice, either

¹⁵ Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 181.

¹⁶ William Safran, 'Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return', *Diaspora*, 1.1 (1991), 83-99 (pp. 83-84).

intact or, as time passes, in mixed, bicultural forms'.¹⁷ This state of 'hybridity', Tölölyan emphasises, is a 'reproduction' rather than a simple combination of different cultural elements. Agreeing with John Armstrong's understanding of the term 'mobilised diasporas',¹⁸ Tölölyan stresses that diasporization is an uncertain, indeterminate process. The term 'diaspora' is not a fixed concept or a permanent social formation. Rather, it is 'a process [...] that charts the shifting boundaries of certain communities hierarchically embedded as enclaves with porous boundaries within other, larger communities'.¹⁹ Beside the strong connection between the diasporic communities and the 'homeland' (whether it refers to a geographical one, a symbolic or a cultural one), Roza Tsagarousianou suggests that 'diasporas should be seen not as given communities, a logical, albeit deterritorialized, extension of an ethnic or a national group, but as imagined communities, continuously reconstructed and reinvented'.²⁰

In the discourse of Chinese diasporic studies, many scholars and activists of Chinese heritage started to use the term 'Asian American' referring to themselves in the late 1960s and early 1970s. During a period of political tumult in the United States and abroad, they 'sought to emphasize the idea that Asians in America have been writers who had for a long time been writing their own stories of immigration, struggle,

¹⁷ Khachig Tölölyan, 'The Contemporary Discourse of Diaspora Studies', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 27.3 (2007), 647-55 (p. 649).

¹⁸ John Armstrong, 'Mobilized and Proletarian Diasporas', *American Political Science Review*, 70 (1976), 393-408 (p. 394).

¹⁹ Tölölyan, p. 650.

²⁰ Roza Tsagarousianou, 'Rethinking the Concept of Diaspora: Mobility, Connectivity and Communication in a Globalised World', *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture*, 1.1 (2004), 52-65 (p. 52).

aspirations, love, and dignity'.²¹ Kai-yu Hsu and Helen Palubinskas point out that 'the rebellion against the stereotype is a real and serious undertaking of these Asian-American writers'.²² One of the other pioneers of this term is Frank Chin, who, along with his co-editors, declared in 1974 in the co-edited anthology *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers*, that he would define Asian American as 'Filipino-, Chinese-, and Japanese Americans, American born and raised'.²³ The editors state that this anthology aims to emphasise the literary tradition of Asian Americans, who 'have been writing seriously since the nineteenth century, and writing well'.²⁴ They narrowed down the category of Asian American in 1991 to focus more specifically on Chinese and Japanese American literature which is authentically Asian American, in the revised edition of the anthology with the subtitle *An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature*.²⁵

In his *Imagining the Nation: Asian American Literature and Cultural Consent* (1998), David Leiwei Li regards Asian diasporic literature from the perspective of a national identity. Li traces the emergence of Asian-American literature in the 1970s and argues that: 'the product and productive textual mediation of political, social, and economic relations entails a genealogy of the formations of US citizenship'.²⁶ Despite policies

²¹ Min Hyoung Song, 'Within and beyond the Immigrant Narrative', in *The Cambridge Companion to Asian American Literature*, ed. by Crystal Parikh and Daniel Y. Kim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 3-15 (p. 6).

²² Kai-yu Hsu and Helen Palubinskas, *Asian-American Authors* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1972), p. 5.

²³ Frank Chin, Jeffrey Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada and Shawn Wong, eds, *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* (Washington: Howard University Press, 1974), p. vii.

²⁴ Min Hyoung Song, 'Within and beyond the Immigrant Narrative', in *The Cambridge Companion to Asian American Literature*, ed. by Crystal Parikh and Daniel Y. Kim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 3-15 (p. 6).

²⁵ Frank Chin, Jeffrey Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada and Shawn Wong, eds, *The Big Aiiieeeee, An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Writers* (New York: Meridian Books, 1991).

²⁶ David Leiwei Li, *Imagining the Nation: Asian American Literature and Cultural Consent* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 2.

of exclusion throughout American history, aimed at (among others) Asian immigrants, Li claims that the immigration of Asian Americans into the United States must be regarded as ‘a form of oppositional politics intended to revise the exclusionist US history’.²⁷ Li insists that allowing Asian Americans to become US citizens is highly significant since ‘inhabiting the nation as a space of contradiction, the Asian American constitutes a critique of the national community and proposes an alternative reconstruction’.²⁸ According to Li, the idea of ‘nation’ should be understood as an imagined and reconstituted space which includes Asian Americans. Li further elucidates that this inclusion of Asian Americans into the nation is a strategy of the dominant culture to maintain what Said terms the continuation of ‘positional superiority’.²⁹ Yet Li points out that the potential dangers of classifying Asian Americans within the US nation may cause a basic conflict between ‘the emergent Asian-American discourse of self-delineation and the neo-orientalist discourse that attempts to “derealize” the self through abjection’.³⁰

In her article ‘Immigration and Diaspora’ (1997), Shirley Geok-Lin Lim makes a distinction between reading Asian-American writing as immigrant writing and as diasporic writing. She points out that, considering ‘ideological, political, and institutional consequences’, the term ‘diasporic writing’ is more suitable in addressing Asian-American literary works than is ‘immigrant writing’.³¹ Lim explains that Asian diasporic writing refers to those works produced by ‘members of a diasporic group’

²⁷ Ibid., p. 8.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 12.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 7.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 8.

³¹ Shirley Geok-Lin Lim, ‘Immigration and Diaspora’, in *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature*, ed. by King-Kok Cheung (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 287-311 (p. 291).

such as Chinese, South Asian, or Filipino diasporas, while Asian immigrant writing implies the texts produced by ‘US writers of Asian descent’.³² That is, diasporic writing can be seen as ‘falling outside US canonical work’,³³ and the Asian cultural characters and elements can be equally emphasised. Lim’s article concludes: ‘In an international perspective, paradigms of diaspora will tend to overlap, destabilize, or supersede paradigms of immigration’.³⁴

Lim’s call for an international perspective is taken up regarding Asian-American cultural criticism by Sau-ling Wong in her article ‘Denationalization Reconsidered: Asian American Cultural Criticism at a Theoretical Crossroads’ (1995). Wong points out the significance of the shift in the field of Asian American studies from national to international concerns.³⁵ Wong also explains the risks of uncritically embracing a denationalized and de-territorialized perspective on Asian-American studies. The main dangers, according to Wong, are the ‘unwitting subsumption into master narratives’ and a clear ‘depoliticization occluded by theoretical self-critique’.³⁶ Moreover, Wong distinguishes two different approaches to Asian-American studies between what she calls ‘a diasporic perspective’ and ‘a domestic perspective’.³⁷ According to Wong, ‘a domestic perspective’ emphasises ‘Asian Americans as an ethnic/racial minority within the national boundaries of the United States’ whereas ‘a diasporic perspective’ stresses ‘the status of Asian Americans as one element in the global scattering of

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Sau-ling C. Wong, ‘Denationalization Reconsidered: Asian American Cultural Criticism at a Theoretical Crossroads’, *Amerasia Journal*, 21.1-2 (1995), 1-27 (p. 1).

³⁶ Ibid., p. 12.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 2.

people of Asian origin'.³⁸ Wong argues against the diasporic perspective and claims that 'coalitions of Asian American and other racial/ethnic minorities within the US should take precedence over those formed with Asian Peoples in the diaspora'.³⁹ Thus, she defines the term 'Chinese immigrant literature' as 'all Chinese-language works about American life written by first-generation writers residing permanently in the United States'.⁴⁰ Wong's definitions generated a 'denationalisation debate' in the late 1990s.⁴¹ The shift of Chinese diasporic studies from nationalist discourse to attempts to claim transnational identities, with ensuing denationalisation debates, implies that diaspora is not divorced from the national ideologies and histories of colonialism, nor is it unmarked by the processes of racialisation. In this sense, it is not surprising for Kandice Chuh to refuse the term Asian Americans in her book entitled *Imagine Otherwise: on Asian Americanist Critique* (2003). Chuh argues that Asian American studies is itself 'a subjectless discourse' as any attempt to give it a name is 'a kind of ideological illusion'.⁴²

The most recent research, such as that included in *The Cambridge Companion to Asian American Literature* (2015), extends Asian-American literature from traditional narratives to other categories such as 'immigrant narratives, internment memories or

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 18.

⁴⁰ Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, 'Ethnicizing Gender: An Exploration of Sexuality as Sign in Chinese Immigrant Literature', in *Reading the Literature of Asian America*, ed. by Shirley Geok-lin Lim and Amy Ling (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), pp. 111-29 (p. 126).

⁴¹ Details of these debates can be seen: King-Kok Cheung, 'Re-viewing Asian American Literary Studies', in *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature*, ed. by Cheung (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 1-36; Arif Dirlik, 'Asians on the Rim: Transnational Capital and Local Community in the Marking of Contemporary Asian America', *Amerasia Journal*, 22.3 (1996), 1-24; Susan Koshy, 'The Fiction of Asian American Literature', *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 9.2 (1996), 315-46; Lingyan Yang, 'Theorizing Asian America: On Asian American and Postcolonial Asian Diasporic Women Intellectuals', *Journal of Asian American Studies*, 5.2 (2002), 139-78.

⁴² Kandice Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 1.

diasporic narratives'.⁴³ In 'Toward a Definition of Diaspora Literature', Hyungji Park distinguishes the terms diasporic literature and Asian-American literature. He defines Asian-American literature as an umbrella term for non-diaspora literature as well as diaspora literature, with the former being the majority. He further explains that non-diaspora literature refers to texts that explores the problem of 'Asian American identity, often within but at times against an American assimilationist teleology that assumes inclusion with the American nation, and a corresponding loosening of ties to the country of origin, as shared goals'.⁴⁴ In the majority of Asian-American literature, Asia is often depicted as a source of fanciful and fictive alterity or exoticism, being rarely 'given an independent or ongoing existence'.⁴⁵ In contrast, diaspora literature acknowledges 'ongoing allegiances to nations beyond US boundaries' rather than 'focusing on integration with the American "nation" as a sole objective'.⁴⁶ Moreover, diaspora literature, Park stresses, does not hold 'either "assimilation" or a "teleology" toward an "American" future as assumed values'.⁴⁷ Like other scholars of diaspora studies, Park emphasises that the most significant difference between Asian-American and diaspora literature depends on the attitude towards the relationship between Asia and America. The former takes Asia as 'source, and anterior, a past' while America represents 'the here and now, inhabiting a subject position shared by the reader'.⁴⁸ The latter places Asia and America 'in a "coeval" space, without relative sequence, order, or priority'.⁴⁹

⁴³ Crystal Parikh and Daniel Y. Kim, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Asian American Literature*, ed. by Crystal Parikh and Daniel Y. Kim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. xxi-xxiv (p. xxii).

⁴⁴ Park, p. 156.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Park, p. 157.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

In comparison to this field in the US, Asian Canadian literature has a relatively short history. The term ‘Asian Canadian writing’ began attracting cultural and literary critical attention in the late 1980s. In Canada, multiculturalism as official federal policy was announced by the Trudeau government in 1971 and it was legislated as the Canadian Multiculturalism Act in 1988.⁵⁰ The metaphor of ‘cultural mosaic’ has been used to allow for cultural diversity of ethnic groups to denote belongingness within a nation.⁵¹ To a degree, this multicultural policy satisfies a longing for many diasporic subjects for inclusion within a nation-state. Critics, however, have called into question whether this policy is effective or even applicable. For instance, as Ien Ang points out, ‘achieving this ideal of peaceful and equal coexistence has proved difficult if not impossible’.⁵² More importantly, ‘cultural mosaic’ possibly appears to supply room for all minorities, yet simultaneously suggests as precondition that all minorities must fit into the mosaic. In other words, the Multiculturalism Act claims a space within the nation-state for the uniqueness of a minority’s identity (Chinese-Canadian, for example) as a ‘whole’ to be a part of the larger Canadian collective identity. It eschews the differences between diasporic individuals and ignores the specific characteristics of diasporic subjectivities. Asian-Canadian writer Roy Miki argues that cultural appropriation is another form of racial oppression. Cultural products manufactured by outsiders such as ‘white writers, artists, and film-makers’ are still based on white assumptions; they ‘have all too often confirmed and reinforced the systemic racialization process through which privilege and power has been maintained’.⁵³ To

⁵⁰ For the text of the legislation, see <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/PDF/C-18.7.pdf> [date accessed 16 October 2017].

⁵¹ Sarah V. Wayland, ‘Immigration, Multiculturalism and National Identity in Canada’, *International Journal on Group Rights*, 5 (1997), 33-38 (p. 33).

⁵² Ien Ang, ‘Beyond Chinese Groupism: Chinese Australians between Assimilation, Multiculturalism and Diaspora’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 37. 7 (2014), 1184-1196 (p.1184)

⁵³ Roy Miki, ‘Asiancy: Making Space for Asian Canadian Writing’, in *Broken Entries: Race, Subjectivity, Writing* (Toronto: Mercury Press, 1998), p. 104.

distinguish their identity, authors of Chinese ancestry in Canada tend since the 1980s to call themselves 'Chinese Canadian'. This is seen in two anthologies, *Many-Mouthed Birds: Contemporary Writing by Chinese Canadians* (1991)⁵⁴ and *Strike the Wok: an Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Canadian Fiction* (2003).⁵⁵ The editors of the latter, Lien Chao and Jim Wong-Chu explain in the introduction that this anthology aims to 'give Chinese Canadian writers a proud place in which to belong, a place not only in the era of Chinese Canadian literature, but also the national literature of Canada'.⁵⁶

Similar to the term 'Asian American', 'Asian Canadian' reveals contradictory functions at play in relation to national discourse. On the one hand, it contains the situation of marginalization marked by racism and exclusion. On the other hand, however, it provides the power of cultural and literary possibilities to create their own voice. Many recent scholars call for the use of 'Asian Canadian' in a border sense, for example, Susanne Hilf points out in her study entitled *Writing the Hyphen: the Articulation of Interculturalism in Contemporary Chinese-Canadian Literature* (2000) that although the policy of multiculturalism has its controversial effects, Chinese-Canadian identity is a continuous process of individual identity formation and the Chinese-Canadian literary texts living within 'an intercultural world oscillate between the various cultural codes and practices'.⁵⁷ So, 'Chinese-Canadian literature' is not a label hyphenated between 'Chinese and Canadian', rather, it is something new created

⁵⁴ Bennett Lee and Jim Wong-Chu, eds, *Many Many-Mouthed Birds: Contemporary Writing by Chinese Canadians* (Vancouver and Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1991).

⁵⁵ Lien Chao and Jim Wong-Chu, eds, *Strike the Wok: An Anthology of Contemporary Canadian Chinese Fiction* (Toronto: TSAR, 2003).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 'Introduction', pp. xi-xiv (p. xi).

⁵⁷ Susanne Hilf, *Writing the Hyphen: the Articulation of Interculturalism in Contemporary Chinese-Canadian Literature* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000), p. 17.

in the result of different cultural interactions. This interaction should be mutual and inclusive of all ethnic groups, a point which has been stressed by the editors of *Transnational Poetics: Asian Canadian Women's Fiction of the 1990s* (2011).⁵⁸ In the introduction to this volume, the editors explain that ethnic groups and their works have been ghettoized and eroticised under the label 'ethnic', thus they call for a mutual interaction between various racial groups.⁵⁹

Some scholars also categorise Asian American and Asian Canadian writing as 'Asian North American literature'.⁶⁰ In *The Politics of the Visible: in Asian North American Narrative* (2004), Eleanor Ty uses the category of 'visible minorities' both in America and Canada.⁶¹ She points out that the Canadian government gives a slightly different assumption when it comes to representing people of diverse origins according to 'the roles it [Canadian government] believes they might play in society' wherein Ty argues, 'it is more insidious and based on a hierarchy of cultures still dependent on visibility – who looks and does not look white or European'.⁶² She criticises the Canadian government as 'an organic structure premised upon the privileging of the Caucasian'.⁶³ In this context, women and Asians/Orientalists are marginalised as the other, being objectified by the dominant Anglo-European culture and Orientalist representation. Similarly, for Chinese diasporic women in North America, how they can resist

⁵⁸ Pilar Cuder-Domínguez, Belén María-Lucas and Sonia Villegas López, *Transnational Poetics: Asian Canadian Women's Fiction of the 1990s* (Toronto: TSAR, 2011).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. ix.

⁶⁰ Eleanor Ty and Donald C. Goellnicht, eds, *Asian North American Identity Beyond the Hyphen* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Eleanor Ty, *The Politics of the Visible in Asian North American Narratives* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

⁶¹ Ty, *The Politics of the Visible in Asian North American Narratives*, p. 7.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

performing stereotypical Oriental and ethnic roles and constitute their own identity still remains the biggest challenge to self-representation.

In the ongoing dialogue surrounding diaspora studies, this thesis follows Lim, Tölölyan, and Park in drawing a distinction between diaspora, immigration and Asian American and Asian Canadian identity. Moreover, the main two discourses covered in this thesis — the construction of home, and fantasy — are to be found in a space that negotiates, coordinates and constitutes the identity-politics of an individual's place of origin with that of their place of residence. As Brah asks: 'When does a location become home? What is the difference between "feeling at home" and staking claim to a place as one's own?'⁶⁴ It is possible to call the diasporic location 'home', yet the experience of political exclusion and cultural alienation may prevent the diasporic subject from 'feeling the place as their home'.⁶⁵ The state of unhomeliness does not, however, mean that diasporic subjectivity is 'rootless' or 'homeless'; rather, it stresses the difficulties of feeling at home and the estranging relationship to 'home' which results from geographical and cultural displacement. The concept of diaspora signals processes of 'multi-locationality across geographical, cultural and psychic boundaries',⁶⁶ the construction of 'home' for the diasporic subject remains a major concern in diasporic writing.

⁶⁴ Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 193.

⁶⁵ For extensive research into diasporic experience of social exclusion, see Phil Cohen, *Home Rules: Some Reflections on Racism and Nationalism Everyday Life* (London: The New Ethnicities Unit, University of East London, 1992); Kum-Kum Bhavnani, *Talking Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Barbara Tizard and Ann Phoenix, *Black, White, or Mixed Race?: Race and Racism in the Lives of Young People of Mixed Parentage* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

⁶⁶ Brah, p. 194.

With the focus on authors of Chinese descent living in North America, I will apply the term ‘Chinese diasporic women’s literature’, with special attention to female diasporic experience both in Canada and the US, and the use of literary fantasy and their constructions of home/unhomeliness. Chinese diasporic literary and cultural criticism has developed swiftly in many directions over the past four decades. There are also several publications which include Chinese diasporic studies within the slightly wider category of Asian American and Asian Canadian Studies.⁶⁷ Needless to say, it is impossible to list all the texts here. The following two sections will narrow down this literature review, and focus on the key topics covered by this thesis: the trope of home and the use of literary fantasy. I intend to clarify how these two discourses are explored in Chinese diasporic literature in North America, why these two areas become the key themes, and account for the research gaps.

⁶⁷ There are also a large number of publications categorized under the specific countries of settlement. Asian American literature as a category of writing came into existence in the early 1970s. Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, *Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Sheng-mei Ma, *Immigrant Subjectivities in Asian American and Asian Diaspora Literatures* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998); Patricia Chu, *Assimilation Asians: Gendered Struggles of Authorship in Asian America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Leslie Bow, *Betrayal and other Acts of Subversion: Feminism, Sexual Politics, Asian American Women’s Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Monica Chu, *Filthy Fictions: Asian American Literature by Women* (Oxford: AltaMira Press, 2004); Rocio G. Davis, *Begin Here: Reading Asian North American Autobiographies of Childhood* (Hawai’i: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007); Wenying Xu, *Eating Identities: Reading Food in Asian American Literature* (Hawai’i: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008). Asian Canadian writing rose to critical attention by the late 1980s, at a time when much analysis was gender-focused, including studies devoted to the work of individual authors, such as Joy Kogawa, Michael Ondaatje, Neil Bissoondath, Bharati Mukherjee, Rohinton Mistry, Rienzi Crusz, M. Lakshmi Gill, Sunita Namjoshi, Cyril Dabydeen, M. G. Vassanji, Fred Wah, Roy Miki, Roy Kiyooka, and Richard Fung. Key references can be seen: *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions*, ed. by Linda Hutcheon and Marion Richmond (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1990); *Beyond Silence: Chinese Canadian Literature in English*, ed. by Lien Chao (Toronto: TSAR Publications, 1997); *Strike the Wok: An Anthology of Contemporary Canadian Chinese Fiction*, ed. by Lien Chao and Jim Wong-Chu (Toronto: TSAR, 2003).

1.2. Diasporic constructions of the home

The notion of home is a popular trope in Chinese diasporic literature in North America. As R. Radhakrishnan states, diasporic writing provides an excellent opportunity to explore the concept of home. It is, after all, concerned with many vexed questions such as ‘solidarity and criticism, belonging and distance, insider spaces and outsider spaces, identity as invention and identity as natural, location-subject positionality and the politics of representation, rootedness and rootlessness’.⁶⁸ The position of diasporic subjects in-between two nations in relation to their understanding of home was first theorized by Amy Ling, who, in her work *Between Worlds: Woman Writers of Chinese Ancestry* (1990), notes that Chinese American writers are caught between Chinese and American cultures. This position of in-betweenness may have two effects: the diaspora may feel alienated from both cultures or it may bridge the gap between the two cultures, so the diasporic subjects feel nowhere to be home in the situation of ‘both/and’ or ‘either/or’.⁶⁹ Ling’s description of the ‘between-world’ consciousness can be true for many diasporic individuals. Anne Anlin Cheng theorizes this consciousness by putting forward the concept of the ‘negative space’, arguing that the minority subject becomes ‘a haunting body’ which has no space to call ‘home’.⁷⁰ Both Ling’s and Cheng’s studies provide fundamental insights into the focus of this thesis on Chinese diasporic women authors. Their position of in-betweenness and the state of unhomeliness deeply reflect political and social reality, as well as the process of compromise, negotiation and resistance involved in their identity construction and definition of home.

⁶⁸ R. Radhakrishnan, ‘Is the Ethnic “Authentic” in the Diaspora’, in *The State of Asian America: Activism and Resistance in the 1990s*, ed. by Karin Aguilar-San Juan (Boston: South End Press, 1994), pp. 219-33 (p. 232).

⁶⁹ Ling, *Between Worlds*, p. 105.

⁷⁰ Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 15.

Yu-fang Cho develops the theme of the difficulties involved in building a home neither in the host country nor returning back to a 'home country'. She uses Hualing Nieh's novel *Mulberry and Peach*⁷¹ as a case study, arguing that in the diasporic journey 'mobility is always already haunted by immobility, freedom to move by the threat of imprisonment, and open landscape by enclosure'.⁷² Cho emphasises that for Chinese diasporic women, home is either disrupted or reduced to 'a closed space' by various political and historical forces within China and the United States. The return to home is thus 'not only impossible but also undesirable'.⁷³ Cho defines the diaspora as homeless and regards the space of home as unattainable. For the diasporic subject, every point of return is always the point of departure. Cho's understandings of home stress the struggle for diasporic female subjectivity within the complex domestic and international political economy of 'the US-Taiwan-China triangle from the 1940s to the 1970s'.⁷⁴ It is also the basis on which this corpus is located: against the background of the US, Canada, Hong Kong (in the cases of Mah and Lai) and China from the 1970s to the 1990s.

In her book *Negotiating Identities: An Introduction to Asian American Women's Writing* (2002), Helena Grice introduces various understandings of 'home' as found in literary works, in her chapter 'Homes and Homecomings'. Believing place and space to be the most important aspects in defining one's identity,⁷⁵ she discusses

⁷¹ Hualing Nieh, *Mulberry and Peach: Two Women of China*, trans. by Jane Parish Yan and Linda Lappin (New York: The Feminist Press, 1976).

⁷² Yu-fang Cho, 'Rewriting Exile, Remapping Empire, Re-membering Home: Hualing Nieh's *Mulberry and Peach*', *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism*, 5.1 (2004), 157-200 (p. 160).

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Helena Grice, *Negotiating Identities: An Introduction to Asian American Women's Writing* (Manchester; Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 200.

various representations of ‘home’ by migrant writers of different generations, such as: ‘home’ as ‘where you belong’, often unattainable for migrants; ‘home’ as ‘an imagined place’ for postcolonial immigrants; ‘home’ as the desire to be assimilated in the adopted country for writers who have grown up there; ‘home’ as ‘a mythologised location’ for the ‘grandchildren of immigrants’; ‘home’ as a refuge ‘from the destructive effects of racism’ and ‘home’ as a ‘patriarchal place’ and a ‘gendered zone’.⁷⁶ Grice provides diverse ways of understanding the notion of home and categorizes the various concepts of home for several generations of Chinese diasporic subjects. I found her distinctions most valuable.

In addition to the approaches to home that Grice has introduced, there are other discussions about home taking other directions. For instance, the notion of ‘home’ is brought into a discussion concerning the family and the quotidian. Meena Alexander discusses the significance of kinship ties in her own migrant experiences as well as in her writing about diaspora, in her article ‘Diasporic Writing: Recasting Kinship in a Fragmented World’ (2000). She theorises that kinship offers ‘anchorage’ for ‘the seeking self’.⁷⁷ It should be noted that her argument is illuminating although it may not be relevant for migrants who are determined to sever kinship ties and seek a new start far from their original home. Some diasporic subjects form and imagine new kinship ties that are not defined by bloodlines and national cultural identities. Their reconstructions of subjectivity challenge the conventional understanding of ‘home’ based on bloodlines and nuclear families. This is a topic I take up in my third chapter.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 203.

⁷⁷ Meena Alexander, ‘Diasporic Writing: Recasting Kinship in a Fragmented World’, *Hitting Critical Mass*, 6.2 (2000), 21-36 (p. 21).

In the light of kinship and home, David L. Eng's book *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (2010) provides an intersectional approach combining queer and critical race studies. Eng aims to rethink the significant 'cleavings and dissociations of sexuality from race, and race from sexuality, that organize contemporary structures of family and kinship as well as the privatized space of the intimate in our colour-blind age of global capitalism'.⁷⁸ Eng's approach to theorizing conventional notions of family and kinship outside the geographical boundaries of the nation-state and beyond the ideological boundaries of US exceptionalism is particularly useful for understanding the idea of home for diasporic subjects. Moreover, he proposes the term 'queer diasporas' to describe unsettled diasporas of queer Asian bodies in the era of globalization. This becomes relevant in my fourth chapter.

Two important contributions to date, devoted to the discussion of 'home' in diasporic writing, are a collection of essays edited by Geoffrey Kain, *Ideas of Home: Literature of Asian Migration* (1997) and *Home, Identity, and Mobility in Contemporary Diasporic Fiction* (2009) by Jopi Nyman. The collection has as its goal a reconsideration, or 'redefinition', of the age-old experience of migration in the contemporary world as well as a discussion of 'a complex of factors' to be resolved before the new location 'may be sincerely embraced as "home"'.⁷⁹ First-generation immigrant experiences are diasporic in nature, and provide a useful point of discussion in the present study. In particular, a number of contributions shed light on the impact

⁷⁸ David L. Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), p. xi.

⁷⁹ Geoffrey Kain, ed., *Ideas of Home: Literature of Asian Migration* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1997), p. 1.

of diaspora and promote a deeper understanding of the notion of ‘home’; these include essays about the impact of the past on immigrants’ understanding of their cultural identity and about the exilic experiences of postcolonial subjects that render them homeless. Nyman’s monograph explores post-colonial narratives of home, requiring mobility to be embedded in the global and its socio-cultural relations to be restructured. Nyman emphasises the necessity of uncovering silenced histories of immigrants and the interconnectedness of cultures. The literary representation of global movements ‘emphasise[s] the meeting of cultures, problematize[s] the idea of home, and probe[s] the issues of belonging and national identity’.⁸⁰

In terms of the intersection between the construction of home, and gender studies, Rajini Srikanth explores gender relations within the diasporic home in her article entitled ‘Gender and the Image of Home in the Asian American Diaspora: A Socio-Literary Reading of Some Asian American Works’ (1994). She discusses ‘strategies that men and women employ to make themselves “feel at home” in a new environment’.⁸¹ Srikanth argues that the diasporic home ‘is increasingly identified with the woman’ because for the diasporic male, the woman is responsible for recreating ‘the idyllic home in the new destination, whether or not this idyll can ever become reality’; for the diasporic woman, on the other hand, ‘the expectation that she will recreate the lost home sets up a situation that both empowers and debilitates her’ in maintaining the traditional values of the original home country in a diaspora setting.⁸² Srikanth’s appealing argument, however, fails to consider the possibility that

⁸⁰ Jopi Nyman, *Home, Identity, and Mobility in Contemporary Diasporic Fiction* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009), p. 13.

⁸¹ Rajini Srikanth, ‘Gender and the Image of Home in the Asian American Diaspora: A Socio-Literary Reading of Some Asian American Works’, *Critical Mass: A Journal of Asian American Cultural Criticism*, 2.1 (1994), 147-81 (p. 149).

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 151.

diasporic men and women may want to sever their bond with their original home and home culture, in their eagerness to assimilate into the mainstream of the host society.

A collection of essays titled *Homemaking: Women Writers and the Politics and Poetics of Home* (1996), edited by Catherine Wiley and Fiona R. Barnes, offers a feminist critique of 'home' as both a private and public domain, and argues that home 'can be re-made'.⁸³ Cynthia F. Wong's essay titled 'Remembering China in *Wild Swans* and *Life and Death in Shanghai*'⁸⁴ contends that Chinese immigrants are bound to their origins and 'finally are unable to completely break from [their Chinese] ties'.⁸⁵ Emphasising that such a connection to the homeland is the only means for Chinese migrant writers to find 'their true homes, their true selves',⁸⁶ Wong argues that diasporic individuals can never be free from 'the psychological burden that their homeland exerts on their remembered experiences' even though they are enjoying political and literary freedom in the West.⁸⁷ This paradoxical attitude towards 'home' for the diasporic subject, which reveals the relationship between the original country and the resident country, echoes several of the approaches that can be found in cultural studies, providing us with a deeper understanding of the terms 'diaspora' and 'home'.

From the current research on the trope of home, as summarised above, it can be seen that the notion of home has been transformed from a fixed understanding based on geographical perspective, to a transitional process in the diasporic context; this is seen

⁸³ Catherine Wiley and Fiona R. Barnes, eds, *Homemaking: Women Writers and the Politics and Poetics of Home* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), p. x.

⁸⁴ Cynthia F. Wong, 'Remembering China in *Wild Swans* and *Life and Death in Shanghai*', in *Homemaking: Women Writers and the Politics and Poetics of Home*, ed. by Catherine Wiley and Fiona R. Barnes (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), pp. 115-33.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

in light of the transformation of national identity and cultural hybridity, and with links to other discourses such as gender, race and class. The existing research is similar in its focus on the sociological and cultural materialist approach to exploring the notion of home in diasporic writing, which underpins this study. My thesis also considers the aesthetic and formal analysis of Chinese diasporic women's literature through examining the use of literary fantasy, thus responding to Sue-Im Lee's call for a balance between the literary text and its political and social implication in diasporic studies.⁸⁸ The next section examines current research on fantasy in writing.

1.3. Reworking of literary fantasy

Helena Grice points out in a co-edited book titled *Beginning Ethnic American Literatures* (2001) that a recognisable feature of much diasporic writing is its use of literary fantasy and validation of marginalised oral tradition; readers of American ethnic fiction are familiar with narratives originating in oral tradition, such as folklores and myths from various countries.⁸⁹ This common narrative feature of Asian American diasporic writing, Grice argues, can be considered a means of 'educating the reader and of preserving cultural heritage' and is usually 'allied with the construction of alternative histories and preservation of memory'.⁹⁰ The function of literary fantasy is similarly emphasized in Chinese diasporic writing in North America; it shares with other ethnic authors the aim of countering the damaging effects of

⁸⁸ Sue-Im Lee, 'Introduction: The Aesthetic in Asian American Literary Discourse', in *Literary Gestures: The Aesthetic in Asian American Writing*, ed. by Rocio G. Davis and Sue-Im Lee (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), pp. 1-14 (p. 1).

⁸⁹ Helena Grice, Candida Hepworth, Maria Lauret and Martin Padget, 'Introduction', in *Beginning Ethnic American Literatures*, eds by Helena Grice, Candida Hepworth, Maria Lauret and Martin Padget, (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp. 1-9 (p. 8).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

‘Anglo cultural imperialism’.⁹¹ The text does not further theorise about the use of fantasy in the ethnic corpus, nor does it cover Chinese diasporic authors who explore this topic. Its insights into the function of fantasy in ethnic writing in America will be further applied to close reading of this study. Besides breaking the silence for marginalised subjects, enabling them to (re)tell an alternative history and to spread the cultural heritage, I will further explore other functions of fantasy in bridging the dominant and the ancestral cultures, crossing geographical and temporal boundaries.

Celestine Woo’s article titled ‘Bicultural World Creation: Laurence Yep, Cynthia Kadohata, and Asian American Fantasy’ (2006) explores the use of fantasy in Asian American writing. Woo points out that the literary tradition of fantasy has been ‘dominated by Anglo-American practitioners’ almost exclusively, an identification that results in an inhospitable environment for ethnic minority writers.⁹² Her claim that ‘Yep and Kadohata are the only authors who have written fantastical stories with identifiably Asian American elements’⁹³ is inaccurate since there is a large group of Chinese diasporic authors in North America who create fantastic stories with ethnic elements. However, I agree with her explanation of the function of fantasy, namely that it ‘provides Asian American literature with a sense of imaginative non-realism and an expanded repertoire of modes of representation of identity formation’.⁹⁴ Furthermore, I argue that this sense of ‘imaginative non-realism’ is more than a product of the imagination. Rather, it is a form of rewriting cultural and literary

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Celestine Woo, ‘Bicultural World Creation: Laurence Yep, Cynthia Kadohata, and Asian American Fantasy’, in *Literary Gestures: The Aesthetic in Asian American Writing*, ed. by Rocío G. Davis and Sue-Im Lee (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), pp. 173-86 (p. 175).

⁹³ Ibid., p. 173.

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 174-75.

tradition, such that it enriches Asian-American writing through the interaction between aesthetic and socio-political issues, bridging the past and present.

Bonnie Winsbro uses the term ‘supernatural force’ to explore works by six ethnic women writers in her book *Supernatural Forces: Belief, Difference and Power in Contemporary Works by Ethnic Women* (1993). Winsbro selects authors from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds; the six authors include Appalachian, Native American, African-American, and Chinese-American. Winsbro claims that their texts ‘represent an alternative reality [...] out of Judaeo-Christian tradition’ and a ‘reality’ which has been ‘disproved’ by science.⁹⁵ By examining how in these texts the individual belief system clashes with those of family, community or the country of residence, Winsbro argues that it is dominant cultures which ‘have historically sought to unify reality by imposing their own version on those around them. As a result, the realities, or beliefs, of marginal cultures have frequently been destroyed’.⁹⁶ Thus, within the US ethnic subjects in between cultures need to depend on their effective ‘self-definition’; in other words, ‘the process by which they define who they are and what they believe in relation to surrounding social units – family, community/tribe, and society at large’.⁹⁷ Winsbro’s approach is useful in a variety of ways: first, her consideration of supernatural force as a means of empowerment through self-definition is particularly important, and there are many examples in Chinese diasporic women’s writing that recount cultural folklore, myths and folk tales, which eventually become a method of empowerment; second, the chapter ‘Warring with Ghosts: Power

⁹⁵ Bonnie Winsbro, *Supernatural Forces: Belief, Difference, and Power in Contemporary Works by Ethnic Women* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), p. 4.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

through Individuation in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*', provides an important criticism of Kingston's book which is incorporated into the analysis provided in the first chapter of this thesis. The main argument in Winsbro's chapter is that 'only by knowing one's ghosts, giving them life and substance, can one know oneself'.⁹⁸ In other words, the author-narrator in Kingston's text should understand the relationship with all the ghosts which represent both beliefs and the barriers to assimilation, which are a consequence of her socio-cultural heritage.

Another useful piece of research on the fantastic is titled *Tricksterism in Turn-of-the-Century American Literature: A Multicultural Perspective* (1994) edited by Elizabeth Ammons and Annette White-Parks. The term 'trickster' is understood to mean that which is 'not privileged by Eurocentric notions of the real, natural, or modern'.⁹⁹ Ammons and White-Parks emphasise that diasporic women authors in America are constantly challenged to 'resist ghettoization and silencing' and need to find ways of writing 'from borderland territories of cultural connection and clash'.¹⁰⁰ The notion of the trickster provides a principle of resistance as well as a force to 'cross cultural boundaries without relying on dominant cultural maps'.¹⁰¹ Although this thesis does not use the term 'trickster', its meaning is similar to that of the fantastic – tricksters and the fantastic 'articulate a whole other, independent, cultural reality and positive way of negotiating multiple cultural systems'.¹⁰² Chapter Four of this thesis will

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 9.

⁹⁹ Elizabeth Ammons and Annette White-Parks, 'Introduction', in *Tricksterism in Turn-of-the-Century American Literature: A Multicultural Perspective*, ed. by Elizabeth Ammons and Annette White-Parks (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1994), pp. vii-xiii (p. vii).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. x.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. xi.

provide a detailed examination of the fox in Chinese folktales in order to explore the function of literary fantasy in Lai's text.

Andrew Hock Soon Ng's edited work *Asian Gothic: Essays on Literature, Film and Anime* (2008) studies a particular aspect of fantasy. Including three categories of literary text – postcolonial Asian Gothic literature, Asian American Gothic literature and the Gothic tradition in Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Turkish literature, this volume provides new perspectives for the study of Asian-American literature study that are not limited to the social-realist reading. Ng argues that Asian-American literature, to a large extent, has been informed by 'a social-realist reading'.¹⁰³ Reading Asian-American writing through a Gothic lens can illuminate other elements such as cultural, racial, national, sexual, class, historical and ideological difference, which 'layers the narrative with deeper and even alternative significances'.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, Ng further stresses that 'perhaps unsurprisingly, the Asian American writers who invite ghosts into their narrative are all women'.¹⁰⁵ The Gothic in Asian-American women's writing offers them 'special kinds of freedom [such as the freedom] to offer critiques of male power and sexuality which are often more radical than those in more realist genres'.¹⁰⁶ This main argument is particularly helpful for my first and third chapters, which deals with ghost stories, 'ghost' used metaphorically; in both Kingston's and Chen's texts ghostly spirits provide them with the freedom to criticize and rebel against filial piety, familial attachment, and patriarchal tradition.

¹⁰³ Andrew Hock Soon Ng, 'Introduction', in *Asian Gothic: Essays on Literature, Film and Anime* (Jefferson, North Carolina and London: McFarland & Company, 2008), pp. 1-15 (p. 3).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁰⁶ Diana Wallace, 'Uncanny Stories: The Ghost Story as Female Gothic', *Gothic Studies*, 6.1 (2004), 57-68 (p. 57).

There is much scope for further research into literary fantasy in Chinese diasporic literature in the North American context. There is as yet no full-length monograph dealing with either literary fantasy or home, in the category of ‘Chinese diasporic literature’, nor does published research consider the interaction of these two topics. Ng points out that ‘Asian American literature is rich with narratives of haunting, the uncanny, and the monstrous, but lacks the trope or a critical heritage to discuss these matters’.¹⁰⁷ Despite the abundance of literary works classified under the umbrella term ‘fantasy’ which have appeared on the international publishing market since the 1970s, as Woo points out, ‘sadly, to date, there is little scholarship or theory pertaining to fantasy, and there is still a widespread tendency to denigrate “escapism” or “escapist literature” as pure indulgence, elite and effete absurdity, devoid of social or political transformative power’.¹⁰⁸ My thesis aims to describe how fantasy functions in Chinese diasporic women’s writing as a literary mode, delivering the aesthetic values of their writing and functioning as a cultural device which can convey socio-political issues whereby it considers social categories of race and gender. With my focus on both literary analysis and socio-political concerns I explore how literary fantasy becomes one of the keys to constructing political and cultural identity in contemporary society, while at the same time functioning as a literary-writing strategy to recount stories and rework cultural resources.

¹⁰⁷ Andrew Hock Soon Ng, ‘Malaysian Gothic: The Motif of Haunting in K.S. Maniam’s “Haunting the Tiger” and Shirley Lim’s “Haunting”’, *Mosaic*, 39.2 (2006), pp. 75-88 (p. 75).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

2. Theoretical Context: Interaction of Fantasy and Home

Many theoretical approaches are used in this study to explore the relationship between social categories such as race and gender, and theories of literary fantasy. First, I explain theories of fantasy as a literary mode, encompassing the work of key theorists including Tzvetan Todorov, Rosemary Jackson, Christine Brooke-Rose and Brian Attebery. I introduce the term ‘new fantasy’ which relates to the post-colonial narratives of home, the notion of location and dislocation, belonging and displacement, migration and exile. The third theoretical approach is from feminist fantasy and considers the category of gender and sexuality in fantasy and home, exploring women’s domestic and familial life, the mother-daughter relationship, and women’s subordination and submission within patriarchy.

2.1. Understanding literary fantasy as a mode

Fantasy literature has proven tremendously difficult to define. The word itself is taken from the Latin *phantasticus*, which in turn derives from the Greek *phantastikos*, a term which Lance Olsen defines as ‘presented to the mind, made visible, visionary, unreal’.¹⁰⁹ Fantasy literature is commonly understood as ‘an imaginative or fanciful work, especially one dealing with supernatural or unnatural events or characters’.¹¹⁰ But from there the major theorists hold different definitions of fantasy. One of the pioneers, Bulgarian-French structuralist Tzvetan Todorov, first put forward the term ‘literature of the fantastic’ in his highly influential book titled *The Fantastic: a*

¹⁰⁹ Lance Olsen, *Ellipse of Uncertainty: an Introduction to Postmodern Fantasy* (New York and London: Greenwood Press, 1987), p. 14.

¹¹⁰ *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, 2nd Edition, Unabridged (New York: Random House, 1987), p. 698.

Structural Approach to a Literary Genre.¹¹¹ According to Todorov's theory, the key element in defining the concept of the fantastic is the moment of hesitation that a reader experiences when he or she attempts to resolve a seemingly supernatural event in a text 'so that the event is acknowledged as reality, or so that the event is identified as a result of the imagination or the result of an illusion'.¹¹² Once a reader decides that such an event actually occurs within the fictional world depicted, the work ceases to be 'fantastic' and becomes 'marvellous', which Todorov defines as a genre in which mysterious events are presented as 'the supernatural'. If the reader determines that the event is either the result of some illusion or has never taken place, the work may then be considered 'uncanny', in that it provides an improbable but essentially rational explanation for the event. The pure fantastic exists only when the reader cannot decide between these solutions to the problem: it exists only in the reader's and one or more characters' uncertainty. Todorov argues that the hesitation inherent in the fantastic relies on an acceptance of the representational function of narrative fiction, since the reader's response must link 'to events as they occur in the world evoked'.¹¹³ Todorov emphasises that the fantastic in literary works might be eliminated since 'if what we read describes a supernatural event, yet we take the words not in their literal meaning but in another sense which refers to nothing supernatural, there is no longer any space in which the fantastic can exist'.¹¹⁴ He gives as example Kafka's story *Metamorphosis* (1916), arguing that since none of the characters in this story experiences any senses of hesitation between natural and supernatural explanation, this story cannot be

¹¹¹ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Cornell University Press, 1975).

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

classified using the category of ‘the fantastic’.¹¹⁵ Todorov draws the conclusion that the fantastic has disappeared from twentieth-century literature.

From his definition, it can be seen that the concept of hesitation is the key point of Todorov’s understanding of the fantastic. Rosemary Jackson develops Todorov’s theory and reshapes it using the social and political implications of literary forms. Her book *Fantasy: the Literature of Subversion* (1981) aims to ‘stretch Todorov’s ideas into a more widely based cultural study of the fantastic’.¹¹⁶ In so doing, Jackson defines fantasy as a mode of discourse, hovering between ‘the marvellous and the mimetic’.¹¹⁷ She defines a mode as ‘a particular type of discourse [...] a temptation and a mode of expression across a whole range of historical periods, seeming to offer itself, if only intermittently, as a formal possibility which can be revived and renewed’.¹¹⁸ She defines fantasy as a literary mode that permeates literature, which is no longer contained in a single genre such as Science Fiction or Utopian; rather, it is ‘an aesthetic category’ that freely mixes different genres and styles with realism. It is a mode between the marvellous and mimetic, Jackson explains: the marvellous is a mode in which narrative events are backed by ‘a coherent ideology’, employed by most fairy tales, romance, utopias, satires, supernatural tales, surrealist texts, and science fictions. The marvellous mode concerns itself with ‘a supraworld’, with the ‘over there’.¹¹⁹ In the mimetic mode, on the contrary, the narrative believes in politics, psychology, and community and concerns itself primarily with what it believes to be

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 72.

¹¹⁶ Jackson, *Fantasy*, p. 3.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 33.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p. 7.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

this world, with the 'here'. Hovering in between, fantasy becomes a cultural production, a deliberate response to a gap between the real and the desired.

Jackson proposes two approaches to literary fantasy. First, that fantasy is a literature which expresses desire in two ways – it can 'tell of, manifest or show desire', or it can 'expel desire'.¹²⁰ This desire is not a simple psychological drive but a tension caused by social inhibition and 'a lack resulting from cultural constraints'.¹²¹ Second, since fantasy is able to reveal impossible desire, Jackson stresses the subversive power of fantasy which opens up social and cultural conventions and allows the reader a view of the structures to which the diasporic subject is exposed:

Fantastic literature points to or suggests the basis upon which cultural order rests, for it opens up, for a brief moment, on to disorder, on to illegality, on to that which lies outside the law, that which lies outside dominant value systems. The fantastic traces the unsaid and unseen culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made 'absent'.¹²²

The two functions of literary fantasy, argues Jackson, enable the author and the text to describe 'the impossible attempt to realize desire, to make visible the invisible and to discover absence'.¹²³ Jackson's theory establishes the association between fantasy literature and resistance to the dominant social order. According to Jackson, an understanding of fantasy reveals its capacity not only to unmask elements of reality which normally remain hidden, but also its power to actively challenge and subvert the parameters of reality. As she points out, literary fantasy is produced 'within, and

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 2.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 3.

¹²² Ibid., p. 4.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 2.

determined by, its social context. Though it might struggle against the limits of this context, often being articulated upon that very struggle, it cannot be understood in isolation from it'.¹²⁴ The social context of fantasy includes not only its current 'reality'; Jackson further emphasises that 'modern fantasy is rooted in ancient myth, mysticism, folklore, fairy tale and romance'.¹²⁵

For Jackson, the subversive power of literary fantasy does not mean that it escapes from social reality. Rather, fantasy 'reveals reason and reality to be arbitrary, shifting constructs and thereby scrutinizes the category of the "real"'.¹²⁶ The subversiveness of fantasy lies in its disruption of the smooth surface of the bourgeois social order, as constructed in the mimetic novel. It does not constitute an escape into a made-up realm different from taken-for-granted reality, but constructs fictional worlds that are 'neither entirely "real" [...] nor entirely "unreal" [...] but [are] located somewhere indeterminately between the two'.¹²⁷ In her analysis of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, which she claims is a failed fantasy, along with other works by Kingsley, MacDonald, Le Guin and Lewis, Jackson argues that these texts evade reality. For example, the elements of fairytale represented in Tolkien's fiction are 'transcendentalist', 'sentimental' and 'nostalgic', which is the product of 'an outworn liberal humanism'.¹²⁸ Jackson focuses on Tolkien's portrayal of social systems: despite his obvious dislike for twentieth-century industrial society, he seems to 'support a ruling ideology',¹²⁹ failing to criticize capitalism, which might well be the root cause of 'the

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 3.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 2.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 12.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 19.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 155.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

noise, pollution, dehumanization and destructiveness of modern cities'.¹³⁰ Fantasy, on the other hand, should manifest social anxieties; Ceri Sullivan and Barbara White give the following summary of this aspect of Jackson's theories, 'moving boundaries into the empirically unknown or hypothetically impossible were codes for what is acceptable or might no longer apply – allowing the primary world to be interrogated by the second – is a central characteristic of the fantastic'.¹³¹

This characteristic of fantasy raises the question of to what degree literary fantasy can reflect and engage in the sociopolitical situation. Jackson argues forcefully that subversion is a political function of literary fantasy. The violation of dominant assumptions about what is generally accepted as normative 'is not in itself [...] a socially subversive activity: it would be naïve to equate with either anarchic or revolutionary politics. It does, however, disturb "rules" of artistic representation and literature's reproduction of the "real"'.¹³² The shift of understanding fantasy from the sense of hesitation to a cultural product, emphasises its political function, becoming 'a response to varied political exigencies' and 'a deliberate response to a gap between the real and the desired'.¹³³

In his study of fantasy, Brian Attebery argues that Jackson fails to consider the function of a literary text such as *The Lord of the Rings* as a rhetorical device. Attebery points out that Jackson emphasises that each text inevitably represents its own age and 'objects to Tolkien's Medievalism on the grounds that he is evading the writer's

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ceri Sullivan and Barbara White, 'Introduction', in *Writing and Fantasy*, eds., by Ceri Sullivan and Barbara White (London and New York: Longman, 1999). pp. 1-11 (p. 3).

¹³² Jackson, p. 14.

¹³³ Ceri Sullivan and Barbara White, p. 3.

responsibility to represent his own age'.¹³⁴ Attebery further comments on Jackson's two ways of performing desires and reflecting society, namely, their expression or their expulsion; these, Attebery summarizes, are two different types of fantasy that can overwhelm the narrative, in 'good or radical fantasies' and 'bad or sentimental ones'.¹³⁵ Widening Jackson's theories of fantasy as a literary mode of discourse, Attebery expands the notion of fantasy in his work *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992), as a 'fuzzy set': a group of literary texts that share 'a cluster of common tropes' which may be objects and simultaneously may be narrative techniques.¹³⁶

This question of distinguishing between 'real' and 'unreal' in literary studies has been explored by Christine Brooke-Rose in her *A Rhetoric of the Unreal* (1981). She defines two categories of narrative technique: 'the unreal as real' and 'the real as unreal'. In the former category, she also uses Tolkien's novel *The Lord of the Rings* as a case study, arguing that although there are magical elements in the narrative, its 'historico-geographico-sociological megastory' connects with the realistic narrative.¹³⁷ This novel is still based on 'the familiar', such as the 'real' village life in England and the genre is also familiar to English readers.¹³⁸ In the category of 'the real as unreal', Brooke-Rose explains that the ambiguity and hesitation should also cause two possible interpretations of the events to become possible. Brooke-Rose gives examples of novels by French author Alain Robbe-Grillet in order to support her argument that 'it

¹³⁴ Brian Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 22.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Christine Brooke-Rose, *A Rhetoric of the Unreal. Studies in Narrative and Structure, Especially of the Fantastic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 243.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

is usually impossible to decide between several interpretations'.¹³⁹ The first deals with the use of devices deriving from narrative realism to describe events which would otherwise fall into the category of the marvellous, and the second refers to deliberate narrative estrangement from what is familiar and 'real' to the reader. These subversions and reversals of reality fit in, she suggests, with more contemporary sensitivities: 'what used to be called empirical reality, or the world, seems to have become more and more unreal, and what has long been regarded as unreal is more and more turned to or studied as the only "true" or "another and equally valid" reality'.¹⁴⁰ The acceptance of these 'displaced' forms allows a more inclusive definition of fantasy, which remains focused on the ambiguity of reality and on the reader's feelings of uncertainty, but avoids what Brooke-Rose sees as the rigidity of Todorov's definition. Moreover, Brooke-Rose's theory allows us to view the spectrum of narrative possibilities, considering various narrative elements such as characters, setting, events, narrative time, all of which can determine the parameters of the reader's response.

Todorov's central idea of fantasy is based on the hesitation that the reader experiences as to whether the event is supernatural or not. Jackson places her argument within a social and cultural domain, in which this hesitation might be caused by different social contexts and divergent cultural interpretations. Brooke-Rose and Attebery stress the primary rhetoric of the narrative and the aesthetic characteristic of the texts. Following Jackson, Brooke-Rose and Attebery's theories of fantasy, this group of texts resolves into a 'fuzzy set', a mode of discourse – from their tropes and narrative techniques, to

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 65.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 4.

their literary expression of sociopolitical reality. Rather than the simple clash of opposites, these theorists understand fantasy as an ongoing dialogue between the ‘real’ and ‘unreal’ and between the rules of narrative representation and the contravention of them. In this sense, as Lance Olsen argues, fantasy with its defamiliarizing potential ‘becomes the realism our culture understands’.¹⁴¹ As in Jackson’s perspective, I am interested not only in ‘the poetics’, but also the ‘politics’ of fantasy, and I would argue that fantasy offers a powerful way for Chinese diasporic women authors to reflect concerns such as their diasporic situation of being alienated and the racial, gender and sexual discrimination they experience. Its function of subversiveness allows them to express and fulfil their desires and make their voices heard. Through the device of fantasy these texts turn into critical works addressing issues of race and complexities of cultural appropriations; they question common terms such as ‘home’, ‘others’ and ‘identity’. They retell marginalized subjects’ desires, their diasporic stories while referring to Chinese myths, fairytales, legends and folk tales. Taking up this understanding of fantasy as a literary mode of discourse, a term which will be consistently applied through the four chapters of this thesis, the following section will explore fantasy in diasporic and post-colonial narratives; I will introduce the term ‘new fantasy’, attempting to show the interaction of home and fantasy in Chinese diasporic women’s literature in North America.

¹⁴¹ Lance Olsen, *Ellipse of Uncertainty: An Introduction to Postmodern Fantasy* (London: Greenwood, 1987), p. 14.

2.2. 'New Fantasy': the post-colonial narrative of home

Although critics claim that fantasy is usually populated by 'white people, with societies and values replicating those of mainstream Western European cultures',¹⁴² some theorists call for the interaction of race and colour in modern fantasy studies. In *Into Darkness Peering: Race and Color in the Fantastic* (1997), the editor Elisabeth Anne Leonard claims that it is necessary to break the silence in the research of fantasy dominated by the 'white'. She explains that the interaction of race and colour coding in fantasy enables us to 'place fiction into a political and social context',¹⁴³ since the matter of race has been largely silenced in literary discourse. Fantasy, in some ways, is a particularly useful device for understanding race and culture because, she argues, works of fantasy are simultaneously situated both within the writer's realms and within their imaginary or constructed worlds, therefore, they can 'both re-enact and alter racial codes and representations'.¹⁴⁴ Even though this collection of articles focuses on race and colour coding in fantasy in African American writing, its insight is useful to apply in understanding my corpus.

Diasporic authors in the Anglo-American fantasy market have been the subject of recent study, Nnedi Okorafor, in the chapter 'Writers of Colour', in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* (2012), calls for new theories and perspectives to understanding narratives of fantasy by 'writers of colour' since they 'create fantasy worlds which distance themselves from the default whiteness of the Tolkien

¹⁴² Celestine Woo, 'Bicultural World Creation: Laurence Yep, Cynthia Kadohata, and Asian American Fantasy', in *Literary Gestures: The Aesthetic in Asian American Writing*, ed. by Rocío G. Davis and Sue-Im Lee (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), pp. 173-86 (p. 174).

¹⁴³ Elisabeth Anne Leonard, 'Introduction', in *Into Darkness Peering: Race and Color in the Fantastic*, ed. by Elisabeth Anne Leonard (Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 1997), pp. 1-12 (p. 1).

¹⁴⁴ Leonard, p. 4.

tradition'.¹⁴⁵ In terms of writers of Asian ancestry, such as Larissa Lai and Hiromi Goto, Okorafor explains one of the most outstanding characteristics is that their fantasy draws heavily on the myths and folktales of their original countries, interweaving fantasy with social reality. The use of fantasy in their writing thus offers a way of addressing issues of race and 'complexities of cultural appropriation and problematizing common terms of engagement such as the injunction to "write the other"'.¹⁴⁶ In Canadian post-colonial studies, critic Laurence Steven posts the term 'new fantasy', providing diasporic authors with an opportunity to enact this 'third thing', meshing 'elements of realism and fantasy, this and the other world'.¹⁴⁷ Thus this 'new fantasy' participates in the 'post-colonial search for a way of out the impasse of the endless play of post-modernist difference that mirrors liberalism's cultural pluralism'.¹⁴⁸

This third place is also defined by Homi K. Bhabha as 'in-betweenness' and a culture of 'hybridity',¹⁴⁹ in which new fantasy creates a space in between worlds. This definition of 'new fantasy' is linked with Bhabha's notion of home/unhomeliness. Bhabha explains that this is the space interwoven with cultural interstices and the intervention of beyond that 'establishes a boundary: a bridge, where "presencing" begins because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the

¹⁴⁵ Nnedi Okorafor, 'Writers of Colour', in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, eds by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 179-89 (p. 183).

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

¹⁴⁷ Laurence Steven, 'Welwyn Wilton Katz and Charles de Lint: New Fantasy as a Canadian Post-colonial Genre', in *Worlds of Wonder: Readings in Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature*, eds by Camille R. La Bossière and Jean-François Leroux (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2004), pp. 57-72 (p. 60).

¹⁴⁸ Diana Brydon, 'The White Inuit Speaks: Contamination as Literary Strategy', in *The Post Colonial Studies Reader*, eds by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 136-42 (p. 24).

¹⁴⁹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 1.

home and the world – the unhomeliness – that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations’.¹⁵⁰ For diasporic subjects living in a country of residence away from their homeland, Bhabha claims that ‘the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting’.¹⁵¹ Bhabha also reformulates Freud’s uncanny as a model of history for diasporic subjects living in doubled time/spaces that can imagine their histories and memories in their own way from a distance, as their ‘histories are broken and fragmented through war, dislocation, slavery, or the loss of language’.¹⁵² Therefore, fantasy gives meanings to subjects who are in-between. It enables them to articulate an imagined space, floating in between repressing and recovering. This is the moment of aesthetic distance that provides difference ‘within’ for the diasporic subject – a subject that ‘inhabits the rim of an “in-between” reality’.¹⁵³

This state of ‘unhomeliness’, along with the contrasting search for a sense of belonging, causes a ‘home desire’, a term posited by cultural theorist Avtar Brah, which refers to a way of negotiating between ‘the discourse of home and dispersion’.¹⁵⁴ This deconstruction of home, Rosemary Buikema further explains, marks ‘the loss of stories, cultural memories, and myths’ and home desire becomes a ‘longing to come home to the magic of stories, a longing for the feeling of community that emerges through the actual telling’.¹⁵⁵ Fantasy enables diasporic subjects to fulfil this homing

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁵³ Homi K. Bhabha, ‘The World and the Home’, *Social Text*, 31/32 (1992), 141-53 (p. 148).

¹⁵⁴ Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 193.

¹⁵⁵ Rosemary Buikema, ‘A Poetics of Home: On Narrative Voice and Deconstruction of Home in Migrant Literature’, in *Migrant Cartographies: New Cultural and Literary Spaces in Post-Colonial*

desire through the resource of myths. This repressed desire can be articulated through the device of fantasy, as in Jackson's definition of fantasy which 'characteristically attempts to compensate for a lack resulting from cultural constraints: it is a literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss'.¹⁵⁶

It is, therefore, not surprising to see the interaction of discourses of fantasy and home in the works by diasporic Chinese authors in North America, considering their position, even though neither Steven nor Bhabha addresses their theories directly to the subject of Chinese diaspora. Yet their theories, as well as Jackson's explanation of the function of fantasy, will provide the fundamental approaches to understanding my corpus and subject. This interaction of fantasy and home, therefore, has the potential to reconstitute diasporic subjects by blurring the binary oppositions of the strange and intimate, the inside and the outside, the temporal and geographical boundaries. This device of fantasy in Chinese diasporic women's literature enables them to construct home both in the geographical sense and from a fantastic and cultural perspective. In this respect, Avtar Brah points out that members of diaspora groups are characterized by 'a craving for home as "mythic place"'.¹⁵⁷ This imagined space is mixed with the reconstructing of histories, including voices which are unheard and cultures which are unseen, desires which are repressed. This understanding of home looks beyond the geographical locality; rather, it is reconstructed by the reconnection of histories which are reworked, as Stuart Hall argues, through 'memory, fantasy, narrative and myth'.¹⁵⁸ That is to say, fantasy enables marginalised subjects to imagine a 'home', however,

Europe, ed. by Sandra Ponzanesi and Daniela Merolla (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005), pp. 177-87 (p. 184).

¹⁵⁶ Jackson, p. 3.

¹⁵⁷ Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 180.

¹⁵⁸ Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', p. 396.

the term of ‘home’ is not fixed within a geographical territory. Rather, this hybrid space is, Bhabha claims, not a form of celebration but ‘the prime mode of being in the world that uncovers the discursive appeals to tradition, purity, and nation as attempts to maintain fixed and hierarchical boundaries between human beings’.¹⁵⁹ Through this space, the discursive condition of enunciation can ensure that ‘the meanings and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew’.¹⁶⁰

The diasporic Chinese women authors selected for this thesis demonstrate some ways to graft diasporic experience into fantasy. They manifest various narratives by inscribing their use of Chinese folklore and mythology with their family stories and personal diasporic experiences. Obviously, how diasporic authors use ancient myths, folktales, fairy tales and other elements of the fantastic, as well as how they rework these cultural sources, turns into the key narrative of construction of home and the main content of their literary fantasy, since fantasy is grounded to a great extent on the roots and history of fairy tales, folklores and myths.¹⁶¹ I argue that for diasporic authors of Chinese heritage, their statement of ‘unhomeliness’ and displacement necessarily, pushes them to establish a different relationship with Chinese cultural sources in their writing of fantasy within the North American context. This use of fantasy, differing from the Anglo-dominated world of high fantasy, carves an imaginative space that affirms and empowers diasporic subjects and enriches the

¹⁵⁹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 37.

¹⁶⁰ Bhabha, p. 37.

¹⁶¹ Vijayan A. V., ‘The Existence of Fairytale, Folklore, and Myths in Fantasy: A Study Based on J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter Series’, *IJELLH, International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities* 2321-7065, February, 2016), pp. 420-28, p. 421. <http://ijellh.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/48.Mohammad-Kawish-Haider-paper-final.pdf> [accessed on the 10th of January 2018].

literary discourse between the purely supernatural and social-political reality. Hence, it can be argued that the notion of home is rearticulated in post-colonial narratives of diaspora, and its link with the tool of fantasy is emphasised in this thesis. The next section will narrow down the terms fantasy and home to focus on their place within women's writing, exploring potential points of interaction between the fantasy and gender.

2.3. Women's alternatives: interaction of fantasy and gender

The last section has explored theories of the interaction of fantasy and race; this section will further extend this by the introduction of the category of gender. James Clifford explains that diasporic discourse has a paradoxical impact on gender subordination. On the one hand, patriarchal structure may be renewed by 'maintaining connections with homelands, with kinship networks, and with religious and cultural traditions',¹⁶² while on the other hand, diasporic interactions would open new political spaces and requires women to take on 'new roles and demands'.¹⁶³ Under such a situation, diasporic women's experience can be doubly painful in 'struggling with the material and spiritual insecurities of exile', with 'the demands of family and work', and with 'the claims of old and new patriarchies'.¹⁶⁴ It is not surprising that critics Anne Koenen and Lucie Armitt have both called for feminism to address fantasy. They both consider that women's literature has been examined differently to male-authored works that employ the device of fantasy.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² James Clifford, 'Diasporas', *Cultural Anthropology*, 9.3 (1994), 301-38 (p. 314).

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Lucie Armitt, *Contemporary Women's Fiction and the Fantastic* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p. 12; Anne Koenen, *Visions of Doom, Plots of Power: the Fantastic in Anglo-American Women's Literature* (Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert Verlag, 1999), p. 2.

Diasporic women are silenced and othered by white male-dominated patriarchal discourses. They are writing from the position of the other and challenging dominant values, which as Anne Koenen points out, coincides with definitions of fantasy.¹⁶⁶ This use of fantasy imposes fewer restrictions on female characters in the literature who are silenced in the patriarchal society. Jackson's definition of fantasy as a literature of desire and a mode of discourse, of revealing the 'silenced' and 'invisible' parts of culture has particular relevance to diasporic women's literature. It is through such imaginings that women have attempted to break their silence and to become visible. Cranny-Francis points out the invisibility of women in society is followed by a denial of their subjectivity. She explains that: 'women, the experiential subjects rather than the idealist construct, are not only invisible; they are entirely imperceptible'.¹⁶⁷ The use of fantasy in women's writing then enables them to 'explore the problems of being for women in a society which denies them not only visibility but also subjectivity. It scrutinizes the categories of the patriarchal real, revealing them to be arbitrary, shifting constructs'.¹⁶⁸ Cranny-Francis's research subjects are not diasporic Chinese women, however, the construction of subjectivity for them is similar. In women's constructing of their subjectivity, Koenen argues, fantasy can 'violate verisimilitude and describes realities which have been excluded from hegemonic construction of reality as non-existent, as impossibilities in a supposedly natural order'.¹⁶⁹ Chinese diasporic women authors, who belong to the socially unseen and invisible, write against the muteness reinforced by double marginalisation caused by racist and sexist silencing. Their use of fantasy empowers

¹⁶⁶ Koenen, p. 38.

¹⁶⁷ Anne Cranny-Francis, *Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction* (New York: St. Martin's, 1990), p. 77.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Koenen, p. 4.

them to articulate and develop their own alternative spaces of desire against both dominant cultural hegemony and patriarchal ideology, both of which have marginalised Chinese diasporic women, confirming them to the traditional roles mothers, daughters, and wives.

The tropes of home and family are normally interwoven with fantasy in diasporic writing. Women's search for home, or their negotiation of home, indicates a political and ideological struggle as it is a notion which 'condense[s] social power-struggles in a microcosm'.¹⁷⁰ Fantasy offers a means to reconstruct their identity and destabilises the equation of women with home and their family. Armitt points out that 'woman's social relationship with the home has become increasingly alienated as the century has worn on, this apparently positive space has become a site of anger and tension', so that home becomes 'a site of fantasy'.¹⁷¹ Theories of fantasy have explained its subversive relationship to the familiar. It is not unusual that in Chinese diasporic women's writing, the family becomes a source of the uncanny, a battlefield of gendered power-conflicts, and a location of resistance against patriarchy. Nancy Walker has argued that women's writing essentially adopts fantasy to subvert the control of authority.¹⁷² Women negotiate their self-identity with their family, attempting to free themselves from patriarchal authority such as parents' control and marriage. For diasporic minority women, the problems of self-identity and isolation have been compounded by cultural as well as gender barriers. Koenen argues that fantasy in diasporic women's literature is set as a 'native mode' against the rationalism of the dominant culture.¹⁷³ Thus it

¹⁷⁰ Koenen, p. 311.

¹⁷¹ Lucie Armitt, *Contemporary Women's Fiction and the Fantastic* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p. 2.

¹⁷² Nancy A. Walker, *Feminist Alternatives: Irony and Fantasy in the Contemporary Novel by Women* (Jackson and London: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), p. 8.

¹⁷³ Koenen, p. 46.

becomes a ‘re-evaluation or celebration of minority culture, a re-capturing of a past cultural wholeness that often achieves utopian dimensions’.¹⁷⁴ Fantasy in Chinese diasporic women’s literature does not necessarily achieve ‘utopian dimensions’, while it does attempt to make visible its Chinese diasporic subjects visible and make their voices heard.

This search for a space of desire makes fantasy ‘a locus for the articulation of radical resistance’.¹⁷⁵ This resistance, for diasporic women, entails the search for a space ‘where there is unlimited access to the pleasure and power of knowing, where transformation is possible’;¹⁷⁶ a space enabling diasporic subjects to ‘redeem and reclaim the past, legacies of pain, suffering, and triumph in ways that transform present reality’.¹⁷⁷ A common characteristic in the corpus of this study is how writers take recourse to cultural tradition in their fantasy, and mix Chinese ancient myths, folktales, fairy tales and legends in their diasporic North American reality. Considering their position in-between, fantasy written by diasporic Chinese women authors do not record or introduce Chinese cultural and fantastic elements as literary source, rather, they rework these stories in their own ways and challenge androcentric literary tradition in Chinese diasporic studies. Besides, their writing does not succumb to the danger of idealizing the nostalgic sense of homeland, the location of conflict for their women protagonists; rather, it negotiates between differences and identification, as well as imagining difference constructions of home, and unsettling the fixed understanding of this term.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 46.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 308.

¹⁷⁶ bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), p. 147.

¹⁷⁷ hooks, p. 149.

To sum up, my theoretical framework starts with theories of understanding fantasy including Todorov, Jackson, Brooke-Rose and Attebery, narrowing down this conception as a literary mode of discourse with a subversive function. These theories of fantasy are further explored in the postcolonial narrative of home and a sense of ‘unhomeliness’ for the diasporic subjects. The interaction of these two discourses has been theorised by Nnedi Okorafor’s term ‘new fantasy’, Homi K. Bhabha’s ‘cultural hybridity’, Avtar Brah’s ‘home desire’ and Stuart Hall’s ‘cultural identity’. This interaction is also supported by some feminists’ references to fantasy and home, since they argue that fantasy is a mode of discourse and articulates an imagined home for marginalised subjects, and therefore challenges hegemonic and patriarchal constructions of gender. Each chapter will therefore draw as appropriate as the various theoretical approaches discussed in order better to understand the specific interplay between discourse of home and mode of literary fantasy in the corpus at this study.

3. Thesis Structure

Having introduced theoretical approaches, this section will further explain how the four chapters in the main body will apply these theoretical perspectives and approaches to the corpus. In the second part, I will set out the aims and contributions of this study, and the potential difficulties that have arisen in this study.

3.1. Outline of chapters

Chapter One, entitled ‘The Mythical Homeland and Ghost Hunting in Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*’, explores the way Kingston articulates her own

voices and identity through retelling various family stories, Chinese legends and her diasporic life experiences. Her memoir provides different understandings of home for members of the first and second generation of Chinese immigrants in America from the 1930s to the 1970s. The notion of home can be understood from biological, geographical, and ethnographical perspectives, as well as being constructed via elements of personal memories, family histories, myths, and literary imagination. This chapter will argue that by drawing upon Chinese legends and myths mixed with the narrator's diasporic daily life stories, literary fantasy breaks the silence of diasporic women, enabling them to construct their identity as Chinese Americans. The use of fantasy provides ways for Kingston to challenge the notion of home within a nation stereotyped by Orientalist and nationalist representation.

The second chapter, 'Homing Desire and the Use of Cinderella Tales in Adeline Yen Mah's *Falling Leaves: The True Story of an Unwanted Chinese Daughter*, demonstrates the depiction of subjectivity within and away from the family, by interpreting relations of kinship and subjectivity within a particular social, cultural and historical context in China from the 1930s to the 1990s. Focusing my analysis on the use *Cinderella* motif in this memoir, this chapter demonstrates how diasporic women negotiate the space of 'home' between the nuclear family, original country and the resident nation as a flexible citizenship. This chapter will argue that the use of fantasy in Mah's memoir unsettles Orientalist stereotypical representation of Chinese women and culture, dismantling the notion of home in the basis of a fixed root.

Chapter Three, 'The Ghostly Search for Home and Self in Ying Chen's *Ingratitude*', discusses the representation of the subject within a dysfunctional family and in the

mother-daughter relationship in a patriarchal society. Chen uses the posthumous narrative as a mode of fantasy in this novel, to question traditional women's role in a patriarchal society. Through exploring the posthumous voice, this chapter will argue that the use of literary fantasy in this text opens the possibility and fluidity to constitute identity in the relation with the notion of home and unhomeliness within and beyond the nuclear family unit.

Chapter Four is entitled 'Crossing Boundaries: the Reconstruction of Queering History and Home in Larissa Lai's *When Fox is a Thousand*'. In this novel, the mode of fantasy is represented by Lai's rewriting of folk tales, such as the mythological figure of the Fox, who can transform across temporal and geographical boundaries. By exploring how Lai rewrites this folk tale and retells the life stories of a poet in ancient China, this chapter will argue that this novel creates an imagined space in a constructed ancient China as home for marginalised subjects. This chapter will also illustrate the difficulties of a diasporic queer subject experiences in building a home in contemporary Canada. By crossing racialized, gendered, and sexualized boundaries, Lai's reconstruction of home challenges the conventional understanding of home based on kinship, family and fixed locality, and supplies an alternative history for queer women.

Although each chapter has a slightly different perspective reflecting the divesting of the corpus, the similarities in their concerns are easily seen, such as issues of the relationship with family and home, history and memories, conflicts between cultures and different generations. Collectively, this group of writers allows me to investigate the ways in which their texts critique, subvert and reconstruct the notion of home

through their use of a variety of types of fantasy in their writing. In the case of each author, it will be seen that even though the ways they use fantasy in their writing are various, fantasy has a similar function of subversion, allowing marginalized subjects to break the silence, to retell their stories, to rewrite history and to express their desires, all of which would create a new space for negotiating a more egalitarian representation of their subjectivity and their differently imagined notions of home.

3.2. Potential difficulties and contribution

This thesis investigates the relationship between fantasy and home, including the interaction of race and gender in contemporary Chinese diasporic women's literature. My project might present a number of difficulties. First, fantasy in women's writing might simply reinforce a tendency identified by feminist theorists to 'further dematerialize and de-realize "woman"'.¹⁷⁸ This is already noticed by Maria Clark, who explains that feminine fantasy may be considered as an expression of 'what is essentially feminine, namely, irrational, mad, imaginary, and everything else that takes a negative position in a hierarchical polar opposition'.¹⁷⁹ In a similar vein, there is a debate in diaspora studies around whether it is a risk for minority authors to use fantasy for a strategy of achieving commercial success in the Western publishing market, since by doing so they may exoticise themselves and reinforce the stereotype of China as conceived by the Western gaze. Moreover, as I argue that fantasy can imagine a space as home for marginalised subjects, this might be considered as a form of 'escapism' or a 'utopia' which are more negatively interpreted. However, my attempt to bridge

¹⁷⁸ Maria B. Clark, 'Usurping Difference in the Feminine Fantastic from the Riverplate', *Studies in Twentieth Century Literature*, 20.1 (1996), 235-49 (p. 239).

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

literary fantasy and social categories of gender and race through Chinese diasporic women's literature will not aim to create a rational blueprint for a better society. The literary fantasy of subversion, as used by these authors, points to the gaps in the dominating hegemonic discourse that enable the marginalized subject to speak, and enables 'other cultures' to be read. My thesis argues, by examining a selected corpus of texts by diasporic women in different positions in relation to ideas of home and belonging, how their use of fantasy as a tool of subversion is broader and more far-reaching than existing critical studies have demonstrated.

Chapter One: The Mythical Homeland and Ghost Hunting in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*

Introduction

This opening chapter will examine Maxine Hong Kingston's best-known work *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*.¹⁸⁰ It is considered a pioneering text of Chinese American literature, not only because of the form of expression it adopts in order to create a political consciousness and identity, but also because of its generic instability: part memoir, part fiction, and both involving elements of the fantastic. This mode of writing, as Esther Mikyung Ghymn explains, leads the way for Chinese American diasporic women writers to join the world of fantasy.¹⁸¹ In selecting the text as a case study, this chapter explores the mode of fantasy in relation to the notion of home that exists in earlier Chinese American women's writing of the 1970s; the subsequent chapters will focus on works published in the 1990s. As the subtitle indicates, Kingston was haunted by ghosts during her childhood. I explore the way in which Kingston constructs her identity by retelling various stories of the 'ghosts'. I suggest that literary imagination enables Kingston to create these stories by making a hybrid identity and cultural space, which can empower her to cross the boundaries between nations. Kingston's use of Chinese folktales, myths and ghost stories may expose her to a self-Orientalizing tendency which capitalizes on Chinese sources to appease American audiences and a dominantly

¹⁸⁰ Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976). (It was first published in Great Britain 1977 by Allen Lane, this study uses the Picador edition published in 1981 by Pan Books Ltd, London). All subsequent citations of this work are given parenthetically within the text.

¹⁸¹ Esther Mikyung Ghymn, *Images of Asian American Women by Asian American Women Writers* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), p. 162

western publishing market. Nevertheless, this chapter argues that the use of fantasy offers Kingston ways of reimagine a 'home' away from nationalist and Orientalist Stereotypes.

As a second generation Chinese immigrant, Kingston was born in California on 27 October 1940 and grew up in a Chinatown area in California. Her first book *The Woman Warrior*, consists of five different stories told by various voices, combining Kingston's family stories, her mother's story-telling and her own experiences and imagination. The first story, 'No Name Woman', introduces the life story of the narrator's unidentified aunt who is intentionally ignored and effectively erased from the consciousness of her family because of her adultery and the fact that she bore an illegitimate child. This story is told in the first person using Kingston's voice, and becomes a story imagined by Kingston. The second story, 'White Tigers' rewrites mythical figures from the Chinese legend of the woman warrior, Fa Mu Lan, who takes the place of her ageing father in the army, fighting in battle and vanquishing enemies in order to protect her country and hometown. In this story, Kingston presents her younger self, identifying with Fa Mu Lan and retelling her story in the first person. The third story 'Shaman', tells life stories from the narrator's mother, Brave Orchid, including her experience in China of exorcising ghosts when she was studying in medical college, and her life afterwards after immigrating to the US, where she and her husband ran a laundry. The fourth chapter 'At the Western Palace', told in the third person, narrates the sad tale of Moon Orchid, Brave Orchid's sister, whose husband abandons her for the US and leaves her behind in China for thirty years. With her sister's help, Moon Orchid comes to join her husband but is rejected by him as is now married to a young American woman. This rejection is the cause of her mental

confusion, and eventually death. The final story, 'A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe', relates the narrator's realisation of the desire to break the silences oppressing her, in order to finally possess her own voice and tell her stories. It concludes with the rewriting of a legend of an ancient Chinese poetess Ts'ai Yen, who represents a successful model for making a bridge between two languages and cultures.

The multi-narrative lines in each of these tales break the conventional chronology and sequenced accounts of autobiographical writing. Its mixed genres, personal experiences, family stories, and rewriting of legendary stories, retelling of stories passing down from one generation to the next, have all raised debates about whether to categorise it as autobiography, memoir, novel or non-fiction. Equally, the genre mixture blurs the line between realism and literary fantasy.¹⁸² Nevertheless, it was published in the generic category of 'non-fiction', and Charles Elliot, Kingston's editor at Knopf, explains that this choice was taken in consideration of the publishing market as 'it [*The Woman Warrior*] would stand a stronger chance of selling well as non-fiction autobiography'.¹⁸³ Regarding genre, Kingston herself claims that she finds its normal boundaries too confining and instead prefers to take an unconventional approach.¹⁸⁴ She deliberately problematises certain generic conventions culled from Chinese and American culture. Her position in between cultures results in a textual and fictional construction of subjectivity.

¹⁸² The debates on its generic status can be seen from: Joan Lidoff, 'Autobiography in a different Voice: Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*', *A/B: Auto/Biography Studies*, 3.3 (1987), 29-35; Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 1987); Lauren Rusk, *The Life Writing of Otherness: Woolf, Baldwin, Kingston, and Winterson* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

¹⁸³ Gloria H. Chun, 'Metaphysician of Orientalism: Maxine Hong Kingston', Sixth National Conference of the Association for Asian American Studies (New York: June 1989).

¹⁸⁴ Shelley Fisher Fishkin, 'Interview with Maxine Hong Kingston', *American Literary History*, 3.4 (1991), 789-91 (p. 780).

This chapter is organized into three parts: the first section explores how Kingston, as an America born-and-raised daughter and her Chinese parents understand the notion of home and unhomeliness differently, and how she manages to address her confusion over her identity in-between cultures, especially in the context of her experiences under the double oppression of racism and sexism. This section also discusses whether Kingston's claim of Americanness represents an Orientalist representation of Chinese, and Chinese-American cultures; or whether it creates a hybrid space for diasporic identity. The second section explores Kingston's retelling of her aunts' stories; Kingston is haunted by her dead, no-name aunt and seeks to voice her story; and her maternal aunt Moon Orchid is presented as a ghost of cultural Other reflecting the aunt's experience of geographical and cultural displacement. The third section focuses on Kingston's rewriting of two Chinese legendary stories about the woman warrior Mu Lan and the poetess Ts'ai Yen: both presented as positive models of cultural hybridity.

1. Constructing Chinese-American identity

As an American-born daughter to native Chinese parents, Kingston struggles for identity in-between both cultures. Without any life experience in China, she learns about Chinese culture and histories from her mother's storytelling. Her remoteness and separation from China, as well as her marginal status and experience of exclusion and alienation in American society, causes her confusion about who exactly she is. She experiences difficulties and cultural dislocation caused by both racism and sexism, which lead to her sense of unhomeliness.

1.1. State of unhomeliness: living among ghosts

As the subtitle of her text suggests, Kingston writes about her memories of childhood among ghosts. Her parents have lived in America for thirty-five years, they continue to cherish the idea of home and the homeland, where they own a piece of land in a village in China. As Vivian Hsu points out, the first generation of Chinese Americans actually ‘have not spiritually immigrated to America. They wander in a ghostlike existence, hanging on to a former reality’.¹⁸⁵ For Brave Orchid, life in America is not real enough for her to build her home. She often says to her daughter: ‘someday, very soon, we’re going home, where there are Han people everywhere. We’ll buy furniture then, real tables and chairs. You children will smell flowers for the first time.’ (92). Brave Orchid has a very strong sense of unreality, living in a world inhabited by ghosts: ‘America has been full of machines and ghosts – Taxi Ghosts, Bus Ghosts, Police Ghosts, Fire Ghosts, Meter Reader Ghosts, Tree Trimming Ghosts, Five-and-Dime Ghosts’ (90). Brave Orchid often tells her daughter that they are ‘among ghosts, were taught by ghosts, and were ourselves half ghosts’ (183). The word ‘ghost’ is used here to convey the meaning of ‘otherness’ for both sides: for one thing, as David Leiwei Li explains, ‘ghost’ presents a derogatory description of ‘foreigners’ and ‘non-Chinese’ people defined from a racial perspective. It has been commonly used in China since the late nineteenth century when ‘Western imperial powers invaded the Chin [Qing dynasty] Empire of China with guns and opium’.¹⁸⁶ So in the eyes of Brave Orchid, Americans are ‘ghosts’, the other, compared with her conventional self-identification as a ‘Chinese’. In the meanwhile, inhabiting in America, she is equally

¹⁸⁵Vivian Hsu, ‘Maxine Hong Kingston as Psycho-Autobiographer and Ethnographer’, *International Journal of Women’s Studies*, 6 (1983), 429-42 (p. 437).

¹⁸⁶David Leiwei Li, ‘The Naming of a Chinese American ‘I’: Cross-Cultural Sign/ifications in *The Woman Warrior*’, *Criticism*, 30.4 (1988), 497-515 (p. 508).

othered as a foreigner. Sami Ludwig distinguishes between ‘Chinese Ghosts’ and ‘American Ghosts’ – ‘Chinese ghosts’ are inside a cultural context which stands for a represented absence and a metaphysical space which is physically non-existent; whereas ‘American Ghosts’ stands for human beings who have shapes ‘like our own’, being outside a cultural discourse but physically present, thus defining ‘a presence which is not represented’.¹⁸⁷ Because of different cultural contexts, the metaphor of ‘ghosts’ inside and outside cultural discourse speaks of invisibility and metaphysical nonexistence.

This also accounts for some of the hardships that face them as American immigrant labourers. Brave Orchid was a medical doctor in China and had a comfortable life there, but when she comes to America to join her husband, she and her husband have to work hard in a laundry. In the back of the laundry there is a stove and a bed, which make it ‘a cosy new home’ for the family (125). They have no other home to go to, living and working at the laundry, where ‘five or six people would crowd into the bed together. Some slept on the ironing tables, and the small children slept on the shelves’ (125); and ‘no ghost would know there were Chinese asleep in their laundry’ (126). In order to survive in the new country they have to work hard for themselves and for their children. Brave Orchid repeatedly says to her daughter: ‘this is a terrible ghost country, where a human being works her life away’ (97) and ‘I have worked too much. Human beings don’t work like this in China. Time goes slower there. Here we have to hurry, feed the hungry children before we are too old to work’ (98).

¹⁸⁷ Sami Ludwig, *Concrete Language: Intercultural Communication in Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior and Ishmael Reed's Mumbo Jumbo* (Frankfurt am Main; Berlin; Bern; New York: Peter Lang, 1996), p. 122.

At the same time, they also clearly know that it is impossible to return home. For one thing, they have grown accustomed to the American way of life; as her mother explains, ‘Chinese are mischievous. No, I’m too old to keep up with them. They’d be too clever for me. I’ve lost my cunning, having grown accustomed to food’ (100). For another, the fear caused by bad news from China stops them from returning to their homeland. They receive letters from the relatives in China which describe traumatic events happening to ‘landowners’ during the Cultural Revolution (51). Their previous understanding of home as synonymous with ‘land’ is suddenly disrupted by brutal political reality. They used to feel proud of their land ownership in the Chinese village which they claim as home – ‘Just give your father’s name, and any villager can point out our house’ (73). After the Cultural Revolution, their pride turns to fear. After Kingston’s ‘last uncles have been killed’ by people who ‘had still other plans for the land’ (99), her father is asked to write his permission to hand over the land to the government. Thus, they feel that home as it existed in their memories has disappeared. As Brave Orchid claims, ‘we don’t belong anywhere since the Revolution. The old China has disappeared while we’ve been away’ (165) and ‘we have no more China to go home to’ (100). Aware of this, even though they still consider China as their home, Brave Orchid and her husband never go back. Kingston says that ‘my grandmother wrote letters pleading for them to come home, and they ignored her’ (100).¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ Kingston explains her family’s paradoxical relationship to China in an interview: ‘The older generation feel it’s a very terrible place. If any of us go, something bad will happen to us. We will get killed or something. In my family, just about all the men were killed in the revolution. The other fear is that we’ll be thought of as Communist sympathizers if we go and if there is a McCarthy type witchhunt, we will be thrown in relocation camps. There is a whole weight of history involved here’. See Karen Horton, ‘Honolulu Interview’, in *Conversations with Maxine Hong Kingston*, ed. by Paul Skenazy and Tera Martin (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1998), pp. 5-13 (p. 8).

Unlike her parents, Kingston struggles to balance the two cultures and attempts to construct her own identity. Suzanne Juhasz points out that Kingston's 'constitution of self' necessarily involves a definition of home:

Is it America, China, or someplace in between? [...] For Kingston, in fact, who has never been there, China is not so much a physical state as it is a construct made by her parents, a psychological state as much as a place.¹⁸⁹

Juhasz understands home based on a choice between two identities, or the splitting of identity into separate Asian and American components, by asking whether home can be located in 'America, China, or someplace in between'.¹⁹⁰ For Kingston, all the elements of Chinese culture passed down from her parents reinforce in its patriarchal ideology – represented by the stereotypical images of foot-binding, female infanticide, and female enslavement. These images feed into commonly repeated statements such as 'Girls are maggots in the rice'; 'It is more profitable to raise geese than daughters' (43); 'A husband may kill a wife who disobeys him, Confucius said that' (173). The definition of traditional Chinese femininity is forced upon her by the Chinese language and its etymology: 'There is a Chinese word for the female I – which is slave' (49). She is angered when the audience at a Chinese opera performance laughs raucously each time the daughter-in-law sings, 'Beat me, then beat me' (173). This patriarchal ideology perpetuated by her parents terrifies her to such an extent that Kingston cannot accept their understanding of China as 'home', and she claims that:

¹⁸⁹Suzanne Juhasz, 'Narrative Technique and Female Identity', in *Contemporary American Women Writers: Narrative Strategies*, ed. by Catherine Rainwater and William J. Scheick (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1985), pp. 173-89 (p. 74).

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

Whenever my parents said 'home', they suspended America. They suspended enjoyment, but I did not want to go to China. In China my parents would sell my sisters and me. My father would marry two or three more wives, who would spatter cooking oil on our bare toes. (92)

She recounts events in her childhood including the occasion when she attempted to resist her role as a girl by denying her femininity in a conflict with her mother, sobbing: 'I'm not a bad girl [...] I'm not a girl' (48). She refuses to play the role as a Chinese woman, she 'refused to cook' and when she had to wash dishes, she would 'crack one or two' (49). Instead, she claims that she would like to become 'American-feminine' (49). Kingston's narrative internalizes and promotes the American feminist thoughts of freedom and power. She announces her preference for an 'American-normal' (87), a stereotypically white lifestyle. She desires to sever the relationship with her family and her cultural heritage because in order to 'see the world logically [she needs], logic [as] the new way of seeing' (182). She claims to her mother: 'when I am away from home, I don't get sick, I can breathe' (108).

However, she also declares that '[m]y American life has been such a disappointment' (47). She is aware of the existence of racism and discrimination to which she and her family are subjected because of their racial identity and class. Her parents' laundry is destroyed and replaced by a parking lot in the process of urban renewal (49). During her own life and career, she is always encountering mistreatment by 'the stupid racists' (50) illustrated by her boss's words 'nigger yellow' (50) in an art supply house. Moreover, when she works in 'a land developers' association' and helps her boss plan a banquet, her boss means to choose a restaurant which 'is being picketed by CORE

and the NAACP' (50).¹⁹¹ When she 'whispered' her disagreement in a 'voice unreliable', she is fired on the spot (50). Weighed down by racism and discrimination, her resistance is weak, uttered in a 'small-person's voice that makes no impact' (50). As E.D. Huntley explains, Kingston lives 'inhabiting the invisible borderlands between China and America, the geography of the immigrant nation, the country of diasporic people who have lost a homeland and yet have not fully gained a new country of the heart'.¹⁹² In this situation, Kingston uses literary fantasy in this text to allow the 'ghosts' to talk and empower the marginalised subject to cross the boundaries.

1.2. Claiming America: Orientalist or Feminist Fantasy

Critics have pointed out that *The Woman Warrior* fuels Orientalist discourses with a confirmation of their stereotypes, making a plea for 'claiming Americanness', a desire for assimilation into the mainstream culture. In the introduction to *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian American Writers*, Frank Chin argues that Kingston only created a 'white fantasy', having exoticised Chinese culture for commercial success in the American market.¹⁹³ The editors' criticism is that Kingston's lack of cultural authority is due to the position she chose in white American culture. So her representation of Chinese American ethnicity is based on the Orientalist images fashioned by American hegemony. Sheng-Mei Ma argues that Kingston's status of 'American born and raised' already indicates 'the cultural nationalism of the early 1970s when American nativity

¹⁹¹ CORE: Congress of Racial Equality; NAACP: National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People.

¹⁹² E. D. Huntley, *Maxine Hong Kingston: a Critical Companion* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001), p. 40

¹⁹³ Jeffery Paul Chan, Frank Chin, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Wong, eds, *The Big Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature* (New York: Meridian, 1991), p. xi.

was the prerequisite for Asian American identity'.¹⁹⁴ Responding to one of the publishing market's reviews of *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston claims that she has been criticised for her representations of Chinese society and culture in an American context: 'the background is exotic, but the book is in the mainstream of American feminist literature'.¹⁹⁵ She states that the reviewer admires the book because of the exotic background but dislikes it because it is part of the mainstream. Kingston guesses that 'he is saying, then, that I am not to step out of the exotic role, not to enter the mainstream. One of the most deadly weapons of stereotyping is the double bind, damned-if-you-do-and-damned-if-you-don't'.¹⁹⁶

Within the tangled web of diasporic identity, the term *Orientalism* requires clarification. Orientalism, according to Edward Said, is essentially a theory and practice 'based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and "the Occident"'.¹⁹⁷ In this context, Orientalism is a means to iterate 'the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures'.¹⁹⁸ It will be understood that because of Western hegemony, Orientalism identifies Easterners as inferior to Westerners. We see that Kingston's fantasy fails to fit this definition. In *The Woman Warrior*, retelling her family stories based on those of her mother, she uses the voice in the third person and emphasises that these stories are already 'twisted' (147). She expresses uncertainty about the authenticity of her mother's stories about Chinese culture. She shows a

¹⁹⁴ Sheng-mei Ma, *The Deathly Embrace: Orientalism and Asian American Identity* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. xv

¹⁹⁵ Maxine Hong Kingston, 'Cultural Mis-Readings by American Reviewers', in *Asian and Western Writers in Dialogue: New Cultural Identities*, ed., by Guy Amirthanayagam (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 55-56 (p. 56).

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹⁹⁷ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978), p. 10.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

desire to check what ‘real Chinese women’ are and writes ‘I’d like to go to China and see those people’ (184). Without direct life experience in China, she searches for her identity between two cultures. She claims:

Chinese-Americans, when you try to understand what things in you are Chinese, how do you separate what is peculiar to childhood, to poverty, insanities, one family, your mother who marked your growing with stories, from what is Chinese? What is Chinese tradition and what is movies? (13)

With the examination of her self-identity, Kingston does bring Chinese cultural elements into her Western life experience. However, China in *The Woman Warrior* not only serves as a literary source but more importantly, helps inhabit the diasporic subject position. This East/West configuration is not a contrasting binary of opposites. Rather, Kingston places Chinese and American in a ‘coeval’ space, which as Hyungji Park explains, is a space ‘without relative sequence, order, or priority’.¹⁹⁹ Said stresses the position of superiority, but he does not elaborate on the position of Asian diasporic subjects living in Western discourse. Even though Kingston might saturate her work with Orientalist stereotypes, she is not, strictly speaking, a representative of Orientalism. Her struggle is revealed in the ambiguous nature of her identification with Chinese heritage alongside her unsatisfying American life. She does separate herself from Chinese women, but she also uses Chinese myths and legends as her weapon of resistance against dominant powers. It is therefore in this ‘coeval’ space, at least, that these voices of Chinese women and their unseen culture can be heard and seen in Western culture and hence made visible. As Sheng-Mei Ma argues, ‘in order to retire racist stereotypes, one is obliged to first evoke them; in order to construct ethnicity,

¹⁹⁹ Hyungji Park, ‘Toward a Definition of Diaspora Literature’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Asian American Literature*, ed. by Crystal Parikh and Daniel Y. Kim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 155-66 (p. 157).

one must first deconstruct what is falsely reported as one's ethnic identity. Both result in an unwitting reiteration of Orientalist images'.²⁰⁰ Ma's view seems to classify Kingston's Orientalist images as an unintentional or perhaps unconscious fantasy; I argue that this is due to the 'double bind' of the difficulties of subjective decision and the problem of authorial responsibility.

Nevertheless, consciously or unconsciously, Kingston's literary fantasy becomes a mode of subversion, making visible the invisible and unseen, speaking for the diasporic women who are silenced by Chinese patriarchal ideology as well as dominant American hegemony, helping her to place her experiences of sexual oppression and racism into a fantasy of revenge. As Kingston claims in her 'Personal Statement' for this book, 'Fa Mu Lan is a fantasy that inspires the girls' psyches and their politics. The myths transform lives and are themselves changed'.²⁰¹ The Orientalist fantasy in *The Woman Warrior*, as Joanne S. Frye argues, transposes Chinese literary sources into an English language tradition that has achieved success on the Western publishing market.²⁰² In this way, the fantasy empowers the author to open hegemonic discourses and break into main stream American culture, where, even though it might not break, or even fulfil, Orientalist expectations. Kingston herself has noticed its double effects. In her article 'Cultural Mis-Readings by American Reviewers', she claims that 'the critics who said how the book was good because it

²⁰⁰ Sheng-Mei Ma, *The Deathly Embrace: Orientalism and Asian American Identity* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. xi.

²⁰¹ Maxine Hong Kingston, 'Personal Statement', *Approaches to Teaching Kingston's The Woman Warrior*, ed. by Shirley Geok-lin Lim (New York: MLA, 1991), pp. 23-25 (p. 24).

²⁰² Joanne S. Frye, 'The Woman Warrior: Claiming Narrative Power, Recreating Female Selfhood', in *Faith of a (Woman) Writer*, ed. by Alice Kessler-Harris and William McBrien (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1988), pp. 293-301 (p. 293).

was, or was not, like the Oriental fantasy in their heads might as well have said how weak it was, since it in fact did not break through that fantasy'.²⁰³

The cover design of *The Woman Warrior* (the 1981 Picador edition used in this study) provides a vivid example of this cultural hybridity, and its Orientalist images: a female figure in a traditional Chinese red robe, an obviously Asian face with dark hair. Her blue eyes and short hair make her look like a feminist warrior. The skin of her face is mixed with dark brown on the top half and pale underneath, suggesting her hybrid identity. Behind this figure, there are some small red Chinese written characters; the only identifiable one is '唐' (Tang dynasty (CE 618-907), representing the imperial dynasty of China.²⁰⁴ Behind, is an image of a modern American city with brightly-lit skyscrapers and high-rise buildings. At the right of the picture, brown-black smoke issues from the tall buildings. The whole image echoes the scene in the chapter 'White Tigers', recounting how the author-narrator occupied the palace of the last emperor, and 'exorcised the house with smoke and red paper' (47), claiming that 'this is a new year' (47). In this cover picture, although there are obvious stereotypical images of Chinese culture, the notion of cultural hybridity is scarcely made apparent.

Another example of Kingston's 'accommodation, adaptation and appropriation' is her description of Chinese ideograms in *The Woman Warrior*. For instance, in the chapter 'White Tigers', the narrator describes the Chinese ideograph for 'human' (人) as 'two

²⁰³ Maxine Hong Kingston, 'Cultural Mis-Readings by American Reviewers', in *Asian and Western Writers in Dialogue: New Cultural Identities*, ed. by Guy Amirthanayagam (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 55-56 (p. 55).

²⁰⁴ Tang dynasty is generally regarded the highest point in Chinese feudal history and a golden age of cosmopolitan culture. More details can be seen in Mark Edward Lewis, *China's Cosmopolitan Empires: The Tang Dynasty* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2012).

black wings' as the bird flew in the sky (26, my Chinese insertion). And 'the bird would cross the sun and lift into the mountains' (26) reminds the narrator of the ideograph 'mountain' (山). These descriptions, however, do not provide Chinese ideographs in the text. Li argues that the use of Chinese ideographs might be seen as transcending Chinese culture in a new landscape. He explains that 'the imagining of self in a bird's flight, symbolic of one's freedom and transcendence, is probably as old as literary romanticism, both Western and Eastern'.²⁰⁵ What makes it new, is that this freedom of 'imagining of self' has not completely escaped from Chinese cultural heritage. The narrator describes her confusion of Chinese 'I' (我) from the English one: 'I could not understand "I". The Chinese "I" has seven strokes, intricacies. How could the American "I", assuredly wearing a hat like the Chinese, have only three strokes, the middle so straight?' (150). Both of her attempts to fit her American 'I' in her Chinese language and Chinese 'I' in American daily life turn out to be in vain. She claims that she is equally confused with the word 'here' (这儿), which in English has 'no strong consonant to hang on and so flat' (150) while in Chinese it is 'two mountainous ideographs' (150). The author-narrator has difficulties in understanding what 'here' means as she cannot locate herself in an American 'here'. The narrator thus brings Chinese 'there' to 'here' in order to 'figure out how the invisible world the emigrants build around our childhoods fits in solid America' (13).

²⁰⁵ David Leiwei Li, 'The Production the Chinese American Tradition: Displacing American Orientalist Discourse', in *Reading the Literatures of Asian America*, ed. by Shirley Lim and Amy Ling (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), pp. 319-30 (p. 327).

The use of with becomes a strategy for Kingston in the publishing market but it does not guarantee nor promise accurate representation. However, this does not mean that the representation is necessarily negative. It bears close resemblance to a critique in which Said rejects the structure of Orientalism as a misrepresentation of the truth of the Orient. He explains that there is no such thing as ‘a real or true Orient’,²⁰⁶ and stresses the ‘sheer knitted together strength of Orientalist discourse’.²⁰⁷ The power of Orientalist fantasy, then, cannot stem from the prejudiced or negative representation of Chinese people and culture in Kingston’s writing. In *The Woman Warrior*, I argue, the way in which Kingston constitutes subjectivity for Chinese women, as well the way in which she struggles towards an understanding, using both fantasy and imagination, can only take place through considering both Chinese and American cultures; and this draws in part on Orientalist images of China.

Thus for Kingston, ‘claiming America’ does not depend on a narrow understanding of nationalism and a desire for assimilation. Rather, it can be understood as a sense of diasporic universalism. In this sense, Li claims that Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* ‘remained the first text to both enter the arena of national culture and arrest American public imagination’.²⁰⁸ Kingston remarks clearly that ‘I do believe in the timelessness and universality of individual vision. *The Woman Warrior* would not just be a family book or an American book or a Woman’s book but a world book’.²⁰⁹ In an interview, Kingston explains: ‘claiming America does not mean assimilation of American values,

²⁰⁶ Said, p. 322.

²⁰⁷ Said, p. 14.

²⁰⁸ Li, p. 44.

²⁰⁹ Maxine Hong Kingston, ‘Cultural Mis-Readings by American Reviewers’, *Asian and Western Writers in Dialogue: New Cultural Identities*, ed. by Guy Amirthanayagam (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 55-56. p. 56.

but rather a response to the legislation and racism that says we of Chinese origin do not belong here in America. [...] No, we're not outsiders; we Chinese belong here. This is our country, this is our history, we are a part of America. If it weren't for us, America would be a different place'.²¹⁰ Kingston claims: 'I learned to make my mind large, as the universe is large, so that there is room for paradoxes' (29). She asks her mother, 'does it make sense to you that if we're no longer attached to one piece of land, we belong to the planet? Wherever we happen to be standing, why, that spot belongs to us as much as any other spot?' (99). In this sense, David Leiwei Li explains, it was Kingston's 'deliberate accommodation, adaptation, and appropriation of the familiar orientalist geopolitical imagination' that enabled her text's entry into American culture.²¹¹ Kingston does not just record and use ancient Chinese stories as exotic sources, nor does she tell contemporary stories of Chinese women with a stereotypical representation. Rather, her text shows the power of creative writing and imagination applied to Chinese myths and legend. I shall discuss this more fully in the two following sections.

2. Ghosts of Silence and Haunting

Her mother told many stories about members of the family, and Kingston is often haunted by these family memories. In an interview in 1987, she says of the memory that it is 'insignificant, except when it haunts you and it is a foundation for the rest of the personality'.²¹² The present section explores how Kingston rewrites her family

²¹⁰ Arturo Islas, 'Maxine Hong Kingston: From an Interview Between Kingston and Arturo Islas', in *Women - Writers of the West Coast*, ed. by Marilyn Yalom (Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1983), p. 16.

²¹¹ David Leiwei Li, *Imagining the Nation: Asian American Literature and Cultural Consent* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 46.

²¹² Maxine Kong Kingston, 'Eccentric Memoires: A Conversation with Maxine Hong Kingston', *Michigan Quarterly Review* 26 (1987), p. 178

memories and stories using her imagination; she does not exorcise the ghosts but give them ‘substance’ and ‘solidity’, as she explains: ‘I have learned that writing does not make ghosts go away. [...] I wanted to give them a substance that goes beyond me’.²¹³ Through retelling these ghosts’ stories, Kingston enables herself, as a ‘half-ghost’, to build a personality that fits in ‘solid America’ (13).

2.1. Ghosts of retelling: breaking the silence

The Woman Warrior opens with the story of ‘No Name Woman’; Kingston’s mother issues an injunction to silence in recounting the story of her aunt, who commits suicide. Hence, her name is erased from the family history: ‘You must not tell anyone’ my mother said, ‘what I am about to tell you. In China your father had a sister who killed herself’ (11). The aunt has ruined the family’s reputation and is henceforth considered as a ghost without a name. ‘We say that your father only has brothers because it is as if she had never been born’ (11). The no-name aunt’s story is silenced by her family and they call her ‘ghost’ and ‘pig’ instead of her name (12). Kingston’s mother tells her the story on the occasion of her first menstrual flow, in order to teach her daughter that sexual indiscretion can lead to the loss of family and the denial of her existence. Her mother warns her: ‘What happened to her could happen to you. Don’t humiliate us. You wouldn’t like to be forgotten as if you had never been born. The villagers are watchful.’(13). For this purpose, the mother only tells Kingston the basic plot of the punishing actions of the villagers upon the aunt and her family. Kingston wants to know more details about her aunt but the mother ‘has told me once and for all the useful parts. She will add nothing unless powered by Necessity’ (13). Her aunt’s sexual desire is not a ‘necessity’ but an ‘extravagance’ (13), in a patriarchal

²¹³ Ibid.

society where 'to be a woman, to have a daughter in starvation-time was a waste enough. My aunt could not have been the lone romantic who gave up everything for sex' (14).

In her mother's version, the no-name aunt is a victim of feudalism and arranged marriage in the 1920s. It was a harsh period in China as the traditional village was under threat from a number of directions. Kingston mentions these: 'ghost plagues, bandit plagues, wars with the Japanese, floods' (19). The poverty and starvation made all the men of the villages decide to sail to America to earn money. The village arranges 'seventeen hurry-up weddings' in such a situation to make sure that 'all of them sent money home' (11). The no-name aunt's marriage was arranged in this rush and 'she had stood tractably beside the best rooster, his proxy, and promised before they met that she would be his forever' (21). Rather than someone who can choose as husband the man she loves, she is a mere object in this marriage. Kingston's mother does not explain whether the no-name woman's pregnancy is a result of adultery, rape, true love or purely from here sexual desire. In a society in which 'sex was unspeakable' (21) the mother herself is silenced by the patriarchal ideology and the power of her husband: 'Don't let you father know that I told you. He denies her' (13). Moreover, Kingston declares that her mother does not know the whole story since she never lived with the no-name woman. Kingston explains that in Chinese a synonym for marriage is 'taking a daughter-in law' (14), which means once a woman is married, she must live with her husband's parents. They 'could have sold her, mortgaged her, stoned her' (15). Doubting the authenticity of her mother's account of the no-name woman's story, Kingston questions the way her mother spoke 'as if she had seen it' (15), and tries to reconstruct the story in her own way.

In Kingston's retelling of the story, the no-name aunt is a sexually alive woman; her parents arrange a marriage for her with a man she had never met and 'the night she first saw him, *he* had sex with her. Then he left for America.' [my emphasis] (14). She is an object of her husband's desire, a tool for bearing children in order to continue the family line. In Kingston's imagination, the no-name aunt is a strong sexual woman with a very clear sense of individuality. She desires love and she intentionally attracts men's sexual interest by combing her hair into special styles and spending hours in front of a mirror to make herself more attractive: 'To sustain her being in love, she often worked herself in the mirror, suggesting the colours and shapes that would interest him, changing them frequently in order to hit on the right combination. She wanted him to look back' (16). Kingston imagines that her aunt 'combed individuality into her bob' (16) and 'she dreamed of a lover' (17). Kingston normalises the no-name aunt's desires for a man: 'She liked the way the hair was tucked behind his ears, or she liked the question-mark line of a long torso curving at the shoulder and straight at the hip' (15). Or simply because of 'warm eyes or soft voice or a slow walk' (15). Her sexual desire for men is as normal as the desire for love and company from her husband, who has left so soon after her marriage that she 'had almost forgotten what he looked like' (14). Through her imagination, Kingston empowers her aunt to satisfy her sexual desire to confirm her existence as a subject.

However, in a patriarchal society, the no-name woman's sexual desire is repressed by the traditional law of kinship. Kingston empowers her aunt with the spirits of rebellion. Living in an environment where 'all the village were kinsmen' (18), individual sexual desire indicates the fear of incest which may destroy family circles and the blood

kinship. Without outsiders entering, each villager, as Kingston describes, ‘depended on one another to maintain the real’, thus the no-name woman’s individuality breaks the ‘roundness’ (18). Individual sexual desires in the village are repressed as preservation demands that ‘the feelings playing about in one’s guts not be turned into action. Just watch their passing like cherry blossoms’ (15). But her aunt is a ‘forerunner’ who would ‘let dreams grow’ (15).

Besides the Chinese feudalism of the village, Kingston also emphasises the traditional roles weighing down women. While men went to the US to search for opportunities, women were expected to maintain Chinese traditions. The no-name aunt is the only daughter in her family, her four brothers, father, husband and uncles are ‘out on the road’ and years later they become ‘western men’ (15). In contrast, the women back home are expected to ‘keep the traditional ways’ (15). Harsh living conditions make Chinese women look like ‘great sea snails – the corded wood, babies, and laundry they carried were the whorls on their backs’ (17). They sacrifice their youth and beauty for the family and their own identity has been erased by these burdens. Yet ironically, their work is not appreciated: ‘The Chinese did not admire a bent back: goddesses and warriors stood straight’ (17). Kingston suggests that if Chinese women were liberated from the burden of traditional roles, they would be able to construct a new subjectivity: ‘Still there must have been a marvellous freeing of beauty when a worker laid down her burden and stretched and arched’ (17).

Seen in a broader international context, in the 1920s all the men in no-name’s family emigrated from China to ‘the Gold Mountain’, the United States; but their wives and daughters could not join them. This is perhaps a result of US institutional racism, an

exclusion policy forbidding Chinese women from joining their labourer husbands in the US.²¹⁴ So Kingston's version of her no-name aunt's life story is also a rebellion against this historical racism. Kingston imagines her aunt 'crossed boundaries not delineated in space' (15). In this sense, Bonnie Winsbro argues that, in Kingston's fantasy, the no-name aunt is actually 'a part of a family that tended toward the west, toward the expression of individuality, toward the crossing of oceans and boundaries'.²¹⁵

Kingston's rewriting of her aunt's story empowers the no-name woman to become both desiring and brave. Her rewriting of the no-name aunt's story enables her to talk and satisfy her sexual desires and re-imagine her identity. Kingston feels that her aunt's ghost spirit 'haunts' her so much that she 'devote[s] pages of paper to her' (22). Through these 'pages of paper', Kingston not only breaks the silence for her, she also fills the gaps in her mother's telling and re-creates new versions, transforming a cautionary tale into a fantasy, in which the aunt turns from a 'ghost' other, a victim of patriarchy, into a speaking subject. As Brian Norman argues, the dead aunt in *The Woman Warrior* becomes 'not a dead woman talking but a dead woman talked about'.²¹⁶ This can be further seen in Kingston's retelling of the story of her other aunt, Moon Orchid.

²¹⁴ Historian Sucheng Chan observes that 'Under such strict conditions, the number of Chinese females entering the country each year during the six decades when Chinese exclusion was in effect numbered in the hundreds rather than the thousands.' See Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: In Interpretative History* (Boston: Twayne, 1991), p. 106. A similar situation can be also seen in the experience of the author-narrator's mother Brave Orchid and her other aunt Moon Orchid, both of whose husbands went to the United States and stayed separated from their wives for years.

²¹⁵ Bonnie Winsbro, *Supernatural Forces: Belief, difference and Power in Contemporary Works by Ethnic Women* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), p. 160.

²¹⁶ Brian Norman, *Dead Women Talking: Figures of Injustice in American Literature* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), p. 177

2.2. Ghosts in displacement: memory and madness

'Ghost' in no-name aunt's story is used as a supernatural figure – a drowned spectre with 'wet hair hanging and skin bloated' (22), and also as an 'other' who is silent, lacking her own voice and identity. In the chapter 'At the Western Palace', Kingston recounts in the third person the story of Moon Orchid, who represents a stereotypical Chinese woman as gentle, useless, and weak. As in the case of the no-name woman, Moon Orchid's husband left China to make his fortune in America after the arranged marriage. Thirty years later, Moon Orchid reaches America with the encouragement and support of her sister Brave Orchid. Encouraged by her sister, Moon Orchid goes to join her husband, who becomes a successful brain surgeon. But Moon Orchid finds that her husband has built a new home in America 'like an American' (139), and married a young American woman. Never returning to China to visit Moon Orchid, nor inviting his wife to America, he claims that he has fulfilled his responsibility to her by regularly sending money. Confronting her husband, Moon Orchid is unable to utter a single word and can only cry. She is too weak to blame him for '[making] her a widow' for thirty years (139). Her husband shouts at her that 'it is a mistake for you to be here. You can't belong. You don't have the hardness for this country.' (138), and his shouting 'silences her crying' (139), as if she were a child threatened into silence after misbehaving.

In this 'reunion', the way in which both Moon Orchid and her husband look is emphasized by describing how they observe each other. In each sentence whenever the husband speaks to Moon Orchid, the narrative always adds 'her husband looks at her' (138-139). In his eyes, Moon Orchid is old like a 'grandmother' (139), or figuratively a book that he 'had read a long time ago' (139); she is an old traditional

Chinese woman who would ‘never fit into an American household’ (139). As for Moon Orchid, she sees her husband like ‘a child born here [in America]’ (138). She feels her husband’s way of looking at her like ‘the savages’ through ‘the rude American eyes’ (138), a person who ‘looked and smelled like an American’ (137). Under her husband’s gaze she feels confused about both his identity and her own. Both of them appear like ghosts: ‘Her husband looked like one of the ghosts passing the car windows, and she must look like a ghost from China. They had indeed entered the land of ghosts, and they had become ghosts’ (139).

The ghost metaphor reflects the conflicts between Moon Orchid and her husband, which represent two cultural codes of China and America. Living in China for most of her life, Moon Orchid only arrives in America in her sixties, with her roots running deep in a cultural tradition, including an understanding of marriage. She never gets a job and financially relies on her husband. She does not get divorced from him and lives with her husband’s family. It is not surprising to see that he still holds the patriarchal authority to which she feels beholden. Roberta Rubenstein explains that Moon Orchid ‘is stripped of her one claim to identity – marriage – and is left with no defined place in the social structure of her immigrant community’.²¹⁷ Once her marriage is denied, her construction of identity loses its foundation. Her Westernized husband has escaped the old values and remarried with a ‘modern’ American young woman. So for each other he and Moon Orchid become ‘ghostly’.

²¹⁷ Roberta Rubenstein, *Boundaries of the Self: Gender, Culture, Fiction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), p. 177.

Soon after re-encountering her husband, Moon Orchid is described as having ‘misplaced herself, her spirit [...] scattered all over the world’ (148). This sense of non-existence gradually makes her lose her vitality, both physically and psychologically. Her skin ‘hung loose, like a hollowed frog’s, as if she had shrunk inside it’ (140). She lives in fear that ghosts might trace her and she slips into what others view as intense paranoia. She begs the children and her family members not to leave the house for fear that they will never return: ‘Don’t let them go’, pleads Moon Orchid, ‘They will never come back’ (143). Although Moon Orchid’s fear and anxiety are extreme, she is not as mad as she might seem. Both her husband and her sister have left for China to America and never came back afterwards. Moreover, many of her family members ‘disappear’ during the Cultural Revolution: ‘[Kington’s] uncles were made to kneel on broken glass during their trials and had confessed to being landowners. They were all executed, and the aunt whose thumbs were twisted off drowned herself. Other aunts, mothers-in-law, and cousins disappeared’ (51). Thus, many years later, a feeling resembling her fear for her life in Communist China seizes Moon Orchid again when she is in an alien country. These painful memories seem to be triggered by her geographical displacement and have resurrected her deep-rooted fear of losing family members.

As perceived by others, Moon Orchid’s insanity has two causes. For one thing, her links with the family and her homeland have been cut off through geographical displacement, where her husband’s denial of her existence deprives her of the last hope of adjusting to her new life in America. Secondly, her fears are still shaped by the trauma experienced while living in Communist China, even though the changing environment has rendered this feeling irrational. She is unable to communicate with

local people because of language barriers; nor can she explain herself to her sister and other 'overseas Chinese' relatives who had not undergone the trauma of the Cultural Revolution. Moon Orchid's inability to explain herself is apparently caused by the language barrier. Sneja Gunew points out that 'language means not simply a linguistic system but the varieties of sign systems which constitute a particular cultural domain'.²¹⁸ She can only understand her new situation by transposing her old cultural values. Geographical displacement brings her into a different language system as well as a different cultural symbolic order. Brave Orchid realizes that the first reason for her sister's madness is, namely, the double fracture of relationship with the 'homeland' and the invisible cultural gap between Moon Orchid and her family (her husband, sister and other relatives). So Brave Orchid's cure for her sister's insanity consists of giving her strength and well-being. Brave Orchid emphasises the bond between her and her sister with the recognition of Moon Orchid's connection to family and the feeling of belonging. Brave Orchid attempts to save her sister by speaking with her for hours, remaining with her all the time as if she was keeping vigil. She believes that she, as a member of Moon Orchid's family, is the anchor for her sister 'to this earth' (142), and that she can connect her sister to a family line in this unfamiliar country. She tries to call her sister's spirit home by repeatedly whispering to her 'you're home. Stay home. Don't be afraid.' (141); 'I'll help your spirit find the place to come back to' (142). It is difficult, however, for Brave Orchid to understand the second deeper reason for her sister's misery, as she emigrated to America in the 1930s and had no social contexts which might help her understand her sister's suffering.

²¹⁸ Sneja Gunew, *Framing Marginality: Multicultural Literary Studies* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1994), p. 114.

Because of her irrational behaviour and fears, Moon Orchid is considered truly and irretrievably mad and is placed in a mental asylum. When Brave Orchid visits here, Moon Orchid seems to be happy living as other women. Moon Orchid proudly tells her sister that ‘we understand one another here. We speak the same language, the very same’ (144). Rendered silent by her Americanised husband and her experiences of geographical and cultural displacement, Moon Orchid eventually finds her path in the mental asylum to transcend language and cultural barriers. Kingston explains that the story of Moon Orchid is told by her sister who hears it from their brother. So the version is ‘twisted’ (147). She is haunted by Moon Orchid’s story and realizes that ‘talking and not talking made the difference between sanity and insanity. Insane people were the ones who couldn’t explain themselves’ (166). Kingston recalls how her whole childhood is silenced due to her gender and her racial status as a Chinese-American daughter. She is silenced by her racial status as a Chinese in her American school since she cannot speak English: ‘The silence had to do with being a Chinese girl’ (150). And she is also rendered speechless by being subject to sexism in the Chinese patriarchal culture of her family and her Chinese-language school. She practices finding her own voices through (re)telling stories.

3. Crossing Boundaries: Rewriting Legends and Myths

In order to overcome her loss of a voice and her feeling of unhomeliness, Kingston imagines that she has the power to cross boundaries between China and America, for ‘nobody in history has conquered and united both North America and Asia’ (50). So her retelling of stories contributes to the process of finding a voice and enabling suppressed voices to be heard; and it unites two cultures. Kingston rewrites two

ancient Chinese legendary stories, Mu Lan and Ts'ai Yen, offering two positive models of cultural hybridity.

3.1. The woman warrior: a heroine of rebellion

In the story 'White Tigers', Kingston recounts the story of a woman warrior based on the Chinese legend 'The Ballad of Mu Lan'.²¹⁹ The woman warrior is a paragon of filial loyalty,²²⁰ who joins the army in order to liberate her elderly father from his rigorous military life and the dangers of battle. Disguised as a man, she conceals her gender beneath the warrior's armour in an era of Chinese history when women were not allowed to join the army because of their domestic duties. For twelve years in the army, she fights against the invading Tartar barbarians, a period in which, thanks to her bravery which matches that of the other soldiers, no one recognizes her gender. After the final victory at the end of the war, she refuses the reward of an official rank and only requests a swift camel so as to return home immediately. Her return as a 'hero' is eulogized by her family and other villagers, and her legend has since been regarded in Chinese history as a fine representation of both filial piety for family and patriotic loyalty to Han ethnicity.

In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston maintains the basic plot structure of this legend but rewrites it in her own way. The family name of Mu Lan actually is Hua, and Kingston uses its Cantonese pronunciation, Fa, since she learned this legend from her mother's bedtime stories, recited in her Cantonese dialect. She claims the swordswoman story

²¹⁹ Frank Chin supplies a version of this poem and its English translation. See Frank Chin, 'Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake', in *The Big Aiiieeeee!: An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature*, ed. by Jeffery Paul Chan, Frank Chin, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Wong (New York: A Meridian Book, 1991), pp. 1-61 (p. 4).

²²⁰ This is paradoxical because of her gender.

already exists in her consciousness as something that would impact the way in which she constructs her own identity: 'Night after night my mother would talk-story until we fell asleep. I wouldn't tell where the stories left off and the dreams began' (25). From her mother's stories, she feels that she possesses the same power as the woman warrior and that subsequently, as she claims, 'I would have to grow up a warrior woman' (26). In the story 'White Tigers', this recognition explains why the whole rewriting of this story uses the first-person narrative. Kingston imagines that a magical bird lures her away into the mountain. A mysterious old couple appear there and begin to train her to be a warrior. After fifteen years of training, the imagined 'I', the author-narrator, returns home, where her parents use a knife and ink to carve revenge, writing out 'oaths and names' (38) upon her back. She leads some peasants who volunteer to join in her army, and heading north, eventually win a battle, beheading the emperor and occupying the palace. She then returns home, both to the one she shares with her parents-in-law and her husband and son, and the other one with her own parents. She becomes a heroine and 'a legend of perfect filiality' (47). Bonnie Winsbro argues that although Mu Lan in *The Woman Warrior* is 'courageous, glorious, and victorious',²²¹ she still fights for males rather than expressing her own desires and dreams. Winsbro summarizes the author-narrator's actions: 'She goes to battle in her father's place, she leads an army of men, she kills the baron to avenge the conscription of her brother and the villagers' sons'.²²² This argument is reinforced, given how the author-narrator reflects the Chinese preference of having a son rather than a daughter. Indeed, in addition to the fact that she gives birth to a son, after the final victory she returns home to take up traditional roles. She kneels before her parents-in-law: 'Now my public

²²¹ Binnie Winsbro, *Supernatural Forces: Belief, Difference, and Power in Contemporary Works by Ethnic Women* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), p. 170.

²²² *Ibid.*, p. 170.

duties are finished [...] I will stay with you, doing farm work and housework, and giving you more sons' (53-4). It is the son, instead of the daughter, that the author-narrator promises to bear in the future.

Although in 'White Tigers', Mu Lan responds to patriarchal ideology by fulfilling the traditional roles for the women as a wife, daughter, and mother, at the same time she also achieves her personal dream of self-autonomy and sexual desire. In its original Chinese version, Mu Lan needs to hide her sexual identity, disguising her femininity, cutting her hair and dressing as a man. In contrast, the author-narrator innately maintains her sexuality in her rewriting of this legend. When her menstruation comes during her training, she asks her female mentor whether she needs to use her magical power to control and stop it. Her mentor explains to her that it means that she grows up as a woman so that she can get married and give birth to children as 'it is the same with the blood. Let it run' (35). Moreover, during her training, her parents arrange her wedding. With her mentor's magical power, she witnesses her wedding through the water in a gourd (35). The author-narrator's mother shows gratitude to the bridegroom: 'Wherever she is, she must be happy now. She will certainly come back if she is alive, and if she is spirit, you will have given her a descent line' (35). However, she changes this tragedy into a happy relationship full of love. She declares, 'How full I would be with all their love for me. I would have for a new husband my own playmate, dear since childhood, who loved me so much he was to become a spirit bridegroom for me' (35). After leading the army, her husband joins her and offers support. Her pregnancy makes her 'a powerful, big man [...] with words carved on my back and the baby large in front' (42). Her roles as wife and mother make her stronger rather than weakening

her. The author-narrator claims: 'marriage and childbirth strengthen the swordswoman, who is not a maid like Joan of Arc' (49).

In this rewriting of the woman warrior, Kingston not only refers to the French heroine Joan of Arc, but also to Chinese culture and myth. For instance, there are the carved words of revenge on the author-narrator's back, which she describes in this way: '[My father] began cutting; to make fine lines and points he used thin blades, for the stems large blades' (38). Her whole back becomes covered with words 'in red and black files, like an army, like my army' (38-39). This reference is from story of a patriot hero and a national epitome of loyalty, named Yue Fei, a Chinese military general who lived during the Southern Song dynasty (CE 960-1279). He is a Han Chinese general and leads his army under his family name, fighting against the barbarian invasion in North China. According to legend, he has four Chinese characters *Jin Zhong Bao Guo* ('serve the country with the utmost loyalty') inscribed on his back and was sentenced to death by the emperor for his spurious conspiracy. Sheng-mei Ma argues that Yue Fei's legend is used by Kingston as a trope for diasporic women's identity. Ma explains that 'the excruciating pain inflicted upon the woman warrior by her parents signifies the anguish of identity formation for minorities in the 1970s'.²²³ As an American daughter born and raised by Chinese parents, she absorbs her knowledge and images of Chinese cultures through a grounding in American life, and inspired by her parents' storytelling, combining an American popular imagination with Orientalist fantasy. Besides Yue Fei's legends, there are many other Chinese sources: Chen Luan-feng, a mythical figure who chopped a leg off the thunder god (41); images of dragons (26); Chinese

²²³ Sheng-mei Ma, *The Deathly Embrace: Orientalism and Asian American Identity* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 139.

silk and herbs (27); Chinese traditional opera (27); china bowls and silver chopsticks (27); all stereotypical images representing China, but used in an original way.

Kingston forms a hybrid version of the myth, incorporating Chinese references from multiple sources as well as Western references. Indeed, many details indicate that the woman warrior has been situated in a context of cultural hybridity. For instance, in depicting how the old couple invites the author-narrator for a meal with ‘bowls of rice and soup and a leafy branch of peaches’ (26), and utilising the common Chinese greeting of ‘Have you eaten today?’, with a ‘standard’ response, ‘Yes, I have’, showing politeness. But after this answer, there is an additional, parenthetical comment: (‘No, I haven’t’. I would have said in real life, mad at the Chinese for lying so much. ‘I’m starved. Do you have any cookies? I like chocolate chip cookies.’) (26).

Besides crossing cultural boundaries, Kingston also twists ancient Chinese legends into modern historical events. Even though grafting together Yue Fei’s and Mu Lan’s legends, both of which express loyalty to the emperors, Kingston re-imagines their fighting against the last emperor of the dynasty in the Forbidden City as a result of the peasants’ grievances at the threat of starvation: ‘The peasants would crown as emperor a farmer who knew the earth or a beggar who understood hunger’ (40). She leads an army north, to Peiping, the country’s capital city: ‘Though it be ten thousand miles away, we shall walk to the palace’ (40). This can be understood as alluding to the Long March lead by the Red Army of the Communist Party of China (1934-1936). Kingston describes how her soldiers sew the red flags and wear red clothes. They are well-disciplined as claimed by the Red Army and its slogan explained in the text: ‘My army did not rape, only taking food where there was an abundance. We brought order

wherever we went' (40). After arriving at the palace, the author-narrator feels 'the depth and width of joy' because she finds that 'the land was peopled, the Han people [...] the Chinese population' (45). She beheads the emperor and 'inaugurated the peasant who would begin the new order. In his rags he sat on the throne facing south and we, a great red crowd, bowed to him three times' (45).

This scenario echoes both Chairman Mao's announcement of the establishment of the New Republic China in 1949 and people's subsequent worship of him, also blending Chinese rituals and the tradition of 'the throne facing south'. Besides these historical political events, Kingston also provides stereotypical representations of Chinese women. The author-narrator liberates a large group of women who as wives and concubines are represented as weak, mad, foot-bound and useless. The author-narrator describes how: 'They blinked weakly at me like pheasants that have been raised in the dark for soft meat' (46) and she comments: 'These women would not be good for anything. I called the villagers to come identify any daughters they wanted to take home, but no one claimed any. I gave each woman a bagful of rice, which they sat on. They rolled the bags to the road. They wandered away like ghosts' (46). These women later become violent 'amazons' who 'killed men and boys' (47). Kingston distances herself from these useless Chinese women. In her fantasy, she fulfils the roles of a daughter, a wife and a mother, but she is independent and has a strong desire for justice. She is filial but not submissive; she is assertive but not dictatorial.

Contrasting attitudes can be seen from the author-narrator in 'White Tigers': she empowers Mu Lan and westernises this ancient Chinese warrior into a heroine in a cultural hybridity, which suggests Kingston's attempt to constitute her identity

balancing between her born-and-raised American background and her Chinese heritage. She decides to proclaim her own voice and makes her own stories from her mother's story-telling, as the author-narrator says 'She [her mother] said I would grow up a wife and slave, but she taught me the song of warrior woman, Fa Mu Lan. I would have to grow up a warrior woman' (26). In creating this fantasy, Kingston becomes simultaneously an insider and outsider: she expresses a cultural authenticity, retelling ancient Chinese legends, and utilising a large number of Chinese cultural references without, in 'White Tiger', giving notes or explanation; this might be unfamiliar to Western readers, yet the very form of her narrative reveals a subversive tone – not only is she producing her own hybrid of different legends, she is also writing into the narrative a Western point of view.

3.2. Intercultural communication: Legend of Ts'ai Yen

Unlike the woman warrior in 'White Tiger', Kingston in reality has no magical or physical power for 'revenge' (53). Instead, she has the power of words so that she can 'report', as she claims: 'The reporting is vengeance – not the beheading, not the gutting, but the words' (53). In the last section, 'A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe', Kingston uses the first person voice to narrate another Chinese legend of Ts'ai Yen, whose story is presented as a successful model of intercultural communication. Kingston searches for her own voice to tell her stories adapted from her mother's story-telling. She claims that 'it's my turn' and 'the beginning is hers [the mother's], the end, mine' (184). This self-expression results in a retelling of the legend of the ancient poetess and musician Ts'ai Yen living in Eastern Han dynasty (CE 25-220). In Kingston's version, Yen was captured by the 'primitives' barbarians, the 'Hsiung-nu' (185), during the period of chaos in China. The chieftain captured her and brought

her back to the northern lands as prisoner and wife. Afterwards, she no longer had a single fixed home, but was constantly on the move as a nomad. The chieftain made her 'sit behind him when the tribe rode like the haunted from one oasis to the next' (185). She lives with the 'barbarians' for twelve years and stays isolated among them without a common language in which to communicate. Later she gave birth to two sons who could not 'speak Chinese' and could only 'imitate her with senseless singsong words and laughed' (185). Her sense of isolation and alienation remains unbroken until one night when she is attracted out from her tent by the captors' reed pipes to hear the music 'tremble and rise like desert wind', inspiring her to sing her songs to match the flutes (189). Her songs are in Chinese 'about China and her family there' (189). Separated from her family and home, and forcefully leading a nomadic life with 'barbarians', Yen sings her 'sadness and anger' about 'forever wandering' (186). Her fear of unhomeliness is profoundly meaningful to the Hsiung-nu as they have led a nomadic life for generations; eventually an intercultural empathy develops. The shared emotion and cultural interaction are also passed onto the next generation: 'Her children did not laugh, but eventually sang along when she left her tent to sit by the winter campfires, ringed by barbarians' (186).

Yen uses her singing to communicate with others — her husband, children and other 'barbarians'. Her voice transcends the barrier of the enclosure and complements the barbarians' flutes; this indicates the possibility of intercultural communication. Yen creates songs by combining her own voice and language with the music of the barbarians, and these songs turns into a form of communication that unites two cultures. Throughout her songs, in a combination of words and melody, Yen communicates with both the barbarians and her own people, bridging cultural

differences and also transmitting meaning into a different language. After twelve years, the Han Chancellor paid a heavy ransom to the Chieftain for Yen's release and freedom.²²⁴ So Yen returned to her homeland and brought back her songs, which have been passed down and translated into English titled 'Eighteen Stanzas for a Barbarian Reed Pipe' (186). Even though it is a Chinese song for Chinese instruments, the author-narrator comments: 'It translated well' (186). Kingston appropriates this figure and, emphasizing the positive example of bi-cultural songs, turns Yen into an icon for the overcoming of intercultural alienation. Kingston claims for herself the power of Yen, the power of language both to shape and to convey reality: intercultural communication can bridge and overcome cultural and racial barriers. As Leslie Rabine points out, 'The fantasy of the legendary poetess is on a formal level a fantasy of transforming the conflict from pain into beauty and from paralysis into a harmonious movement'.²²⁵ Kingston provides a satisfying fantasy showing how cultural boundaries can be transcended. She stretches her imagination to accept paradoxes and conflicts between cultures and nations and successfully to deal with her state of unhomeliness, so constructing her Chinese-American identity.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored how literary fantasy is applied in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*. Rewriting various family stories and Chinese legends and myths, Kingston tries to break the silence endured by Chinese women who are repressed by racism and sexism, and to enable Chinese diasporic women's writing to

²²⁴ Hans H. Frankel, 'Cai Yan and the Poems Attributed to Her', *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews*, 5.1-2 (1983), 133-56.

²²⁵ Leslie W. Rabine, 'No Lost Paradise: Social Gender and Symbolic Gender in the Writings of Maxine Hong Kingston', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 12 (1987), 471-92 (p. 486).

reach the American reading public. As David Leiwei Li points out, Kingston's text gives 'Asian American experience [...] an official literary visibility'.²²⁶ Although this may also reinforce the Orientalist stereotypical representation of Chinese women and culture, the fantasy in Kingston's text reflects a particularly severe and complex struggle for Kingston in her construction of an identity as a Chinese emigrant in America. This included her fight as a woman facing a patriarchal society, and different social and cultural contexts as a diasporic Chinese woman in the US. Her identity as both an insider and outsider in Chinese and American cultures means that her understanding of home differs from that of her parents, who conceive of home through associations of the 'homeland' and the nuclear family. The author-narrator's 'claiming America' indicates a call for a sense of national belonging. However, she does not deny her family histories and cultural heritages, which are an important part of her identity. In the story of No-Name aunt, Kingston employs literary fantasy to retell these Chinese women's stories, empowering them to transform from victims of Chinese patriarchal ideology into heroines able to express their own desires. In the chapter titled 'At the Western Palace', the author-narrator uses the ghost metaphor to represent the displacement of identity for diasporic subjects who confront two different cultural codes. Through the rewriting of the legends of woman-warrior Mu Lan and the poetess Ts'ai Yen, the author-narrator ultimately empowers herself through the mechanisms of language and an artistic form. She thus develops a symbol for potential intercultural communications.

²²⁶ Li, p. 45.

Chapter Two: Homing Desire and the Use of Cinderella Tales in Adeline Yen Mah's *Falling Leaves Return to Their Roots*

Introduction

The opening chapter has explored how Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* retells various women's stories, from that of an ancient Chinese legendary heroine to her family members, and how the narrator constructs her Chinese-American identity. Kingston's mode of writing provided a model for a large number of authors in the following two decades. Adeline Yen Mah's memoir, titled *Falling Leaves Return to Their Roots: The True Story of an Unwanted Chinese Daughter* (1997), shares similarities with Kingston's text in terms of its interweaving Chinese historical and cultural sources with her own life experience and stories of other women in her family. However, in contrast to Kingston's position of 'claiming Americanness', Mah expresses a homing desire, as indicated in the title, to return to her family and her cultural roots in China. Her efforts and desire to be accepted by her family members, though, are rebuffed by the denial of her parents. Her initial understanding of home based on the kinship and geographical homeland is broken, making her search for a 'home' unsettled and can never be ultimately finished.

Both Kingston and Mah have achieved huge successes in a competitive international publishing market; whether or not that was their intention, both have been constructed and consumed as writers reinforcing the stereotypical assumptions concerning Chinese cultural characteristics, particularly in terms of traditional gender roles and political traumas in contemporary China. The transformation of 'claiming Americanness' by Kingston in the 1970s to a 'claiming Chineseness' by Mah in the

1990s may well signify a process of Chinese diasporic women's writing as a response to, (borrowing Helena Grice's term), Neo-Orientalism. Grice proposes this term as a new concern emerging parallel to the rise of Asia in the global economy, in which Asians are still culturally and racially othered, thus triggering 'a neo-orientalist fascination with all things Asian'.²²⁷ In *Falling Leaves Return to Their Roots*, this neo-orientalism goes beyond stereotypical representations of Chinese women, and reveals a search for home and cultural identity within the People's Republic of China. This chapter will highlight the way in which Mah applies the *Cinderella* motif as it interacts with her personal life stories, and the intertextual use of the Chinese *Cinderella* stories as a literary source for her life writing. This chapter argues that the use of literary fantasy in Mah's memoir acts in such a way that it unsettles Orientalist stereotypical representation of Chinese women and culture. Its combination of Chinese ancient cultural sources and Chinese contemporary socio-political history, reflects a fluidity of cultural change and interaction in a dialogue between the East and the West. Possibly, it also reflect the potential risk of locating diasporic women within a kind of national belonging.

The rewriting of fairy tales in Mah's memoir as a literary mode of fantasy differs from Kingston's strategies in *The Woman Warrior*, in which Kingston dramatically rewrites Chinese myths and legends through a Westerner's gaze, explaining these tales as based on mother's story-telling and partly on her literary imagination. In contrast, Mah assumes her cultural authority as an insider: she introduces what she considers Chinese sources and history around her own life stories, emphasising that these stories are real.

²²⁷ Helena Grice, *Negotiating Identities: An Introduction to Asian American Women's writing* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 111.

If Kingston's text expresses a desire to 'escape' from her family and build a new home in America, Mah presents a strong desire to 'return' to her family in China. As an unwanted daughter and a diasporic woman, Mah tries her best to be accepted by her family. Her efforts are demonstrated by her journeys between the UK, the US and China, and constructs her identity considering with various categories such as gender, class, nation and culture. Her homing desire, using Avtar Brah's definition, reflects way of negotiation between 'the discourse of home and dispersion'.²²⁸ This reconstruction of home, as Rosemary Buikema further explains, marks 'the loss of stories, cultural memories, and myths', the homing desire becomes a 'longing to come home to the magic of stories, a longing for the feeling of community that emerges through the actual telling'.²²⁹ Mah's 'actual telling' of her own stories and cultural sources becomes a reconciliation with, rather than a solution to, her unhomeliness.

Mah was born on 30th November 1937 in Tianjin and she grew up in Shanghai, China. She went to London to study when she was fifteen and obtained a degree in medicine in England before returning to China. She then went to the United States to work as a physician. Her memoir remained on *The Times* bestseller list for more than thirty weeks and to date has sold over one million copies. Its success prompted Mah to quit her medical career at the age of sixty to embark on a full-time writing career. Her use of Cinderella tales, either as motif or literary source, continues in her subsequent works, including *Chinese Cinderella: The Secret Story of an Unwanted Daughter* (1999), *Chinese Cinderella and the Secret Dragon Society* (2004), *Chinese Cinderella: The*

²²⁸ Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 193.

²²⁹ Rosemary Buikema, 'A Poetics of Home: On Narrative Voice and Deconstruction of Home in Migrant Literature', in *Migrant Cartographies: New Cultural and Literary Spaces in Post-Colonial Europe*, ed. by Sandra Ponzanesi and Daniela Merolla (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005), pp. 177-87 (p. 184).

Mystery of the Song Dynasty Painting (2009), and *Along the River: a Chinese Cinderella Novel* (2009).²³⁰ These four works continue to develop themes similar to those in her first book, using many fairy-tale motifs.

Focusing on *Falling Leaves Return to Their Roots* as my case study, this chapter is divided into three sections. Section One summarises the author's life story, exploring how Mah interweaves her life story as an unwanted daughter in the family with the motif of the fairy tale Cinderella in both its Western and Chinese versions. Section Two explores the functions of literary fantasy in the rewriting of fairy tales in this memoir, emphasizing its crucial part in diasporic women's life writing. Section Three analyses the narrator's homing desire and how she manages to search for a sense of belonging by referring to Chinese literary and cultural sources. This section further demonstrates why it is important for diasporic subjects to find their roots and how they might understand home-based 'original cultures' in a transnational context as opposed to remaining with a geographical and ideological conception of nation or homeland.

1. Life Writing with the Motif of Fairy Tale

In *Falling Leaves Return to Their Roots*, Mah writes her life story using fairy-tale motifs in two ways: firstly, she uses the motif of *Cinderella* stories in her text as a narrative strategy, namely, characters, plots and narrative elements are strongly reminiscent of fairy tales. Secondly, in a direct way, Mah refers to Chinese fairy tales

²³⁰ Adeline Yen Mah, *Falling Leaves Return to Their Roots: The True Story of an Unwanted Chinese Daughter* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997); *Chinese Cinderella: The Secret Story of an Unwanted Daughter* (London: Penguin Books, 1999); *Chinese Cinderella and the Secret Dragon Society* (London: Puffin, 2004); *Chinese Cinderella: The Mystery of the Song Dynasty Painting* (London: Puffin, 2009); *Along the River: a Chinese Cinderella Novel* (New York: Delacorte Press, 2009). Her other two works are: *Watching the Tree: A Chinese Daughter Reflects on Happiness, Traditions, and Spiritual Wisdom* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000); *A Thousand Pieces of Gold: A Memoir of China's Past Through its Proverbs* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003).

by inserting a Chinese version of the *Cinderella* story into her text as an inspiring source told by the author's aunt. This section illustrates how these two forms are used in her memoir through the motif of fairy-tale stories.

1.1. The life story and *Cinderella* motifs

In this memoir, Mah bases her story on her life in China and her diasporic experience in the UK and the US. She was born into a wealthy family in Tianjin, a coastal city in North China. Her mother died two weeks after her birth and she grew up unwanted and emotionally and physically abused by her stepmother; her father was a wealthy real estate agent and later an importer-exporter. In 1943, the family moved to Shanghai because of her father's business, and after five years, due to the Civil War, they left for Hong Kong. During the family's Hong Kong years, Adeline was sent by her stepmother to the St Joseph boarding school in Tianjin when most people were fleeing in the opposite direction at the height of the civil war. After two years, Adeline was brought to Hong Kong by her uncle's family to be reunited with her family. But she was sent away again to the Sacred Heart Convent School, a Catholic school for boarders and orphans. Adeline stayed there and spent most of her time reading and writing in the library until she won a prize in a dramatic writing competition, which convinced her father to send her to study in England in 1952. Despite her interests in literature and her wish to become a writer, her father decided that she should study medicine and specialise in obstetrics.

After coming to the UK, Adeline was initially enrolled at a Catholic boarding school in Oxford. Through hard work, she fulfilled all the entrance requirements for medical school and was admitted to University College London at the age of seventeen. After

her graduation from UCL, she spent another two years working and at the same time studying a post-graduate course in Edinburgh. In 1963, she left the UK for Hong Kong. At her father's suggestion, she accepted a position as an intern at Hong Kong University. Finding the job physically demanding but not intellectually challenging, Adeline decided to move to America to pursue a new career. There she married Bryon, a Chinese-American, with whom she had a son. In 1971, she got divorced after six years of unbearable married life. She became a successful medical doctor in America. She married her current husband, Bob, in 1972, and their daughter was born two years later. Despite her the successful career, her father, stepmother and siblings continued to reject her. In 1988, her father died. Adeline's stepmother transferred all the father's wealth into her own name and, without reading his will, the stepmother claimed that their father left no money for his children. In 1990, the stepmother died and Adeline was heartbroken when she was told that she inherited nothing in her stepmother's will. In despair, she found the document written by her father which showed that her father had actually left her ten percent of his wealth in his will. She finally found comfort in this document and felt the acceptance of her family, which she had sought throughout her life.

From this outline of the author's life story, the strong resonance with the fairy tale Cinderella is evident. There are multiple versions of Cinderella stories both in the West and in China. Maria Tatar points out that 'when we say the word "Cinderella", we are referring not to a single text but to an entire array of stories with a persecuted heroine who may respond to her situation with defiance, cunning, ingenuity, self-pity, anguish,

or grief'.²³¹ So even though there is no 'original' version of 'Cinderella', as Armando Maggi explains, when we speak of 'Cinderella', we actually 'refer to a narrative type'; 'an abstract plot that derives from the interaction between Perrault's and the Brothers Grimm's literary versions, plus Walt Disney's film adaptation'.²³² Maggi further points out that the majority of works offering a retelling are 'based on this visual-verbal narrative type, which still holds a firm grip on the contemporary imagination'.²³³ The basic narrative of Cinderella tells a story in which a daughter is abused by her cruel stepmother and stepsisters in an unbearable family situation produced by her father's remarriage. With the help of her godmother's magic, the daughter has the chance to meet a prince, they marry and live happily ever after.²³⁴ Mah's life writing can be seen as incorporating a clear *Cinderella* motif. Maria Nikolajeva, in her study of fairy-tales, defines the insertion of the fairy tale motif into the life writing as an 'open dialogue', referring to texts that are 'written intentionally so that readers recognize the original setting, the characters and the plot pattern'.²³⁵

It is hard to know whether Mah inserts the Cinderella motif into her life stories intentionally or whether her life stories were simply reminiscent of the pattern of the Cinderella tale. At the opening of this memoir, Mah clarifies her authorial authority in the 'Author's Note' to emphasise that 'this is a true story. Much of it was painful and difficult to write but I felt compelled to do so' (ix). This differs from Kingston's

²³¹ Maria Tatar, 'Introduction', in *The Classical Fairy Tales*, ed. by Maria Tatar (New York and London: Norton, 1999), pp. ix-xviii (p. ix).

²³² Armando Maggi, 'The Creation of Cinderella from Basile to the Brothers Grimm', in *The Cambridge Companion to Fairy Tales*, ed. by Maria Tatar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 150-65 (p. 150).

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Charles Perrault, 'Donkeyskin', in *The Classical Fairy Tales*, ed. by Maria Tatar (New York and London: Norton, 1999), pp.109-16. Brothers Grimm, 'Cinderella', in *The Classical Fairy Tales*, ed. by Maria Tatar (New York and London: Norton, 1999), pp. 117-22.

²³⁵ Maria Nikolajeva, *Children's Literature Comes of Age* (New York: Garland, 1996), p. 155.

explanation for the genre categorisation of *The Woman Warrior* and its blurring of the boundary between autobiography and fiction. Mah claims an essential 'self', a female subject that is, as Maria DiBattista argues in her entry on women's autobiographical writing, 'a confident and credible author of her own life'.²³⁶ Yet it can be seen that when Mah tells her life stories from before her birth to the (then) present day, her memoir turns into a literary reconstruction of these stories. As Patrick Madden argues, when authors have suffered an abundance of trauma/s they feel compelled to write their life experiences: 'this can drive the writing in several directions, from the rubber-necking voyeuristic to the sympathetic self-helping to the artful-analytical'.²³⁷

In this memoir, the narrator tells her traumatic experiences of abuse during her childhood at the hands of her stepmother. As an unwanted youngest stepdaughter, Adeline is treated mercilessly by her stepmother. Adeline's strong personality and her refusal to obey threaten the stepmother's authority within the family. Her childhood memories are full of recollections of her stepmother's abuse, emotional and physical. The stepmother abandons Adeline several times by sending her to one of the most dangerous places in China during the Civil War. She often makes open remarks, 'I do think Adeline is getting uglier and uglier as she grows older and taller' (114). The stepmother slaps Adeline whenever she is in a bad mood. Adeline describes a scenario that takes place when she is ten years old, where her classmates come to her house unexpectedly to congratulate her on being elected class president. The stepmother

²³⁶ Maria DiBattista, 'Women's Autobiographies', in *The Cambridge Companion to Autobiography*, ed. by Maria DiBattista and Emily O. Wittman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 208-21 (p.209).

²³⁷ Patrick Madden, 'The "New Memoir"', *The Cambridge Companion to Autobiography*, ed. by Maria DiBattista and Emily O. Wittman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 222-36 (p. 231)

treats Adeline cruelly and slaps her face so hard that she ‘was knocked off balance’ (68). Refusing to listen to her explanation, the stepmother ‘slapped me again, this time with the back of her hand across my other cheek’ (69), which causes Adeline’s nose to bleed. Her face ‘was stained with a mixture of tears and bloody mucus’ (68).

Having experienced such trauma, Adeline claims that fairy tales become her weapon of self-help and consolation. She often uses her imagination to overcome this difficult time: ‘I also made up fairy-tales and indulged in an imaginary wonderland’ (53). In her fantasy, she imagines herself to be a little princess and she believes that ‘if I was truly good and studied very hard, one day my own mother would come out of the sky to rescue me and take me to live in her enchanted castle’ (53). Adeline describes how through ‘absorb[ing herself] in these fantasies’ she held a key enabling her to ‘enter a magic land’ (53). With the narrator’s escape into imagination and fantasy, the credibility of her life stories is reduced and the motif of fairy-tales is highlighted. Furthermore, the use of fairy tales in *Falling Leaves Return to Their Roots*, on the other hand, is also evident through the intertextuality of a Chinese *Cinderella* story.

1.2. Intertextuality of Cinderella stories

In her life stories, Adeline describes how her Aunt Baba plays a similar role to that of the godmother in the fairy tale: only she transforms Chinese Cinderella stories into a magic power to inspire Adeline to be stronger and conquer the traumas. Throughout the thirty-two chapters, this memoir describes how Aunt Baba encourages Adeline from time to time by telling her stories, and she tells Adeline that she is a Cinderella to encourage her never to give up. In the last chapter, Adeline is told a complete version of the Cinderella story by her Aunt Baba entitled ‘The Incurable Wound’ (273).

The protagonist in this story is Ling-ling, an artist. After her mother's death, her father's favourite concubine begins to mistreat her by favouring her own children. The stepmother is jealous of Ling-ling's painting talent. So she sticks a dirty nail into Ling-ling's hand having spread faeces on the nail to cause an infection, Ling-ling's hand becomes red and swollen, her fingernails fall off, pus suppurates from the wound. However, she continues to paint with the wound in her hand and her paintings steadily improve. Ling-ling's masterpieces attract the emperor, who invites Ling-ling to paint in the palace. During this period of painting, the emperor falls in love with her and they eventually get married (273).

Without magical power to help Adeline to escape from the stepmother's abuse, Aunt Baba tells Adeline this Chinese *Cinderella* story in order to guide her towards 'a spirit of independence' (273). The Ling-ling story implies that traumas need not destroy a person's life if she is strong enough. Mah uses Chinese cultural references to indicate what she thinks is truly valuable for her female characters and to show how they deal with traumas. These references together build up the belief that the female characters will eventually be recognised as worthy of love and respect and that leads to a good life. The way of combining the motif of *Cinderella* and drawing on Chinese *Cinderella* stories has been consistently applied by Mah in a number of works, such as her autobiography published two years after her memoir, *Chinese Cinderella: The Secret Story of an Unwanted Daughter* and her children's story *Chinese Cinderella and the Secret Dragon Society* published in 2004. In these works, Mah inserts one of the other versions of the Chinese *Cinderella*, the story of Ye Xian, a talented potter who lived in the Tang dynasty (CE 608-907). Ye's father has two wives and two daughters, one from each wife. After the death of parents, Ye's stepmother mistreats Ye and favours

her own daughter. Ye is an accomplished potter. Her pet goldfish is her only friend. The stepmother kills the goldfish and eats it. Out of sadness, Ye saves the fish's bones from a pile of manure to commemorate it and continues to make pots to support her life. The fish bones give off magical rays imparting a special sheen to her pots. Soon there is a great festival held by a local warlord. The stepmother brings her own daughter to attend it and forbids Ye to attend. After her stepmother and sister have left, Ye dresses herself in a beautiful cloak made of kingfisher feathers and a pair of golden shoes and sneaks off to the festival, where she meets a warlord who falls in love with her. Her stepmother recognizes her and begins to chase her. Ye runs home but loses one of her shoes, which is later picked up by the warlord. The warlord orders all the girls in the town to try on the lost shoe, but he still cannot find the owner. The cobbler who makes the shoes tells the warlord about Ye, who has traded one of her pots for the golden shoes. The warlord eventually finds Ye Xian. They get married and live happily ever after.²³⁸

Like Kingston, Mah does not provide any precise reference notes when she refers to these Chinese Cinderella stories. In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston rewrites the legend of woman warrior Mu Lan in an American context, where the ancient Chinese woman has been transformed into a Westernised heroine. Even for readers who are not familiar with Chinese cultural sources, Kingston's story reads like a new story with a Chinese background and American content. In comparison, in *Falling Leaves Return*

²³⁸ As well as Mah's versions, Chinese Cinderella tales are recorded in a miscellany in Tang Dynasty (618-907), it was finished in the 9th century, by Duan Chengshi, 段成式, *Youyang Zazu*, 《酉阳杂俎》 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1981), pp. 200-01. More details of Chinese *Cinderella* stories in English can be seen Arthur Waley, 'The Chinese Cinderella Story', *Folklore*, 58. 1 (1947), 226-38; Arthur Waley, 'The Chinese Cinderella Story, in *The Secret History of the Mongols and Other Pieces* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1963), pp. 147-59. Carrie E. Reed, *A Tang Miscellany: An Introduction to Youyang Zazu* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), pp. 11-13; Amy Lai, 'Two Translations of the Chinese Cinderella Story', *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology* 15:1 (2009), 49-56.

to *Their Roots*, Mah directly cites the Chinese Cinderella stories, the story being inserted within quotation marks and retold in the third person, as if to suggest that this turns the Chinese oral literary tradition into a written record for Western readers. Combing Chinese cultures and stories, this memoir reads like a diasporic female *Bildungsroman*. A contrasting parallel can be seen here, on one hand, with the Cinderella motif in her life stories, and readers' can easily recognise the plot pattern whereby Mah does not mention which version of the Cinderella story she has applied in her memoir. On the other hand, she assumes an engagement of cultural authority and interpretation through intertextuality by quoting the stories told by her aunt. Consequently, readers can compare the Chinese versions of the tale, the author's focused text (her retelling of the life story with fairy tale motifs), and the pre-texts (the presupposed traditional fairy tales). The intertextuality of these divergent versions, draws on a range of cultural contexts and sources.

In their discussion of ways of rewriting traditional stories, John Stephens and Robyn McCallum argue that intertextual use of fairy tales is consciously 'played off against some common notion of the shape and content of an "original" text',²³⁹ and as a result, 'the authors might assume that the audience will be in a position to weigh one discourse space of pre-text and focused text out in the process of interaction between the texts. That is, the effect is intertextual in its fullest sense'.²⁴⁰ The 'invisible' motif of Cinderella, with the 'visible' pages of content on Chinese Cinderella stories, becomes a model for Adeline's identity, as made explicit in the way that Aunt Baba encourages her: 'like Ye Xian, you have defied the odds and garnered triumph through

²³⁹ John Stephens and Robyn McCallum, *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture: Traditional Stories and Metanarratives in Children's Literature* (New York: Garland, 1998), p. 88.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

your own efforts. Your future is limitless and I shall always be proud of you, my Chinese Cinderella'.²⁴¹

2. Reconstituting Identity: Fantasy, Gender and Race

The previous has explored Mah's two approaches in using Cinderella tales as motif and source in her memoir. This section will discuss how this mode of writing is categorised as fantasy and what function it plays in the constitution of diasporic women's identity. By amalgamating fairy tales in her memoir, Mah challenges the patriarchal and traditional gender roles and constructs her subjectivity in negotiation with other categories such as national and racial identities.

2.1. The acculturation of gender ideology

The Cinderella tales are often criticised for their ideological embeddedness. In the study of fairy tales, Jack Zipes argues that 'the ideological and psychological pattern and message of *Cinderella* does nothing more than reinforce sexist values and a Puritan ethos that serves a society which fosters completion and achievement'.²⁴² The female character is encoded with the ideological position of passive objectification, and her identity is completely constituted through the agency of the 'prince', a man. However, the combination of motif and the intertextual use of *Cinderella* stories in *Falling Leaves Return to Their Roots*, challenges the patriarchal and traditional gender roles, both in the use of Chinese versions of *Cinderella* stories and Mah's own life stories.

²⁴¹ Adeline Yen Mah, *Chinese Cinderella: The Secret Story of an Unwanted Daughter* (London: Edinburgh Gate, 1999), p. 225.

²⁴² Jack Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), p. 173.

The intertextual use of Chinese *Cinderella* stories in this memoir shares a basic storyline with Western counterparts, but they also have many Chinese features. These reflect patriarchal culture concerning Chinese woman, such as the practice of foot-binding and the notion of the concubine. Marina Warner explains that the tiny precious golden shoe in Ye Xian's story reverberates with fetishism of the bound feet, a tradition established in the sixth century CE and developed in the Tang dynasty, to distinguish highborn, valuable and desirable women.²⁴³ The bound feet in ancient China are symbolic for Chinese women, in particular those from the upper class, as prevailing criterion of beauty and an assurance of a good marriage. The shoes therefore become an important symbol and a key element in the plot of *Cinderella* tales. In addition to these elements in Chinese *Cinderella* stories, Mah chooses to highlight the fact that the female characters fight independently and win love through their skills, hard work and intelligence rather than with the help of the godmother's magic power. For instance, Ling-ling attracts the emperor through her painted masterpieces, and Ye Xian exchanges the pot she made for shoes in order to go to the festival. Furthermore, marriage is not the only way to these women's happiness. Skills (painting for Ling-ling and pottery for Ye Xian) and intelligence, rather than physical beauty, are emphasised in the Chinese versions of *Cinderella* tales.

In her memoir, Adeline criticises the shortcomings of Chinese gender ideologies. She observes that her grandmother cannot walk properly for the whole of her life because of her bound feet. Adeline's biological mother dies because she followed her

²⁴³ Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: on Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 203.

husband's orders obediently by not going to hospital when she was birthing to Adeline; Aunt Baba sacrifices her life for the family and never gets married in order to look after her brother's children while Adeline's father remarries shortly after his wife's death as remarriage 'was considered unchaste for widows' (8). Adeline claims that over a long history in China, women in a patriarchal society have held submissive roles: as daughters who 'could be legally sold or bartered'; as a wife treated 'as an indentured servant', and as a tool to continue the family line as 'if she failed to bear a son, one or more concubines would be brought in' (8). Through these descriptions, Mah evokes Western readers' stereotypical assumptions regarding Chinese women, with the images of bound feet, polygamy, and concubines. However, she criticises these representations and resists the imposition of patriarchy imposed upon women. In this memoir, Adeline starts her narrative by introducing her grand aunt's stories in the first chapter,²⁴⁴ she proclaims her independence by refusing to have her feet bound (5). The grand aunt received a good education and never married. She founded her own bank, the Shanghai Women's Bank in 1924, which was considered as 'extraordinary' in a patriarchal society where 'the very idea of a woman being capable of simple everyday decisions, let alone important business negotiations' was thought highly unlikely (9). Even though her grand aunt's stories happened before Adeline's birth, Adeline describes them in detail and imagines her grand aunt positively, emphasising her spirit of rejecting traditional roles. Adeline describes how all employers in her grand aunt's bank are women who 'were tired of being patronized at male-dominated establishments' (9).

²⁴⁴ Grand aunt (great aunt) refers to her grandfather's sister; this memoir mimics Chinese language to refer to Chinese family relationship.

The grand aunt becomes Adeline's pioneer, inspiring Adeline to fight for independence. Adeline criticizes the Confucian belief that 'only ignorant women were virtuous' (14). She chooses education as her stepping-stone towards success and acceptance by her family. During her childhood, she devotes all her time and energy to reading and writing: 'I read because I have to. It drives everything else from my mind. It lets me escape to find other worlds. The people in my books become more real than anyone else' (180). Reading and writing enable Adeline to construct her identity according to her wishes. When Adeline is at the boarding school in Tianjin, reading and writing form an escape from the harsh reality of her surroundings: 'When I wrote, I forgot that I was an unwanted daughter who had caused her mother's death. Instead, I could be anybody I wished to be' (53). In her literary imagination, Adeline resisted her identity as 'the lonely little girl bullied by her siblings' (53). Instead, 'I was the female warrior Mulan, who would rescue her aunt and Ye Ye from harm' (53). Here both Kingston and Mah imagine their narrators as the woman warrior Mulan; they possess the power to challenge patriarchy in order to constitute their own identities. Kingston rewrites the legends of the woman warrior to subvert the Orientalist representation of Chinese women and culture. Mah emphasises the power inherent in the Mulan and Cinderella figures as inspiring sources of independence, their idealized outcomes enabling the oppressed young Adeline to see a way of overcoming an abusive childhood and of critiquing and reassessing traditional gender roles.

Looking beyond her role as a daughter, Adeline also subverts the patriarchal definition of women in marriage. Cinderella tales widely reveal the impact of marriage upon the life of women, signified by women entering into a higher class by marrying a male. A

woman's future largely depends upon her marriage and a suitable husband is a key element in seeking a 'happy ending'. *Falling Leaves Return to Their Roots*, however, changes this pattern. In her first marriage, Adeline's husband, Byron, a Chinese American, is a waiter initially in a restaurant and later runs a restaurant bought by Adeline, only ending with a failure and her losing her investment. With Adeline having a successful career, Byron relies upon his wife financially. He keeps his marriage like a Chinese proverb 夫妻相敬如賓 *fu qi xiang jing ru bin* (husband and wife should respect each other like honoured guests) (163). In a scene when Adeline confronts with Byron, Adeline attempts to communicate with him 'in a calm and logical way' (161). Her husband replies that '嫁雞隨雞， 嫁狗隨狗 *Jia ji shui (sui, sic) ji, jia gou shui (sui) gou* (Marry a chicken, follow a chicken; many a dog, follow a dog) (161), emphasising submission of the wife to her husband. Adeline immediately responds - 'What a rubbish' (160). She challenges him 'what's this, a dictatorship? Are we husband and wife or master and slave?' (161). With her independence and search for equality in marriage, Adeline tries her best to manage her marriage and looks after her son alone, even though her marriage ends in a divorce.

By telling her experience, Adeline reassesses her gender identity in opposition to Chinese patriarchal ideology, transforming herself from an unwanted daughter into a successful woman doctor through her hard work. However, her identity is not solely dependent upon aspects of gender role in a patriarchal society; there is also her family situation, her diasporic experience, and the social political histories. Her identity is constructed in the context of different discourses of Chinese patriarchal tradition, Western superiority and colonial power relationships as they existed between the 1920s and 1990s both in China and in the West.

2.2. The construction of diasporic identity

Adeline's mother died when giving birth to Adeline, hence Adeline's birth and continued presence is regarded as a bad omen for the family. Despite her stepmother's abuse and her father's indifference, Adeline persists in longing for acceptance and love from her family. However, her efforts prove in vain because of the peculiar situation she occupies within the family, and the historical context. In the first two chapters, her memoir provides some historical background about the nineteenth century when China suffered from war and colonial occupation. After the First Opium War in 1842, the memoir describes the situation in China after Britain, France and the US had staked out their own settlements in Shanghai and in other Chinese coastal cities: 'for roughly one hundred years (between 1842 and 1941) westerners were perceived throughout China as superior beings whose wishes transcended even those of their own mandarins. The white conquerors were treated with reverence, fear and awe by the average Chinese' (6). In this situation, Adeline's his family moved to the French concession in Shanghai (7).

Adeline's stepmother exemplifies the very specific power relations between China and Europe in the 1930s. Western colonial powers claimed territories in China, and Western culture was recognized by many as superior to Chinese cultures. Until the 1930s, in harbour cities like Tianjin and Shanghai, as Adeline describes, 'everything western was considered superior to anything Chinese' (27). The stepmother is a young daughter of a French father and a Chinese mother. And her half-European identity 'made her something of a trophy, to be prized, cherished and put on display' (27). As a wealthy business man, to have a 'Western wife' was a status symbol in society. This is one of the most important reasons why Adeline's father marries her stepmother,

since ‘a young, beautiful and educated European wife is the ultimate status symbol’ (27). Adeline’s father brings his wife to attend all social activities to show her off, proudly introducing his ‘French wife’ to his friends (28). The stepmother also highlights her western ancestry by only wearing French clothes and wearing French perfume (29). She complains to Adeline’s father that ‘some of his Chinese kinsmen at the wedding banquet offended her delicate French relatives by being too loud and strident’ (29). Adeline’s father soon begins to adopt ambivalent notions about his own race. ‘Growing up in the treaty ports, observing daily the symbols of western might, living within a foreign concession in his native country, ruled by extraterritoriality, he, like many Chinese, had come to see westerners as taller, cleverer, stronger and better’ (29).

The stepmother’s French ancestry made her a privileged person in the family, and people of Chinese blood less privileged. The power relationship inherent in patriarchal society confronts with the alternative binary of East/West relations. In the Grimms’ version of *Cinderella*, the wicked stepmother remains more or less confined to the male dominated system. But under these particular social conditions in China, the stepmother’s half-western origin allows her to exert power over a Chinese family and challenge the authority of her parents-in-law. She challenges patriarchal power and reverses the traditional Chinese Confucian concept of filial piety. Adeline’s grandfather, who laid the foundation of the family business and created a fortune for the family, has to negotiate with the stepmother for his living allowances. When the stepmother organises parties, Adeline’s grandfather and all the stepchildren must keep themselves hidden in their rooms so as not to ‘embarrass anyone by our presence, especially when there were westerners’ (97-98). In their own house, therefore, Adeline

and her Chinese family members are marginalised and silenced by the Eurasian stepmother.

The stepmother treats her own children and her stepchildren unequally in every aspect: ‘They [Niang’s children] were already “special” from the moment of their birth. Though nobody actually said so, it was simply understood that everyone considered Niang’s “real” children better-looking and smarter than her stepchildren – simply superior in every way. Who dared disagree?’ (10). While the stepmother’s own two children are given the best clothes, Western food and overall preferential treatment, the five step-siblings are consigned to old-fashioned Chinese clothes (79). Moreover, their living conditions are different – the five step-children are all lumped together on the second floor of the house. They are not allowed to receive visitors in the house; nor are they allowed to visit their friends’ homes. They can only enter and leave the house through the back entrance, for the front entrance is exclusively designated for their father’s guests, the two youngest siblings and the stepmother. They are not allowed to enter the rooms on the first floor without prior permission. Furthermore, the stepmother treats her own son and daughter differently, imposing rigid gender preference for the male child. While the stepmother indulges Franklin, her own son, with large sums of pocket money, Susan, her own daughter, was not given a penny (119). The stepmother treats her own son and daughter differently: ‘every night she came into the bedroom to kiss Franklin goodnight. She sat on the edge of his bed and cooed and teased and talked to him without even acknowledging Susan’s presence’ (82). On the one hand, the stepmother’s spatial arrangements in the house and her unfair treatment of her stepchildren and her own son and daughter, reflects the different family order with its inside and outside distinctions, indicating the various

levels of power. On the other, it also shows that there is a gender hierarchy in traditional Chinese families: boys are consistently privileged above girls. The boundaries between West and East, male and female, are thus reinforced by the stepmother.

Throughout the narrative, Mah intersperses her own tragic life stories with the turbulent events shaping China at the time. The personal incidents affecting Adeline at particular moments appear reflected in the wider political and social changes occurring in China contemporaneously. For example, the stepmother changes all her stepchildren's names into English ones, and Adeline describes the effects as parallel to the national event of the Japanese invasion of China. She explains that 'overnight, my sister Jun-pei became Lydia, my three brothers Zi-jie, Zi-lin and Zi-jun were named Gregory, Edgar and James, and I, Jun-ling, was called Adeline' (30). Without any break or transmission, the following paragraph immediately describes: 'Japanese troops, which already occupied Tianjin and Beijing, were now moving steadily southwards. They met surprisingly strong resistance in Nanking and, in retaliation, went on a terrifying spree of rape, looting and murder' (30). By changing her stepchildren's names from Chinese to English, the stepmother asserts her authority and denies her stepchildren's identities.²⁴⁵ In addition, Adeline and her siblings' Chinese given names share the same character, to follow the Chinese tradition of giving names to all the children in a family to show their blood bond. By changing her stepchildren's traditional Chinese names and combining their Chinese family name with English given names, the stepmother not only denies the stepchildren's identities

²⁴⁵ Rey Chow explains the importance of 'proper' names in Chinese tradition, 'naming is the way to make a certain reality "proper", that is, to make it real. That is why it is so important to have the right name and the right language'. See Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 105.

but also breaks this bond, which is a mark of family belonging between Adeline and her siblings. This bond is broken and replaced by a dominant culture and a new language. The personal loss echoes the crimes of Japanese invasion and deeper concerns caused by colonialism.

Immersed in Western colonialism in concurrence with Chinese patriarchy. Chinese women are forced into a subordinate position. When Adeline's biological mother died, Aunt Baba had to give up her own life to look after the family. The text describes how 'in those days, women in China were expected to sublimate their own desires to the common good of the family' (25). Aunt Baba had a good job at a bank, but she resigns from her job and acts as a carer for the family. She does not get married, since in China 'the double standard accorded to men and women determined that single girls not married off by the age of thirty often remained single for life, whereas a man was expected to take at least one wife, regardless of his age' (25). This means that Adeline's father, as a successful business man, can easily remarry while Aunt Baba sacrifices her life for her brother's family and stays single because of family duty. In this paradigm of two contrasting types of womanhood, Adeline does not simply choose one side and criticise the other. Rather, she associates their respective gender roles with the particular historical context in China in the first half of the twentieth century when European enjoyed power and status in China. As her aunt Baba comments on the stepmother, 'The spell she cast over your Father was like that of the fox-devil of our ancient folklore. Besides her youth and beauty, she was probably in awe of her foreign blood. Remember, he grew up in the French concession during an era which was unique in China. We are all victims of history' (224).

3. Homing Desire and Fantasy: From Orientalism to New Orientalism

In negotiating different discourses, Adeline's identity as a diasporic woman becomes multiple and ambiguous. Her personal and family stories are interwoven with the political and social upheavals in China during the period of her narrative, which also shapes her identity and impacts upon her sense of belonging. With a pattern of constant departures and returns between China and abroad, Adeline's consecutive notions of home change through her life experiences. Her optimistic call for a return to China shows a concern for new Orientalism but risks becoming a discourse which incorporates a narrow understanding of nationalism.

3.1. Memory and history: from Orientalism to Neo-Orientalism

In parallel to, and contextualising her narrative of her personal life stories, Adeline includes in her memoir a chronology of Chinese history from the 1920s to the 1990s. This encompasses her life experience during the Nationalist-Communist conflict in the 1930s, the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the period of Communist consolidation and reform in the 1950s and early 1960s, the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976 and the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989. These historical and political events in contemporary China can not be separated from personal and family stories. Strategically, Mah juxtaposes the breakdown of her family with the fragmentation of China as a whole, making her story a personal memoir complemented by a wider historical background. The intertwining of personal, familial and national histories implies a struggle for a sense of belonging within her own family, which engages with the national allegory debate, its national development and its independence within an international context. National events parallel with the personal struggles of an unwanted daughter and this reinforce the epic dimensions of

the memoir as it brings those national events into the realm of the fairy tale. This mode of interweaving narratives, personal life stories, national histories and fairy tales complicates the Orientalist representation of China and the Chinese as represented by Orientalism.

Through telling Adeline's experience of being born and raised in China and her diasporic experience in various locations such as Hong Kong, the UK and the US, rather than simply negating one in favour of the other, this memoir scrutinises the tensions and the dialectical relationship between Chinese and Western cultures. Adeline's search for a sense of belonging and home undergoes a continual process of contradiction and shifting allegiances in her diasporic experience and its histories. During her childhood, living under the abuse and power of her stepmother and witnessing the stepmother's superiority in the family, Adeline paradoxically desires the Western world that her stepmother represents. She considers the West as a location of freedom and an escape from her oppressive home. She describes the West as 'fabulous lands': '*Ying Guo* (Heroic Country) and *Mei Guo* (Beautiful Country)! These words, meaning England and America, conjure up vistas of ivy-covered college buildings, citadels of learning in the shape of baronial castles and holy cathedrals' (105). After eventually moving from China to the UK at the age of fifteen, Adeline is disillusioned by the racial prejudice she experiences in the UK as a Chinese immigrant. When Adeline studies in England in the 1950s, 'racism and sexism are very much in evidence in England' (152). Adeline describes the fact that most of her English classmates feel uncomfortable in her company. They either show 'disguised contempt' or display a 'patronizing' attitude towards anything Chinese, which reveals an underlying assumption of Western superiority (125). Confronted with racial and

sexual discrimination, Adeline fails in her search for a sense of belonging in the UK as a Chinese woman.

The same period witnessed the rise of China after its emergence as the People's Republic of China in 1949, and its rapid development in the following two decades. Adeline and other Chinese overseas students were raised with a strong sense of patriotism for China which had risen in the eyes of the world because of the way that Chairman Mao had liberated China. She feels positive about China and desires to go back to make a contribution to the country: 'I believe most of us, [...] saw ourselves as a group of skilled university graduates trained in the latest disciplines of Western technology, dreaming of going home to serve our motherland and right the wrongs of long ago' (134). In 1963, after ten years of study in the UK, Adeline leaves for Hong Kong where her family have now settled. As a British colonial territory, Adeline describes how in 1960s Hong Kong, 'everything was in flux. Life revolved around passports and money' (147). The flow of capital pushes citizens there to work fourteen to sixteen hours a day for meagre wages, many have to save every penny to buy a small flat (148). Working as an intern under her father's friend at Hong Kong University, Adeline is disappointed by her job which is physically demanding but not intellectually challenging and she feels like a 'fish swimming in a cauldron' (141). Adeline subsequently applies for jobs in the US and succeeds in receiving an offer from the Presbyterian Hospital in Philadelphia. The hospital accepts her request to borrow money against her future earnings to buy her flight tickets. A secretary sent her a note which says: 'I just want you to know that our home will always be open to you' (156). The hospitality from strangers contrasts with her parent's indifference and refusal to offer her financial help.

Yet when Adeline goes to America to pursue her career in 1964, she continues to experience racial discrimination, compounded with the sexism she experiences as a woman at a time when there were few female physicians in the 1960s. This pattern of departure and return between China and the West reflects Adeline's continuing search for a sense of belonging and a place where she can feel at home. Her failed efforts to find a 'home' only reconfirms her state of unhomeliness. However, the unhomeliness brings nations and cultures into a dialogue characterised by contestation, and negotiation rather than adherence to the Orientalist representation of a superior modern West and an ancient and mysterious China. 'Orientalism', according to Edward Said, is a representation of international relations 'based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident"'.²⁴⁶ The East is represented as an exotic, cruel, irrational, timeless, and culturally and politically inferior Other in the Western gaze. By conjuring up stereotypical images, Asian Woman is negatively represented as 'no more than a machine' who 'never spoke of her self, never represented her emotions, presence or history'.²⁴⁷ Mah's memoir provides her own version of the 'Orient' for Chinese women, representing her story and culture as an insider, speaking women's stories in history and claiming her cultural authority. As Helena Grice explains, this type of narrative in the context of Asian American women's writing, 'provides a unique range of inside perspectives – especially of women's experiences – on a country that has not only undergone radical political change throughout the twentieth century, but that has also largely been closed to the West'.²⁴⁸ Along with Adeline's own first-persona

²⁴⁶ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Pantheon Books, 1978), p. 2.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

²⁴⁸ Helena Grice, *Asian American Fiction History and Life Writing: International Encounters* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), p. 3.

narrative voice, she also provides an empathetic insight into different type of womanhood, which inverts the Orientalist representation of jealous, silenced, and evil Oriental women. In this memoir, it is the stepmother, who identified herself as half-European, who fits these description. Chinese women, are represented as independent, kind and intelligent.

The notion of the political inferiority of the Orient associated with Orientalist expectation can be found in this memoir: it provides detailed descriptions of some political events in Communist China in the twentieth century, such as the Cultural Revolution. One might argue that these atrocities in Chinese history confirm China's reputation as a draconian nation lacking in democracy comparing with the West. However, this memoir provides an abundance of stories experienced by her friends and family members during the period of the Cultural Revolution. In these narratives, while Adeline describes the tortures and sufferings yet she also emphasises her friends, and family members' faith in China. For example, Chapter Fourteen tells how one of her friends, C.S., returned to Shanghai after studying in the UK and suffered greatly during the Cultural Revolution; he asked Adeline for help to obtain a post-doctoral fellowship in America. Adeline explains that 'what concerned him most were plans for his children's education and a pleasant retirement spot (138); however, 'not once did he complain about his decision to return to China. He remained warm, generous, honest and kind' (138). Similarly, Adeline's Aunt Baba had an opportunity to leave Shanghai and join her family in Hong Kong to escape from the Cultural Revolution. Instead, she insisted on staying in Shanghai which she considered to be her home. Furthermore, when describing this political issue, the memoir also points out that social classes are less fixed and more complex than those in the West. For instance,

this memoir explains that Chairman Mao divided people into various categories of ‘enemies of the Cultural Revolution’ (203), including 黑六類 *hei liu lei* (six black categories) – referring to ‘the capitalist, landlord, rightist, rich peasant, counter-revolutionary and criminal element’ (203). Class differences can be seen from her Aunt Baba’s experience. It records that in 1966 when a group of local Red Guards come to Aunt Baba’s house, they slap Miss Chien’s face hard when she claims that she is Aunt Baba’s close friend. They stopped beating her when she claims her status as a ‘servant’ (202). Aunt Baba, as the mistress of the house, instead, was tortured by them: ‘broke her dentures, pulled her hair, whipped her with their belts, kicked her until she fell, then punched her injured back’ (202). A Western perspective of the Cultural Revolution may neglects events such things, the fact that members of the less privileged classes, and many from the Chinese working class and peasants, benefited from, or at least avoided suffering from the revolution.

Like her friends and Aunt Baba, concerning the political atrocities, in this memoir Adeline still expresses a strong homing desire to claim China as her home, one which might inadvertently resonate with the neo-orientalist impetus in the West. With the rise of China representing a new power in the trend towards globalization, there is an increasing interest in Chinese culture in the Western publishing market, and this memoir might be consumed by a readership which is entranced by a neo-orientalist fascination drawn upon Asia, and in particular with Chinese communism. Even with a prefix ‘neo’, David Leiwei Li argues that ‘neo-orientalism’ is still part of Orientalism, in contrast to ‘Old Orientalism’ in the Asian American genealogy of American

Orientalism.²⁴⁹ Li explains that in the era of old Orientalism, the ‘Oriental’ was legally regarded as ‘the Other to the (European) American self, and as the object of national prohibition’.²⁵⁰ In comparison, in the stage of neo-Orientalism after 1965, Asian Americans have begun to be recognized ‘as either citizens or legal aliens’.²⁵¹ However, this inclusion of Asian Americans might have been a strategy of Western dominant powers to continue maintaining, to Said’s words, their ‘positional superiority’.²⁵² Bearing these potential concerns in mind, I argue that the long historical period covered in the text emphasises the changes in China; it shows different state of negotiation, criticising the stereotypical representations of Chinese culture and its women. For nearly a century, Chinese social changes have dramatically liberated women. Then came, the wars and the building of the new country, leaving them poised on the cutting edges of time and space. Especially since the late 1970s, China has reopened to the West, and many new western thoughts have entered China, have mixed and assimilated but also come into conflict with traditional Chinese cultures. The Criticize Confucius campaign in 1974 has also loosened patriarchal restrictions on women (204). The process of modernisation demands a sound understanding of Chinese cultures and women rather than hanging on to the Orientalist representation.

When considering as target western audiences, the use of Chinese *Cinderella* tales and the telling of historical events in this memoir are valuable literary sources that can only survive and be created anew as part of a long history of cultural exchange between the East and the West. This is a strategy that challenges the Orientalist representation

²⁴⁹ David Leiwei Li, *Imagining the Nation: Asian American Literature and Cultural Consent* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 5.

²⁵⁰ Li, p. 5

²⁵¹ Li, p. 6.

²⁵² Said, p. 7.

of Asian Cultures as ancient, marginalised, inferior, and exotic. A similar effort can also be found in the use of language in Mah's text. The titles of its thirty-two chapters are presented as traditional Chinese idioms in Chinese script, Chinese pinyin pronunciation, and English, summarising the stories of each chapter and expressing the emotional appeal in these narratives. These Chinese idioms themselves contain stories and have become well-known sayings in contemporary Chinese language. Western readers who are not familiar with the Chinese language and culture may feel confused by Mah's application of these idioms in the chapter titles. For example, the title of chapter 22 is '四面楚歌 *Si Mian Chu Ge*: Besieged by Hostile Forces on All Sides' (vi). This is an idiom from a Chinese historical story referring to the isolated situation when surrounded by enemies. In the same chapter, the memoir quotes the idioms from characters to explain how it should be interpreted. In the conversation with her brother James about their father's senility and their stepmother's eventual control of her husband's business empire, Adeline suggests that James leave their parents to pursue his own freedom whereupon he refuses to leave as 'they are being 四面楚歌 *si mian chu ge* (besieged by hostile forces on all sides). There is no one else' (216). Similarly, in each chapter, there is a direct quote of the idiom from the narrative's characters, each corresponding to an interpretation of the idiom. Additionally, Mah uses written Chinese language when she refers to Chinese family terms and relationships (for instance, grand aunt refers to great aunt, Ye Ye for grandfather), Chinese place names, foods, and all names for political units. These Chinese words are inserted into English utterances and emerge on the Western publishing market. On the one hand, they may be a neo-Orientalist strategy to attract western audiences, while on the other, they also function as a way to introduce Chinese culture, and its potential for forming part of a diasporic hybrid identity. This emphasis

on Chinese cultural identity differs from the Orientalist representation of the East as an ahistorical and timeless existence. The memoir presents a cultural identity that is partly constituted in and by a cultural heritage. This cultural heritage is not fixed in ancient history. Rather, it can be used in contemporary literary writing and historical retelling.

3.2. Falling leaves return to their roots?

Adeline stresses throughout this memoir that ‘falling leaves return to their roots’. The memoir represents the notion of ‘return’ in terms of a circle. In the prologue, she emphasises that ‘my roots were from a Shanghai family [...] and the collision of East and West played out within and without my very own home’ (3-4). It ends in its last chapter by depicting how ‘life had come full circle, 落葉歸根 *Luo ye gui gen* (Falling leaves return to their roots). I felt a wave of repose, a peaceful serenity’ (274). The memoir ends with Adeline’s reconciliation through her return to Shanghai to visit Aunt Baba, who tells Adeline the Chinese *Cinderella* story from ancient history and her optimistic predication of China’s future. China, thus, is not only a country with numerous political upheavals in recent history, it also presented as a country with a reconstructed past, full of legends and fairy tales. More importantly, however, it is simultaneously an imagined future. Adeline agrees with Aunt Baba’s prediction and she expresses her hopes for the new century at the end of the memoir:

The way I see it, the nineteenth century was a British century. The twentieth century is an American century. I predict that the twenty-first century will be a Chinese century. The pendulum of history will swing from the *ying* [sic, *yin*] ashes brought by the Cultural Revolution to the *yang* phoenix arising from its wreckage. (226)

Adeline's return to the Chinese *Cinderella* tales, combined with her imagination of China's future, reflects a sense of optimistic nationalism. This reinforces her desire to turn to a national discourse for constructing her self identity. If she asserts her gender identity as a woman warrior with her power of self-autonomy and spirit of independence and resistance against patriarchy, then her yearning for home maintains national identity and a sense of belonging to a traditional family order. She emphasises that the homing desire is 'a basic need: a longing for acceptance, a craving' for her 'rightful place in the family' (250). Her expression of an essentialist idea of national culture, though, is also a product of change during the long historical period from the 1930s to the 1990s.

In her childhood, in China's part-colonised history of the 1930s, Adeline's Chinese identity is subordinated and rendered inferior by her Eurasian stepmother. During her period in the UK from the 1950s to the 1960s, whenever ethnicity or national identity was concerned, Adeline selectively identified herself as Chinese. This identity of being 'Chinese' though, sees her express solidarity with her Chinese friends who share the same language and culture but not the same nationality, because there were Chinese students not only from China and Hong Kong, but also from Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Mauritius and elsewhere, bringing an international dimension to our mini-Chinese world' (132). This ethnic identity is community-based resulting from an adherence to a flexible Chinese cultural identity. This identification is further reinforced by her clarification when she returns to Shanghai in 1979. When her second husband, her Aunt Baba and she herself were treated differently by the hotel receptionist, Adeline explains that at that time in China there is 'an unofficial policy'

which divided people into four classes. Namely, ‘First class were the white tourists, especially if they were rich North Americans’; second were ‘the overseas Chinese who could speak Chinese’; Adeline emphasises, ‘I belonged to this category’. Her husband belongs to the third class, ‘the *hua qiao* (American-born ethnic Chinese) whose parents had emigrated before 1949 and who could not speak Chinese’; the lowest class refers to those like her Aunt Baba, ‘the hundreds of millions of native Chinese’ (224). When it turns to the 1990s, Adeline describes her journey back to China in 1994 when Shanghai ‘had been transformed into a city bursting with energy and vitality’ (271). In this modern city, Adeline spent her time with Aunt Baba during her final days. Aunt Baba told Adeline the Chinese *Cinderella* tale, and Adeline feels grateful to her aunt’s inspiration: ‘in her [Aunt Baba’s] modest and unassuming way, she had guided me towards a spirit of independence’ (274). Throughout the historical narrative, Adeline’s identity was engaged in different social milieus. Her construction of an identity over time, across national borders and in social diversity is varied, contradictory, and ambiguous. And her return home is similarly complex.

However, the use of a *Cinderella* tale from ninth-century China as a means to prop up a rational identity risks confining this identity within national borders and racial categories. Cultural identity, according to Stuart Hall, is not a fixed category. Rather, it is subject of transformation and full of differences, and is constantly narrated in negotiation which complex alliances and relations within the heterogeneity of communities. Thus there is no origin to which to make a final return.²⁵³ Hall’s view of cultural identity offers an insight into how to avoid the risks of essentialising national

²⁵³ Stuart Hall, ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’, in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 392-403 (p. 397).

identity by rejecting the authority with which the hegemonic nation lays claim to a fixed essence. In the context of the 'Black Atlantic', Paul Gilroy uses the image of the ship as a cultural symbol that turns away from 'roots' and 'originary' homelands to what he terms the dynamic of 'routes'.²⁵⁴ In Mah's memoir, cultural identity should be understood as a process developed from the fixity of 'roots' to the fluidity of 'routes' without final returns and without ever finding completion. The return to 'roots' in diasporic studies based on the fixed understanding of national identity is problematic. Instead, the return to 'routes' is couched in terms of a transnational aesthetic, and criss-crossing geographical and cultural boundaries. In this sense, Adeline's homing desire is not fulfilled by the returning 'circle' that she initially plans. Her efforts to be accepted are denied by her parents: this destroys her dream of an idealised 'home' where she can return to her 'roots'. Rather, her search for home becomes a movement with the fluidity of 'routes'.

Chinese diasporic studies should be careful not to risk nationalist interpretations of history and culture within the US; yet, in a similar vein, should be careful to avoid an understanding of cultural roots based on Chinese history and Chinese culture, which as Mazumdar explains, '[a]ssumes "America" could be understood independently of "Asia" or vice versa'.²⁵⁵ Thus cultural roots in Mah's text, through her reference from Chinese cultural and literary sources, and despite Adeline's claim of Chinese identity, reflect a transnational reconstruction of diasporic identity and history incorporating with both American and Chinese cultural recourse. Avtar Brah explains that for diasporic subjects, their journeys towards a new 'are essentially about settling down,

²⁵⁴ Paul Gilroy, *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1993), p. 193.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

about putting roots “elsewhere”²⁵⁶ Brah’s process of a ‘homing diaspora’ does not imply a nostalgic desire for ‘roots’, nor ‘is it the same as the desire for a ‘homeland’; it is realized instead as a construction of ‘multi-locationality within and across territorial, cultural and psychic boundaries’.²⁵⁷ In this memoir, Adeline’s homing desire involves a continuing process of return ‘home’, to be accepted and respected, while simultaneously, the desirability of the return is both denied and questioned. Her journey ‘home’ tells her diasporic experiences in-between nations and culture. The homing desire does not idealize one over the other; instead, it is a recognition of many cultural values and a reconciliation of tensions within and across imagined and encountered boundaries.

Conclusion

To sum up, this chapter has explored the use of fantasy, represented as a motif and the intertextual application of Chinese *Cinderella* tales, in the interweaving narratives of life stories and national history in Adeline Yen Mah’s memoir *Falling Leaves Return to Their Roots*. Mah suggests that her rewriting of the fairy tales of *Cinderella* allows a possibility of return and an alternative sense of belonging. I argue that this homing desire of a ‘return to roots’ with a fixed conception of Chinese national belonging may risk pulling the diasporic subject back to the discourse of nationalism. However, its narrative combination of Chinese ancient tales with modern Chinese history in a diasporic context also subverts Orientalist representations of China.

²⁵⁶ Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting identities* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 182

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

Focusing on women's experiences, predominantly that of Adeline and her family members such as her grand aunt, grandmother, biological mother, Aunt Baba and her stepmother, this memoir provides a detailed account of shifting social and political circumstances in the lives of Chinese women throughout the twentieth century. It illustrates changes in gender roles in Chinese history, offering both representation of traditional women who are victims of a patriarchy, and modern women who resist patriarchal social structure. This comprehensiveness challenges Orientalism's stereotypical representation of Chinese women. The interweaving of narrations of women's life stories with national allusions, constructs Chinese women's identity in a consistent process of change. Even though this memoir claims a location within China, a yearning for a national belonging at the end might reflect a new Orientalism, one caused by the rise of China on the global stage since the 1990s. Nevertheless, this memoir suggests that diasporic identity politics should open up its axes of categorization to include race, gender and class. This repositioning arises from a larger global movement of transnationalism, one which includes a recognition of diasporic subjectivities and the fluid movement of border-crossing.

The intertextual use of Chinese language and cultural references in this memoir, on the other hand, also displays Mah's efforts to conform to the stereotypes of an exotic and ahistorical China. The different stages of Adeline's life change from an understanding of home as that based on kinship and family ties, to one of home as a geographical location, and again to home as an allegory for a nation and its cultural roots. As an unwanted daughter abused by her stepmother, Adeline strongly expresses her homing desire strongly throughout this memoir. Through by telling her life stories and diasporic experiences within national and international contexts, the homing

desire shifts from an initial wish to be accepted by her parents and a sense of belonging in her family house in China, to a unsettled process of constructing her identity and a state of unhomeliness. Thus her 'return' becomes a start of a new journey which, is never completed.

Chapter Three: The Ghostly Search for Home and Self in Ying Chen's *Ingratitude*

Introduction

The preceding two chapters have explored different constructions of home and the use of literary fantasy in the life writings of two Chinese diasporic women authors living in America. Both texts show, from an autobiographical perspective, issues of assimilation, general conflicts and clashes between the cultural of a homeland and adopted Western culture. Chapters Three and Four turn to discuss two Canada-based authors from new perspectives of what Eleanor Ty and Christl Verduyn call 'beyond autoethnography', to show how race and gender are represented differently.²⁵⁸ This chapter considers a domestic view of the construction of home in a nuclear family, exploring kinship and a mother-daughter relationship through analysing Ying Chen's third fiction *Ingratitude* (1995).²⁵⁹ Sharing the similar trope of home/unhomeliness, this novel nevertheless differs from other diasporic texts in its methods of using literary fantasy, including its story setting, the mode of story-telling and narrative voice. It is also a text initially written in French, Chen having adopted French instead of English as her language of literary expression. By choosing this novel as a case

²⁵⁸ Eleanor Ty and Christl Verduyn explains they use 'beyond autoethnography' to characterize and highlight texts that 'refuse to be contained simply by their ethnic markers [...] moving away from questions of "authenticity", essentialist identity politics, and a view of a cultural group that is static, rather than evolving'. See 'Introduction, in *Asian Canadian Writing Beyond Autoethnography*, eds. by Eleanor Ty and Christl Verduyn (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008), pp. 1-27 (p. 4).

²⁵⁹ Ying Chen, *Ingratitude*, trans. by Carol Volk (Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1998). It was originally published in French as *L'Ingratitude* (Montréal/Arles: Leméac/Actes Sud, 1995). It has since been translated into several languages and quotations from this text in the present study are taken from the 1998 English translation. Ying actually is her family, she insists her name in Chinese order with the combination of surname followed by given name. In this project, I still use Chen to make it consistent with the style of the current research.

study, this chapter will propose a critical angle that has been relatively neglected in scholarly studies of diasporic writing.

Chen does not focus on stories on a diasporic woman, rather, she writes about displacement in a different way, away from ethnographical restrictions. Unlike the others in the corpus, this novel chooses the posthumous narrative as a technique, which gives this novel its status as fantasy. By exploring its function of this mode of fantasy in the construction of identity and explanation of unhomeliness, this chapter will argue the use of fantasy creates a space in-between life and death, from which the protagonist-narrator can articulate her self-representation and constructing her identification that has been repressed by a male-dominated patriarchy and conventional institutional order. The adoption of a posthumous narrator makes the novel more complex than the subject matter. It offers the possibility and fluidity to constitute identity in the relation with the notion of home and unhomeliness within and beyond her nuclear family unit. As Anne Koenen forcefully argues, '[the] individual quest for an identity beyond the confines of society [...] necessitate the fantastic in women's literature'.²⁶⁰

Born on 20th February 1961, Chen grew up in China and experienced the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) as a young person. During a period of comprehensive economic modernization and reforms from the late 1970s to 1990s, which is called the period of the 'Reform Era' in China,²⁶¹ along with a large number of Chinese students who went abroad as students in higher education, Chen went to Montreal in 1989

²⁶⁰ Anne Koenen, *Visions of Doom, Plots of Power: the Fantastic in Anglo-American Women's Literature* (Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert Verlag, 1999), p. 3.

²⁶¹ Eugenio Bregolat, *The Second Chinese Revolution* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 1.

(shortly before the Tiananmen Square protests), after having obtained a degree in French language and literature from Fudan University in Shanghai, and having worked as a translator at the Institute of Astronautical Research from 1983 to 1989. In Montreal, Chen finished studying for a master's degree in creative writing at McGill University in 1991 and began to publish novels, poetry and articles on literary criticism in French afterwards.²⁶² Reflecting her personal trajectory, a central preoccupation among Chen's works is the consideration of existence and identity crossing borders beyond the boundaries of society, be it as a member of the diaspora or as a woman (traditionally limited by her roles as a wife, a mother, and a daughter). Chen's understanding of identity, similar to other authors selected in this study, is not fixed or completed; rather, it is a process of construction in flux. This trope can be particularly observed from her third novel entitled *Ingratitude*, a work which has won international acclaim and has received increasing attention from literary scholars.

This novel is narrated by a young woman named Yan-Zi, who is revealed to be dead at the beginning of the novel. As a ghost spirit waiting in a limbo for the god of death, the posthumous narrator uses a first-person voice to oscillate between two narrative lines: one exploring memories of her past life, and the other haunting in the present at her own funeral in the opening chapters and describing her family's life after her death. This posthumous narrative allows the protagonist-narrator to review her relationships with male friends and with members of her family, her possessive mother in particular.

²⁶² For example, her fictional works include *La Mémoire de l'eau* (Montréal: Leméac, 1992; Arles: Actes Sud, 1996); *Les Lettres Chinoises* (Montréal: Leméac, 1993); *Immobile* (Montréal: Boréal, 1998); *La Champ dans la mer* (Montréal: Leméac, 2001; Paris: Seuil, 2002); *Querelle d'un squelette avec son double* (Montréal: Boréal 2003); *Un enfant à ma porte* (Montréal: Boréal, 2008; Paris: Seuil, 2008); *Espèces* (Montréal: Boréal, 2010; Paris: Seuil, 2010); *La Rive est loin* ((Montréal: Boréal, 2012; Paris: Seuil, 2013). Chen has also published poems, including a bilingual poetry collection in French and Mandarin, short stories and essays, including *Quatre Mille Marches*, *Un Rêve Chinois* (Montréal: Leméac, 2004; Paris: Seuil, 2004); and *La Lenteur des montagnes* (Montréal: Boréal, 2014).

With this focus, Rosemary Jackson's conception of fantasy as a mode of discourse and a literature of desire with subversive function,²⁶³ Anne Koenen's theories on women's fantasy in negotiating with family and home,²⁶⁴ and Alice Bennett's theories on posthumous narrative,²⁶⁵ among others, are particularly relevant in interpreting this novel, and will be applied in this chapter.

This chapter will be divided into three parts. The first section will examine the mother-daughter relationship within the Chinese patriarchal society which emphasises parental authority and children's filial piety. It will focus on the maternal control and violence and the role of the father described in the novel. The second part will explore the narrator-daughter's feeling of unhomeliness and her resistance through suicide. The third part will analyse the representation of literary fantasy used in the text in the form of posthumous narratives and ghost spirits. In so doing, I explore the functions of this use of literary fantasy in constructing subjectivity and reassessing notions of home.

1. Maternal Control and Patriarchal Ideology

Family and kinship are key elements of the understanding of home in Chinese diasporic women's writing, and the mother-daughter relationship is one of the most popular topics in their texts, which generally focuses on the complex negotiations between traditional Chinese mothers and their Westernized daughters.²⁶⁶ Chen's

²⁶³ Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London and New York: Methuen, 1981).

²⁶⁴ Anne Koenen, *Visions of Doom, Plots of Power: the Fantastic in Anglo-American Women's Literature* (Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert Verlag, 1999).

²⁶⁵ Alice Bennett, *Afterlife and Narrative in Contemporary Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

²⁶⁶ There is a long list of examples, including Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976); Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), Chuang Hua's *Crossings* (1986); Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth*

Ingratitude changes this setting into an urban Chinese family in a patriarchal society, in which the daughter revolts against the dominating mother. Chen locates a failed family bond in a broader social and political context in which Chinese Confucian beliefs still influence people's understandings of home and definitions of the roles of women in the family.

1.1. Maternal control and violence

The mother-daughter conflict in this novel takes place between a narrator-daughter, Yan-Zi and her dominating mother. Yan-Zi is a 25-year-old career woman with social experience and financial independence, yet her mother continues to treat her like a child and attempts to control every aspect of her daughter's life, from demanding that she come home for dinner every night, to the point of trying to choose a husband for her. The mother always emphasises her authority over Yan-Zi, objectifying her daughter as something she owns through their physical connection and she keeps saying to her daughter: 'a child who loves her parents would never have an opinion about them' (21). She considers her daughter as her personal 'possession': 'you can't get away from me, I'm the one who formed you, your body and your spirit, with my flesh and my blood – you're mine, all mine' (16). The mother's understanding of motherhood is based on traditional Confucian ideas, echoing the dogma of filial piety which claims that 'an individual owes everything to the remote ancestors as well as to the immediate ancestors, as one's body is nothing other than that which has been

Chinese Daughter (1989), Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone* (1993); Catherine Liu's *Oriental Girls Desire Romance* (1997), Patricia Chao's *Monkey King* (1997), Gish Jen's *Mona in the Promised Land* (1997), Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Café* (1990), Aimee Liu's *Face* (1994), etc.

“bequeathed to one by one’s parents””.²⁶⁷ Under such rules, the mother insists that Yan-Zi, as her daughter, should unconditionally ‘respect parental authority and uphold family values’ (45).

Asserting her authority, the mother demands that Yan-Zi returns home directly after work and forbids her from eating out with friends or engaging in any other social activities. The only time Yan-Zi is invited for a dinner party, her mother goes to check with her friends whether the gathering has ‘actually taken place’, since the mother knows all ‘the names and addresses of all my friends by heart’ (81). The mother also spies on her daughter’s every movement, and keeps Yan-Zi ignorant of sexual matters. She dresses her in shapeless clothing and urges her to keep her virginity even though she is twenty-five years old. Whenever thwarted, she becomes verbally abusive. She claims many times that if she had known beforehand what kind of daughter Yan-Zi would be, she would have had an abortion rather than keeping her (17). Her psychological and verbal abuse extends to physical violence after being told that her daughter has lost her virginity:

She studied me for a second, then charged at me: ‘You dare return to this house! Go back to your men’. I headed slowly for the door; she grabbed me by the hair and pushed me against the wall. ‘Wait! Before you go, tell me how many men would be enough for you’. (94)

The mother refuses to acknowledge Yan-Zi’s humanity and sexuality, which she perceives to be harmful to family honour. It is revealed in the text that the mother herself was forced into an arranged marriage and she never really loved her husband.

²⁶⁷ Yao Xinzong, *An Introduction to Confucianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 202.

She and her husband still lie ‘together in a single bed don’t tell each other their dreams’ (53).²⁶⁸ With her own miserable and loveless marriage, she does not try to understand her daughter or respect her daughter’s choice of a boyfriend out of love. Neither does she challenge the constraints imposed upon her by patriarchal society of which she is similarly a victim. Rather, she plays the roles of a wife and a mother in the family as she is supposed to do under the rules of patriarchal society. The thinking of Confucius in China has defined the ideal woman in terms of ‘three obediences’ (to the father before marriage, to the husband after marriage, and to the son in the case of widowhood) and ‘four virtues’ (propriety in morality, speech, appearance and diligent housework).²⁶⁹ This definition of women in Confucianism limits them to the household in terms of unconditional filial piety, taking care of their husbands, giving birth and nurturing children, as confined and subordinated subjects.

Yan-Zi’s mother seems to be continually defending traditional values such as obedience, filial piety, and submission to authority. As a wife, she looks after her husband, who never makes any contribution to the family, and takes care of all the household chores. As a mother, she holds the parental authority and passes all these values onto her daughter. She believes that this authority and tradition are unchangeable. She claims to her daughter: ‘you could have shaken up the earth and the sky if it pleased you to contradict your parents and defy our traditions’ (127).

Gabrielle Parker explains that the tension of the mother-daughter relationship in

²⁶⁸ Though this appears to be a mistranslation from the French, it is in fact an accurate translation of the original, which itself contains a number of structures mimicking Chinese.

²⁶⁹ Shari L. Thurer, *The Myths of Motherhood: How Culture Reinvents the Good Mother* (New York: Penguin, 1994), p. 36. ‘Three obediences’ and ‘four virtues’ are originally expressed in the work as Confucius’s *Lunyu* (*The Analects* (480 BC – 350 BC)). The first English translation of *The Analects* is by James Legge in 1861, published in the first volume in *The Chinese Classics*. For the details regarding Confucian ideas, see Yao Xinzong, *An Introduction to Confucianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Heiner Roetz, *Confucian Ethics of the Axial Age* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), p. 276.

Chen's text reads like 'an extended battle between a mother insisting on the ownership of what we might term the copyright of womanhood, and her daughter wishing to break away from the type'.²⁷⁰ In order to maintain this type of womanhood and assert her authority, Yan-Zi's mother is strict with her daughter and is characterized as invariably stern and unsmiling only in front of her daughter. When Yan-Zi tells her cousins that her mother is strict, 'but they didn't agree' (21). Yan-Zi wonders whether she has preconceptions about her mother, only catching up her mother laughing when she is talking with a neighbour. But when her mother realizes that Yan-Zi is watching, she immediately changes her smiling face, frowning and asking her about her homework (33). For a brief moment, the daughter sees her mother as another person, a warm and benign woman, instead of the harridan portrayed throughout the novel. The mother's real personality and emotion are repressed in the role of a 'mother'. In this sense, she, as a mother, represents patriarchal laws upon her daughter, and is thus still an embodiment of male domination.

1.2. The power of the father

In the novel, Yan-Zi's father is presented as impotent and half-alive professor, who spends all his time writing, indifferent to his wife and daughter and to material concerns of all kinds. After being injured in an accident, he either sleeps or sits restlessly at his desk without uttering a word. Nevertheless, his power is exerted not by actively dominating his wife and daughter, but by withdrawing into his own work, around which the entire household revolves. Yan-Zi is clearly aware that her father's

²⁷⁰ Gabrielle Parker, 'Writing an Immaterial World: The Case of Ying Chen's Fiction', in *Modern French Identities: Women Matter / Femmes Matière: French and Francophone Women and the Material World*, ed. by Maggie Allison and Imogen Long (Oxford and Bern: Peter Lang, 2013), pp. 71-86 (p. 73).

absence in the family is the main reason for her mother's over-controlling behaviour towards Yan-Zi. The mother's grudging admiration for, resentment towards and repressed anger at the father are deflected towards Yan-Zi. She wonders if her father had 'deigned to be a little more attentive to Mother and what she was doing in the house [...] Mother wouldn't have been so dependent on my presence and on my virtue' (28). The father's indifference has left Yan-Zi with sole responsibility for her mother's unhappiness. Similarly, the father is also indifferent to his daughter. When Yan-Zi takes a cup of tea to him sitting in the study. She is extremely careful not to distract the father from his work. She feels so tense that her hands 'shook so strongly that drops of boiling water leapt to my wrist' (28). The father's reaction is both of surprise and indifference, 'he looked at me as if he didn't know me. Then he turned away' (28). This experience makes Yan-Zi aware that even if she dies, her death might interest her father 'less than the assassination of an American president' (29).

Yan-Zi, after having sex for the first time, comes home late. Upon hearing the news that Yan-Zi has lost her virginity, the father delivers a punishment but is unable to assemble a complete, uninterrupted sentence: 'She is a ... an idiot!' (94). Instead of touching his daughter, he throws his glass of water at her head. They 'stared at each other in silence' (95) and 'his gaze ordered me to lower my eyes' (95). When Yan-Zi sees her father raise his hand high, she even awaits her father's punishment and is thinking that: 'Good, that's right, yes, hard, really hard, finish the job, hurry up, don't wait, finish me off now, once and for all' (95). The father at this point simply leaves her without saying a word. Yan-Zi guesses that, for her father, 'it wasn't worth it to strike me anymore and risk going to jail' (95).

Besides his indifference to his wife and daughter, the father expresses his disgust with the body and with food, in fact with ‘all those petty things he called carnal’ (89), making the wife and the daughter ashamed of their own femininity. While at Yan-Zi’s funeral, ironically, facing the death of his daughter, the father is ‘most alive at this moment’ (70). He sits next to Yan-Zi’s cousin, leaning toward her and taking her hands. He seems ‘intoxicated by such a fine meal, such fine company’ (70), and ‘saliva dribbles from his gaping mouth’ as if he is preoccupied with life ‘beyond the memory of his daughter, beyond the scrutiny of his wife, and finally, beyond death’ (70). Yan-Zi is angry with her father. She criticizes him, ‘stripped of the mask of intellection, prey to an indiscreet desire, Father’s face is before me in all its animal reality’ (71). Yan-Zi observes the behaviour of her father and other guests at the meal of her funeral. She feels that her body is being eaten by them: ‘suddenly I have the crazy idea that I am being eaten by Mother’s guests. Now I know why they have come to celebrate my death. They love flesh’ (68). This echoes the work of Lu Xun, the icon of China’s May Fourth literature²⁷¹ Lu writes about the cannibalistic nature of traditional patriarchal Chinese culture in his novellas entitled ‘The Diary of a Madman’,²⁷² in which the protagonist-narrator believes that he is persecuted by all those around him and feels his parents and brother want to eat him, and questions whether he has unconsciously eaten his younger sister who died years ago. This metaphor of eating human flesh reflects Lu’s concerns that Chinese patriarchal culture would have a damaging impact

²⁷¹ Lu Xun is the pen name of Zhou Shuren (1881-1936), a leading author in modern Chinese literature. His works are collected and published in 1981, see Lu Xun, *Lu Xun Quanjì* 鲁迅全集 (Complete Works of Lu Xun), 16 vols. (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 1981). There are some other representative authors and works of May Fourth literature that have been translated into English, such as Ding Ling, Zhang Ailing, Dai Wangshu, Shi zhicun, their representative works can be found in *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature*, ed. by Joseph S. M. Lau and Howard Goldblatt (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

²⁷² Lu Xun, *Diary of a Madman and Other Stories*, trans. by William A. Lyell (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990).

the younger generation, as Lu satirises the Chinese belief that ‘a son, in order to be counted as a really good person, should slice off a piece of his own flesh, boil it, and let the [parents] eat it’.²⁷³ Lu’s allusion to cannibalism points directly to the essence of Chinese patriarchy, through which parents conduct the rules upon children.²⁷⁴ Thus Lu writes ‘maybe there are some children around who still have not eaten human flesh. Save the children’.²⁷⁵

Lu’s call for breaking with patriarchal traditions was developed later by the Chinese leader Mao Ze Dong, as was advocated by the popular political propaganda campaign ‘Down with Confucianism’ (1915-1918). Chen seems to use the tradition of family bonds to criticize the patriarchal values which still persist in China and continue to shape the relationship between children and their parents. In *Ingratitude*, the daughter-protagonist Yan-Zi states ‘I wrote broadsides against the father of our feudalism. Down with Kong-Zi, I wrote, or our civilization will sink in the mud of its origins, our generation will be lost at the hands of our parents’ (9). Chen uses the Chinese pinyin ‘Kong-Zi’, Confucius, to represent Confucianism. Living in such a dysfunctional family, Yan-Zi never feels at home in the house with her parents, questioning the loss of her rights in the name of preserving tradition in a patriarchal culture. She desperately desires freedom and resists patriarchal ideology by planning to commit suicide.

²⁷³ Ibid., p. 41.

²⁷⁴ Gang Yue’s *The Mouth That Begg: Hunger, Cannibalism, and the Politics of Eating in Modern China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999) addresses this metaphorical genealogy of cannibalism in Chinese writing.

²⁷⁵ Lu, p. 41.

2. Poetic Resistance: Suicide and Exile

Yan-Zi's originally understands home to mean the place where she is resident and the site of her relationship with her parents. At the same time, she is also aware that home should be a place where her identity and selfhood can be present and respected. The difficulties for her in constructing such a home arise from the conflicts between these two aspects - conflicts between the traditions of filial piety, submission to parental authority and her more Western ideas of individuation, autonomy and desire for freedom. Yan-Zi attempts to balance her paradoxical attitudes towards the place she lives in, her parents against whom she revolts, and the culture that she criticises. This tension between the family bonds, patriarchal culture and her own selfhood leads her experience a senses of unhomeliness and exile.

2.1. Unhomeliness and suicide

In the house in which she has lived for twenty-five years, Yan-Zi feels that she is 'more like a visitor there than anywhere else' (112). For her parents, she claims that she is just 'a temporarily placed child, a migrant in Mother's life' (118) She never experiences her existence in a full sense as in her family, which denies her presence as an equal human being and '[her] existence [is] worth less than zero' (102). She is annoyed that 'my life didn't fully belong to me' (20). At the beginning, she makes an enormous effort to be 'a perfect daughter' as her mother demands by doing all the housework and devoting eight hours a week to learning to sew, rarely going out, and 'say[ing] okay to everything with an unflinching smile' (17). Nevertheless, all her efforts to be a good daughter fail as her mother denies her existence from the beginning. Yan-Zi reaches the conclusion that it is impossible for her to please her mother 'after you hurt her by coming into the world. You can't repair that oh so violent wound to the

body which later becomes a wound to the heart' (17). Yan-Zi describes the way that the mother examines her daughter's body when they are having a shower in the public bath. Her mother is described as having the 'demanding and lucid eyes of a stranger' which makes Yan-Zi feel that her mother 'wanted to swallow me whole, remake me in her body and give birth to me all over again, with physique, a personality, and a mind more to her liking' (17). Yan-Zi's fear of losing her identity by the cannibalistic images at her mother's gaze.

Moreover, she is objectified by her mother. Yan-Zi describes how her mother raised some birds before giving birth to her daughter. She locked them in the cages in the bathroom 'from time to time to punish them for cheeping too much' (56). The mother sold the birds to the restaurant when they 'were no longer enough to appease her maternal longings' (56). After giving birth to her daughter, the mother names her Yan-Zi, meaning swallow. The name swallow, linking to Yan-Zi's fear of being swallowed, suggests that the carnation enters the text in the English translation. In the Chinese cultural context, the swallow is usually symbolised as the inseparable link with family, because once swallows nest in the roof of a family's house, after migrating to warmer places in winter, they fly back to the same family in spring every year.²⁷⁶ Thus the symbolic meaning of the narrator's name might also indicate the mother's wish to control her daughter even after she grows up. Whenever Yan-Zi decides to move out from the house and find a place of her own, the mother expresses her anger to claim that: 'her [Yan-Zi's] wings have hardened, she's going to fly away' (121). Yan-Zi

²⁷⁶ Wolfram Eberhard, *A Dictionary of Chinese Symbols: Hidden Symbols in Chinese Life and Thought* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), p. 280; Charles Alfred Speed Williams, *Chinese Symbolism and Art Motifs: A Comprehensive Handbook on Symbolism in Chinese Art Through the Ages* (North Clarendon: Tuttle Publishing, 1993), p. 380.

feels that her existence is the same as the birds controlled by the mother so she keeps claiming that 'I hate this bird's name' (56).

In this situation, Yan-Zi feels that it is difficult for her to be grateful to her parents, since 'I was ungrateful for the life they had given me' (21). Yan-Zi believes that her life would be easier if she had no parents and no home: 'when I went to school, I envied the orphans' (9). Yan-Zi's feeling of unhomeliness initially is caused by this denial by a dysfunctional family, which denies her personal hood, neglects her emotionally and the mother abuses her physically and verbally. So she attempts to find other alternatives to change her situation, such as running away from her family. But soon Yan-Zi realises that her situation also results from her position as a daughter and a woman in a patriarchal society, in which absolute submission to one's parents is emphasised while individual desire is denied. Thus, she is unable to find any ways to reconstitute her selfhood and find a place she can call home. She seeks to escape from her mother and the family and she wants to destroy traditions by refusing filial responsibility. She therefore chooses to commit suicide out of rage and rebellion, and two goals, as Yan-Zi plans for her suicide, would be achieved: for one thing, the mother and daughter are so closely bound together that death seems to be the only escape from her mother's control in order to get her freedom. Yan-Zi feels that her relationship with her mother is like 'an old couple for whom everything had become limp, predictable, rotten' (6). The only way to get her freedom is from 'an abrupt separation, a vigorous uprooting to rediscover each other, even if only to abandon each other forever' (6). Yan-Zi claims that this is the only way to constitute her identity, 'when I was no longer anything, I would be me' (20). Moreover, by breaking up the mother-daughter relationship, Yan-Zi might revolt against the patriarchal culture

which underpins women's roles as women, mothers, and daughters. Yan-Zi's mother defines herself as a mother, and plays the role as a mother that society expects her to and derives all her self-worth as a wonderful mother. Thus, through Yan-Zi's suicide, the mother will cease to exist as a mother. Yan-Zi ceases to be a daughter, and she will not become a mother either. Yan-Zi is excited by her idea of suicide because after her death, 'when the conversation turns to children she'll shut her mouth' (7) and 'I forced her to resign from her position as a mother' (7).

In so doing, the morbid mother-daughter relationship will not be continued and repeated. Yan-Zi claims that 'I was supposed to become the most exact possible replica of my mother. [...] I had to destroy that replica at any cost. I had to kill her daughter. There was no other way of taming her' (109). In choosing suicide Yan-Zi feels she is inflicting the harshest possible blow on her mother. Since she is the only child in the family, albeit being a daughter, Yan-Zi's suicide will stop the family line. Her forced separation from her mother is thus equated with 'uprooting' (12). Yan-Zi hopes that she will violate filial duties and lead to her mother's own destruction. In this sense, Ben-Z Shek argues that Chen's novels include a 'clear distancing of the confused narrative voice from history, society, the outer world, representation, particularly in the use of a female voice that questions patriarchy'.²⁷⁷ Chen's narrative in this text focuses on the daughter's struggle for her identity, which is still largely formulated by patriarchal cultures. This reconstitution of women's identity and resistance of patriarchal culture not only provides a way to reconsider women's roles

²⁷⁷ Ben-Z. Shek, *French-Canadian and Québécois Novels* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 88.

in the family, but also calls for a rethinking of the value of life, the meaning of existence for each individual.

Therefore, Yan-Zi's suicide links her desires in life to the importance of life, and the relevance of tradition in holding a culture together. For her, suicide is a choice whereby she as a woman can refuse to assume a social prescribe role; it is a reaction to her society's refusal to allow her a choice rather than following the essentialist notions of traditional women's roles. Suicide has been commonly used by women as a way to rebel against an oppressive reality. Liu Meng explains that in a patriarchal society, suicide is not only 'the last resort' for the person who is suffering, but also 'a threat to others', and through suicide, women 'fight against their oppressors and achieve goals that were unattainable in their lifetime'.²⁷⁸ Yan-Zi, by planning a suicide, hopes to gain authority in the material, mortal absence of her life that she never had during its presence. Yan-Zi says that 'no one had asked my opinion before casting me out into the world. So I hoped they would at least allow me to choose the time of my own departure' (20). She attempts to reach a state of rupture with the dictates of gender roles escape the denial of her identity: 'I had to die differently. I would end my days my way' (20).

She collects enough sleeping pills and is ready to swallow them after finding a suitable place to write her mother a farewell letter. However, the manner of her death runs contrary to her plan because of an unexpected collision; it is the final dissolution of control in and over her life. When she is writing the letter at the Happiness Café, her

²⁷⁸ Liu Meng, 'Rebellion and Revenge: the Meaning of Suicide of Women in Rural China', *International Journal of Social Welfare* (2002), 300-309 (p. 308).

boyfriend that her mother has chosen for her, Chun, spots her through the window. She is frightened by Chun's interactions with the owner of the restaurant, and she feels nervous at the thought of being caught in the act of committing suicide and how that might lead to being sent to a mental hospital where her mother could have total control over her life again. Thus, she frantically runs out from the café and dashes into the crowd in the street so that she would escape from her boyfriend. Chun chases her, and during the chase, she is hit by a truck and killed.

Yan-Zi dies in a way that is contrary to what she planned. Ironically, she is effectively killed by the mother's chosen boyfriend, Chun. Yan-Zi describes the character of Chun on an occasion when he is invited to have a dinner with her parents. Yan-Zi notices that her boyfriend always adds 'don't you think' to everything he says whenever he chats with Yan-Zi's mother, even if 'he wasn't expecting a response' (47). His submission and deference please the mother who commends Chun that 'his in-laws would be more important than his own parents' (48). Her boyfriend can be seen as an agent of the mother's authority as well as of patriarchal authority; given Confucianism's three obediences, Yan-Zi would have passed from her mother's control to that of the boyfriend if they had eventually got married. Therefore, her death in the accident caused by her boyfriend's pursuit suggests the impossibility for Yan-Zi to escape her mother's power, which represents the power of patriarchal ideology.

2.2. Death: emotional exile and cultural space

After death, Yan-Zi becomes a ghost spirit, oscillating in limbo and waiting for Nilou, the god of death to come for her. She finds that death is not the peaceful refuge she had hoped it to be. In this condition, she represents her death as a state of exile: 'I am

an exile now. It is impossible for me to return' (5). This feeling of exile is reflected in the suspension of her relationships with others and the interruption of the daily routines of her family's lives, and their history. Yan-Zi's suicide would have been an attempt to devastate her mother and the family dynamics dictated by Confucian values, but her death does not create the misery she had intended. She had tried to punish her mother by her death: 'I was burning with the desire to see mother suffer at the sight of my corpse. Suffer to the point to vomiting her own blood. An inconsolable pain. Life would be slipping through her fingers and her descendants would be escaping her' (12). However, her family does not suffer as much as she has expected. Life goes on without her and the longer she is dead, the harder it is for her to connect to the humans' world. When she sees members of her family processing together, she realises that they are celebrating the national holiday: 'Flags, plastic stars, and scarves invade the street. Suddenly I realize it's the national holiday' (105). Her death does not mark the end of family life, but rather excludes her from participating in daily family routines. The gesture of staying outside represents her resistance to the changing nature of family life and her inability to participate in that life. Jaime O'Dell claims that Chen's work, 'through the anxiety her female characters' experience, connotes the frustration of alienated peoples who want to improve their positions or question their society, and yet [they] find themselves unable to move in a desired direction'.²⁷⁹

Yan-Zi's pattern of displacement and her double feeling of exile further complicate the understanding of home by calling into question notions of origin and the dissemination of culture. She decides to escape from the family and the feeling of

²⁷⁹ Jaime O'Dell, 'Transgressive Narratives: Gender and Revolt in two Québécois Novels by Ying Chen' (unpublished thesis, University of Florida, 2004), p. 6.

‘unhomeliness’ by committing suicide. However, shortly after leaving home, she longs to go back to the house which, contradictorily, she is trying to escape, ‘I missed my little room, my prison’ (137). After her death, the feelings of loneliness and exile do not disappear. In this sense, death becomes a form of exile as well as an imaginary space of cultural exchange. As a ghost spirit in a transition to the afterlife, Yan-Zi observes her origins and family within a nameless Chinese setting. Even though the text does not provide specific names and references, her narrative is full of Chinese cultural traditions such as Chinese funeral customs and table manners. The narrator uses a satirical voice when she comments her past, tradition and other Chinese cultural elements. For example, in the scenario of her own funeral, she is watching an argument between her mother and her grandmother who have different opinions on Chinese funeral rituals. ‘Grandmother insists that I should be dressed in a traditional winter coat, so that I won’t be cold when I arrive and the ancestors’ spirits will be hospitable’ (39). Yet her mother believes that her daughter should be ‘made presentable, as befits a proper family’ (39). Instead, they let Yan-Zi’s ‘nearly decomposed body’ emanate ‘a smell of urine’ in the summer rather than sending the body into the fire sooner (40). The ironic narrative stance on Chinese tradition and culture in this novel evokes a reconsideration of the extent with which Chinese cultural traditions should be maintained. For example, a scenario is described where Yan-Zi’s ill uncle cannot finish his bowl of rice because of his poor digestion, but both Yan-Zi’s mother and her uncle insist that he should finish the rice later, as they show the strong conviction inherited from their parents: ‘if one wishes to obey the wishes of the sky, one must absolutely never leave a single grain of rice in one’s bowl at the end of meal. You’d be struck by lightning if you did’ (119). The narrator satirically explains that even though it is a good habit and tradition not to waste, the way to maintain the traditions

is to remind the next generation of the hardships of their parents and their grandparents, where these traditions are unchangeable. So even if Yan-Zi's uncle is seriously ill, 'if [he were] asked to choose between jumping out the window or leaving rice in his bowl, he would have had to think it over' (120). When Yan-Zi is alive, she takes heed of these cultural traditions, while after her death, her ghost spirit occupies a position in flux, which allows her a new perspective from which to examine the culture, more than a simple representation of the distance between cultures on a stable ground. So this creative a narrative distance believe the posthumous narrative voice and Yan zi as protagonist in her life story, humours are sighs of this distance enabled by the device.

Besides this ambivalent attitude, the nameless city Yan-Zi and her family live in reflects a space of old and new thoughts interwoven, which indicates a reflection of global urbanism. She emphasizes that the environment of the city is 'opening up to foreigners', in which her mother fails to 'fit the new situation to her old beliefs' (24). While her mother claims 'in order to stand up to the new influences and to remain ourselves more than ever, it was necessary to fortify our mind and strengthen our immune system' (25). The conflict between these two cultural forces can be seen from the relationship between the mother, who is the agent of tradition and Confucianist value, and the daughter, who searches for freedom, individualism and self-autonomy. In this sense, the trope of mother-daughter relationship in Chen's novel continues the conventional model created by Kingston which I explored in the first chapter. Yet, the setting of this conflict in Chinese society, as Maria Ng argues, 'pushes for the need to redefine Canadian literature, since it is written in French by an ethnic Chinese living

in Montreal, while the narrative itself is firmly located within China'.²⁸⁰ Chen's position as a Chinese Canadian writer, the Chinese setting, as well as the language choice of her text was written in, provide a good example of the crossing of geopolitical borders in order to highlight Eastern and Western problems. It also prompts us to reconsider the expectation that diasporic writers will tend to represent their own diasporic position in literal, geographical terms.

3. The Use of Fantasy: Posthumous Narrative and Reincarnation

Chen centres her story on a dead protagonist-narrator and a backward movement from death to rebirth, from the current moment to the past. The narrative levels are woven together in the novel: one represents daily life after the narrator's death, where, as a ghost spirit oscillating in the air, she plays the double roles of a character participating in the stories that happened in her past before her death, and the other as an observer describing her own funeral and her family's life without her after her death. This form of literary fantasy takes the reader into a space inbetween life and death, and offers an articulation of identity formation for the protagonist-narrator. This mode of fantasy enables the repressed subject to break the silence and articulate her identity. As Anne Cranny-Francis emphasizes, fantasy for women 'explores the problems of being for women in a society which denies them not only visibility but also subjectivity'.²⁸¹ The adoption of the ghost perspective is a way of playing with the notion of 'invisibility' by giving the ghost (the narrator) the power of sight and voice.

²⁸⁰ Maria Ng, 'Abusive Mothers: Literary Representations of the Mother Figure in Three Ethnic Chinese writers: Hsieh Ping-Ying, Denise Chong, and Chen Ying', in *Asian Women: Interconnections*, ed. by Tineke Hellwig and Sunera Thobani (Toronto: Women's Press, 2006), pp. 139-60 (p. 154).

²⁸¹ Anne Cranny-Francis, *Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p. 77.

3.1. After death: posthumous narratives

In *Ingratitude*, the protagonist-narrator is newly deceased from the opening chapter and observes her own funeral as a ghost spirit: ‘they throw my body onto a rolling got in the middle of a windowless white room’ (3). The days following her death are documented by the ghost spirit when she waits in limbo for a transition to the afterlife. In this space, she anxiously waits for the figure of Lord Nilou the god of death, to come for her. Yan-Zi knows about Lord Nilou from her grandmother’s stories. The figure of Nilou is considered to be an important part of the Chinese tradition as the one who decides where and when each human being will be born and die, how each soul will be punished, and in what form the soul will return to Earth. Yan-Zi describes in the text:

He will be in charge of me, this tyrant of the Yin universe, a second mother who this time will make my death unbearable. He makes sure that we’re born and die, and then that we’re born again and die again, as insects, as anything. He’ll do what mother will no longer be able to do: discipline and punish me, sending me into the world of domestic animals to imbue me with greater wisdom. (104)

The knowledge about the figure of Nilou, along with its primitive powers, is passed from the older generation to the younger generation as a cultural tradition in China, thus forming an integral part of the Chinese belief system. Chen draws on Chinese cultural references and Chinese language (Niluo according to the Pinyin system) to reinforce the specificity of the Chinese setting but at the same time to evolve a sense of Chinese beliefs and culture as non-Western. This figure of Nilou, as well as the ghost spirit, is situated within a Chinese cultural and belief system. In her study of Chinese suicide, Liu Meng explains that in Chinese society, it is a common belief that the dead can be reincarnated and achieve liberation: ‘when a person dies, the spirit is

still alive, and this spirit may help the person to realise his or her goals after death [...] this belief was sustained in many local legends and dramas and transmitted from one generation to another'.²⁸² Considering the fact that this novel potentially targets its readers as Westerners as it was originally written and published in French for the Canadian publishing market,²⁸³ these two cultural codes can be explained through Rosemary Jackson's term of fantasy, a mode hovering between the marvellous and the mimetic. Jackson explains that the marvellous is a mode in which narrative events are backed by a coherent ideology, represented in forms such as fairy tales, utopias, or other supernatural tales and the mimetic mode relates to narratives in politics, and community, and concerns itself primarily with what it believes to be this world.²⁸⁴ Jackson places fantasy between the opposing modes of the marvellous and the mimetic, a term that 'can then be understood by its combination of elements of these two different modes'.²⁸⁵ The ghost narrative and the figure of Nilou, combine a supernatural source (responding to the marvellous) and a part of the Chinese belief systems (echoing the mimetic).

This whole story is told by a ghost-spiritual narrator. The protagonist-narrator, as a ghost spirit, floats in a vague and indefinable space between her earthly existence and the limbo space which follow death. That is to say, the narrator, recalls her past life as well as her present posthuman state. The subject telling stories and observing others' stories is the same as the object who experiences the stories. Jackson explains in this mode of fantasy, 'the limit between subject and object is effaced'.²⁸⁶ This effacement

²⁸² Meng, p. 302.

²⁸³ This novel was rewritten by Ying Chen herself in Chinese in 2002, and published by Zhejiang Literature & Art Publishing House in China in 2002.

²⁸⁴ Jackson, *Fantasy*, pp. 26-29.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

prompts the key question in the use of fantasy of 'vision and the control of the eye/I of the subject'.²⁸⁷ This fantastic narrative associates the self, the 'I' and the other 'not-I'. Jackson argues that 'the relation of self to other is mediated through desire, and the fantastic narratives in this category tell of various versions of that desire, usually in transgressive forms'.²⁸⁸ The protagonist-narrator in Chen's *Ingratitude*, as a ghost spirit, involves herself in all her own life experience and rethinks her relationships with others. At the same time, she is ghost-spirit at a distance, observing other people's lives and critically considering the value of cultural tradition and the existence of her life. The separation of the body and her spirit, and the self and other, places the narrator inside and outside of her family and society. Lucie Armit explains that the function of fantasy in contemporary women's fiction is to revise one's personal life through a dual narrative voice and 'such an effort reflects the search for identity'.²⁸⁹

The thirty-five short and condensed chapters of this novel interweave the past and the present, life and death. The protagonist-narrator constantly recalls the past, which interferes with her ability to commit fully to the present. This form of narrative makes it possible for the narrator to tell her stories and re-examine her life with the increased awareness not only of retrospection, but with an overview of a life completed. She lives as a part of her family under the control of her mother and wants to know about life and love, and to seek her existence beyond the control of the family. At the same time, the protagonist-narrator recounts the sequence of events leading up to her death. The singular perspective of the narrative with two levels turns the narrator into the observer of herself as well as the observer of others. Alice Bennett argues that

²⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 51.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Lucie Armit, *Contemporary Women's Fiction and the Fantastic* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p. 33.

posthumous voices offer ‘a retelling of a life that is apparently perfected by its completeness’.²⁹⁰ The previous life of Yan-Zi, the protagonist-narrator, has been completed by the unexpected accident, which is pre-empted her own desire to commit a suicide as a way to claim her self-autonomy and to punish her mother. This adds an additional twist to Bennett’s theory, if Yan-Zi carried out her untended suicide, her life might have been completed on her own terms, and to that extent at least, perfected. The accidental death arguably leaves her life less complete. The posthumous narrator is therefore in a state of limbo which resists closure.

The protagonist plans suicide as a way to punish her mother. Narrating her motives prior to the intended suicide the protagonist states that ‘she [the mother] will no longer have the pleasure of flaunting her experience as a mother’ (7) and predicts how her mother will be sad and regretful for her failure to understand her daughter: ‘she’ll blame herself for not understanding me, despite all these years of housing, feeding, washing, scolding, and dressing me, of turning me this way and that’ (8) She expects that after reading her farewell letter, her mother will eventually understand her: ‘reading my recovered letter, she’ll understand – too late [...] all these regrettable years, in the hope of taking her to a garden of promise’ (8), and she imagines her mother living ‘alone, exhausted and without hope’ (8) after her daughter’s death. By contrast, on the posthumous narrative level the narrator observes her mother’s reflection and reaction to her daughter’s death, and describes how her mother whispers: ‘You thought you were going to drive your mother insane with your death, my poor idiot. [...] you were wrong. You were fatally wrong’ (126). Contrary to the narrator-

²⁹⁰ Alice Bennett, *Afterlife and Narrative in Contemporary Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 148.

daughter's prediction that the mother would regret what she has done to her daughter, the ghost spirit narrator observes her mother's claim that 'You think you'll get along better with the dead, but in joining them you turn to ashes yourself [...] yes, yes, I know you regret it, you must regret it' (126). Moreover, in contrast to the narrator-daughter's plan and prediction, the mother lives happily after her daughter's death, and never changes her ways: 'she has even bought a young bird and placed it in a cage hung from the window' (152), so opening a further cycle in her life.

After Yan-Zi's death, it makes it possible to testify whether her suicide proves to be a way of rebellion. Posthumous narrative, therefore, has a double function: 'telling of a complete life from the end' and 'emphasizing the constant slippage of this "I"'.²⁹¹ One level of the narrative tells her own experiences and describes her own mental activities, while the other level involves the dead narrator's observation of other people's lives without her participation. These two narrative levels form a sharp contrast that might question the identity of the narrator – either the dead narrator has the ability to read or enter other's minds in the manner of an omniscient narrator or her observations of her mother's and other people's thinking are still the narrator-daughter's subjective understanding seen only from the outside.

Bennett suggests that the use of a ghost narrator may lead the reader to question who tells the story, because of the special position of the ghost narrators which 'occupy a space between God and man, but also between persons and non-persons, because they erase any possibility of a façade of natural narration'.²⁹² In his article on the analysis

²⁹¹ Bennett, p. 148.

²⁹² Alice Bennett, *Afterlife and Narrative in Contemporary Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 126.

of the narrator, Richard Walsh claims that the narrator functions ‘primarily to establish a representational frame within which the narrative discourse may be read as report rather than invention’.²⁹³ In Chen’s text, one of the narrative levels can be read as a ‘report’ of the narrator’s life. The reader’s perspective is altered, as Walsh explains, since ‘by conceiving of a fictional narrative as issuing from a fictional narrator, the reader has cancelled out its fictionality, negotiated a mode of complicity with representation, and found a rationale for suspension of disbelief’.²⁹⁴ The narrator in *Ingratitude* says that after dying, she begins to lose her sight and to confuse family members and strangers (152), and she doubts whether the woman who keeps birds is her mother, and wonders whether her mother might move on in life without her, yet she is not quite sure as she has no sense of time (153). Then the narrative line is shifted to her daily life. This narrative weaves together both ‘report’ and ‘invention’ in order to allow for a double version considering the narrator as a person and as a function existing for expression. As Bennett argues, ‘there can be no intermediate position between an all-knowing or all-creating author who exists outside the represented narrative and the created narrating character inside the narrative is what causes the dissonance in the position of an omniscient person’.²⁹⁵ The protagonist-narrator stays in limbo, as an in-between space, enabling her to step back from her life. Standing at a distance, she can critically examine other people, her family relationships, and the culture that she experiences. This situation also reflects Chen’s position as a diasporic woman who lives in Canada and creates her works in French. She occupies a position in flux and in between cultures, which provides her freedom and space to represent her response to her original culture.

²⁹³ Richard Walsh, ‘Who is the Narrator’, *Poetics Today*, 18.4 (1997), 495-513 (p. 496).

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Bennett, p. 128.

3.2. Reincarnation: return or rebirth?

As a free-floating subject, fantasy enables the protagonist-narrator to express a desire and tell her stories, which are silenced when she is alive, therefore it enables her arouse a general sense of subversion. Jackson explains that the literary fantasy tells ‘an indomitable desire, a longing for that which does not yet exist, or which has not been allowed to exist, the unheard of, the unseen, the imaginary, as opposed to what already exists and is permitted as “really” visible’.²⁹⁶ The protagonist-narrator’s desires are indomitable in a patriarchal society: her desire for marriage based on love is not allowed in the age of marriage arranged by parents; her desire for freedom beyond a family is difficult to satisfy as she cannot deny her origin and genealogy; and her desire for a self-determination turns out to be an illusion as when she was born, her ‘ego’ is already formed in this social frame. However, fantasy provides a subversive power, and enables her to cross the boundaries of a confined society. Jackson explains that fantasy is inhabited ‘by an infinite number of selves preceding socialization, before the ego is produced within a social frame. These selves allow an infinite, unnameable potential to emerge, one which a fixed sense of character excludes in advance’.²⁹⁷ Like other diasporic women authors, Chen also expresses that identity is not fixed; rather, it is a flexible process of deconstruction and reconstruction.

Chen’s use of fantasy in *Ingratitude* separates different ‘selves’ of the narrator, pushing the narrator back to ‘the ego’ produced ‘within a social frame’, thus opening up a new way of seeing. When her soul is leaving Earth, she can see mountains, deserts, and bodies of water. She feels that she can see everything essentially for the first time.

²⁹⁶ Jackson, p. 91.

²⁹⁷ Jackson, p. 91.

The narrator eventually realises her bitterness as not-being-herself. After her death, her ghost spirit flies in limbo where is outside of the nuclear family and far beyond the oppressive society to which she is always attached. She finally gets a sense of self-autonomy, so that she can make choices for her own life: 'I wanted to choose a mother, or at least to change her to my liking. I wanted to choose a man. I wanted to choose between life and death' (150). In this sense, she has achieved the level of self-identity that she fought for during her short life. However, she does not directly rush into a new life after reincarnation. Instead, she is halfway between her departure point and being a new world after death. This space in-between pushes her to go back to her past, to re-examine her relationships with others. Gabrielle Parker points out in her article on Chen's writing that the reincarnation of the protagonist-narrator can be said to be in dialogue with former selves, or 'an alter ego'.²⁹⁸ The protagonist-narrator attempts to deny and destroy that 'ego', the self in the family of a confined society, even at the cost of sacrificing her life as she believes that 'there was no other way for me to be me' (109).

When she was alive as a daughter in the family, all she fought for was the freedom of running away from her parents and cut off the mother-daughter bond. After death, she is away from her nuclear family, which, nevertheless, does not set her free. In this isolated space, she realizes that it is impossible to define herself without situating herself in the relationship with others. She feels a deep sense of 'exile', being 'free' of 'coming from nowhere and going nowhere' (99). Without any links with her family, she is free as 'the wind' without directions. She says, 'You move in space and out of space, in time and out of time. You skirt alongside history, but you have no history,

²⁹⁸ Parker, p. 83.

all because you don't have parents anymore' (99-100). The afterlife does not meet her expectations that she would obtain freedom, self-autonomy, love and home. In contrast, she is still lonely and unsettled, floating in a space between life and death. As the protagonist-narrator describes, 'I have never seen such a neutral place, so devoid of colour, of scent and taste, of shape, weight and heat. And yet, isn't this what I had wanted? Sterile eternity and a flowerless garden' (148). This neutral, lifeless, and colourless space does not give her sense of homely. Without directions and destinations, she re-examines and re-values her former life.

This voyage back to the past not only reveals a new awareness of herself, but also a changing definition of that self. Without family, memory and history, she feels that she loses a solid foundation. As a ghost spirit, the narrator notices that she loses her sense of time and loses her sight. But the sense of evaluating time, she claims, is the most important aspect of people's existence. 'You count the years, the seasons, the days, and the seconds. Nothing escapes this calculation. Even the light and the sand have an age' (153). This feeling of possessing time makes people 'do everything, to love and to hate, to build and to destroy' (153). The awareness of time in life makes people happy as well as sad, and it is time that pushes people to experience, to love and to hate. All these experiences make up people's memory and history, which are the foundation for individual identity formation. The narrator compares the relationship of life and time with the diasporic experience. She claims 'how can you appreciate this newfound happiness, its timelessness and emptiness, without having lived within time, without having suffocated in its richness? How can you feel the glacial joy of the foreign without having once had a homeland?' (153). These questions evoke some important questions on the roles of history and memory in the

construction of home for diasporic subjects, and how they navigate between conflicting desires to belong to a community at the same time as longing to be free from the weight of an oppressive heritage, a topic that I explored in the first chapter about Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, in which the narrator claims that she is like a ghost who has no memories as a diasporic woman, experiencing disconnection from and discontinuity with the history of her homeland (151). Kingston uses the ghost more as a metaphor than a narrative voice, but it is useful for an understanding of ethnic identity in multi-ethnic spaces. For instance, the narrator's mother, as a member of the first generation of Chinese immigrants, insists on seeing America as a country which is full of ghosts such as 'Taxi Ghosts, Bus Ghosts, Police Ghosts, Fire Ghosts, Meter Reader Ghosts, Tree Trimming Ghosts, Five-and-Dime Ghosts' (90). Those ghosts are 'have no memory anyway and poor eyesight' (184). The implication of the ghost in diasporic women's writing, either as a metaphor, a category of supernatural spirit, or as a narrative device, is that of foreign experience, diasporic displacement and their identity as an 'other'. The narrator in *The Woman Warrior* recalls 'we had been born among ghosts, were taught by ghosts, and were ourselves ghost-like. [Our parents] called us a kind of ghosts' (183). Rajagopalan Radhakrishnam explains that for diasporic subjects, 'the location is a ghostly location where the political unreality of one's present home is to be surpassed only by the ontological unreality of one's place of origin'.²⁹⁹ This ghostly location in-between life and death in Chen's novel *Ingratitude*, along with the ghostly existence of the protagonist-narrator as an 'other', are similar to the diasporic situation described in Kingston's text. Both the protagonist-narrator in Chen's text and the author-narrator in Kingston's text, as E. D. Huntley

²⁹⁹ Rajagopalan Radhakrishnam, 'Postcoloniality and the Boundaries of Identity', *Callaloo*, 16.4 (1993), 750-71 (p. 765).

explains, occupy a significant cultural space ‘inhabiting the invisible borderlands’ and ‘have lost a homeland and yet have not full gained a new country of the heart’.³⁰⁰

At the close of *Ingratitude*, the protagonist-narrator experiences a strong unexpected sense of homesick for her mother. Yan-Zi longs for her mother to receive her loving letter she wrote before and to realize the depths of the daughter’s feeling for her mother. Waiting in limbo, she gradually loses her earthly connections. The final paragraph is revealing: ‘my memory evaporates like the cloud that carries me. Through the fog of this memory, like an enchanted lament, comes the last human voice, maybe the cry of an infant: “Mother!”’ (154). At the moment when life is over, even beyond death, one word and one longing remain: the need for a mother. Jack A. Yeager claims that the protagonist-narrator’s mother can be considered as a symbol of her original country and ‘images such as these, underscored by the ambiguity surrounding the death of the narrator, evoke the notion of floating and rootlessness, of marking time in transitory spaces, another theme common in immigrant literature’.³⁰¹ This appeal to a symbolic mother seems to return the starting point. But this pattern of return, indeed, as Rosalind Silvester comments, ‘fits in with the general tendency of contemporary critics [...] to examine the nativist/essentialist assumption that all ethnic Chinese literary representations everywhere consistently point back to an essential Chinese core of belonging’.³⁰² This can be proved by the experiences of the narrators in Kingston’s and Mah’s works, which I have explored in the previous two chapters.

³⁰⁰ E. D. Huntley, *Maxine Hong Kingston: A Critical Companion* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001), p. 40.

³⁰¹ Jack A. Yeager, ‘Bach Mai and Ying Chen: Immigrant Identities in Québec’, in *Textualizing the Immigrant Experience in Contemporary Québec*, eds. by Susan Ireland and Patrice J. Proulx (London: Praeger, 2004), pp. 137-47 (p. 142).

³⁰² Rosalind Silvester, ‘Ying Chen and the “Non-Lieu”’, *The Modern Language Review*, 106. 2 (April 2011), 407-422 (p. 407).

In Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, even though the author-narrator claims to leave her family in order to construct her selfhood, she simultaneously realizes that she has to figure out family memories and histories. The author-narrator in Mah's text also feels homesick with and about her family, even though she seeks the acceptance of her family. Moreover, Chen's text also shares similarities with Kingston's and Mah's texts in that they all expand the mother-daughter relationship to a deeper level, using it as a mean of considering the 'original' culture from their 'motherland' in the process of constructing their home. Even though Chen's text is set in the context of Chinese society, it shares many common motifs with diasporic literature. Their in-between space makes them belong both/and as well as neither/nor among cultures and nations. Rosalind Silvester summarises that these concept of being between worlds for ethnic minorities in North American 'encapsulates the double-bind of being female in their original, often patriarchal society and being an immigrant on the outskirts of the dominant culture'³⁰³

This statement of unhomeliness for diasporic women and their desire to be 'outside', to carve a space they can call home, as Anne Koenen points out, both 'liberating and subversive'.³⁰⁴ On the surface, the resistance of the protagonist-narrator in *Ingratitude*, as well as the narrators in works by Kingston and Mah, seems to be in vain. I would argue, however, that the subversive power has worked through the use of fantasy in their writing. Fantasy enables Chen's narrator to find herself inside and outside herself, within and beyond the family. The space in-between is represented by moments of

³⁰³ Silvester, p. 409.

³⁰⁴ Anne Koenen, *Visions of Doom, Plots of Power: the Fantastic in Anglo-American Women's Literature* (Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert Verlag, 1999), p. 3.

refusal, denial to accept, situating the protagonist-narrator between the absolutes and resisting fixing her fluid identity with a more rigid view of boundaries between self and other. It permits a reconciliation with the past, and offer her the possibility of recovering her life. In this sense, the return becomes a rebirth, as the protagonist-narrator articulates as her perpetual vagrancy, ‘to be excluded from the cycle of life, to be everywhere and nowhere. To not be’ (149).

Chen’s writing reflects her own divided self in her unique position as a Chinese diasporic woman living in Canada. Chen does not celebrate this cultural space of being in-between, nor does she take an ethnic nationalist approach to represent an essence of ethnic group. She focuses in her narrative on a family through the protagonist-daughter’s love-hatred mother-daughter relationship, engaging an anti-essentialist project. Parker terms spaces like those reflected in Chen’s novel as reflecting ‘doubled cultural disassociation’, which enables the protagonist-narrator ‘to become much more critical of the mother figure, since she is aware of the ideological tradition but is also disassociated, though differently, from Confucianist dictates’.³⁰⁵ Thus, she creates a space of blurring binary distinctions between Chinese or Western, modern or traditional, life or death, and eventually achieves ‘a holism’ that ‘exceeds the boundaries of place and time’.³⁰⁶ Her reincarnation also indicates her ‘final death’, and the beginning of her new journey of ‘home’.

³⁰⁵ Parker, p. 85.

³⁰⁶ Julie Rodgers, ‘Ying Chen: Experiment and Innovation’, In *Ten Canadian Writers in Context*, eds, by Marie Carrière, Curtis Gillespie and Jason Purcell (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2016), pp. 3-9 (p. 5).

Conclusion

To sum up, this chapter has explored the use of literary fantasy as represented in the posthumous narrative in Chen's text *Ingratitude*. The novel explores popular tropes in Chinese diasporic women's literature, such as the themes of origins, separation, loss, and the narrator's attempts to search for an identity when cut off from her mother and her home. Focused on the female protagonist-narrator and her family, this novel primarily deals with the dichotomy between Chinese patriarchal society structured upon an oppressive Confucianist social order and a desire for freedom and self-autonomy associated with Western societies oppressed both by maternal violence and the power of her father, the protagonist-daughter's own identity and existence are denied. Her desires for freedom and home are thwarted by this highly restrictive society. Her resistance through suicide, albeit failed, pushes her into a state of exile and displacement, but the posthumous narrative enables her to re-examine her past life.

Chen's fiction centres on the oppressive treatment of women that can result from cultural constructs, yet she holds a paradoxical attitude towards these cultural constructs, questioning exactly what cultural heritage the diaspora should retain. Through this novel, Chen does not provide any definitive answers to the question of which cultures and histories the diasporic subjects should retain; indeed, her own attitudes towards Chinese cultures seem to be contradictory. Moreover, her writing challenges the limits of diasporic writing and extends it to a universal scope to understand one's selfhood, family, origin, histories and cultures. By using different writing strategies, such as that of a ghost spirit's voice, the double narrative levels, the first-person narrative and short chapters, Chen distances herself and her work from the territory of identity politics, and her use of fantasy engages differently with social-

political aspects of identity. The critical success of her creative writing has led her to be described as ‘one of the most experimental and radical diasporic women authors in Canada in the twenty-first century’.³⁰⁷ Her application of literary fantasy in the form of the posthumous narrative and reincarnation carves an undefined space of in-betweenness; in which the unspeakable can talk and repressed desires can be represented. Thus fantasy becomes an aesthetic and cultural mode which reflects Chen’s critical re-examination of her original culture from a distance. It also functions as a way of mimicking the original displacement and the concerns of historical discontinuity in the condition of the diaspora. In this space of crossing boundaries between different worlds and different future lives, the protagonist-narrator understands her identity as constantly in the process of becoming.

³⁰⁷ Julie Rodgers, ‘Ying Chen: Experiment and Innovation’, In *Ten Canadian Writers in Context*, eds, by Marie Carrière, Curtis Gillespie and Jason Purcell (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2016), pp. 3-9 (p. 5).

Chapter Four: Crossing Boundaries: the Reconstruction of Queering History and Folktales in Larissa Lai's *When Fox is a Thousand*

Introduction

The previous three chapters have explored applications of literary fantasy, produced through various modes such as ghosts, myths, legends and fairy tales. Fantasy in these works functions as a subversive force for narrators and protagonists to negotiate their constitution of identity and home. However, this is a notion of home which still oscillates between different modes of articulation based upon geographical localities or ethnographical relationships, such as ancestry and resident countries, individual and family. This chapter further problematises this notion of home as something which exists within a fixed locality or kinship, and through a case study of Larissa Lai's novel *When Fox is a Thousand* (1995), it explores the function of fantasy as blurring these boundaries to imagine a home for diasporic queer subjects. This chapter argues that Lai's use of fantasy, in rewriting Chinese folktales and retelling histories, challenges the understandings of home fixed in the geographical localities and ethnographical relationship, and obtains visibility and voices for Chinese diasporic queer women. Moreover, the mode of fantasy in this novel creates an imagined home from which the marginalised subjects can find empowerment and a sense of belonging. Interrelating cultural inheritances and blurring geographical boundaries, this novel calls for a respectful environment for invisibilities, foreignness, alienated memories and experiences of displacement.

Representative of a new generation of Chinese immigrants, Lai is a pioneer in addressing queer identity formation by amalgamating Chinese myths and folktales

with contemporary Canadian urban realities. Born on 13 September 1967 in California, Lai migrated to Canada with her parents when she was a child. To date she has published two novels, *When Fox is a Thousand* and *Salt Fish Girl*,³⁰⁸ and a large number of short stories, poems, and literary criticism and journal articles.³⁰⁹ Lai has been an instructor at the Clarion West Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers' workshop. Her use of fantasy in the novel *When Fox is a Thousand* involves the weaving together of three narrative threads: those of a ninth-century Chinese poet and Taoist nun, Yu Hsuan-Chi; a fictional contemporary Chinese-Canadian woman, Artemis Wong; and the Chinese mythic figure of Fox. The latter has the power of transforming across temporal and spatial boundaries by inhabiting the bodies of both Yu and Artemis so as to connect these three narrative lines as a whole. These three narrative strands are interwoven in a clear order using different pictographs at the start of each section to indicate each narrative voice (a fox, a woman in a nun's garment, and a tree ((resembling a cedar, with its roots seen outside rather than underneath the earth)).³¹⁰ Interspersed between these three narrative lines, Fox and Yu tell their stories from a first-person perspective while Artemis's strand is narrated in the third person. This type of multi-layered narrative, along with the use of fantasy, allows Lai to reveal the

³⁰⁸ Larissa Lai, *Salt Fish Girl* (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 2002).

³⁰⁹ For example, her two books of poetry include: *Sybil Unrest* (co-authored with Rita Wong, Vancouver: New Star, 2013) and *Automaton Biographies* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp, 2009); Chapbooks: *Feminine Sorcery* (Vancouver: True Lai's Chapbook Press, 2000); *Rachel* (Calgary: True Lai's Chapbook Press, 2004); *Nascent Fashion* (Calgary: True Lai's Chapbook Press, 2004); *Maria* (Calgary: True Lai's Chapbook Press, 2004); *Welcome to Asian Women in Business* (Calgary: MODL press, 2004); *Eggs in the Basement* (Vancouver: Nomados, 2009); a work of literary criticism: *Slanting 'I', Imagining 'We': Asian Canadian Literary Production in the 1980s and 1990s* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2014); the edited volume, *Tracing the Lines: Reflections on Contemporary Poetics and Cultural Politics in Honour of Roy Miki*, eds, with Maia Joseph, Christine Kim and Christopher Lee (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2013).

³¹⁰ Larissa Lai, *When Fox is a Thousand* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1995). It was firstly published in 1995 and out of print since 2001. This study use the first edition. The new one was published by the same press in 2004, featuring a new foreword by the author and different pictographs: an image of a fox for the lifetime of the Fox; a lamp for the narrative of the poetess; and a book for narration in the contemporary Vancouver.

Chinese Canadian queer women's desires and to construct their hidden histories and constitute their sexuality and identity.

This chapter is organized into three parts: the first part examines the diasporic life of the Chinese Canadian protagonist, Artemis Wong, in contemporary Vancouver. Wong exemplifies a double sense of exile, in her search for home in her homeland whilst she feels equally alienated living with her adoptive Caucasian parents in Canada. The second part explores how Lai uses literary fantasy to reveal diasporic queer subjects' desires and how she rewrites the Chinese mythical figure of the Fox. Through examining Lai's imagination and recreation of the ancient Chinese poetess's life stories, the third section explores how this novel rewrites a history which has silenced women in a male-dominated society. This chapter will use the term 'new fantasy' to illustrate the constructs of an imagined space as home for marginalised subjects.

1. 'Home' in-Between: Nowhere to Call 'Home'

In *When Fox is Thousand*, Lai describes in detail the protagonists' changing understandings of home, and various experiences of searching for home. One of the narrative lines describes Artemis's diasporic experience and her changing attitudes towards home – from denying her 'origin' and the 'homeland' and thus desiring a new home, to her failure to build a home in Canada, which leads to her final sense of 'unhomeliness' in either country.

1.1. Diasporic dilemma: the impossibility of returning

The novel's contemporary protagonist Artemis Wong was born to Chinese immigrants and adopted by Caucasian parents when she was six months old. Her name suggests

her diasporic identity by combining a common Chinese family name, Wong, with Artemis, the virgin goddess in Greek mythology. The author suggests that in the context of her national-racial categorization this name ‘suits her, since she belongs to no one’ (20). This novel also alludes to ‘a generation of immigrant children whose parents loved the idea of the Enlightenment and thought they would find it blooming in the full heat of its rational fragrance right here in North America’ (10). It is a name that symbolises a hybridity ‘like fortune cookies, or spaghetti noodles in hot-dog soup’ (11). Growing up in urban Vancouver, Artemis at first takes her Westernised childhood and the values of her adoptive parents for granted. However, no matter how hard she rejects ‘a distant past that she pushed away with distaste’ (21), she is haunted by a sense of epigenetic memories linked to her ancestry country. Although Artemis has never been to China and has never read Chinese history, she is often haunted by strange images of the Tiananmen Massacre in Beijing (4 June 1989). In her imagination, she joins a Chinese crowd to listen to a speech by a student leader. She cannot name the figures in her memory; nor does she know where they are from. She wonders whether her melancholy taps into ‘a collective memory of all the deaths, abandonments, and slow stresses of war that have gone unspoken through the generations?’ (85). She thinks that those events that really happened in history must have been lost, but ‘the emotional memory might move from one generation to the next as surely as any genetic trait’ (85).

Lai emphasises the link between diasporic subjects and the ‘collective memory’ of historical events (85), a connection which preserves the lives and experiences of ancestors and through which the dead would influence following generations. Cultural critic Rey Chow points out how ‘émigrés who can no longer claim proprietorship of

Chinese culture through residency in China henceforth inhabit the melancholic position of an ethnic group'.³¹¹ According to Chow, the homesickness Chinese diasporic subjects feel for an origin and their homeland country is a melancholic nostalgia. In other words, inhabiting Western countries, Chinese diasporic subjects take over those historical traumas and memories even though they do not experience them. Leslie Sohn argues that diasporic nostalgia is not a form of melancholy but 'an attempt to alleviate melancholic suffering'.³¹² The melancholic memories Artemis experiences are not necessarily 'suffering', yet they remind Artemis of a relationship to the past and to history. As Malissa Phung explains, diasporisation entails an ongoing process of 'discovering and mending an always tenuous relationship to the past, past histories that subsequent generations inherit, directly or indirectly, from previous generations, past origins that postgeneration may repress for most of their lives'.³¹³ Artemis has no way to ascertain whether these feelings are melancholic memories, cultural nostalgias or her own imagination. Marianne Hirsch proposes the concept of 'postmemory' to describe the haunted relationship between the traumatic knowledge of diasporic subjects and the lived experiences of previous generations.³¹⁴ According to Hirsch, although some diasporas have never experienced the trauma of their parents or previous generations, these histories and experiences have been deeply and affectively transmitted and carried on to the next generations by 'the structure of memory'.³¹⁵ Postmemory plays a role as an embodied 'living connection' between

³¹¹ Rey Chow, *Modern Chinese Literary and Cultural Studies in the Age of Theory: Reimagining a Field* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 20.

³¹² Leslie Sohn, 'Nostalgia', *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 64 (1983), 203-11 (p. 203).

³¹³ Malissa Phung, 'The Diasporic Inheritance of Postmemory and Immigrant Shame in the Novels of Larissa Lai', *Postcolonial Text*, 7.3 (2012), 1-19 (p. 2).

³¹⁴ Marianne Hirsch, 'The Generation of Postmemory', *Poetics Today*, 29.1 (2008), 103-28 (p.106).

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

different generations and as an affective link to the past.³¹⁶ Artemis has not physically experienced the Tiananmen Massacre but she is haunted by these memories through ‘postmemory’.

Yet her feelings are strong enough to make her gradually recognise that she cannot abandon her cultural heritage: ‘the more you run away from the old world, the more it catches up with you’ (41). Those memories pull Artemis back into history and the past, pushing her to confront her cultural heritage. Her curiosity about collective history and desire for a home make her search for her identity. Nyan Shah suggests that identity is about belonging: ‘at its most basic level, identity marks what we have in common with some people and what differentiates us from others’.³¹⁷ To a large degree, hope for those affected by displacement, the search for origins and home fosters a sense of belonging; Artemis therefore decides to leave Canada to ‘return’ to Hong Kong in order to search for her biological mother and a basis for self-identity.³¹⁸

However, far from feeling comfortably ‘at home’ when she walks along a Hong-Kong street, she observes that ‘the ones who are born overseas are always obvious’ (117). Surrounded by a crowd of people at the train station, she feels that she is an outsider unable to understand their language even though they speak in ‘familiar voices’ (120). When she shares a meal with a group of strangers, she feels estranged when sitting around the same table with them and having the same food, ‘poking chopsticks into

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Nyan Shah, ‘Sexuality, Identity and the Uses of History’, in *Q & A: Queer in Asian America*, ed. by David Eng and Alice Hom (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), pp. 141-56 (p. 142).

³¹⁸ Lai’s Chinese parents moved to Hong Kong and lived there for years before immigrating to California and later to Canada. So Lai sets up Hong Kong as Artemis’s ‘homeland’ in *When Fox is a Thousand*, even though this novel was firstly published in 1995, when Hong Kong was a British colonial territory until 1997.

the same dishes of rice noodles or pork and vegetables' (122). This sense of alienation is also manifested by her stilted Chinese and her unfamiliarity with Chinese culture. Her journey of 'homing' and her search for recognition from 'her people' turn out to be in vain. Standing in the street, Artemis 'wishes she would forget that she is Chinese too' (120). When her friend Diane asks Artemis whether she wants to find out about her biological parents, her origins and 'the people who know your history. The people who will care about you even if they don't know you' (97), Artemis impatiently answers: 'I really don't think about it [...] I am no less who I am for where I've ended up' (97). After her journey of searching for a home through her return to the 'homeland', Artemis realises that her search for a sense of belonging a 'homeland' can never be fulfilled. So she attempts to abandon such a racial or ethnic essentialism.

In this scenario, the Fox's narrative emerges parallel with that of Artemis, commenting on her appearance and speculating in her state of mind. When Artemis is contemplating her identity in a street in Hong Kong, the narrative shifts to that of the Fox, who asks: 'is she [Artemis] trying to prove to herself how quaint and archaic these people are [...] or is she merely looking for shadows of herself, glimpses of a truth beyond the dull surface mirage of twentieth century life in any city?' (118). The Fox undermines Artemis's attempt to search for her identity through others, and speculates on her thoughts: 'she [Artemis] does not know that beneath every mirage is another mirage' (118). The interweaving of the Fox's voice and the nameless narrator, blurs the boundary between the mythological shape-shifter and contemporary narrative, placing the main protagonist Artemis in a position of in-betweenness to be adopted, observed and narrated. Both the two other narrative strands start with their life experiences at a young age, narrated in the first person. This story of the modern-

day protagonist Artemis unsettles essentialist, static understating of identity as told by another's voice, creating uncertainty and ambiguity around her identity formulation. Yet from this section, it can be seen that Lai rejects the role of biological essentialism and cuts off links to the homeland in constructing a diasporic identity. In her article titled 'Political Animals and the Body of History' (1999), Lai claims that there is no nostalgic emotion referring to a homeland for diasporic subjects and 'indeed one that never did'.³¹⁹ In her novel, Artemis's unhomeliness does not arise from her desire for a lost homeland, nor from her realisation that, when there, she feels no bond with Hong Kong. She feels equally othered and objectified in contemporary Vancouver; she therefore decides to create her own personal relationship to a Chinese past which restates her position as a diasporic, queer woman, of Chinese descent.

1.2. Being 'othered' in the resident country

Adopted by Caucasian parents and living in Canada for more than twenty years, Artemis never feels at home, rather, she feels that she is just a part of her parents' collection (39). Her father is a professor of Asian Studies and her mother is a curator of Asian art at the Museum of Ancient Cultures in Vancouver; both hold a special role in the process of Asian culture's dissemination in the West.³²⁰ Artemis's friend Diane claims that they are 'Asian-philes' (39). To make Artemis understand this term, Diane immediately explains it as 'Orientalists' (39), implying that Artemis is just one of her Canadian parents' obsessions, similar to their other possessions such as 'Chinese

³¹⁹ Larissa Lai, 'Political Animals and the Body of History', *Canadian Literature*, 163 (1999), 145-54 (p. 150).

³²⁰ Japanese Canadian artist and writer Kyo Maclear points out that the white curators, museologists and professors have played crucial roles in the process of Asian culture's dissemination in the West. Their status and power 'make what they say authoritative and persuasive. They have the ability to form and disseminate cultural canons'. See Kyo Maclear, 'Diss-Orient-ation', *Fuse*, 16.5-6 (1993), 25-27 (p. 27).

pottery, silk hangings, scrolls of calligraphy' (39). Artemis argues that her adoptive parents want to keep these things to make sure that she is aware of her history (39). But immediately, Artemis feels that her argument is not convincing. She also recalls that how when her father is at work, her mother often takes her to a Chinese goods store. These are moments of exposure when Artemis feels alien, but at the same time congenial: 'she knew somehow that all these creepy things had something to do with her, and that she would have to eat them later. Her mother took the child's quietness for reverence or the exercising of collective memory and decided not to interfere' (21). Diane asks Artemis, 'do you catch them looking at you funny?' (39). This touches on Artemis's pain and exposes her condition of homelessness. Artemis responds immediately and exasperatedly: 'I should go home' (39), although she feels that she has no home to which she can go.

With her friends, Artemis also feels alienated because of her Asian appearance. When Artemis attends a party, a blond woman asks her if she can 'speak English' (153). Artemis happens to be smoking and is unable to verbally respond; she simply smiles and nods. The woman immediately turns to an 'equally tall, equally blonde' friend complaining: 'I don't think she understood me' (153). Because of her racialised body, Artemis is excluded from the local group by being classified as a non-Western and non-English speaking 'other'. She feels offended and leaves the party to go home, only to realise that 'there wasn't really anywhere to go' (154). Besides the discrimination she experienced because of her physical appearance, Lai also queries the perpetuation of racist stereotypes based on women's racialised bodies through statements such as 'all Asians look the same' or 'you Orientals never age' (38). Artemis's flatmate Joanne warns her that Chinese landlords are 'scum' and claims: 'next time I move, though,

I'm gonna make sure the landlord is white. At least I'll be sure they understand the law, then' (155). Immediately Artemis loses her desire to talk to her flatmate.

On another occasion, Artemis assists her friend Eden, a Canadian photographer, in a photo shoot session. At the very beginning, Artemis explains that it is not vanity that makes her want to help Eden; instead, it is 'the word *shoot*. Like a gun going off or a star loosening from its fixed place in the heavens and burning down a long arc of sky' (19). However, Artemis does not achieve this sense of experiencing different flexible identities constituted through the camera. During the photo shoot, Eden puts Artemis into dresses 'made of polished steel. Sharp and dangerous' (13). After dressing up, Artemis feels that she 'became something terrible and frightening, something more alien than human, a giant insect inside a hard carapace' (13). Eventually, 'only Eden seemed immune to the monster he had created' (13). Eden seems obsessed with exotic subjects, choosing to photograph 'all kind of social outcasts, marginalised subjects, physically and mentally damaged people and animals' (136). He places Artemis within these categories because of her racial identity. When he shows the photographs to Artemis, he quips, 'you look almost like the real thing', to which Artemis hastily responds, 'I am the real thing' (82). For Eden, the 'real' refers to being Chinese and he seeks to mould Artemis into a fixed racial identity category to define who she is. Artemis's identity as a Chinese Canadian is not 'real' enough for him. In other words, her hybrid identity is not authentic enough as an identity. Eden exercises his authority as photographer to decide what constitutes a 'real' authentic identity for Artemis. This white male 'gaze', Lai's text implies, exoticises difference and denies the diasporic women's identity.

The text also depicts Artemis's friend Mercy Lee, who is similarly confused with her own identity. As a Canada-born daughter of an immigrant family from Hong Kong, she feels 'helpless and guilty at the same time' towards her family (56). Her father owns a factory in China, and it burned down with workers inside who could not escape in time (56). Mercy feels angry with her father and other family members, claiming that 'the older generation is ruining the world' (56). Yet at the same time, she feels responsible for what her father does. When Artemis suggests she move out from the family house, Mercy feels that it will not help her to sever the relationship with them as they are still family: 'we care for each other the way people who are not family don't' (57). The contradictory attitudes toward her family make Mercy change her name from the girlish Mercy Lee, whose life is dominated by her family and the Christian group,³²¹ to Ming, meaning 'shimmering' or 'bright'. The Chinese character combines two components: the sun and the moon; masculine and feminine, thereby creating a figurative coexistence of two genders. She also reinscribes her ethnicity artificially by tattooing her body, 'tattoos that revealed her road to her reinvention of herself – a dragon and phoenix, a yin-yang symbol, a lotus flower in full colour, delicate pink and yellow' (139). Susanne Hilf explains Mercy/Ming's confusion of identity is caused 'by constructing her identity, by re-inventing herself, Mercy/Ming fights against determining constraints imposed on her from the outside'.³²² Mercy's reconstructing of her identity reflects Paul Gilroy's term 'double consciousness':³²³ the internal conflict experienced by subordinated groups in a society dominated by others. Living between cultures, diasporic subjects are constantly reconciling the two

³²¹ The name 'Mercy' alludes to Christian notions of redemption.

³²² Susanne Hilf, *Writing the Hyphen: The Articulation of Interculturalism in Contemporary Chinese-Canadian Literature* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000), p. 132.

³²³ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), p. 1.

that comprise their identity.³²⁴ Mercy feels confused about her own identity due to the fact that one part of her is related to her origin and the other part of her is based on her current life experience in Canada. Both Mercy/Ming and Artemis feel confused with their construction of identity and this confusion pushes them into the state of ‘unhomeliness’, a state that Homi K. Bhabha theorised as cultural hybridity, a space interwoven with ‘cultural interstices beyond boundaries’.³²⁵ The next section concentrates on Lai’s attempt to carve out an imagined space as home through representing Chinese-Canadian experience and drawing upon Chinese cultural sources.

2. The Power of Fantasy: Subverting the Repression of Queer Desires

Lai extends her understanding of home from spatial limitations to the transmission of cultures across different times. In an interview with Ashok Mathur in 2000, she claims that her writing attempts to ‘create a sort of historical launch pad for hybrid flowers like myself. I have been trying to foster the germination of a culture of women identified women of Chinese descent living in the West.’³²⁶ She rejects the term ‘lesbian’ due to its racial and ideological implications and instead speaks about ‘women identified women’.³²⁷ Lai describes the different situations for the queer diaspora in contemporary Canada and she also refers to ancient China. By connecting Artemis to her ancestry – through the figure of Yu, a poetess in the Tang Dynasty of ninth-century China – Lai constructs an imagined home for Chinese queer women where their desires are accepted by society.

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 9.

³²⁶ Larissa Lai, ‘Interview with Ashok Mathur’, *West Coast Line*, 33.3 (2000), 109-17 (p. 110).

³²⁷ Larissa Lai, ‘Political Animals and the Body of History’, *Canadian Literature*, 163 (1999), 145-54 (p. 149).

2.1. Represented queer desire: race and sexuality

Artemis and her friends have difficult life experiences in contemporary Vancouver. When Artemis's friend Andie reveals his homosexuality to his family, his parents warn him that both his race and his sexuality will count against him in the white-dominated and heteronormative Canada (44-5). If race and ethnicity are not a matter of choice, Andie's parents believe that sexuality should be chosen according to the mainstream, which will make his life easier. Andie's father comments: 'It is hard enough being Chinese. Why does he want to make it worse? Especially in something he has a choice over.' (45). Andie insists upon his choice and moves out to live with his boyfriend Stephen, who is 'a tall young man with brown hair and hazel eyes' (45). Andie's parents accept Stephen when Andie brings him to visit his parents. They like him and think Stephen is a good and clever man as he can read Chinese books such as Pu Song-Ling's *Strange Tales of Liao-zhao* (46). Stephen's knowledge of Chinese culture and history makes Andie's father comment: 'my children should read these stories, especially my son' (47). They feel that their son's Western boyfriend is more 'Chinese' than Andie who can neither speak Chinese nor has any knowledge of Chinese culture and history.

Nevertheless, Andie's identification as Chinese seems not to be his own choice but is assigned by others judging from his physical appearance. Soon after Andie moves from Vancouver to Toronto, he is murdered in High Park. His sister Diane receives the news from a newspaper clipping 'from a gay and lesbian rag' with photographs (49) – 'a picture of the dead man, his face barely the breadth of two fingers on the page' (49) and 'a photograph of the site where the body was found, the foot of a tree with thick, snarling roots' (49). Without any clues for the reason of her brother's death,

Diane imagines how Andie was beaten to death by local men who shouted ‘Faggot’ and ‘Chink’ at him, signifiers of both sexual and racial otherness (41-51). She imagines that her brother ‘falls down, and there are steel-toed boots slamming into his mouth, his spine, the crack of his bum. Blood pours hot and sticky over his face. There are pinpricks of light in the darkness, and then there is nothing’ (49). The ‘truth’ of Andie’s death has been silenced in mainstream history, with its elements of racism and homophobia. However, Diane’s vivid and empathetic imagination recounts a narrative with its interpretative power working against stereotypes and dominant narrations, questioning the presentation of facts in the media, imagining a deeper understanding of his death, and its probable motivation.

A similar example can be seen from the death of Artemis’s other friend Mercy/Ming, whose body was found in Stanley Park with a gunshot wound on her head. Without any clues or witnesses, the local media report that Ming/Mercy’s death is related to Asian gang affiliation and drug dealing: ‘the newspapers insisted on drugs. It was the only way they could explain the tattoos’ (233).³²⁸ Artemis feels that it is not convincing since ‘that explained nothing’ (234), but ‘the local television station ran a two-hour special on Asian gangs at large in North American cities’ (244), and ‘for them, Ming’s change of name and appearance was a wilful attempt at deceit, to hide illicit activity’ (245). Lai criticizes the way in which those in powerful position repress the truth about the lives and desires of marginalised people, silence them and falsely invent their history. In an interview in 2005, Lai argues against such abuse of power and explains that her novels aim to address these questions:

³²⁸ Mercy’s changing of her name, dressing and tattoos have been interpreted in the section 1.2.

What, my novels ask, does it mean to have this power and what is an empowered position? Is there an ethical way of using this power? Is there a fundamental [differential;ed] difference between the kinds of power exercised by oppressors and the kind of power exercised by the oppressed?³²⁹

Lai's questions seem to focus not on the oppressed and oppressor binary, but on the power relationship between the two and the question of how the marginalised might become empowered to tell stories and write histories. Living in a heteronormative society, marginalised people including diasporas, women and queers, are not able to validate their existence or express their desires if they do not have voices and histories of their own. Nayan Shah claims that this struggle of self-representation 'has repeatedly enlisted history to attain visibility and voice'.³³⁰ Being invisible and silenced in history, marginalised people are unable to create an identity. As Shah asks, 'how does one justify one's own existence when one can't summon the history or utter a name that describes one's identity'.³³¹ Under the continuing shadow cast by colonial histories and dominant powers, Lai's writing aims to reconstruct a history for marginalised subjects. Her writing can effectively articulate the expression of women's desires and sexualities in a culture of entrenched heterosexuality. To fulfil this goal, one of the literary sources adopted by Lai is the figure of the Fox from ancient Chinese folk tales.

³²⁹ Larissa Lai, 'Sites of Articulation – an Interview with Larissa Lai', by Robyn L. Morris, *West Coast Line 44: A Journal of Contemporary Writing and Criticism*, 38.2 (2005), 21-30 (p. 27).

³³⁰ Nayah Shah, 'Sexuality, Identity, and the Uses of History', in *Q & A: Queer in Asian America*, ed. by David Eng and Alice Hom. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), pp. 141-56 (p. 142)

³³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

2.2. The power of transformation: fox myths and fantasy

The sections of narrative focusing on Artemis leave mysteries unresolved: the reasons for her friends' deaths, and the ways that diasporic queer subjects are silenced in history. Lai inserts a supernatural figure into the story, with another narrative voice. The Fox, with transformational powers, acquires the ability to change into a woman of fifty and subsequently to become immortal at the age of one thousand (88). Her narrative defies temporal limits when approaching her thousandth birthday, she inhabits the ancient Chinese poetess's body for another hundred years before coming to Canada to inhabit Artemis's body. As Lai explains in her 'Source Note' at the end of the novel, the Fox figure is based on two versions of fox tales in a long history of Chinese literature.³³² One is *Hsuan-Chung-Chi*,³³³ a short story about supernatural phenomena by an unknown author, dating from the early Tang Dynasty; the other is the seventeenth-century collection of Chinese stories entitled *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* by Pu Songling (1640-1715),³³⁴ in which Fox is a spirit who usually metamorphoses into an alluring woman who seduces men. Lai dramatically changes the figure so that the Fox still appears as a woman but uses her transformational power to cross both geographical and temporal boundaries. Though the Fox, the ancient Chinese poetess is connected to Artemis in modern Canada, and the Fox acquires the

³³² When a complex system of animals as omens developed in the Han Dynasty (BCE 206 – CE 220), Fox took its place among them. In the Ming and Qing, the most influential body of earlier fox lore was the nine volumes of fox stories, *Taiping guangji* 《太平广记》 (Grand Gleanings Compiled during the Tai ping Reign Period). More details about Fox's role in sexual life are found in the *Sou-shen Ji* 《搜神记》, a work on the supernatural by the fourth-century author Gan Pao in the Tang dynasty.

³³³ *Xuan-Zhong Ji* 《玄中记》 lists the source of the fox spirit under the title 'Shuo Hu', but this text did not survive; for a reconstructed version, see Lu Xun, 鲁迅, *Gudai Xiaoshuo Gouchen* 《古代小说钩沉》 (Ji'nan: Qilu Shushe, 1997), p. 239.

³³⁴ Pu Songling 蒲松龄, *Liao-chai chih-i* 《聊斋志异》 (*Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*), the earliest publication date is 1740. There are various versions of English translation. The earliest one is translated by Herbert A. Giles (London: T. De La Rue, 1880).

ability to bring the past into the present and in so doing uncover the unspoken history of queer women and their desires, both in ancient China and in contemporary Canada.

The Fox explores desires between women, thus breaking down the gay/straight binary, and becoming a symbol of empowerment for queer subjects. The opening of this novel offers a good example, in which the Fox counsels a young housewife repelled by her husband's cold and loveless touch. The young woman agrees to her husband's request to buy a concubine so that she can free herself from her 'wifely' duties, but later her husband abandons her for the concubine. The Fox trains the woman to dress well and behave charmingly. She also teaches her 'how kisses come not from the mouth, but from a well deep below the earth' (5). With the help of the Fox, the husband is re-attracted to his wife but at the end of the story, the wife elopes with the concubine.

In addition to Confucian patriarchal values, the Fox also challenges the dominant power of contemporary heteronormativity. In helping Artemis investigate the mysteries of her friends' deaths, the Fox visits the mythical Court of the Underworld to ascertain what really happened to Mercy/Ming (215). There she finds five different accounts of women who have been murdered, each displaying racism and homophobia. These stories suggest what might have been the real reason for Mercy/Ming's death and dispel the accusation of her Asian gang affiliation and involvement in drug trafficking, as reported by the media. The Fox unearths the silenced history of diasporic queer women. She also helps them subvert the repression of their sexuality. The five stories are recorded in direct speech, as live varying posthumous accounts given by murder victims to the Judge of the Underworld (215); they are respectively the victims of racism, sexism, homophobia, patriarchy, and class supremacy. In this

way, silenced histories become narratives retold by marginalised murdered subjects. In her article Lai asks ‘what is history, after all, but narrative?’, and explains that ‘she who inhabits that narrative truly has ground to stand on. That grounding is necessary when her belonging to the land where she lives is so contested’.³³⁵ However, the fact that the Judge hears five versions of a murder means that Mercy’s murder remains unsolved. As Artemis comments: “‘That doesn’t help [...] All the killers are elusive” (218). The multiple narrations in fact leave the grounding uncertain.

Because of her sexuality, the Fox is isolated by her family. The Fox describes her difference from other foxes: ‘When [she] wrote about the thrill of new life that comes from animating the bodies of the dead, [the other foxes] swept their bushy tails in the dirt in disgust and said they didn’t want anything more to do with [her]’ (6). The Fox lives alone as other foxes are ashamed of her sexual identity. They tell her ‘Don’t you know your actions reflect on us all? If you keep making these visitations, other fox families will talk about us. They will criticize us for not having raised you properly’ (17). The Fox insists on her difference. This reinforces resistances to the historical silences imposed upon the fox stories. Describing the characters in the majority of fox stories in Chinese literature, Lai explains:

[Fox stories] are misogynist tales of wily supernatural fox women who lead innocent men to their doom and receive their just reward. But there are also those versions in which an unsavoury young man leers at a beautiful woman who turns out to be a fox. The fox trounces him. There are other versions where the fox and young man fall in love – star-crossed love, of course, because the human and the divine are not supposed to have such dealings with one another. So you see how the stories can take on a proto-feminist sort of bent.³³⁶

³³⁵ Lai, ‘Political Animals’, p. 149.

³³⁶ Lai, ‘Interview with Ashok Mathur’, p. 109.

Fox spirits in Chinese supernatural tales are usually disguised as beautiful and seductive women, and are often considered wanton in their desires. According to an old Chinese saying, ‘humans and demons follow different paths’.³³⁷ This popular belief discourages marital union between human beings and spirits; such a liaison is possible if fox spirits renounce their own identity as foxes and become fully human, that is, to fulfil the criteria of obedient wives in a male-dominated society. However, in *When Fox is a Thousand*, the Fox, with the transforming power, can cross this boundary between animals and human beings. The Fox can transcend both sides. Introducing herself to Artemis, the Fox says: ““There are creatures who live below the earth and creatures who live in the air above it. And there are those who can travel between both. Foxes, we are called”” (207). Marginalised from a dominant historical trajectory, the Fox knows that ‘human history books make no room for foxes’ (5). Lai’s use of the first person narrative brings the Fox from the position of a marginalised object to that of a narrating and desiring subject.

3. From History to Her Story: Silenced Womanhood and Imagined Home

Defying traditional gender roles, Lai inserts a historical consciousness into her construction of home for women, turning women from being ‘subject to’ to being ‘subject of’ history. This is best illustrated in the ancient Chinese poetess’s life stories. In the remaining narrative line which emerges through the voice of the poetess Yu Huan-Chi, Lai creates a new, unwritten history to represent women’s desire.

³³⁷ Xiaofei Kang, *The Cult of the Fox: Power, Gender and Popular Religion in Late Imperial and Modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 2.

3.1. Rewriting her-story: Yu Husan-Chi

As a Chinese poetess in the Tang Dynasty (618-906), Yu's life story is only very briefly recorded in Chinese documents.³³⁸ According to the limited sources, Yu was born into a poor family. She was attractive and a talented poet. She became the concubine of an official named Li Yi but was soon driven out of the house by Li's jealous wife. Without financial support, Yu became a nun in a Taoist monastery. She was later executed after being accused of murdering her maid, Lu Ch'iao, who seduced her lover. Since no historical record has offered more details about what really happened in the poetess's life, mystery has surrounded Yu's life story. In *When Fox is a Thousand*, in order to contribute to the visibility of women's desire in China's male-dominated, patriarchal history, Lai imaginatively recreates Yu's life as it might be seen from the late twentieth century, to the present.

Lai's history is not purely one of literary imagination. In the 'Source Note', Lai explains that Yu's narrative in the novel is based on two Anglophone sources,³³⁹ *Women Poets of China* (1972), a collection of poetry edited by Kenneth Rexroth and

³³⁸ In Chinese documents, the life story of Yu is briefly recorded in *Siku Quanshu*: 'Histories', 四库全书, p. 1105; Huang-fu Mei 皇甫枚, *San-shui Xiao-du* 《三水小牒》; and in 'The Poet Yu Hsuan-chi' 鱼玄机答髡绿翘致戮, ed. by Wang Kuo-yuan 汪国垣 in *Tang-ren Xiao-shuo* 《唐人小说》 (Tang's Tales) (Hong Kong: Zhonghua Book Company 中华书局, 1958), pp. 293-97. In terms of her work, forty-nine of her poems have survived and are collected in the *Quan Tangshi* (*Complete Tang Poems*), a major collection of surviving Tang Dynasty poems. It was commissioned in 1705 under the Qing dynasty Kangxi Emperor.

³³⁹ Concerning Yu's life story, Lai claims that she rewrites it in the light of two versions by Kenneth Rexroth and Ling Chung, *Women Poets of China* (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1972); and Robert van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China: A Preliminary Survey of Chinese Sex and Society from ca. 1500 B.C. till 1644 A.D.* (Leiden: E.J. Brill., 1974). See 'Source Notes', in *When Fox is a Thousand*. She also mentions other sources including *Traditional Chinese Stories: Themes and Variations* (Y.W.Ma and Joseph S. M. Lau, eds., New York: Columbia University Press, 1978); *Poets and Murder: A Chinese Detective Story* (R.H.Van Gulik, London: Heineman, 1968); *100 Celebrated Chinese Women* (Cai Zhuozhi (Kate Foster, trans.), Singapore: Asiapac Books, 1994); *Tales of Empresses and Imperial Consorts in China* (compiled by Shang Xizhi, translated and edited by Liang Liangxing, Hong Kong: Hang Feng Publishing Co., 1994); and *Tales About Chinese Emperors – Their Wild and Wise Ways* (compiled by Luan Baoqun, translated and edited by Tang Bowen, Hong Kong: Hang Feng Publishing Co., 1994).

Ling Chung,³⁴⁰ and the Orientalist Robert van Gulik's *Sexual Life in Ancient China: A Preliminary Survey of Chinese Sex and Society From ca. 1500 B.C. till 1644 A.D.* (1974).³⁴¹ Lai recounts that these two works have portrayed the poetess as follows: 'one described her as a woman with many lovers, hence lascivious, hence immoral, hence capable of murder. The second suggested she might have been framed for the murder of a young maidservant by an official who did not like her strong ideas about the role of women in Chinese society'.³⁴² Following the basic details of Yu's life stories and the mystery of whether or not she was guilty of the murder in the light of these accounts, Lai rewrites Yu's stories in her own way, using the historical ambiguity to her advantage and creating a new narrative for Yu.

Yu's story is narrated in the first person. After her mother died during childbirth, she lived with her father in his herb shop (25). From the age of five, her father taught her to read and play chess, 'which is not a very ladylike game' (55). Because of this, her father is concerned that his daughter will never marry (30). She is aware of her sexuality and her love for women. She resists the arranged marriage with a man and dreams of a place without men: 'there was a rumour of a village in the West inhabited entirely by women. Since I have always had trouble distinguishing what is a story from what is real, I packed a bag to take with me the moment I could find out how to get there' (32). In order to help her father with his herb business, Yu persuades her father to sell her to a teahouse as a courtesan. Pretending to be submissive and obedient in

³⁴⁰ Kenneth Rexroth and Ling Chuang, trans. and ed., *Women Poets of China* (New York: New Direction, 1972), p. 145. Yu's poems were published as a collection for the first time in a book translated and edited by David Young and Jiann I. Lin, *The Clouds Float North: The Complete Poems of Yu Huanji* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1998).

³⁴¹ Robert van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China: A Preliminary Survey of Chinese Sex and Society From ca. 1500 B.C. till 1644 A.D.* (Leiden: E.J. Brill., 1974), p. 48.

³⁴² Lai, 'Political Animals and the Body of History', p. 150.

order to please men, Yu maintains relationships with them purely for economic reasons. She gains sexual gratification with other women: ‘we used to be reluctant to admit we enjoyed the company of men. It was a living’ (229). She is bought out from the tea house by Li, whom she subsequently marries. Lu Ch’iao, who works in Li’s house, soon becomes Yu’s lover and servant maid (67). After marrying Li, she finds out that her husband and her parents-in-law are all foxes in a strange metamorphosis within the house (72). She gives birth to Li’s child, who turns out to be ‘human in form, clear and soft jellyfish, with blue veins running through it’ (72). The narration shifts between realistic details and elements of the fantastic, making her stories more mysterious. In the scenario of the Fox inhabiting Yu’s body, the Fox tells Yu, ‘you shall die and live again through me’ (129).

I stroke the soft skin on her belly, feel the sharp bones of her hips, move my hand up the centre of her ribcage and let it rest between her breasts. She reaches her hand up behind my head and pulls me towards her. [...] Her mouth opens, revealing the first hollow of her body. Her tongue is small and pointed. Her breath comes from a warm place inside the earth. We fly close to the ground and let the thunder come back. (128)

This scenario describes vividly a sexual encounter between the Fox and the poetess. It can be considered as a fulfilment of Yu’s sexuality by crossing the boundary between animals and human beings. Sexuality, expressed through bodily change and exotic encounters in Lai’s text, offers what Deborah Wills calls ‘a tremendously heady sense of denying fixed boundaries: the body can be elusive, and illusive, can move freely between and within disguises, can wilfully assume plural roles, can invoke

masquerades as a way of investigating the possibilities of alternative subjectivities'.³⁴³ Both Yu and the Fox are identified as the 'other' occupying 'marginal' positions – a woman, a fox, or a lesbian. According to Robyn Morris, 'to be other is to be non-human. To be human is to be white, western, male and heterosexual'.³⁴⁴ The body is represented as a site of differences. Bennett Yu-Hsiang Fu points out, 'Lai uses Fox as a metaphorical figure for constant transformations of ethnic and sexual subjectivity, affirming both difference and resistance'.³⁴⁵ Seemingly unconstrained by the limitations of space and time, and not contained in a singular body, the transforming power of the Fox and Yu's rebirth through the Fox becomes powerful tropes of border-crossing between animal-human, dead-living, man-woman. Boundary-crossing in this novel suggests that the diasporic women might in a similar way identify herself as a fluid, ambiguous subject, defined by 'her very capacity to cross borders'.³⁴⁶

With her 'rebirth' through the Fox, Yu can enjoy her sexual freedom in the temple with other women; a realisation of her childhood dream of living in a place without a single man. The temple, traditionally considered as a place to repress women's sexuality and desires in Chinese culture, transpires to be a haven for Yu. Lai draws on scholar Robert van Gulik's book *Sexual Life in Ancient China*. Van Gulik explains that in ancient China, 'since women's yin supply is considered to be unlimited in quantity [...] a very tolerant attitude is taken also towards sapphism. It is also

³⁴³ Deborah Wills, "“But Do You Have to Write about It?”: Transgression and Multiplicity in Larissa Lai's *When Fox is a Thousand*", Learned Societies Conference, Memorial University, St John's NL., 1-4 (1997), p. 3.

³⁴⁴ Robyn Morris, 'Making Eyes: Colouring the Look in Larissa Lai's *When Fox is a Thousand* and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*', *Australian-Canadian Studies: Journal for the Humanities & Social Sciences*, 20.1 (2002), pp. 75-98 (p. 82).

³⁴⁵ Bennett Yu-Hsiang Fu, 'Meta-Morphing T'ien Hu: Sexual Transgression and Textual Transposition in *When Fox is a Thousand*', *West Coast Line*, 44 (2004), 147-63 (p. 158).

³⁴⁶ Judith Butler, 'Transformative Encounters', *Women and Social Transformation*, eds by Elizabeth Beck-Gernsheim, Judith Butler, and Lidia Puigvert (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 81-89 (p. 85).

recognized that when a number of women are obliged to live in continuous and close proximity, the occurrence of sapphism can hardly be avoided'.³⁴⁷ Lai does not use the term 'sapphism' to represent queer women in her novel; her use of fantasy allows her to depict ancient China as a paradise for female homoeroticism, a reimagining or an image which runs contrary to the popular belief of Chinese culture being sexually repressive and the West being sexually liberated. Commenting on her use of Chinese sources, Lai explains:

I've had people come up to me and say, 'I didn't realize there were so many lesbian stories in Chinese culture'. Of course there are lots of stories in Chinese culture about women's alliances, sexual and otherwise, just as there are in European culture. But they are there beneath the surface, between the lines, you have to draw them up like water from a well.³⁴⁸

Lai gives two reasons for the lack of historical materials on Chinese queer women: first, that 'for a long time sexual practice was not considered a focal point for identity', and second, 'the absence of such texts could be ascribed to the fact that women's lives were not deemed important enough to write about, or if worthy of writing, were not deemed worthy of translation'.³⁴⁹ After reaching her thousandth birthday, when Fox 'could change at will into any shape [she] could imagine' (223), she goes to the Library of the Western Heaven to 'check the scrolls of the Poetess's life to find out whether she really murdered her maid or she was entirely innocent (223), only to be told by the librarian that 'in those days very few records were kept on women, if any at all' (224) and 'nobody's really taken an interest in that kind of thing for thousands of years'

³⁴⁷ van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China*, p. 48.

³⁴⁸ Lai, 'Interview with Ashok Mathur', p. 110.

³⁴⁹ Lai, 'Political Animals and the Body of History', p. 152.

(224). The Fox lists all the limited existing sources, one of which explains ambiguously how in Yu's 'jealous rage' (226) she beat her innocent maid to death because of a handsome young man named Li Jinren (226). But this is not very convincing because another source writes that 'she was – *probably wrongly* – accused of having beaten a maid-servant to death, and was convicted and executed' [my emphasis] (226). This journey to the Library of the Western Heaven is narrated by the Fox in the first person; this blurs the boundaries between the author Lai and the narrator the Fox. The Fox's narration in the research corresponds to what emerges from Lai in the novel.

Following the Fox's search in the Library, Yu's own voice appears in a new chapter, at a time when she lives in the temple and is considered by people as a 'mad' woman (228). In the temple, Yu is followed by some foxes to meet Lu Ch'iao, with whom she has sex. Yu describes her longing for Ch'iao 'quietly feeding on the soul, a longing almost like the longing for home, or the longing for death' (228). Their love, Yu explains, is 'tense beauty', like 'a dream falling' (228). They promised each other 'we would not let any male creature come between us' (229) but later Yu finds that Ch'iao has betrayed her, having an affair with Yu's male lover Li Jinren (229). But there is no direct description of the subsequent event in question, that is, Lu Ch'iao's death. Rather, only a monologue in which Yu, in a confused manner, indicates what happened:

Was it wrong of me to beat her? I didn't mean to or maybe I did but I didn't think I was beating her very hard. Then all of a sudden there was all this blood and she fell down. I thought she was just being dramatic, so I left her there and went back to the funeral ground to see if there were any ashes left. When I came back she was still there, in the same position I had left her'. (230)

This imagined narrative changes from Yu's crime to focus on her confused mental state, and it turns Ch'iao from an innocent maid into a cheating lover. It also makes visible women's desire for other women rather than sacrificing themselves for men. Since women's homosexual desires for women have been historically suppressed, Lai's rewriting of Yu's life story presents an alternative history so that women's voices can be heard and their sexuality represented. Lai emphasises the ambivalence and contradictory nature of available sources of information. Lai's rewriting creates an alternative version of Yu's life, a new history consisting of myth and supernatural elements. In this sense, Lai takes advantage of the gaps in historical discourses in order to fill them with her own literary imagination. In doing so, she questions so-called historical truth and carves out a space for these women. Lai's novel criticises the authority and the absolute truth embedded in dominant historical narratives. In an interview she poses certain acerbic questions:

If a history – your own history – is so distant from you as to be unknowable, could this mean that you no longer have a right to it? And if not, who does? And what history belongs to you then? What history belongs to those of us born and raised in the *West*, who are not descended from that wave of immigration that came late last century and earlier [...] to work the railroads and the mines, to open the laundries, the restaurants and the grocery stores?³⁵⁰

To fill in history's gaps and to address the specific situations for diasporic subjects whose relationship with history has been ruptured, Lai uses fantasy by blending the supernatural elements, her literary imagination, myths, legends, and other cultural frames both from the East and the West, from the past to the present. This rewriting

³⁵⁰ Lai, 'Interview with Ashok Mathur', p. 110.

of history and the constitution of a new identity is explained by Stuart Hall that 'histories have their real, material and symbolic effects [...] It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth'.³⁵¹ In *When Fox is a Thousand*, Lai expresses a similar idea and she defines history as an ever-changing constellation comprised of collected myths, memories and stories. The Fox describes how:

history gathers like a reservoir deep below the ground, clear water below the ground, clear water distilled from events of ages past, collecting sharp and biting in sunless pools. How stars dream like sleeping fish at the bottom, waiting to be washed out into the bowl of the sky some time in the distant future when enough myths have collected to warrant new constellations. (18)

Lai's writing exemplifies the process of recreating history constituted by stories and myths, which are always reconstructed by temporal and geographical changes. Consequently, history is a stable term, in Homi Bhabha's words, 'the belief that we must not merely change the narratives of our histories, but transform our sense of what it means to live, to be, in other times and different places, both human and historical'.³⁵² Lai believes that 'the key to liberation is to recall their [diasporic queer women] histories and retain their memories, so that men's histories and the systems of oppression they justify will no longer hold water'.³⁵³

3.2. Imagining home: narrative, utopia or fantasy?

Lai explains in her article 'Political Animals' that her novel not only aims to obtain visibility and voice for marginalised people, but also 'strives to create a history that

³⁵¹ Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', p. 396.

³⁵² Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 256.

³⁵³ Larissa Lai, 'Sixth Sensory Organ', in *Bringing It Home: Women Talk about Feminism in Their Lives*, ed. by Brenda Lea Brown (Vancouver: Arsenal, 1996), pp. 199-219 (p. 217).

can work towards the creation of a “homespace” from which diasporicized women-identified women from Asia can find empowerment and a sense of community’.³⁵⁴ With racialised and gendered identities, diasporic women confront various barriers in search of a home – not only because of the experience of dislocation and the orientalist stereotypes encountered in such an experience, but also owing to the patriarchal values implicated in the very ideology of home. Roger Bromley describes the position of women in the ‘worlds’ which are almost ‘exclusively male dominated’ and designed as envisaged by men ‘occupying positions of power’,³⁵⁵ claiming that such women ‘are doubly exiled’.³⁵⁶ For ‘diasporicized women-identified women from Asia’ living in the West, this exile would exist on four fronts, requiring resistance to stereotypical representation within the white, male-centered, heterosexual and Anglophone structures of dominance.

However, Lai refuses to ascribe notions of home to geographical and temporal boundaries. As an alternative, *When Fox is Thousand* stresses an understanding of home as a process of becoming through change as ‘the order of nature is never fixed. The west is moving, the east cannot be still’ (105). This unsettled space as home lies on a ground of contestation as Lai struggles with the dilemma on behalf of diasporic Chinese women in the West without falling into ‘the box’ with which she describes two possibilities: the perspective of an insider trying ‘to understand and work from this racialized position that society allots to the likes of us’; alternatively, that of an outsider working from a ‘color-blind’ liberal position ‘which actively denies the way

³⁵⁴ Lai, ‘Political Animals’, p. 149.

³⁵⁵ Roger Bromley, *Narratives for a New Belonging: Diasporic Cultural Fictions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 4.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

we have been racialized even as it perpetuates the very racial interests it claims not to see'.³⁵⁷ The literary fantasy becomes a mode of subversion as well as empowerment for Lai throughout her novel. Critic Laurence Steven posits how the term 'new fantasy' describes such a diasporic space of cultural hybridity, in which can be found 'elements of realism and fantasy, this and the other world'.³⁵⁸ Both these two characteristics can be seen in Lai's novel. Firstly, supernatural power and ancient myths are amalgamated with the contemporary social reality of Chinese diasporic subjects. It reflects common motifs of diasporic experience, such as the difficulties of assimilation. For instance, the Fox, narrating with a view that spans one thousand years of existence, recalls that as a Chinese immigrant to Canada following her family, she witnessed the family change their values, habits and customs. The Fox comments upon her family's inability to adjust to the environment, given that 'the whole extended family came for the opportunities, not knowing that migration fundamentally and permanently changes value systems' (5). In the narrative of Artemis's stories, Lai reveals some problems in contemporary Vancouver, a modern metropolitan city full of concerns such as a housing shortage, racism, homophobia, murders, drugs and gang fighting. Into the realities of daily life, Lai inserts many supernatural elements: a woman talking with the Poetess suddenly vanishes in the air (58); the house is transformed by foxes (72); a woman floats through the ceiling of a room (141); the Fox changes her shape and clothing in the street (207); Artemis's surreal trip around Vancouver led by an angel who turns out to be another metamorphosis of the Fox (219); the image of a dragon appears (225). In an interview, when quizzed about this special way of talking about

³⁵⁷ Lai, 'Political Animals', p. 146.

³⁵⁸ Laurence Steven, 'Welwyn Wilton Katz and Charles de Lint: New Fantasy as a Canadian Post-colonial Genre', in *Worlds of Wonder: Readings in Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature*, ed. by Camille R. La Bossière and Jean-François Leroux (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2004), pp. 57-72 (p. 60).

‘reality’, Lai responded: ‘If all the truths that I can find are already ideologically determined, what harm is there in producing another, true to my own quirky sense of the world?’³⁵⁹ Her insertion of supernatural elements in an ethnic-cultural context reveals the political potential of a diasporic imagination and addresses issues of race and the ‘complexities of cultural appropriation’.

The second aspect of the ‘new fantasy’ as posited by Steven is to mesh ‘this and the other world’ so as to create a cultural pluralism.³⁶⁰ Lai freely uses various cultural and literary sources from both the West and the East, such as the Fox from Chinese folktales, Chinese opera (230); ‘the cat mother’ (221); ‘the owl’ (an historical story of Wu Zetian, the only female Chinese sovereign) (160-166); the Story of the Princess of Persia (97-98); and scenarios from the American neo-noir science film *Blade Runner* (15-16). Lai also inserts western literary sources within Chinese stories. For example, Lai uses the motif of the fairy-tale of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’³⁶¹ in the story ‘the Nun’ (208-209). The Little Red Riding Hood turns to be a Buddhist nun, bringing food to her sisters in the temple, rather than visiting sick grandmother. The Fox, playing the role of the wolf, poses her questions on the way through the woods, ‘where are you going, and what have you got in that bowl?’ (208). The Fox flies to the nunnery, disguises herself as ‘a beautiful young woman with long flowing hair and a gauzy green dress’ (208), and seduces the nun:

‘What long hair you have’, said the nun. ‘You should shave it, if you want to stay here.’

³⁵⁹ Sook C. Kong, ‘History and Other Fantasies’, review of *When Fox is a Thousand* by Larissa Lai, *Kinesis* (1996), p. 19.

³⁶⁰ Steven, p. 60.

³⁶¹ Lai does not provide a reference to clarify which European version of this fairy-tale she has used a motif here.

‘The better to charm you with,’ said the fox.
‘And what delicate skin you have,’ said the nun.
‘The better to please you,’ said the fox.
‘What tender lips you have,’ said the nun, and kissed the fox spirit before she could speak again. And so they fell in love and lived happily ever after in the temple, even after the gwei lo³⁶² came from overseas and tried to convert them to Christianity. (209)

Lai rewrites a children’s fairy tale in her own way and turns it into a story of life and homosexual love. As Sook C. Kong explains: ‘the complex desire inherent in the thoughts and emotions animating Lai’s novel is strong enough to make the categories of ‘reality’ and ‘fantasy’ leak into each other, resulting in resonant tales of loving, living, and transformation’.³⁶³ The interaction of different literary sources with fantastic elements suggests openness and possibility, corresponding perhaps to Homi Bhabha’s term, ‘the third space’ as a bridge for cross-cultural initiations.³⁶⁴ Christopher Balme also argues that the literary fusion of different cultural elements is ‘a creative and constructive reaction to the intercultural situation’ and ‘the most natural and ultimately unavoidable response to cultural clashes’.³⁶⁵ This new fantasy created through the fusion of cultural elements in Lai’s novel also shows a subversive power of crossing the binaries of ‘modern’ Canada and ‘traditional’ China, therefore transforming the notion of home as a double-sided term. In this fusion, home is forced to be both ‘there’ and ‘here’, the past and the present, on both sides of the Pacific, and expressed in multiple, fluid sites of sexuality. ‘Home’ is also filled with precariousness.

³⁶² This is Cantonese, the Mandarin pinyin is Gui Lao, the ghost, here refers to the westerners in China. See chapter one on this metaphor of ghost.

³⁶³ Sook C. Kong, ‘History and Other Fantasies.’ Review of *When Fox is a Thousand* by Larissa Lai, *Kinesis* (April 1996), p. 19.

³⁶⁴ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 9.

³⁶⁵ Christopher Balme, ‘Inventive Syncretism: The Concept of Syncretic in Intercultural Discourse’, in *Fusion of Cultures?* ed. by Peter Stummer and Christopher Balme (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), pp. 9-19 (p. 14).

This novel breaks with linear and singular narrative through the multiple voices of the Fox, the Poetess, and the modern-day narrator. These narratives interweave to undo any rigid distinctions between the past and the present, the West and the East. Lai, however, chooses to use the first person for the historical and mythological figures of Yu and the Fox, while adopting the third person voice for the sections set in contemporary Canada — which might be in striking contradiction to readers' expectations. Some reviews of this book have already critiqued, for instance, David Helwig's comments on *When Fox is a Thousand* in which 'the characters in the book's present-day narrative are not strongly defined or differentiated, and are not of a lot of interest'.³⁶⁶ Christine Kim explains that Helwig's dissatisfaction is mainly caused by the inconformity of Lai's novel to his reading expectations and practices. That is because 'Lai's investigation of Asian-Canadian communities eschews familiar celebratory discourses of multiculturalism and chooses instead to explore closely the complicated workings of diasporic lesbian communities'.³⁶⁷ The third-person voice for the Chinese diasporic queer subjects, Artemis and her friends, may reflect their silenced and invisible status in contemporary Canada. The Fox, with the transforming power, can tell her one-thousand-year life experiences, as well as oscillate between two narratives of Yu's and Artemis's life stories. Through the Fox's voice, Lai is able to assume a feminist stance, observing and questioning the politics of racial and sexual repression. Through the retelling of Yu's story and the Fox's narrative, 'China', is no longer a material and geographical locality for diasporic subjects; rather, it is a

³⁶⁶ David Helwig, Charles Lillard, and Geyla Reid, 'The Chapters/Books in Canada First Novel Award', *Books in Canada* 25, No. 4 (May 1996), p. 3.

³⁶⁷ Christine Kim, 'Troubling the Mosaic: Larissa Lai's *When Fox is a Thousand*, Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*, and Representations of Social Differences', in *Asian Canadian Writing Beyond Autoethnography*, ed. by Eleanor Ty and Christl Verduyn (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008), pp. 153-77 (p. 169).

reconstructed and imagined space. Home for the marginalised subjects turn out to be a fantasy; through the Fox, it brings the ancient Chinese stories and history into contemporary Canada. As Kim argues that ‘by depicting the Chinese community in Canada as diverse and Chinese culture as multi-layered, this novel [*When Fox is a Thousand*] refuses the familiar representations of alterity that circulate in the West and moves beyond the purview of autoethnography’.³⁶⁸ In this sense, Lai’s reconstruction of home expresses her anti-nationalist sentiment. When asked about whether she attempts to criticize the status quo and suggested Canada might not be the utopia for the minority, Lai explains that the multicultural ideal is ‘an admirable ideal, but it is also really important to recognize its limitations’.³⁶⁹ Lai problematises the Canadian model of multicultural policy which calls for a space as home for different groups of minorities, while stressing similarities rather than differences. Christine Kim explains that Lai’s reconstruction of home for the marginalised subject challenges dominant ideas of nationalism and official multiculturalism from the 1970s onwards.³⁷⁰ Lai critiques the notion of Canada as ‘a homely nation’³⁷¹ and challenges the multicultural discourse that promotes differences but fails to recognise nuances within these difference. In other words, the notion of home within a nation ‘assumes that the people

³⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 168-69.

³⁶⁹ Larissa Lai, ‘Sedimenting the Past, Producing the Future: An Interview with Larissa Lai on the Poetics and Politics of Writing’, by Anja Kruger, *Zeitschrift fur Kanada-Studien*, 31.2 (2011), 93-107 (p. 96).

³⁷⁰ Kim, p. 163. Palmer Seiler notes that ‘the official definition of Canadian culture that emerged in the policy announced by Pierre Trudeau in October of 1971 was “Multiculturalism within a bi-lingual framework”, a phrase that arguably highlighted Canadian culture as the site of a complex process over the nature of Canadian identity and nationhood’, See Tamara Palmer Seiler, ‘Multi-Vocality and National Literature: Towards a Post-Colonial and Multicultural Aesthetic’, in *Literary Pluralities*, ed. by Christl Verduyn (Peterborough: Broadview Press and *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 1998), pp. 47-63 (p. 55). Other heated debates on Canadian multiculturalism can be seen in Neil Bissoondath, *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada* (Toronto: Peiguin Group, 1994); Richard Gwyn, *Nationalism without Walls: The Unbearable Lightness of Being Canadian* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1995).

³⁷¹ Joanna Mansbridge, ‘Abject Origins: Uncanny Strangers and Figures of Fetishism in Larissa Lai’s *Salt Fish Girl*’, *West Coast Line*, 38.2 (2004), 121-33 (p. 121).

are one and share similar interests, but this is mostly a way of uniting diversity. In practice many groups are ignored, have other interests, or continue to be repressed'.³⁷² Yet home as constructed by Lai in *When Fox is a Thousand* through a mode of literary fantasy creates a space of cultural hybridity as it articulates marginalised subjects' desires and crosses racialized, gendered and sexualised boundaries.

Conclusion

Through a case study of Larissa Lai's *When Fox is a Thousand*, this chapter has explored the use of literary fantasy and how it functions as a subversive mode in Chinese diasporic women's writing, to create an imagined space of home. The multi-voiced narratives weave in and out of histories, myths, memories and supernatural creations, and, in doing so, Lai creates an unhomely home – an imagined space in which queer Asian women living in the West can develop their own identities and express their sexualities. The mode of fantasy used by Lai in this novel is represented as strategy drawing on the resource of Chinese ancient myths, folktales, and historical mysteries, interwoven with Western fairy tales and stories. In this sense, the fantasy used in this novel by Lai not only shows a subversive power, giving voices and meanings to marginalised subjects and cultures that were previously silenced; it also shows a creative power to produce a new history that crosses spatial and temporal boundaries.

In this novel, Lai criticizes traditional Chinese patriarchal culture through her rewriting of the story of the Poetess Yu. Further, she challenges Western hegemony

³⁷² Bruce King, 'New Centres of Consciousness: New, Post-colonial, and International English Literature', in *New National and Post-colonial Literatures*, ed. by Bruce King (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 3-26 (p. 7).

through the narrative line of the modern Canada and in so doing this novel can avoid returning to the quest for a national belonging, either in the West, or in China. She clearly raises doubts about the possibility of finding a home for the marginalised subjects in Canada (as demanded by official multiculturalist policy). Moreover, Lai rejects biological essentialism as much as she questions the nostalgia for homeland, family and mother — which contrasts with Mah and Chen. Thus, Lai's writing challenges conventional understandings of the diaspora that constantly suffer from the 'loss of homeland, uprootedness, expulsion, oppression',³⁷³ as well as the 'feeling of being between worlds and at home nowhere'.³⁷⁴ Lai, in her search for home, locates the notion of home through various cultural sites and narratives – ethnic differences, narrative forms, diasporic subjectivity, and queer sexuality – and uses the novel as a platform where she can create an imagined space. Compared with the ambivalent attitudes towards home and family held by Kingston, Mah and Chen, Lai questions the notion of home as a geographical or ethnographic locality, and rather sees it as located in a densely-woven web of relationality, beyond the borders of race, nation, gender and sexuality.

Even though these four authors share a similarity in referring to Chinese sources in constructing fantasy, Lai makes full use of a historical division to create something new while retaining a certain cultural deference to these sources. Lai clearly claims that her writing means to 'open up a sort of imaginative geography that could be inhabited as opposed to articulated'.³⁷⁵ Refusing to be 'faithful' to fixed identities and

³⁷³ Laurence J. C. Ma and Carolyn L. Cartier, *The Chinese Diaspora: Space, Place, Mobility, and Identity* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), p. 8.

³⁷⁴ Ling, *Between Worlds*, p. 105.

³⁷⁵ Lai, 'Sites of Articulation', p. 24.

origins, Lai's search for a home re-imagines the ways in which diasporic queer Chinese women can create a sense of belonging by re-imagining their diasporic origins. In doing so, Lai creates a new narrative to speak for diasporic queer women of Chinese descent living in the West by denaturalizing their marginalised position in a history that has long silenced women. For her, the subversion of fantasy is empowering in this novel, and achieves a strikingly new-textured novel in which fantasy and the real coexist in her shifting, teasing narrative.

Conclusion

By exploring the representation of literary fantasy in the construction of identity and home in contemporary diasporic Chinese women's writing, this study has argued that the use of fantasy acts as a way of unsettling or undermining the power of patriarchal values and fixed notions of belonging and home. In each of these four texts by Chinese diasporic women authors, whether in memoir form or fiction, or a combination of the two, the authors or their protagonists are able to find a voice in response to a state of displacement and unhomeliness, constructing their identity by imagining their notion of home differently. Home for them is not a geographical and ethnographical term, rather, it reflects a search for a sense of belonging which crosses racial, historical and national boundaries encountered by marginalised subjects in the processes of formulating their identity. Identity, then, is fluid, ongoing process of 'becoming' involving complex relationships between individual and family, the present and the past, history and memory, and an original country and the nation of current residence.

My preoccupation with the interactions of the different categories of gender and race, of literary fantasy, the notions of home and unhomeliness has made me question the parameters of social and political realities which have shaped conventional narrative representations. The four texts in the corpus of this study share a similar application of literary fantasy – drawing upon ancient Chinese myths, legends, ghosts, fairy tales and folklore, and combining them with diasporic life experiences and family stories in contemporary North American contexts. This synthesis creates a contested space of cultural hybridity, visualising the unseen and breaking the silences for marginalised subjects, thus bridging the poetics of literature and diasporic identity politics. Rather

than simply reinforcing Orientalist stereotypes of Chinese culture and women's role within Chinese culture, the use of fantasy alongside a more realistic narrative mode may be a way of unsettling and questioning such stereotypes.

Literary Fantasy with Categories of Gender and Race

Theories of literary fantasy so far have largely neglected its function in relation to notions of gender and race. This study has focused on works published by Chinese diasporic women authors in North America from the 1970s to the 1990s, a period which saw a rapid development of Chinese diasporic literature, the publication of Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* in 1976 being a defining point at which Asian American literature became recognised as a separate canon. The corpus provides four different ways of using literary fantasy, articulating the desires and voices of marginalised subjects and unseen cultures, and challenging patriarchal ideology and hegemonic constructions of gender and race. Chinese diasporic women, as I have argued, suffer a double repression from Chinese patriarchal ideology and experiences of racism and sexism in their adoptive country, both of which have relegated diasporic women to the margins. So the use of literary fantasy in the corpus crafts a textual space for their voices and desires, allowing them the self-empowerment to resist traditional roles confining them within the family and society to their roles of mothers, daughters, and wives. Fantasy in this study's four texts provides a new way of story-telling and the possibility of deconstructing the relation of women with home and family. Through women's narrative and voice, fantasy enables diasporic women to break silences and reconstruct history, using the power of narrative to bring them from the margin to the centre. In so doing, the role played by women are reassessed in their writing while male voices in these texts, husbands, fathers or partners, are relatively

marginalised and muted, despite the power they evidently hold over women. This can be seen in all four authors: Kingston rewrites a figure of the woman warrior with magical power and agency to challenge traditional women's roles as 'a wife and a slave'; Mah uses a Chinese Cinderella figure who is independent and skilled, in order to gain a power to overcome traumas; Chen transforms the submissive daughter protagonist into a ghost narrator who can question parental authority in a search for autonomy; Lai draws on the mythical figure of the fox who identifies as a woman to speak for diasporic queer women. Fantasy in these texts functions in transforming women from a silent Other into speaking subjects.

All four authors use female voices to retell their stories, drawing predominantly (though not exclusively) on the first person narrative voice, giving insights into the female characters and aiding in the establishment of independent characters who construct their identities within diverse socio-ethnic frameworks. For example, Chen uses a posthumous narrator to tell a daughter's desire to search for her selfhood. Lai rewrites the histories of Chinese queer women whose desires are hidden in male dominated histories. The use of fantasy can, to some degree, help to 'realise' women's experience against socially constructed, patriarchal norms, and avoid the pitfalls of essentializing women. The corpus of this thesis has combined two memoirs and two novels to show how both fictional and non-fictional works draws on fantasy in their representation of identity formation. Even though Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and Mah's *Falling Leaves Return to Their Roots* are usually classified as memoirs and Chen's *Ingratitude* and Lai's *When Fox is a Thousand* are generally classified as novels, the use of fantasy in these four texts crosses generic boundaries.

There is a risk with works written by diasporic and migrant authors, both fictional and non-fictional, that the author, the narrator, or the central protagonists are considered to be representative of a collective identity or of the culture with which they are uncritically identified. This might run the risk of reinforcing Orientalist stereotypes and postcolonial exoticisation and a voyeuristic fascination with Chinese culture. The four works may indeed be interpreted as offering certain stereotypical images of Chinese women protagonists; their texts include references, for example, to foot-binding, the taking of concubines, and prostitution, all practices which belong to patriarchal Chinese traditions. The temptation of the exotic may be one reason why each text has achieved considerable success in the international publishing market. Nevertheless, as I have argued throughout each chapter, these four authors disavow Orientalism in different ways: Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* tells various women's stories, including both traditional Chinese women, as well as woman warriors and heroines. On the basis of her mother's story-telling, she relays these women's stories, and revises them through a mix of her literary imagination and her own diasporic experiences. Mah's *Falling Leaves Return to Their Roots* provides a long historical trajectory of twentieth century China, explaining cultural and social changes of a particular historical context, rather than fixing 'Chinese culture' within a stereotypical timeless representation. Chen's *Ingratitude* focuses on the posthumous narrative, one which provides a critical insight into Chinese culture. Lai's *When Fox is a Thousand* rewrites women's story and creates a new history for Chinese queer identities, imagining ancient China with queer desires fulfilled.

Commonly, each text uses Chinese mythologies, either legends, folk tales, or fairy tales, as literary sources. However, rather than providing picturesque or stereotypical

glimpses of ancient Chinese culture, the authors incorporate them in their narrative in ways which unsettle those very images. As Larissa Lai argues, 'to keep stereotypes in play, critically, is the best way I can imagine to undo them'.³⁷⁶ In doing just this, they each set their stories, in part, within contemporary contexts, whether in California, Vancouver, or a nameless Chinese city. Chinese culture is not simply represented as an exotic and anterior source. In their own way, each of the four texts challenges the binary between the modern and superior West and the traditional and backward East. The use of fantasy creates a contesting space in which author and narrator alike examine and explore two cultures. This echoes the definition of diasporic literature as it is explained by Hyungji Park, the canon of diasporic literary disrupt stereotypical representation of Asia as 'source, and anterior, a past' while American is 'the here and now, inhabiting a subject position shared by the reader'.³⁷⁷ Rather, diasporic literary texts place Asia and America 'in a "coeval" space, without relative sequence, order, or priority'.³⁷⁸ All four authors in this study emphasise the importance of memoirs and histories, and the ability to construct and retell them in order to shape diasporic identities. They do this by exploring the tensions between their ethnic cultural roots and the values of the host community, highlighting the sense of unhomeliness inherent to both modes of belonging. In such processes of construction, these authors display deliberately ambiguous attitudes toward both cultures, that of their original country and their current place of residence or, in Chen's novel, their current, posthumous state of being.

³⁷⁶ Lai, 'Sites of articulation', p. 21.

³⁷⁷ Park, 'Toward a Definition of Diaspora Literature', p. 156.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

Imagining Home: A Space of Cultural Hybridity

The trope of home in contemporary Chinese diasporic women's writing reflects the conflicted meanings of homeland and host country, family and the self, the dominant and the minority, women and men, nation and the transnational, and the traditional and the modern. These paradoxical dyads also point to the dilemma contemporary diasporic Chinese women encounter in finding a position in which to place themselves. They are in between two cultures and nations, therefore they do not feel accepted by either side. This position is described by Amy Ling as that of the 'outside-outsider', in which diasporic women may have the feeling of 'being between worlds, totally at home nowhere'.³⁷⁹ Confronted with a state of unhomeliness, the four authors explore similar ambiguous attitudes towards their family. Namely, they, or their protagonists, express a desire to leave their family for autonomy and self-realisation while at the same time they realise that the link with the family cannot be cut off. For instance, in Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* she claims that she has to leave 'home' for 'a logic' to build her own life in American society. Yet she realises that she is unable to 'escape' from the ancestry's 'haunting'. In Mah's memoir, although an unwanted daughter, she attempts to find an alternative home by leaving her family for the UK and US, subsequently emphasising a homing desire of being accepted by her family as 'all leaves should return to the roots'. Chen's protagonist even tries to commit suicide to escape her mother's control of her freedom, yet the text closes, somewhat ambiguously, with the protagonist uttering the word 'mother'. In *When Fox is a Thousand*, the Chinese Canadian protagonist is inclined to identify with her Western cultural background but is haunted by racial memory and decides to search for her biological mother. These paradoxical attitudes delineate a common concern about the

³⁷⁹ Ling, *Between Worlds*, p. 105.

conventional understanding of home based on the nuclear family and kinship. However, such conventional notions of home, based on geographical and cultural roots are unsettled, made unfamiliar, enabling alternative notions of home and of belonging to emerge within the texts.

In Chapter One, the narrator in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* lives as a member of the second-generation member of the diaspora who longs to assimilate into the American culture by building a home in the US. Between the 1920s and the 1970s, the strategy of 'claiming America' for a diaspora aimed at dealing with historical and ideological exclusions; it affirmed the United States as an Asian American geopolitical space for this diaspora, especially in the case of the earlier Asian Americans who confronted the politics of exclusion, discrimination and cultural marginalization. Kingston's insistence on Americanness can be understood as a politically motivated gesture of claiming the rights of citizenship denied to ethnic minorities as a subgroup of American literature in the 1970s. The fantasy in this text brings Chinese culture into a dialogue with mainstream American culture and empowers the narrator to claim her home in America. By contrast, in Chapter Two, I explored how Adeline Yen Mah's memoir *Falling Leaves Return to Their Roots* expresses the desire of an unwanted daughter who dreams of being accepted by her family in the hope of finding her roots in China in the 1990s. The author-narrator's search for home repeats the pattern of leaving and departure between three locations: China, the UK and the US. She finds it difficult to imagine a home as a diasporic woman in the west and finds it equally difficult to feel at home in China. The inclusion of the Chinese fairy tale, told by the dying aunt Baba to Adeline, offers not so much a

solution to Mah's search for home as an alternative mode of belonging, one which turns her suffering and sense of exclusion and source of strength an independence.

Both Kingston's desire to 'claim America' and Mah's desired 'return to the roots', as my first and second chapters have argued, reflect a potential risk of bringing the marginalised subject back into a discourse of national belonging. Equally, their sense of home based on different nations (America and China) also suggests the shifts of global capitalism and the improvement of China's international status from the 1970s to the 1990s. Chapters Three and Four discussed different understandings and considerations of the problematic nature of home. Chapter Three focused on Ying Chen's novel *Ingratitude*, which illustrates paradoxical attitudes to the notion of home based on family, kinship and cultural inheritance. Whereas Mah depicts an unwanted daughter rejected by her family wishing to be accepted by her family, as described in Chapter Two, Chen narrates a daughter's attempt to escape from her traditional Chinese family. Useful comparisons can be drawn between Kingston's and Mah's diasporic perspectives, which keep a distance from Chinese cultures. Chen's text positions itself within Chinese culture as represented by a traditional nuclear family and the reader therefore sees the culture to some extent from an insider's perspective. In *Ingratitude*, the conflict is between an individual woman, with a clear awareness of selfhood and the desire to construct her own identity, and the traditional patriarchy in Chinese society which stresses the values of family and community. Yet the posthumous narrative affords a different perspective, a limbo position from which to see the family trap in a different light, a position which implies a future, new incarnation, not simply a return to the old. Chen expresses her critical understanding of what she considers to be Chinese traditional culture in her novel. Thus, the

construction of home requires the adoption of a critical attitude towards cultural inheritance, and, consequently, an understanding of home as neither the anchorage offered by a feeling of home, nor the desire to carve out a space as home within a nation. Chapter Three argued that even if it is possible to construct a home within a nation, essentialistic conceptions of ‘Chinese identity’ and ‘Chinese culture’ are in the process of changing through diasporic routes of writing. Therefore, the concept of home requires a cross-boundary understanding beyond geographical territories and national ideologies.

Chapter Four provided an understanding of home by analysing Larissa Lai’s novel, in which she problematises conventional notions of home based on geographical localities within a nation by situating home in a more complicated web of cultural, social and interactions. Lai examines the possibilities of constructing a home in contemporary Canada and China. She points out that neither place is able to supply an adequate space for diasporic queer women to feel at home. The final chapter of this thesis challenges patriarchal ideologies by identifying sexism and racism as intersecting and oppressive forces affecting diasporic Chinese women. A more nuanced understanding of home should take into account changing national and transnational cultural politics, the recognition of diasporic identities, as well as the interactive and flexible relationship between China and the West within a transnational context.

These four chapters have supported the main argument of this thesis by exploring various ways of understanding home through the use of literary fantasy. The use of fantasy in the four texts has unsettled and rejected fixed notions of home, understood

with in the relation of geographical places and localities; relationships with family and communities; bonds with the original 'homeland' and cultures; and relationships with histories and memories. This study argues that such fixed definitions of home dependent upon place, genealogy, culture or history are no longer valid for those experience a diasporic existence. Rather, it locates the desire for home in relation to diasporic subjects' sense of unhomeliness. Moreover, it pays close attention to how these diasporic authors need constantly to mediate between the cultures of their 'origins' and those of their resident countries.

Whilst the end of each text provides a note of peaceful reconciliation, the quest for home is unsettled and can never be ultimately finished. In Kingston's *the Woman Warrior*, the author-narrator finally obtains her own voice, distinguished from her mother's story-telling and shaped with different narratives, her rewriting Chinese legendary story of the poetess Ts'ai Yan at the text's close provides a positive model of cultural communication, just as Yan's flight from the barbarians after twelve years to return to her village and instigates a new journey home. Mah's *Falling Leaves Return to Their Roots* ends with the author-narrator's journey of returning to reunite with her dying aunt in Shanghai, and reconciliation means the beginning of her new journey. In Chen's *Ingratitude*, the protagonist-narrator, after waiting in limbo between life and death, her final 'death' indicates a new life through reincarnation, the journey to an unknown world. Lai ends *When Fox is a Thousand* by having the Fox leave Canada to renew the quest for home. Each concludes with the start of a new journey, indicating that no notion of home or identity is fixed and stable. Beyond nationalist and Orientalist representations, Chinese diasporic women authors empower themselves through literary fantasy. In an ambiguous manner, they offer different

ways to understand home and unhomeliness, compounding their state of cultural hybridity and ambivalence, by crossing geographical, temporal and cultural boundaries. The constitution of Chinese diasporic identity revolves around this tension inherent in the position of Chinese diasporic subjects in both North America and China. In the complex process of negotiating their own identities through their diasporic experiences in different times and social contexts, their constructions of space as home, both within and without diasporic boundaries, bring forth new concerns, and open out new avenues for future critical engagement.

This thesis concentrates on a particular period from the 1970s to the 1990s. From the late 1990s to the present, there are more publications that centre on the lives of the third or fourth generation of Asian Americans. Experiences of mixed marriage and mixed race children have also become popular topics in recent diasporic writing. As Jackson argues:

Fantasy is not to do with inventing another non-human world: it is not transcendental. It has to do with inverting elements of this world, re-combining its constitutive features in new relations to produce something strange, unfamiliar and apparently ‘new’, absolutely ‘other’ and different.³⁸⁰

The literary fantasy continues to be used by new authors as a popular genre; a long list of publications can be found post-2000. For example, Lisa See’s *Dragon Bones: A Red Princess Mystery* (2003) is a mystery set in China at an archaeological site where the characters investigate the possible theft of ancient dragon bones. The text is full of myths and ancient Chinese historical references;³⁸¹ Marie Lu’s Legend Series –

³⁸⁰ Jackson, *Fantasy*, p. 2.

³⁸¹ Lisa See, *Dragon Bones* (New York: Random House, 2003).

Legend (2011), *Prodigy* (2012), and *Champion* (2013) - are dystopian novels set in the Republic of America 2054, and they explore relationships between nations.³⁸² Anchee Min's *The Cooked Seed* (2013) is a memoir of the author-narrator's dramatic migration stories. Min incorporates fantastic versions of Chinese histories with her diasporic life experience.³⁸³ E. Lily Yu's short stories such as 'The Cartographer Wasps and the Anarchist Bees' (2011) and 'The Forgetting Shiraz' (2013) are stories combining science fiction and fantasy.³⁸⁴ Celeste Ng's *Everything I Never Told You* (2014) is a literary thriller set in a mixed-race family, in which all members attempt to find the missing daughter who has been dead from the beginning of the novel.³⁸⁵ From this incomplete list of texts, it can be seen that there are new ways of using fantasy in recent Chinese diasporic women's writing – for instance, more science-fiction elements are employed; ancient myths are mixed with modern technologies; and thrilling effects are greatly emphasised by the use of fantasy. More attention could be paid to these more recent diasporic authors of Asian heritage to examine how fantasy has been used in literature, and to what extent it continues to be related to the experiences of unhomeliness of a new generation of diasporic authors.

³⁸² Marie Lu, *Legend* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons and Penguin Books, 2011); *Prodigy* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2012), and *Champion* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2013).

³⁸³ Anchee Min, *The Cooked Seed* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).

³⁸⁴ E. Lily Yu, 'The Cartographer Wasps and the Anarchist Bees', *Clarkesworld Magazine* (April 2011), reprinted in *The Year's Best Science Fiction and Fantasy 2014*; 'The Forgetting Shiraz', *Boston Review* (May/June 2013).

³⁸⁵ Celeste Ng, *Everything I Never Told You* (London: Penguin Random House, 2014).

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