Away from China : reincorporating two Sinophone novels into Asian American literary canon

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**NANYANG
TECHNOLOGICAL
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**AWAY FROM CHINA:
REINCORPORATING TWO SINOPHONE
NOVELS INTO ASIAN AMERICAN
LITERARY CANON**

**LIM SOON VIN
SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES**

2019

**Away from China: Reincorporating Two Sinophone
Novels into Asian American Literary Canon**

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A thesis submitted to the Nanyang Technological University
in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of
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2019

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	i
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
SUMMARY	iv
CHAPTER 1	1
WHEN DOES THE TRAGIC SONG OF WANDERER END?	
CHAPTER 2	21
SAVING THE SINOPHONE: THE NOTION OF “CLAIMING AMERICA” IN GELING YAN’S <i>FU SANG</i>	
CHAPTER 3	42
HOLDING ONTO AMERICA, EVEN WHEN WRITING BACK TO CHINA(S): RE-READING HUALING NIEH’S <i>MULBERRY AND PEACH</i>	
CODA	99
CITATION	102

SUMMARY

This thesis argues against the Sinocentric school of thought that perceives Sinophone literary production in the United States as “overseas Chinese literature”. I take issue with this problematic diasporic designation and its proponents, and maintain that when routes can be roots, Sinophone writing – composed and published upon the (migrant) authors’ arrival in their new homeland – in North America should also be acknowledged as a constitutive part of Asian American literature. I employ Shu-mei Shih’s Sinophone theory coined in 2004 to analyze the ways in which we can read Hualing Nieh Engle’s *Mulberry and Peach* (桑青與桃紅) (1976) and Geling Yan’s *Fu Sang* (扶桑) (1996) as two Asian/Sinophone American novels. Chapter One (“When Does The Tragic Song Of Wanderer End?”) draws upon a diverse range of scholarship, including theories on diaspora; Sinophone studies; cultural criticism; and Asian American literary history, in order to justify the objectives of my research, the structure of my thesis as well as my selection of authors and texts. Chapter Two (“Saving the Sinophone”) discusses the significant notion of “Claiming America” in Yan’s *Fu Sang* in order to foreground how Sinophone American authors have demonstrated, in their literary production, their deep local commitments to their new homeland in the United States. Chapter Three (“Holding Onto America, Even When Writing Back To China(s)”) employs Nieh’s *Mulberry and Peach* to explore how a Sinophone novel that narrates predominantly about Asia can still be read and by extension, recognized as an Asian American text.

Chapter One

When Does The Tragic Song Of Wanderer End?

Whether literary works created in various Sinitic languages can claim full membership in Asian American literary canon constitutes the main query of this thesis. This thesis argues against the Sinocentric school of thought that perceives Sinophone literary production in the United States as “overseas Chinese literature”. I take issue with this problematic diasporic designation and its proponents in my textual analysis, and maintain that when routes can be roots, Sinophone writing – composed and published upon the (migrant) authors’ arrival in their new homeland – in North America should also be acknowledged as a constitutive part of Asian American literature. In the following chapters, I employ Shu-mei Shih’s Sinophone theory coined by her in 2004 to analyze the ways in which we can read Hualing Nieh Engle’s *Mulberry and Peach* (桑青與桃紅) (1976) and Geling Yan’s *Fu Sang* (扶桑) (1996) as two Asian/Sinophone American novels. It is essential that I first provide some background information about my field of study and address some of its controversial definitional issues in the beginning section of this chapter before I elaborate on my selection of authors and texts, as well as the chapter outline of this thesis in section two and three respectively.

1. Background

In a public lecture (“Thirty Years of Asian American Literary Studies in Taiwan”) (“亞美文學研究三十年：臺灣經驗”) delivered by Yu-cheng Lee in April 2018 at the National Chiao Tung University in Taiwan, the well-published scholar remarks that some of the earliest works of Asian American literature have indeed been produced in the Sinitic script, such as the telling Sinophone poems carved on the wall of the detention barrack on Angel Island by Chinese

detainees sailed from Guangdong Province in southern China. Most of these verses had been crafted in Cantonese and Toisanese dialects. Yet in Elaine Kim's ground-breaking book *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context* published in 1982 (she had started this project in the late 1970s after the pan-Asian movement that emphasized the importance of acknowledging Asians in America as an ethnic minority), the Korean American scholar defines "Asian American literature as *published creative writings in English* by Americans of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Filipino descent" (xi; emphasis added). Despite that, Kim has admitted that her definition is "problematical", probably due to her own linguistic barrier – she believes that Asian American "writings in Asian languages ... will be presented elsewhere" (xi-xii), perhaps in the critical works of other multilingual academicians in and outside the United States. Similarly, in the annotated bibliography of Asian American literature published by King-kok Cheung and Stan Yogi (1988), both editors have practically "exclude[d creative and critical] works written in Asian languages, unless they have been translated into English", the only common language among Asian (North) Americans (vi). However, in Cheung's *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature* published in 1997, she has also noted that "in every [Asian American sub-]group there is a sizable body of literary production in the corresponding Asian language(s)" (20). Other Asian American literary scholars who are more firm in their stance on examining Asian American writing in the Asian languages include Marlon K. Hom, Shirley Geok-lin Lim and Sau-ling Cynthia Wong.

In 1982, Hom himself wrote a critical Sinophone article "A Case of Mutual Exclusion" ("了解與誤解：移民與華裔在創作文學中的互描") (the English translation was published two years later) comparing the "portrayals by immigrant and American-born Chinese of each other in literature" (29). In the opening paragraph, Hom already asserts that creative works written in

“Chinese-language” by immigrant writers are indeed part of the “literary expressions” of Chinese Americans (ibid; 201-202). In “Immigration and Diaspora”, Lim also stresses that “[a]ny discussion of Asian American immigrant and diaspora writing must take into account ... non-English productions, a body of texts usually delimited as archival, but which make emphatic the shifting relations between diasporic and immigrant social formations” (295). Wong’s perspective on this issue differs slightly from Hom’s and Lim’s. In her article “Chinese American Literature”, Wong does not just stop at reiterating the urgency of exploring Asian American works written in many dissimilar tongues. She takes the advocacy further through alerting and encouraging bilingual scholars to translate these valuable oeuvres into English. Being a bilingual Asian American literary critic who hails from (British) Hong Kong herself, Wong cautions us that unless “first-generation [immigrants’] works in Chinese” are translated and publicized, they “are inaccessible to Anglophone scholars” (42). She explains further that “[s]ome of the texts now considered landmarks in Chinese American literary history were, in the very recent past, in danger of being annihilated, or else relegated to dusty corners of special library collections” (ibid). Hence, in her article, Wong has also credited “scholars and the community” for rendering these works “into English” and publishing them “in book form”, such as Him Mark Lai’s *Island* and Marlon K. Hom’s *Songs of Gold Mountain* (42-43). According to Wong, their “labors of love” have enabled “these once obscure works” to become “part of the Chinese American canon” (42).

Unfortunately, despite the heartening remarks from these Asian American scholars who recognize the significance of Asian-language materials in the US, in Su-ching Huang’s article “Home and Diasporic Imagination” published in 2015 – more than thirty years after the release of Kim’s classic – the Taiwanese American scholar still comments poignantly that “Sinophone

literature has not been on the radar of Asian American literary studies [in spite of] its overwhelming popularity among the Chinese speaking readers in both Asia and America” (69). This heart-rending statement is what forms the point of departure for my thesis. In my opinion, there are many factors that contribute to this enduring predicament, one of which is undoubtedly the scant attention given by bilingual scholars to the Sinophone texts produced by Asian American writers. For instance, in Amy Ling’s article “Chinese American Women Writers” wherein she traces the “[writing] tradition behind Maxine Hong Kingston” (63), the late literary critic migrated from mainland China has excluded advisedly “books written in Chinese by United States residents” in her analysis (64). According to Ling, her decision to omit them is triggered by the fact that “the Chinese language is accessible to so few Americans” (ibid). What Ling does not realize is that this tacit form of self-censorship only goes on to strengthen the “dominance of the English language in the American canon ... and the hegemony of Anglo-centric culture” (Huang 279). Even Wong’s *Reading Asian American Literature* (1993) has not included much Sinophone literary works in her discussion. Sheng-mei Ma also points out in his book *Immigrant Subjectivities* that “Wong’s Chinese essays and her teaching of Chinese American immigrant writings [only] seem supplementary to her English writings on Asian American literature” (107). Ma further elaborates that “the secondary status of [Sinophone] immigrant literature in the careers of most Asian Americanists may be due in part to institutional constraints. These specialists, after all, work in English departments in the U.S. academe, where tenure, promotion, and reputation depend on peer recognition – a recognition harder to come by if one’s subject matter were to be texts written in an unfamiliar language on issues strange to mainstream Americans” (108).

Another reason that perpetuates the alienation of Asian-language materials in America is arguably related to the conclusions drawn by critics upon studying the Sinophone texts. Rather than highlighting the localizing aspects and the adaptative capacity of the main characters in the so-called “Chinese-language” literary works, most critics gloss over these significant features and cling resolutely to the concept of diaspora in their descriptions of these “Chinese-language” writers and their already marginalized oeuvres. The latter is perceived in relation to the migrant authors’ past and ancestral homeland. In Xiao-huang Yin’s *Chinese American Literature since the 1850s*, he comments that “Chinese-language writers in America” still express “sentimental nostalgia for the old country” and “remain emotionally associated with China [in their works despite the fact that] their identification with America has been increased” (160-161). According to Yin, the “natural” feeling of “[n]ostalgia” is “not only shaped by the perpetual baggage the immigrants carried with them but also by their bitter experiences in America. The hardships and racial discrimination they encountered [have] forced them to seek comfort from their Chinese cultural legacy and dream of returning home as a happy ending to their suffering in America” (159-160). However, as far as I am concerned, not all the fictional characters in Sinophone American literary works harbor the same sense of nostalgia for the sending country.

For instance, towards the finale of Geling Yan’s *Fu Sang*, the titular figure Fusang makes a voyage back to China where she was abducted from, bringing Da Yong’s ashes with her. As his newly-wed wife, the female protagonist is obliged to scatter half of his ashes on his mother’s grave (273); the remaining into the sea (272). Even though Fusang’s subsequent return to America is not fleshed out in the novel, she ran into the now “tall thin old” Chris at the Church of the Blessed Virgin four pages later, with “[h]is white hair blown out of place by the wind” (277). This reveals to readers that Fusang has indeed come back to America to spend her twilight

years despite all the tribulations that have happened to her, including for instance her bitter experience of sexual assault and the execution of her husband.

Similar to Yan who left China for an MFA in fiction writing, Kenneth Hsien-yung Pai left Taiwan to attend the Iowa Writers' Workshop in 1963. His "Tea for Two" (compiled in his *New Yorker* (紐約客)) chronicles the romance of a gay couple David and Tony. Having been residing in America for years, these two protagonists make a reciprocal decision to first travel to Shanghai – their place of birth. Then, they plan to commit suicide back in New York, for they "will have no other places to visit except heaven" (197). Shanghai, according to their letter, is "thronged and filthy, even the Chinese cuisine there is not as delectable as that of New York" (202). Apparently, their journey back to their "lost" homeland is tinged with regret. Both characters in Pai's narrative are engrossed in the cultural present of their local place of residence instead.

In You-fang Cao's *American Moon* (美國月亮), the male protagonist Min Shi backtracks to Taiwan and goes through a series of blind date in search of an ideal wife. After spending more than ten years in the US, it is noteworthy that Min Shi can no longer associate with the nightlife in Taiwan. He used to indulge in them before heading to the States. His aversion can be read as a symbol of his sense of displacement. Eventually married to Qi Feng, the married couple left for America almost immediately after tying the knot. Remarkably, Min Shi "feels more at ease this time around compared to his first flight experience" to the US (101).

The main characters in these stories produced in America show us that the perception of 'home' as a place where one was born, whose formative years were spent, has failed to stand the test of time. Failing to empathize with the ordinary or habitual events happen at the place they once called home, some of these characters are nostalgic about their (previous) American life

instead (apparently the sense of nostalgia has moved in the reverse direction), hence they return to the US eventually. These homecoming journeys not only highlight the relegation of their provenance to foreign land, they also underscore the becoming-home of their adopted land. In view of this, it is unsound to generalize that “Chinese-language” writers in America are still “nostalgic” about their old country, China – as if a kind of “long-distance nationalism” (that Benedict Anderson condemns) is behind the scenes – when many of them have already gained their U.S. citizenship and put down roots in their present homeland a long time ago. It is important that we also pay attention to the dynamics of localization, adaptation and transformation that have accompanied their migration, particularly how these foreign-born authors establish clear and unquestionable attachments to their present homeland in America through their literary production. In addition, describing the migrants authors as being “emotionally associated with China” also risks the charge of “un-Americanness” and gives a wrong impression that these transplanted authors still remain distinct and unassimilated. Implying that “Chinese-language” writers in America are “bound by duty, loyalty and longing to China” (Shih 332), Yin’s tenuous over-generalization would only stiffen the Anglo stereotypes that defame these Asian American authors as “undesirable outsiders” and “perpetual foreigners”.

Apart from that, Yin also remarks in his book that although “it is the context of Chinese American life that is dominant in shaping [the] themes and subject matter” of these “Chinese-language” writers’ works, “[t]he authors’ ties to Chinese literature and society *continue*” nevertheless (161; emphasis added). In my opinion, it is really unnecessary to persistently define the so-called “Chinese-language” works and writers in America in relation to “Chinese literature” and “China” – which is exactly what Shih has criticized as treating “diaspora as value” (333) – on the basis of shared blood or consanguinity (arguably derived from the notion

of “blood is thicker than water”). As Rey Chow argues in *Writing Diaspora*, the myth of consanguinity never fails to “deman[d] absolute submission” simply because “it is empty” (24). Chow also reminds us that in “submi[tting]” to consanguinity, we are simultaneously “surrender[ing]” our “agency” (ibid). This striking point is particularly true in the literary realm because the current model of “Chinese literature” is a hegemonic one that centers only cultural production from the people’s republic and only texts that use the standard Hanyu (Han-language or Mandarin). However, the so-called “Chinese-language” works in America are always already multilingual and polyphonic in nature – they are imbued with an abundance of Sinitic languages. Take *Fu Sang* for example. The author Geling Yan has carefully interweaved Cantonese expressions such as “听见有哇？” (“Did you hear what I said?”) (6), “唔客气” (“Not at all”) (38), “你唔知？” (“Don’t you know?”) (43) and “趕唔切” (“Behind time”) (ibid) into her novel in order to enact the Cantonese setting of San Francisco in the 19th century. Abound with ‘foreign’ elements, these literary texts (dismissed by many as “overseas Chinese literature”) can hardly be regarded as an integral part of “Chinese literature” regardless of how closely one has associated them together before (based on ancestry), as noted by Shu-mei Shih in her insightful article “Against Diaspora” (35). The former can only remain on the periphery of Chinese literary canon and be diminished as a “secondary” class of literature, or what Wong calls, “the permanent runt of Chinese literature” (70). At the same time, these Asian-language materials will also continue to be excluded from the Asian American literary canon if we do not make a case for them to be treated critically as cultural production of America. In some cases, even if Sinophone authors (outside China) have composed their literary production using standard Hanyu, their writing will still be denigrated as “tributary” by scholars from mainland China. This dismissal is particularly obvious in a Chinese article (“離散生活情緒下的文學建樹”) written by

a Chinese scholar Lin Nan, in which he writes that “mainland Chinese literature is an overdeveloped, richly resourced, and muscular older brother, while overseas Sinophone literature is a late-born, scrawny little brother who can only suck up canned mother’s milk long distance. But still, they are from the same mother. The older brother should love and care for the little brother. He should not keep saying that the little brother is ugly” (also cited by Sau-ling Cynthia Wong in her article “Global Vision and Locatedness”).

On top of that, Yin’s centripetal discourse (that orients towards Chinese literature and China) also seems to have overlooked the fact that Asian American identities are born out of specific local interactions with other cultures inside the borders of the United States. It is the “common [frustrating] experiences of immigration, discrimination, acculturation, conflict and generational strains” shared by different Asian nationals in America that inspire the grouping in the first place, as indicated in Shirley Lim’s and Amy Ling’s *Reading the Literatures of Asian America* (4). In Wong’s important essay “Denationalization Reconsidered”, she also emphasizes that “the concept of *Asian Americans* is one that doesn’t travel well, ... it grew out of a specific history of resistance and advocacy within the United States ... and will dissolve back into its descent defined constituents as soon as one leaves American national borders behind” (241). This also explains why Shih’s Sinophone theory that underlines local, specific histories and politics and contextual particularities is more fitting than Jing Tsu’s and David Der-wei Wang’s global-scale study and inclusion approach in making a convincing case for Sinophone American literary works to be institutionalized.¹ Such deep-rooted negligence by intellectuals of the lived experience of Sinophone settlers and the spatio-temporal factors that determine the uniqueness of

¹ Both Jing Tsu and David Wang are also leading academics on Sinophone scholarship. See their co-edited book *Global Chinese Literature* (2010); Tsu’s *Sound and Script in Chinese Diaspora* (2010); Wang’s Sinophone articles “Literary Geography and National Imagination: Lu Xun in Taiwan, Eileen Chang in Nanyang” (文學地理與國族想像：台灣的魯迅，南洋的張愛玲) (2013) and “The Politics of “Root”, The Poetics of “Propensity”: Sinophone Discourse and Chinese Literature” (“根” 的政治， “勢” 的詩學：華語論述與中國文學) (2014).

their community has been highlighted and censured by Ien Ang in her influential article “Can One Say No to Chineseness?”. According to Ang, “a dominant tendency in thinking about the Chinese diaspora is to suppress ... the ways in which diasporic identities are produced through creolization and hybridization, through both conflictive and collaborative coexistence and intermixture with other cultures, in favor of ... a linear rerouting back to the imagined ancestral home” (65) to which the Sinophone writers in America no longer belong. In view of the flaws and problematics mentioned above, I adopt Shu-mei Shih’s Sinophone framework to indigenize and, in Margaret Hillenbrand’s words, to “claim Americanness for” (49) the so-called “Chinese-language” literature in America. In Shih’s article “The Concept of Sinophone”, she has made it very clear that “[d]iaspora has an end date” and thus, “one cannot say one is diasporic after three hundred years ... everyone should be given a chance to become local” (714). Arguing against the concept of diaspora which consists of “an essentialist core” (Wong 241), Shih’s Sinophone theory allows us to understand that literary works produced in the Sinitic script outside China – in this case written in, about and because of America – should be studied and treated independently as a place-based literature.

Instead of using the term “Chinese American Literature” (Yin 158) to label such writings undertaken in different Sinitic languages (owing to the incoming of various ethnic groups like “Hakka, Fujianese, Northerners, and immigrants from other parts of the Chinese world” (ibid)) or using Sau-ling Cynthia Wong’s term “Sinophone Chinese American Literature” (“Yellow and Black” 15), I will borrow Shu-mei Shih’s carefully calibrated terminology to identify the literary sub-field I investigate. I follow Shih’s suggestion that we remove the word “Chinese” and will use “Sinophone American Literature” (329) to designate this corpus. Undeniably, the word “Chinese” has multiple interlinked meanings. In the context of Sinophone American literature,

the word “Chinese” as a noun not only refers to the standard Han-language and implies the deprecation of literary works composed in various Sinitic languages as discussed in the previous paragraph, more importantly it also tends to conflate nationality and ethnicity. As an adjective that describes the states of being of a noun, the said word also connotes the sense of (still) belonging to mainland China, such as “modern Chinese literature”; yet Sinophone American literature is indeed a production of America. In addition, the usage of the word “Chinese” as an adjective also cannot fully reflect our identity formation in the present. For example, there is a clear difference between Taiwanese American authors and Chinese American authors. These aspects will be further explored in the following paragraphs.

In her article “Sinophone American Literature”, Shih demonstrates the differences between (Anglophone) Chinese American Literature and Sinophone American Literature, arguing in particular that the latter should not be incorporated under the rubric of the former. Reasons for that are many, one being that the word ‘Chinese’ specifies ethnicity in the wording “Chinese American Literature” but is too homogenous in that it threatens to dismiss the multi-ethnic realities in Mainland China, where it potentially excludes other ethnic groups and non-Han peoples such as the Manchus, Tibetans and Mongolians, for instance the non-Han canonic writer Lao She. This gives the impression that “all Chinese only belong to [the Han-]ethnicity” (330). Hence, the noun ‘Chinese’ can only be employed to denote nationality, not ethnicity (ibid).

Apart from perpetuating Han-centrism, Shih points out that the term ‘Chinese’ is problematic because it simultaneously condones the U.S.-centrism that is notoriously ignorant about the “internal difference” and heterogeneity of the Sinophone communities in the United States (ibid), a trait that can be easily observed in Anglophone critical literature. The unvarying coalescence of Lisa See (whose great-grandmother married a Chinese man), Maxine Hong

Kingston (a second-generation American-born Chinese) and Shirley Geok-lin Lim (a Peranakan in Malaysia who completed her doctorate in the US and later became an American) with Ha Jin and Yiyun Li (who were born in and come from China) by critics of anglophone Asian American literature is a case in point. To paint them all as Chinese American authors is also problematic because some have lost touch with the Chinese language while others may speak a smattering of dialects. To avoid reductive simplification, I reserve the term Chinese to describe nationality.

As we can see, even the already institutionalized Chinese American literature written in the dominant language of America cannot escape the problem of reductive simplification. This suggests also that we should be more cautious with the positioning and naming of literature written in the Sinitic script because its situation is far more complex than its anglophone counterpart. According to Hillenbrand, the act of writing in Chinese has always been disparaged as “writing backward” (49) – writing back to China – instead of writing ‘forward’ to be incorporated in Asian American literary studies. However, to equate a linguistic choice with a specific ethnicity or nationality is simply incongruous. We have to be aware that not all Sinophone immigrants and writers in America come from mainland China. Their decision to compose in the Sinitic scripts does not necessarily signify that they are from China. In fact, many of these Sinophone immigrants hail from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines and other places. Other than prestigious writers like Lin Yu-tang and Eileen Chang, it is noteworthy for instance that a host of prolific “foreign students” of Taiwanese origin have played a remarkable part in the efflorescence of the Sinophone writing field, among them Hualing Nieh Engle, You-fang Cao, Li-hua Yu (*Again the Palm Trees*), Shi-kuo Chang (*Banana Boat*), Daren Liu (*Azaleas Cry Out Blood*) and Ruoxi Chen (*Paper Marriage*). Therefore, I

maintain that it is more accurate to designate their American writings composed of and influenced by diverse Sinitic languages as “Sinophone American literature”.

The following chapters of this thesis are structured according to two particular functions of Sinophone studies which Shih postulated in her article “Against Diaspora”. In thinking about “what ... Sinophone studies [can] do?” (38), one of Shih’s “tentative answers” is that “Sinophone studies allows us to rethink the relationship between roots and routes by considering the conceptions of roots as place-based” and “routes as a more mobile conception of home-ness” (ibid). Shih adds that to “decouple home-ness and origin is to recognize the imperative of living as a political subject within a particular geopolitical place in a specific time with deep local commitments. To link home-ness with the place of residence therefore becomes an ethical act that chooses concrete political engagement in the local” (ibid). In other words, one of the effective ways in which we can employ to highlight the literary value of Sinophone American literature (to demonstrate that it certainly deserves an important position in the Asian American literary canon) is through examining how the localized and naturalized Sinophone writers in America have turned their “routes” into new “root” (and in the case of “foreign student writers”, “hostels” into “home”) by articulating their respective concerns about their local communities in the US and exhibiting their own political allegiance to their present homeland in their literary production. These domestic aspects of their writing have arguably been disregarded by many, in particular scholars of diaspora studies who only revel in genocentric rhetoric such as expressions of sense of loss and homesickness (rather than the potential ‘gains’) precipitated by resettlement and migration. The tragic song of the wanderer can only end if critics realize that writers of Sinophone literature have also incorporated their local contexts into their writing and go on to foreground this dimension in their criticism.

Secondly, Shih also argued in “Against Diaspora” that “when routes can be roots, multidirectional critiques are not only possible but also imperative” (the second function of Sinophone studies) (ibid). She elaborates that “transcending national borders, Sinophone communities can maintain a critical position toward both the country of origin and the country of settlement” (38-39). This means that Sinophone American authors are able to be critical of the United States (their local place of residence) and their sending countries in their writing. Despite that, a large number of literary and cultural studies intellectuals only seem to concentrate on the migrant writers’ narrative about their country of origin in order for them to advance their Sinocentric agendas, while narrative about America recounted in the same writing is deliberately cast aside in their critical works. It is the former that clarifies into sharp focus while the latter fades miserably into vagueness in most of their textual analysis. In doing so, these Sinocentric critics continue to dismiss the Sinophone literary works as production of the foreign-born authors’ “ancestral land” regardless of what these stories truly reveal. Most of them are insensitive to the “new” level of criticalness employed by the transplanted authors in rendering their subject matter, one that has been informed and reshaped by their personal lived experience in the US. In other words, instead of treating these Sinophone writers in America who have participated in the Asian American formation as Asian American authors, a large number of Sinocentric scholars have arbitrarily relegated them into an insignificant constituent in the global dispersion of Asian peoples (the diasporas) by exaggerating only one aspect of their complex, multilayered production. This phenomenon (a manifestation of Chinese ethnocentrism and cultural chauvinism) is close to what Emma Teng calls “a certain kind of transnational homogeneity, essentializing the Chinese as Chinese, no matter where they are located globally or for how many generations” (76). In view of this, my textual analysis suggests that we should

continue to be vigilant in emphasizing the “double critique” available to the Sinophone communities in Shih’s argument before it is exploited by the most fervent passions of Sinocentric scholars, particularly when institutional racism, class bias and Orientalism are still alive and well in Asian America, a non-Chinese locale (39). In this regard, my thesis is also in dialogue with Shih’s Sinophone theory to a certain extent.

2. Selection of Authors and Texts

As I have pointed out in the foregoing paragraphs, a great number of “foreign students” in America who compose their creative works in various Sinitic languages have gradually settled down in the US and called it their new homeland upon graduation. Among these Sinophone American writers, I have decided to focus on Hualing Nieh’s *Mulberry and Peach* and Geling Yan’s *Fu Sang* in the following chapters of my thesis by dedicating a chapter to each of them (the fact that *Fu Sang* is published twenty years later than *Mulberry and Peach* is already an affirmative sign to us that the body of Sinophone American literature will only continue to grow in the future as long as migration still occurs). Reasons for that are many, one being that these two Sinophone novels – that illustrate and reflect about migrant life in America (thus befitting the place-based definition of the genre) – are indeed the first novels written and published by both transplanted authors upon their arrival in the US; to be exact, after the completion of their MFA in fiction writing from the University of Iowa and Columbia College Chicago respectively. Since then, the two female authors have been residing in America and claimed their American citizenship upon getting married with their (Anglo) American husbands; arguably the authors’ interracial romance/relationships have also influenced their worldview and given them new impetus to explore other philosophical questions in their writing (in fact the the plot of these two

novels are mainly propelled by the interaction between the Anglo and Asian American characters in which). Yet prior to their resettlement, Nieh and Yan had already been acclaimed as established writers in their previous homelands in mainland China and Taiwan.

In Taiwan, Nieh had worked as the literary editor of *Free China Fortnightly* before she went on to pursue her teaching career (creative writing courses) at National Taiwan University and Tunghai University. Among her well-received literary works before the publication of *Mulberry and Peach* include her collections of short stories *Jade Cat* (翡翠貓) (1959) and *A Small White Flower* (一朵小白花) (1963), as well as a novel published in 1960 entitled *The Lost Golden Bell* (失去的金鈴子). Similarly, Yan had published three novels which had also won her some literary prizes and fame before she fled mainland China after the Tiananmen Square massacre, among them: *Green Blood* (綠血) in 1986, *Whispers of a Woman Soldier* (一個女兵的悄悄話) in 1987 and *The Female Meadow* (雌性的草地) in 1989.

Given their literary achievement in the sending country, it is not surprise that readers and critics at large have persisted in addressing Nieh and Yan as “overseas”, if not “diasporic” “Chinese” and “Taiwanese” writers and by extension, subsuming their writing produced in America, namely *Mulberry and Peach* and *Fu Sang*, under the literary canon of their “ancestral land(s)” – both novels are *not* seen as Asian American production. The terms “overseas” and “diasporic” also bespeak the peripheral position occupied by these two novels in the “authentic” and “hierarchical” field of Chinese literature. Even though a few Asian American studies scholars have claimed these two award-winning novels as Asian American texts in their analysis (there is still a large number of Sinophone texts remain unclaimed by Asian American studies) – such as Pin-chia Feng’s “Remapping Asian American Literature: The Case of *Fu Sang*” published in 2000 and her 2013 Sinophone monograph *A Tradition of Her Own* (她的傳統：華

裔美國女性文學) (121-156); I-ping Liang's Sinophone article "Women, Maps, Empires: Interspatiality in Nieh Hua-ling, Chuwas Lawa and Mahaweta Devi" (女性 / 地圖 / 帝國: 聶華苓、綢仔絲、玳咪圖文跨界) published in 1998; Sau-ling Cynthia Wong's "The Stakes of Textual Border-Crossing: Hualing Nieh's *Mulberry and Peach* in Sinocentric, Asian American, and Feminist Critical Practices" published in 2001; as well as King-kok Cheung's *Asian American Literature: An Annotated Bibliography* (46) and *Chinese American Literature Without Borders* (9) released in 1988 and 2016 respectively – their assertions about reading these two literary works as Asian American novels have been neglected by a considerable amount of literary critics who published their critical works later on, such as Shuyu Kong's article "Imagining Gold Mountain: Chinese Ethnic Writing in World Literature" (金山想像與世界文學版圖中的漢語族裔寫作) published in 2012 (6); Chen Qing Fei's article "Three Paradigms of the Literary Narrative of "Moving to the South"" ("南渡"文學敘事的三種範式) released in 2018 (155); Chen Sihe's 2016 article "My View on the Literature by Chinese Writers Traveling Overseas" (旅外華語文學之我見) (8) and his 2019 article "Women in Yan Geling's Works" (嚴歌苓筆下的女性) (13). While we can accuse the latter of burying their heads in the sand, this phenomenon also simultaneously implies that the textual evidence put forward by the earlier critics has been rather insufficient and unconvincing for the latter critics to accept and adopt their racinationist viewpoints. Claiming these two Sinophone American novels as "Chinese" literature, some of the latest articles do not even make reference to those previous important and insightful criticism. Therefore, in the following chapters of my thesis, I extend the earlier critics' project of demonstrating *Mulberry and Peach* and *Fu Sang* as two legitimate Asian American texts by focusing more on passages in the novels that have been overlooked by both camps of

intellectuals – hence the title of my thesis, to “reincorporate” these two Sinophone novels which have been “disclaimed” by other scholars back into the canon of Asian American literature.

3. Chapter Outline

In line with the sequence of argument delineated in Shih’s article “Against Diaspora” (38-39), Chapter 2 employs Geling Yan’s *Fu Sang* to demonstrate that as time goes by, Sinophone American writers have also turned their “routes” to America into new “roots” and perceived the United States as their new homeland. I argue that Yan’s endeavor to localize and lay claim to the US can be seen in how she incorporates the notion of “Claiming America” into her novel, one that has been contested within the field of Asian American studies ever since it came into being in the late 1960s. My textual analysis elucidates that the notion of “Claiming America” has been vividly expressed through the authorial intrusion of a narrator in *Fu Sang* – which also governs her depiction of the female protagonist. As far as I am concerned, critics of *Fu Sang* have given very little attention to the interaction between the narrator and the protagonist. To fill this gap, I dedicate a sizeable part of this chapter to discuss the significance of the narrator’s presence in the story and the ideas she conveys. Besides, most book reviewers have also provided rather negative feedback on *Fu Sang*, describing the protagonist as “inscrutable” and the narrator voice as “disturbing”. I argue that in order for readers to fully grasp the novel, we need to read it in the light of “Claiming America”.

Chapter 3 examines how a Sinophone novel composed by a foreign-born Asian American writer that narrates predominantly about Asia can indeed be recognized as an *Asian American text*. Referring to Shu-mei Shih’s analytical Sinophone theory (the second function of Sinophone studies), in which she explicates that “[as a consequence of re-rooting, a] Chinese American can

be critical of China and the United States at the same time” (39), this chapter builds onto this specific perspective and asserts that the versatility embedded in Shih’s statement does not necessarily signify that the said migrant author’s literary works can thus be classified squarely as “Chinese literature”. I begin this chapter by discussing how Sinocentric scholars tend to focus only on the migrant writers’ narratives about their country of origin even though in their literary works, the narratives have shuttled back and forth between multiple discursive locations. In other words, there is indeed a risk (of misappropriation by others) in what Shu-mei Shih calls “multidirectional critiques” (38). Despite moving beyond the false dilemma of having to choose either the “ancestral land” or the “local place” (ibid), I believe reinforcing one’s present-day identity at one’s receiving country is of equal importance. To challenge the uncritical practice of Sinocentric scholars, I employ Hualing Nieh’s *Mulberry and Peach* to argue that it is the protagonist’s lived experience in her country of settlement (America) that inspires her to write back to her country of origin. To strengthen her Asian American identity, my textual analysis demonstrates that the protagonist has also employed her Asian American sensibilities to reconstruct the images of Asian women in her back-writing. And instead of ending the novel with the setting of Asia, the protagonist’s narrative has reverted to the setting of America in the final portion of the novel, thereby illuminating her concern towards her present homeland. It is America that takes center stage in the novel and thus, I contend that *Mulberry and Peach* should be acknowledged as an Asian/Sinophone American novel.

On the whole, this thesis rethinks who is telling the story and reconsiders the place of narration in the text. Both content chapters attempt to identify the presence of the narrators through locating their distinctive voices in the two Sinophone novels, as well as to foreground the relationships between these narrators and their female protagonists. As my textual analysis

will show, both female narrators are undoubtedly Americans voicing from and for the betterment of their migrant life in America. Their main concerns in the narratives indeed strike common chords with some of the political demands of the Asian American movement mobilized by a large number of Asian American students in the 1960s, such as reclaiming their own history, projecting their own voices, addressing their own racial identity and tackling enduring discrimination and stereotypes of the so-called unassimilable foreigners. By elucidating how these novels have reflected, inherited and reiterated the important ethos and sentiments of the Asian American movement, it will also make it easier for readers to recognize Yan's and Nieh's literary works as quintessential Asian American production. Yet I do not rule out the possibility that a different kind of reading strategy will also render these two novels to be acknowledged as an integral part of other literary categories, such as the global Sinophone literary canon. What I intend to show in this thesis is that, despite being placeable in Chinese literature, there is an excess of meaning in Yan's *Fu Sang* and Nieh's *Mulberry and Peach* that also enables these two Sinophone writing to be analytically appreciated as Asian American literature. Ultimately, the ability to cross borders becomes meaningful in a situation where rhetoric about the 'clash of civilization' is used to foster unproductive belligerence, as seen, for instance, in the current trade war between the US and China.

Chapter Two

Saving the Sinophone:

The Notion of “Claiming America” in Geling Yan’s *Fu Sang*

This chapter demonstrates that as time goes by, Sinophone American writers have turned their “routes” to America into new “roots” and perceived the United States as their new homeland as opposed to being constantly disparaged by both eastern and western cultures as temporary “sojourners” or “overseas/diasporic” Chinese writers” in America. These Sinophone authors’ endeavor to localize and lay claim to the US can be discerned in their deliberate articulation of the social problems confronting Asian American community today in their literary works. This writing strategy that deviates from the framework of dislocation and orients towards the cultural present is particularly prominent in Geling Yan’s *Fu Sang* (扶桑) (1996), a Sinophone American novel which has been deemed as enigmatic by most critics and reviewers, including those of Asian American studies. I argue that in order for readers to attain a good grasp of *Fu Sang*, we need to read the novel in the light of “Claiming America”, a term first used by Maxine Hong Kingston in describing the objectives of her first two well-regarded books *The Woman Warrior* (1976) and *China Men* (1980). My textual analysis elucidates that the notion of “Claiming America” has been vividly expressed through the authorial intrusion of a narrator in *Fu Sang* – particularly in her conversation with the titular figure, which also governs the narrator’s depiction of the female protagonist. In my opinion, to claim America is undeniably a form of “concrete political engagement in the local” (Shih 38). In examining this salient aspect of her writing, my reading also proves that Yan has indeed “situated [herself] historically” in Asian America (Wong 244) and perceived herself as “a political subject within” the borders of the US (Shih 38). By showing that the thematic concerns in Sinophone American production

indeed bear some semblance to that of (anglophone) Asian American literature, I hope that Asian American literary canon will begin to acknowledge and incorporate Sinophone works produced by Asian American writers regardless of their place of birth.

1. A Synopsis of *Fu Sang*

Presented with the Taiwan *United Daily News* critics' award in 1995, the winning historical novel *Fu Sang* chronicles the titular figure's (Fusang) journey from Asia to America and her life in the new homeland, with roughly two-third of the story set in nineteenth-century San Francisco's Chinatown. Initially, Fusang is abducted from a village in Guangdong while awaiting the return of her betrothed. Their engagement was arranged when Fusang was still in her babyhood. Transported to America, Fusang is instantaneously sold into prostitution whereupon Chris (a twelve-year-old White American teen) becomes infatuated with her. Being her first customer, Chris is enraptured partly by Fusang's exoticism from the Far East, and partly by her woeful plight as a sex slave. Unfortunately, Fusang fails to maintain a competitive edge over other sex workers in the brothel. Seen as a liability, the female protagonist is led into a cellar by her procuress to be auctioned off. During the auction, Fusang comes face to face with the infamous gangster of Chinatown, Da Yong. Despite the uncertainty of her future, the event turns out to be a blessing in disguise because Da Yong is besotted with Fusang at first sight. As the novel unfolds, both Chris and Da Yong give it their all to rescue Fusang from a stroke of adversities. Even though Chris proposes to wed with Fusang and migrate to Montana (a state that sanctions interracial marriage at that time) thereafter, Fusang leaves the chivalric White American man for the Asian man. Dressed in red satin, Fusang visits Da Yong at the execution ground to complete their marriage ritual right before he is sent to the gallows. On the whole, the

narrative structure of this Sinophone novel is non-linear. The fact that Yan employs a first-person narrator to recount the novel also critically enhances its complexity. Proclaiming herself as the writer of Fusang's missing story, the female narrator "I" ("我") sporadically obtrudes into the narrative proper to interrogate Fusang. Since they share the same immigrant status, the narrator constantly interprets Fusang's destiny based on her own lived experience in the late twentieth century, even though the time gap between these two Asian (American) women is more than a hundred years apart.

2. Some Negative Commentaries on *Fu Sang/The Lost Daughter of Happiness*

Most critics of *Fu Sang* approve of its literary value in their textual analysis, describing its plot and form as "intricate" and "complicate[d]" (in Pin-chia Feng's "Remapping Asian American Literature") (62) and the protagonist as "ambiguous" (in Wen Jin's "Transnational Criticism and Asian Immigrant Literature in the U.S.") (575). Despite acknowledging the narrative's "struggle to integrate the complexities of national and transnational pasts", Sally McWilliams who explores the English translation *The Lost Daughter of Happiness* (rendered by Cathy Silber and published in 2001) has also read the novel as a "feminist" text in her article "From a Distance of One Hundred and Twenty Years" (133). While literary critics of the novel may have fathomed out its intricacy through different theoretical approaches, most book reviewers have been baffled, if not displeased by Nieh's metafictional writing technique and her portrayal of Fusang.

In her book review, Cathleen A. Towey comments that the "imagined writer[']s" voice is "distracting" and laments that "Fusang never becomes a fully realized character" (204). According to Towey, "it is unclear whether [Fusang] survives her ordeals through the power of

her personality or a lack of intellect” (ibid). Therefore, she coldly advises readers to “purchase” the book only if they have “a strong interest in the subject” (ibid). Similarly, Jeff Zaleski considers Yan’s work a “flatly told novel” (62). To him, “Fusang is a real historical figure about whom little is known” (63). He concludes that even though “[s]uch opacity creates an intriguing mystery, but lack of resolution frustrates the reader” (ibid). Rebecca Barnhouse likewise holds the same opinion as Zaleski that “[a]s readers[,] we can never be sure of Fusang and what she thinks” (98). Apart from them, both British reviewer Julia Lovell and American reviewer Jeffrey Kinkley also describe Fusang as an “opaque” and “inscrutab[le]” figure (20; 137). Preeta Samarasan, a Malaysian American author famous for her novel *Evening Is the Whole Day* (2008), has also been bitterly “disappoint[ed]” by Yan’s work of art when “[she] realized [she] would never be allowed to know Fusang” (224). In Samarasan’s review “Putting Words In Other People’s Mouths”, she has written the following lines:

In the end the purpose of every biography, fictionalized or not, is to render its subject more transparent, to help the reader understand him or her as a full human being rather than a one-dimensional attribute. *And this is where Yan fails Fusang.* Not only does she rule out the possibility of true understanding between her and Chris, she also never quite allows Fusang’s character to develop, so that even when Fusang is allowed to step out from under the opening’s merciless stage lights, even when she speaks, *she remains pale, opaque, cryptic ...* She is exactly what Yan doesn’t want her to be: the *inscrutable* Oriental. (223; emphasis added)

Coincidentally, most reviewers have employed adjectives synonymous with one another to describe, rather resentfully, Yan’s depiction of Fusang upon reading her novel. However, is the character of Fusang really that stoic and incomprehensible to readers as they have complained?

What these critics and reviewers have not pointed out or reflected is that Yan could have composed her novel without creating a female narrator to interact with the titular figure – the plot arguably would still be coherent without the narrator’s voice. Despite that, Yan has decided to retain the narrator, thereby suggesting that her presence does carry some weight. I argue that if we read Fusang’s personality and reactions in the novel in relation to the life problems and migrant experience expressed by the narrator, we will find that Yan’s characterization of Fusang is actually a well-thought-out endeavor.

3. Reviving the Notion of “Claiming America”

Although a number of Asian American scholars in the 1990s (Lisa Lowe’s influential essay “Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity” for instance) have articulated the necessities for Asian American studies to “go diasporic”, if not transnational rather than just “remain vigilant about its American stakes” (Cheung 7), Yan has created a female narrator in *Fu Sang* (published in the same decade) who holds on to the originary vision of the field instead. Admitting to her fictional character, Fusang that she is “a writer living in late twentieth century America” after “crossing the Pacific Ocean” (3), the narrator is simultaneously revealing to readers that she has arrived in the US after the implementation of the Hart–Celler Act in 1965, a federal law that has given rise to an unprecedented massive influx of Asian immigrants to America. It is noteworthy that the liberalization of immigration quotas (no longer favoring northwestern European nations) has also inevitably reshaped the racial and literary landscape of the country. On the one hand, the emerging immigrant majority has certainly diversified the heterogeneity of Asian American culture. On the other hand, this substantial influx of “Asian Asians” is concomitantly fraught with risk as well – particularly when these unconcerned, privileged newcomers do not align

themselves with the civil rights agenda that has elevated Asian Americans to a (slightly) more visible social position today.

As Paul Ong and David Lee underline in their article “Changing of the Guard?”, the shift of Asian American population from majority American-born to majority immigrant from Asia “could potentially restructure Asian American politics and the voices representing [this minority group in the US]” (153). This is because “[f]or many immigrants, Asian American history is not their history, so they have no sense of membership in a historically victimized population” (165). Sucheng Chan likewise emphasizes the same phenomenon in her article “Whither Asian American Studies?”, that there is indeed a large number of these Asian immigrants who “arrive [in the US] as adults with well-formed personalities, well defined worldviews, and great personal ambition” (488). She argues that because these immigrants hailing from the East “ha[ve] not been “minorities” in their natal countries, some of them apparently feel uncomfortable about being placed into a “minority” slot in American society” (ibid). To evade such a “racialized identity”, these immigrants “intentionally *disidentify* with the country in which they now live and earn a living” (ibid). They “insist that they are a part of various Asian diasporas[,] that they have diasporic or transnational identities ...and maintain ongoing ties to people and developments in two or more countries without committing themselves, in terms of political allegiance, to any” (ibid). Hence Chan’s pointed remark in the article: “Being coethnics [or co-racial] does not guarantee a shared consciousness” (490). Apart from Chan, Morrison G. Wong has also ended her article “Post-1965 Asian Immigrants” by reminding us that “[f]uture assimilation of the new Asian immigrants is not likely” (168). Apparently, the narrator in *Fu Sang* also shares the same anxiety and disappointment as the abovementioned scholars by interrupting her own narrative to re-articulate the threats posed by these newcomers. With the

benefit of hindsight, the narrator begins by confessing to Fusang that she too, has been indifferent to her new homeland when she first arrived in America, “I’ve never known what made me take that stride across the Pacific. We’ve all got ready answers – that we came for freedom, knowledge, wealth – *but really we have no idea what we’re after*” (“我從來不知道使我跨過太平洋的緣由是什麼。我們口頭上嚷到這裡來找自由、學問、財富，實際上我們並不知道究竟想找什麼。”) (ibid; emphasis mine). This part of the novel is indeed laced with a regretful tone.

As the novel unfolds, the narrator continues to elaborate on the ostensible similarities between the newcomers and the early generation immigrants before she concludes with the incompetence of the former. She first explains how the new majority repeats the same rhythm of flocking to Chinatown for jobs and shabby apartments (156). Slowly, they follow in their so-called “predecessors” footsteps to break out into non-Asian territory for high paying jobs, such as working in the bank (157). The migrant experience of these different generations do look alike on a surface level, to the extent that some of these (supposedly first-generation) newcomers also claim themselves to be the fifth generation or the successors of early-generation immigrants (“有人把我們叫作第五代中國移民” (3; 208); “我們像你們的後代那樣” (156)). Despite that, this subsumption, to me, is a dangerous one if we take into consideration what the abovementioned critics (Ong and Lee; and Chan) have cautioned us about in their respective articles: the opportunistic mindset of the new immigrants and their different worldview. Their inclination to homogenize the complex identities of the long rooted Asian American communities arguably overlooks the latter’s distinctive and deep-rooted national commitment and allegiance to their ‘one and only’ homeland – America. These devoted attitudes have yet to be picked up by the new majority. How, then, can we simply yoke these two camps of immigrants with contrasting

political identifications together?

To explode their misnomers, the narrator immediately points out the internal differences between the newly-arrived and the already-localized to Fusang as well as to readers. The narrator apprises Fusang that the contemporary immigrants of her time do not register the same sincerity between Fusang and Chris (in the nineteenth century) anymore. The new generation is more concerned about the green card, blue-collar and white-collar professions, Honda and BMW whenever the issue of interracial romance crosses their minds (“這情分在我的時代早已不存在。我們講到愛情時腦子裡是一大堆別的東西，比如：綠卡、就業、白領藍領、Honda 或是 BMW。”) (87). While the new waves of immigrants continue to accumulate their wealth, their passion and determination to survive are dwindling down (“這不妨礙我們進取和聚財斂富，但那股對生存的誠意、熱忱，在減。”) (157-158). Even though they are more fluent in English and more confident during their job interviews as compared to their forbears in the thirties and forties (157), the newcomers are lost when it comes to combating racism (158). Since racial discrimination also evolves over time, where it has become increasingly subtle and disguised, the newly-arrived immigrants have no inkling whom to resist anymore (“我們不知該去除掉誰。”; “我們沒有具體的敵對面。”) (ibid). They have become pathetically lackadaisical in fighting for their own social justice, hence the narrator bewails to Fusang: “We are no longer as target-driven and self-directed as our predecessors [who arrived here a century earlier]. Unlike *your generation*, we cannot even find direction in resisting racial discrimination.” (“我們沒有了你們這些前輩的目的性和方向性。連反對種族歧視也不能成為我們的目的和方向。”) (158; emphasis mine).

The narrator’s confession indeed goes in tandem with Ong and Lee’s observation that

“the new Chinese activists” are only interested in ““quality of life” issues and ... property rights rather than social justice” (168). Simply put, the newcomers are engrossed in advancing their own fortunes only. Sadly, what this new majority has overlooked is that they owe the earlier generations of immigrants and their “Asian American Movement” a special debt for much of the privileges and material comfort they are receiving today, such as the abovementioned working opportunities in “non-Asian territory”. In other words, the new immigrants in contemporary times are merely enjoying the fruits of their forerunners’ labors without reflecting on the latter’s ongoing resistance, hence the narrator urges, “What about the first Asian woman who joined the westerners’ ballet troupe as an extra in the forties? Or the astronaut in the sixties?” (“四十年代的那位第一個進入洋人芭蕾舞團跑龍套的女子呢？六十年代那個宇航員呢？”) (157). She deliberately frames the early immigrants’ struggles – how they gradually break through the bamboo ceiling (coined by Jane Hyun in *Breaking the Bamboo Ceiling* (2005)) in the workforce – in rhetorical questions to alert readers about the discontinuity of their progressive activism and the disintegration of Pan-Asian American solidarity in resisting White supremacy and racism.

It should be clear by now that the apolitical stance of the newcomers, their hedonistic and materialistic outlook, as well as their indiscriminate obliviousness about the detriment of racial discrimination indeed do not sit well with the narrator. The former do not consider “Claiming America” as important, even though Asian Americans during their time (in the novel) are still being oppressed and suppressed by the dominant culture (210-211). As the narrator keeps reiterating to Fusang (as well as to us), the immigration officer at the airport today still wears the same hostile facial expression as the one who guarded the dock a hundred year ago (“一百多年從你到我，移民局就是惡聲氣、凶神臉、鐵石心腸的同義詞。你以為現在站在國際機場關

口和曾站在碼頭的那個大鬍子不是一個人嗎? (115); “我們走下飛機，走過移民局官員找茬子的刻薄面孔” (156)). In reality, Asian Americans in the 21st century have also yet to come out as a strong political force for collective social change. Most Asian Americans “often [have to] recapitulate the “old” struggles” (Wong 240) despite the fact that the Asian American population is “more fluid and more closely linked to communities in Asia than in the past” (Partridge 133) – perhaps this also explains the necessity of keeping the narrator’s voice and her perspectives in the story. Similar to Kingston’s declaration, Geling Yan is also “claiming America in a literary way, ... in a pacifist way, in an artistic way” (Islas and Yalom 25). After all, if “claiming America [shrinks to become] a minor task for Asian American cultural criticism”, as Sau-ling Cynthia Wong warns us in her prominent article “Denationalization Reconsidered”, “certain segments of the Asian American population may be left without a viable discursive space” (16). In view of this, it is no wonder that Yan/the narrator has portrayed Fusang as a resilient and unruffled figure who is able to withstand all the hardships in America. In other words, the narrator has inculcated her own realization and beliefs, namely the spirits of “Claiming America”, in her fictional character Fusang.

4. Inheriting the Notion of “Claiming America”

As Elaine Kim writes in her article “Defining Asian American Realities Through Literature”: to claim America “does not mean [we have to] disappea[r] like raindrops in the ocean of white America, fighting to become “normal,” losing ourselves in the process” (88). Rather, it should be “a profound expression of protest against being defined by domination” (ibid). In order for Fusang to “claim America”, the first prerequisite is that the titular figure must be able to land on the shore of America from Guangdong unharmed. Therefore, Fusang has been

depicted by the narrator as being “compliant” and “submissive” to the authority of her abductors on the ship (since she is also under the upper hand), which of course has inevitably agitated a number of feminist readers. Unlike other kidnapped girls, Fusang does not starve herself to end her life (scissors, knives and ropes have all been kept away by the kidnappers) (45). Instead, Fusang “gobbles down” everything given by the abductors to her unhesitantly. Her calm disposition has also shocked some of the captors as none of their captives have appeared to be as poised as Fusang before (“女人唬得楞怔：拐來的女子裡頭，扶桑是唯一不鬧絕食的。”) – to a certain extent, it also signals Fusang’s readiness to begin her new life in America (ibid). Even when Fusang is “sitting up” on the crowded ship, she is still able to “sleep soundly at night while girls lying next to her, whose odor and color have changed, are being thrown overboard” (“人人躺著，扶桑一人坐著。坐著她也睡得爛熟，連天天半夜跑進兩個人來她都毫無知覺。這兩人總要拖出個把變了色也變了氣味的女仔扔進海裡。”) (ibid). Eventually, Fusang has arrived in America safe and sound while many girls have died along the way. It is revealed that Fusang has also gained some weight throughout the journey for her huge appetite (49).

Rather than criticizing this entire scene as reinforcing patriarchal culture of prostitution, I see this episode grounded in history as necessary and important in order for the narrator to advance the notion of “Claiming America”. After all, it is impossible and illogical for Fusang to claim America in Asia. On the other side of the coin, the narrator has also shed light on Fusang’s adaptability to deprivation and her strong will to survive, which are certainly exemplary for the new generation in America whose determination to survive is said to have dwindled down as I have pointed out in the previous section. Metaphorically speaking, Fusang’s sheer tenacity to live, her staggering perseverance and spartan courage throughout the rough journey from the East to the West in the nineteenth century are unequivocally evocative of the ongoing struggle

the Asian American community has been putting up with. The latter is still resisting all sorts of political turbulence to lay claim to America. It must be stressed that Fusang's successful trajectory from Asia to America also forms the basis for the narrator to enlighten readers about the indelible history of Asian Americans in the US, as well as the huge gap between the long-rooted and the newly-arrived Asians. This critical account of her voyage that informs us about Fusang's "point of origin" also serves to remind readers that one's perception of home is always constantly changing. Towards the dénouement of the novel, Fusang returns to China to scatter half of Da Yong's ashes. However, she does not continue to stay in Asia (her old homeland) permanently. She makes a trip back to the US – where her new homeland is located – after fulfilling her responsibility. It is noteworthy that if Fusang had *not* made it to America in the first place, the narrator would not have been able to transmit these important messages about the localization of Asian Americans, as well as their transition and the alteration of their sense of belonging, to us. The titular figure's firm endurance of the wretched living conditions on board is already a manifestation of her female agency.

Upon relocating to San Francisco Chinatown, the female protagonist continues to demonstrate her persistence to lay claim to her new homeland by working – and more importantly, accepting herself – as a prostitute serving the people in America regardless of their race (jobs available to Asian women were extremely rare in the nineteenth century). Even though Fusang is starved and whipped naked by her female employer (Amah) when she fails to entice any customer, the protagonist still bears with the punishment obediently instead of running away from her shelter (7). Other confusing scenes and incidents in the US setting will also become comprehensible if readers interpret them in the context of "Claiming America". For instance, most of the Chinese sex workers in the novel have died "young of disease or hard use"

(Barnhouse 98). There is a female character who dies at 19, a year younger than Fusang, just a few days after she spoke to the titular figure that, “you are too old for a prostitute” (“哦，你好老了。我比你還小一歲。我都覺得自己老得祇剩筋了！”)(52). By contrast, Fusang is able to live past 70 in the novel (even older than Chris who passes away at 75) (274-277). Next, when Fusang is sent to the Chinatown hospital (a place to warehouse the sick until they draw their last breath) after contracting tuberculosis, she spends her last reserves of strength pleading with the porters to “wait until [she] is completely dead before [they] cremate [her]” (“你們要等我死透再燒啲。”) (106-107). In order to survive, Fusang also seizes a bowl of rice prepared for her dead companion and devours it in no time despite its dryness (“你見死去的伴身旁也有半碗米飯。你兩下便將飯粒划進嘴裡。你不像她，跟這境遇賭氣，飯也不吃。”) (116-117). These two scenes devised by the narrator are completely sensible to me because if the narrator had allowed the female protagonist to meet her death at this point, no one would have realized and attested to her aspiration of “claiming America” in her own narrative. On top of that, these episodes have also revealed to readers that Fusang is not really a passive and complaisant figure who succumbs to patriarchal order blindly; neither is she “mentally slow” (Kinkley 137) nor deprived of “intellect” (Towey 204) as a number of book reviewers have claimed. The female protagonist’s will to live is certainly the strongest among all the characters in the novel. The fact that Fusang is indifferent to the “epic battle forty Chinese men wage over her” (Barnhouse 98) is because, to her, the war is not one that could help them as a minority to claim America – it is a pointless event to begin with even though the narrator has spent pages delineating the war. If anything, the catastrophe has only opened the door for the dominant race to slander them based on their Oriental, barbaric actions of killing their own men (race). Hence, a week before their fight, the Anglo characters have been going “from door to door seeking balcony for rent” in

order to observe the sacrifice of the Asian men (152). The last balcony that offers excellent box seats is sold for four times the original price and the Anglo Americans in the novel are willing to pay for it (ibid).

Broadly speaking, what inspires “claiming America” to take shape in the first place is that Asian Americans have been constantly perceived by the dominant group as the racial “Other”, or as inherently “foreign”. Hence, Maxine Hong Kingston’s vehement assertion that “No, we’re not outsiders, we belong here, this is our country, this is our history, and we are a part of America” (Islas and Yalom 25). Kingston’s notion of “Claiming America” has been employed by Yan in her portrayal of Fusang. In the novel, Fusang has acted as a mediator to reduce the growing racial tension and hostility between the dominant and the minority group, instead of merely earning money to avoid punishment and to enhance her fame (like those nonchalant, new immigrants in the narrator’s time). Both Chinese and Anglo American men in San Francisco have been mesmerized by Fusang’s beauty and thus, it presents a chance for the titular figure to close the racial gap between them. From my point of view, this is undoubtedly a form of resistance to the strategies of exclusion and the xenophobia of the dominant race. There is an important scene in which the fourteen-year-old Chris watches Fusang entertaining her tenth client from the window ledge. It is said that Fusang’s eyes have been waiting for Chris by the time he found them (“他找到她眼睛時，她的眼睛早已等著他了。”) (59). A reason for this is that Fusang has intended to open Chris’s eyes to the possible harmonious relationships the trio could have in America. To achieve this end, Fusang first demonstrates how her body derives pleasure from taking in the man, “like the finest sand on the beach that drifts along with the currents” (“她的肌膚是海洋上最細的流沙，那樣隨波逐流。”) (ibid). Their entire lovemaking scene has been performed harmoniously by Fusang to Chris, so much so that it

eventually sets tears coursing down his cheeks (ibid). This is because Chris, the young American man who repeatedly dreams about himself as a knight of courage brandishing a long sword, has expected Fusang to resist and struggle against the invasion and oppression of the (Asian) man. Yet Fusang has shown him the exact opposite (“他以為該有掙扎，該有痛苦的痕跡。而他看到的卻是和諧... 正是這美麗使兩股眼淚順克里斯的鼻腔上湧... 乍然滾出眼眶”) (60). To enlighten Chris about the fact that he cannot just adore her alone but despises her entire race, Fusang transmits the sexual pleasure experienced by her body to Chris through her gazes (“那歡樂不僅存在於她，它被她波動震蕩的肉體播入了那個男人，又隨著她的目光播向克里斯。”) (61). The movements of their body gradually draws Chris into their rhythm and Chris soon realizes that he is crying for a different reason now; in fact, he is tearing pleurably (ibid). As his body unfolds and quickens in ways he has never known, Chris begins to understand that while Fusang’s body is taking in the man, her everything else is also taking him in (“克里斯漸漸發覺他眼淚的成分變了。神秘的歡樂朝他襲來，使他的肉體滋生出他從不知曉的一種舒展與鮮活... 他忽然明白了。她的肉體在接受一個男人，她的眼睛，她剩餘的一切在接受他。”) (ibid). It seems that Fusang’s body has functioned metaphorically as a nation in this case. And all she is trying to do is to reconcile both races by claiming both men as an indispensable part of her pleasure. In other words, Fusang is sending Chris the message that America should not be confined to Anglo Americans alone – like how Fusang has opened herself up to contain both of them, Asians in America should also be acknowledged as a part of the country.

Apart from drawing readers’ attention to the fact that women (represented by Fusang) are equally capable of “affect[ing] ... national and ethnic processes” (Yuval-Davis and Anthias 7) and thus, they should not be excluded or “‘hidden’ in the various theorizations of the nationalist

phenomena” (Yuval-Davis 2), the narrator’s depiction of Fusang’s strategy to “claim America” also strikes common chords with Elaine Kim’s definition of “Claiming America” as aforementioned, namely to “protest against being defined by domination” (88). In the novel, Fusang has protested against the dominant party’s offensive definition of her race by rejecting the missionaries’ assistance and quitting the mission. This is arguably one of the most astonishing scenes in *Fu Sang* as it clearly defies the general stereotype of “white men [and white women] saving yellow women from yellow men” – when the titular figure decides to leave the Christian missionaries who have rescued her from the hideous Chinatown hospital. The female protagonist admits to the crowd that she has stolen Da Yong’s jewelry – which, of course, is a blatant lie – and thus, it is reasonable that Da Yong takes her away (137). While readers may blame Fusang for relinquishing her alliance with women and caving in to patriarchal power, from my perspective, Fusang’s action to leave with Da Yong is very much triggered by the ethnic pride flaunted by the purportedly righteous Christian women. As McWilliams points out in her article “From a Distance of One Hundred and Twenty Years”, “the Christian actions of the Rescue Society [has been] depicted as laced with moral superiority and hatred ... [They] nonetheless participate in society’s pernicious discursive racialized violence” (139). Indeed, the missionaries not only despise the Chinese language as “the ugliest language [they] have ever heard” and pray to “Lord [to] forgive [those] who speak such a vile language” (“主饒恕這些講醜惡語言的人！中國話是我聽到的最難聽的語言。”) (*Fu Sang* 120), the former also condemns the Chinese girls whom they have rescued as “creatures possessed by evil [who] are here to punish the world” (“中國人.....生了這些魔鬼似的女孩來懲罰世界”) (131). Fusang is the only character in the novel who has heard these swear words. It frightens her that even the most benevolent members of the dominant race have also attempted to define (and confine) the

ethnic minority according to their own racial fantasy (ibid). One of the old nuns, Mary even castigates Fusang for trying to “seduce an underage child” like Chris when all Fusang has done is just putting on her own form-fitting wrinkled red satin blouse, “How could you whore here? ... Have you no conscience? ... Look at him, he’s only fourteen!” (“怎麼可以在這裡販娼？[瑪麗]說，怎麼可以引誘一個沒成年的孩子？... 難道你沒有良知嗎？... 看看他，他祇有十四歲！ ”) (124-125). Taking these scenes into consideration, readers should not be surprised that Fusang has chosen to walk away with Da Yong when he finally emerges. What the narrator shows us is that the titular figure has refused to “lose” herself and assimilate unthinkingly into yet another racist structure that still operates alongside White supremacy and the myth of Asian Americans as “perpetual foreigners”, one that requires Fusang to compromise on the ignorance and moral superiority of the condescending missionaries.

To a certain extent, Fusang also leaves the missionaries in hope of shaping the consciousness of Chris, who “has the potential of growing up a racist man” (Feng 64). As Pin-chia Feng argues in her article “Re-mapping Asian American literature”, Chris’s “aggressive possessiveness and his boyish curiosity [indeed] mirror a fraction of the racial ideology of his elders” (ibid). Feng explains that his entrance into Fusang’s world “was intended as a mere ritual: he was hoping that through the purchase of [Fusang’s] “alien” body he could gain an access to adulthood and participate in a family tradition since every man in his family has a mistress of a different race” (ibid). I would not go so far as to discredit the deep affection Chris has felt for Fusang, but one thing is for sure: Chris has always considered Fusang as a victimized figure to help him attain his sense of chivalry, hence Fusang opts to leave with Da Yong after taking a deep look at Chris who is standing by the partly open door (“克里斯發現扶桑此刻正在看他。”) (136-137). The titular figure bows her head and smiles deeply to herself after making the

decision (“她低下臉，深深微笑給自己。”) (137). She is satisfied with the message she delivers to Chris. That is, until the American teen is ready to renounce his racial superiority and perceive Fusang as his equal, they have to remain separated. Unfortunately, unable to come to terms with Fusang’s preference for Da Yong over him, Chris has joined a group of White men to gang-rape Fusang during a raid of Chinatown.

According to the narrator, Fusang “does not scream at all” when those men pull her into a carriage and abuse her violently (226). She merely accommodates the pain. Her behavior is “as amenable as the fog”, “enveloping each man stabbing into her mercifully” (“你當時不僅沒有叫喊，你柔順得如同無形無狀的霧。你祇是迎合上去，迎合在狂野和疼痛上... 像霧一樣包容著每一個戳向你的人。”) (ibid). Instead of being treated as a sexual object, Fusang shifts the power relations and turns herself into a host to satisfy the sexual desire of the men. She sees no difference between the gang rape and the prostitution she has been experiencing every day (227). In other words, Fusang continues to lay claim to America despite the racial hatred and oppression of the dominant race, hence the narrator’s remark, “she is redeeming [something else (in this case, her Asian American identity)] while providing her body” (“在給予的同時索取”) (ibid). The brutality of the rapists has not discouraged her. Fusang spends her last remaining strength biting off the brass button from Chris’s jacket (229), and the missing button has changed Chris’s life forever. It sticks in his mind and constantly reminds Chris of that night of violation even after he has thrown the jacket into the sea years ago (232). This sense of guilt eventually inspires Chris to take up a teaching position offered by the missionaries at the new school they set up specifically for the Chinese in America (235-236). He is assigned to teach the latter four hours of English language and two hours on the U.S. Constitution every day (236). To Chris, aiding her race to localize in America is the best way to repay Fusang (“他... 把它做為對扶桑

的償還。」) (ibid). To a certain extent, this arrangement also seems to inform readers that the notion of “Claiming America” cannot be seen as a mission restricted only to the ethnic minorities. In order for Asian Americans to “claim America” effectively, the dominant race also needs to be included in this arduous journey. However, this would not have happened if Fusang had not pulled off Chris’s button.

Towards the end of the novel, the titular figure is relieved to see the cordial interaction between Chris and his female students who no longer bind their foot like her. Fusang’s “heart is calm and steady” when they walk past her (“扶桑心裡一陣安然與沈穩”) (244). Instead of keeping the opposite race at a distance, Chris and the Chinese girls make fun of each other amicably. He even turns around to let the girls brush off the dirt on his back after they lift him off the ground (266). Their camaraderie in this joyful scene unmistakably stands in marked contrast with Chris’s initial suspicion and negative impression of the Chinese immigrants in America. In the exposition of the novel, Chris follows the white crowd thronging the municipal government to protest Chinese coolies, opium addicts and prostitutes (whom he later plays with after they have become his students) (41). Chris even keeps one of those handbills that list over ten accusations of the Chinese, thereby suggesting that this inferior race should be wiped out, in his pocket (ibid). Apart from that, Chris’s obsession with an Oriental sex worker like Fusang is also a disgrace to his military family migrated from Germany (101). Hence, Chris’s father bellows out the order to the male protagonist, “you will stop seeing that goddamned Chinese whore immediately” (148). And according to the narrator, since “each person has become a mindless body, just hands and feet realizing the will of the crowd but can never escape from it” (the “will of the crowd” here undeniably refers to the cumulative hatred of the White community) (“每個人都身不由己；每個人都祇是一個小小的末梢肢體去實現這個群體的意志。每個人

都逃不出群體對他的支配。”) (234), Chris has also succumbed to the racism propagated by the dominant race and adopted their xenophobic attitudes. Despite that, as time passes, the male protagonist begins to repent his hostility and is overwhelmed with guilt. Drowning in sorrow, his hatred towards the Chinese also gradually disappears. Instead of holding a grudge against one another (the White to continue annihilate the outsiders and the Chinese to avenge their death and humiliation), both parties (Chris and the Chinese girls) have made great strides towards a more harmonious America by accepting the presence and commonality of each other (the Chinese girls in America, like the Anglo Americans, are required to honor the U.S. Constitution as well upon learning about it in class from Chris) before the novel comes to a close.

My textual analysis above has demonstrated how Geling Yan, as a Sinophone American author, incorporates the notion of “Claiming America” into her novel. Apart from that, I have also tried to show in this chapter that the narrator’s portrayal of Fusang will become more intelligible if we read Fusang’s character in relation to the notion of “Claiming America” that underpins the narrator’s conversation with Fusang. This progressive political subject matter has been contested within the field ever since it came into being in the late 1960s. As King-kok Cheung reminds us in *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature*, “while [she] welcome[s] the growing recognition of the crossover between Asian and Asian America – a crossover that permits a more fluid sense of identity – [she] believe[s] Asian American literary studies must also keep alive the impetus to claim America. Otherwise the field may swing from excluding the voices of immigrants to marginalizing those of American-born Asians” (9). Simply put, Cheung also agrees with Sau-ling Cynthia Wong’s forewarning that “the potential to glamorize a non-committal political stance in one’s land of principal residence is [indeed] a real danger” (“Denationalization Reconsidered” 240). Apparently, Yan also holds the same belief as

Wong and Cheung to continue safeguard the boundaries of Asian American identity and culture and write them into existence. The domestic issues of Asian America reflected in *Fu Sang* are certainly not popular topics discussed in the literary circle of Chinese literature. Despite that, the “Americanness” of this Sinophone novel has yet to be discovered and embraced by (Asian) American readers at large. Will the canon of Asian American literature ever acknowledge an America-centered novel written in the Sinitic script? *Fu Sang* throws us that challenge.

Chapter Three

Holding Onto America, Even When Writing Back To China(s):

Re-reading Hualing Nieh's *Mulberry and Peach*

This chapter exemplifies how a Sinophone novel composed by a foreign-born Asian American writer – that narrates predominantly about Asia – can indeed be recognized as an *Asian American text*. Referring to Shu-mei Shih's analytical Sinophone theory, in which she explicates that “[as a consequence of re-rooting, a] Chinese American can be critical of China and the United States at the same time” (“Against Diaspora” 39), this chapter builds onto this specific perspective and asserts that the versatility embedded in Shih's statement does not necessarily signify that the said migrant author's literary works can thus be classified squarely as “Chinese literature”: a literary field or a national literature that presupposes a different “center”, one that is made up of “the Chinese nation-state, the Chinese cultural tradition ... and the Chinese people”, as noted in Sau-ling Cynthia Wong's article “Global Vision and Locatedness” (51). Just as we do not mistake a “Chinese American” for a “Mainlander” or a “Chinese Chinese” (but as “American”), it behooves us to be equally cautious when it comes to the nomenclature or naming practices in literary and cultural studies. In view of this, how to read the literary accounts of foreign-born Asian American authors migrated from Asia, wherein they have written critically about their so-called “original homeland”, becomes important.

While it is ubiquitous among foreign-born Asian American authors to write back to their sending country upon their resettlement, literary and cultural critics from far and wide have been attuned to trivializing this complex feature of their creative works. Consequently, much of these writings have been dismissed as the literary productions of the migrant authors' “ancestral land” regardless of what the narratives truly reveal. Literati at large are insensitive to the “new” level

of criticalnesss employed by these Asian American authors in rendering their subject matter, one that has been informed and reshaped by their personal lived experience in, as well as the local ethos of their receiving country. More often than not, genocentric and Sinocentric scholars only dedicate their attention to the transplanted authors' depiction of Asian countries and cultures in order for them to validate their categorization of such literary works, whereas narrative on America recounted in the same composition, be it minimal or sizeable, is deliberately cast aside by these enthusiastic intellectuals, let alone inspecting the intricate connection between these different spaces in the texts.

This chapter challenges the uncritical practice mentioned above through re-examining the disrupted narrative structure of Hualing Nieh's (聶華苓) *Mulberry and Peach* (桑青與桃紅) (1976)², one that has been cleverly devised by the foreign-born Asian American female author in order for her to highlight the remarkable presence of her receiving country, the United States of America, among other disparate regions in her seemingly Asia-bound narrative. It conveys the fact that any critical representation of one's ancestral land in migrant writing can only be fathomed out cogently and meaningfully in the context of one's present homeland. A close scrutiny of the significance of Nieh's narrative technique not only brings to the fore the inappropriateness of subsuming the Sinophone novel (written by an Asian American) under the canon of Chinese literature by literary critics, more importantly it also opens up the possibility for *Mulberry and Peach* to be identified as an Asian American novel. To be fair, I will first discuss how a few well-published Sinocentric writer-scholars have misconceived the publication of migrant writers outside China as "overseas Chinese literature" in section one before I delve

² The original version of *Sangqing Yu Taohong* (桑青與桃紅) was translated into English by Jane Parish Yang and Linda Lappin in 1981. To differentiate the first (Hong Kong) version of the novel from the expurgated edition circulated in mainland China, where both are discussed in this chapter, I use the translators' terms "Mulberry and Peach" to denote the prototype and "Sangqing Yu Taohong" to indicate the Chinese mainland variation.

into the textual analysis of *Mulberry and Peach* in section two and three. The latter segments call into question the prejudiced perspectives of the Sinocentric literati outlined in the first part of this chapter.

Most critics of *Mulberry and Peach* tend to read the novel as the equivalent of Nieh's individual exilic journey to the West, one that commences strictly in mainland China, stops over briefly in Taiwan, and ends on a poignant note in America. This tendentious reading re-affirms their own reductive labeling of the novel as a representative of "Chinese" and "Taiwanese" literature, even though as this chapter illustrates, the Sinophone novel can only occupy a peripheral position in both of these canons. Most reviewers stop short of probing Nieh's objectives of disarranging the chronological order of her creation in their close-reading. My research fills the gap and questions the validity of these origin-centered designations by re-reading *Mulberry and Peach* according to its complex, non-linear narrative form featured in its first edition published in British-Hong Kong – wherein the narrative first drifts from the American shore back to the regions of mainland China and Taiwan, and eventually reverts to America again.

Through close textual analysis in section two, I argue that the installation of the American scenes in the beginning part of *Mulberry and Peach* does have a significant purpose behind it. It reveals to readers that it is the socio-political realities of the protagonist's (Peach) present homeland in America that impel her to write back to the East. My reading propounds that Peach has consciously formulated her narratives about mainland China and Taiwan in order for her to solidify her Asian American identity and to enhance her migrant life in the US, instead of merely re-claiming or re-connecting with her "original homelands" like most Sinocentric scholars have proclaimed. To demonstrate her Asian American subjectivity, the titular figure has

employed a constellation of western feminist ideals – which she has been practising in America – to reconstruct the images of Asian women in her back-writing. Their indomitable spirit and aberrant behaviors in the face of patriarchal forces not only attest to the cultural influence of America (Peach’s present homeland) over Peach’s narrative about Asia, Peach’s discursive empowerment of the Asian women also serves as a reminder to readers that any narrative about one’s “ancestral land” indeed *cannot* be singled out from the entire story and read independently – this component part(s) has to be appreciated in relation to the protagonist’s local place of residence.

Section three argues that the disjointed narrative order of the novel also enlightens readers on the shifting sense of belonging and the changing social allegiance of foreign-born Asian American authors that veer towards the United States. This argument is informed by the re-appearance of the American setting in the final portion of the novel before it comes to a close. Such reversion unveils the author’s aim to criticize the persisting ethnocentrism and xenophobia of the dominant race in America, as well as to question the nation’s promise of liberty to its immigrants, that “all men are created equal” as delineated in the United States Declaration of Independence. Given the emphasis on (Asian) America in the novel, I contend that *Mulberry and Peach* should be read as an Asian/Sinophone American text.

1. Could There Be A Home Away From “Home”?

No doubt it is crucial to uncover the ways in which Sinophone American writers display their “deep local commitments” to America in their literary works³ – as Shu-mei Shih reminds us in her illustrious essay “Against Diaspora” (38) – in order to transpose these marginalized oeuvre

³ I have explored this notion at length in the previous chapter of this thesis that centers on Geling Yan’s *Fu Sang* (1996).

to a more central position in the Asian American literary canon. However, in the same controversial article about the prerequisites for Sinophone theory published by Shih, she also painstakingly points out that,

When routes can be roots, multidirectional critiques are not only possible but also imperative. Transcending national borders, Sinophone communities can maintain a critical position toward both the country of origin and the country of settlement. It is no longer an either/or choice between the ancestral land and the local place, which has been shown to jeopardize the well-being of the immigrants and their descendants. A Chinese American can be critical of China and the United States at the same time. (38-39)

Shih's incisive justification and endorsement of the flexibility of reconnecting with one's provenance are much-needed because most critics of literary studies, particularly those subscribing to the anachronistic notions of rootlessness and cultural dispossession, have yet to distinguish the authorial decision of writing back to one's "country of origin" as a reflective writing process, one that accounts for the larger context of revaluation. Having lived in different regions of the world, migrant writers are conceivably exposed to a great diversity of cultures and intellectual influences, which thus enables them to re-evaluate their previous place of residence (as well as the current one) by re-writing it based on their most preferred cultural ideals upon careful comparison and consideration. Despite that, literary critics not only tend to underplay the critiques of migrant writers towards their "ancestral land" in their narratives, they also randomly shrug off the factors that encourage these foreign-born authors to generate such negative commentaries, not least the influence coming from their land of settlement. According to these critics, it is the cultural wealth of the transplanted authors' native land that inspires them to write

back to their provenance – the cultural capital of their sending country is believed to have outweighed that of their receiving country.

Chen Sihe is one of the most articulated contemporary scholars to remark on, if not diminish the “homeward gaze” of “diasporic Chinese writers” outside China. In Chen’s 2016 Chinese article “My View on the Literature by Chinese Writers Traveling Overseas”⁴ (“旅外華語文學之我見”), the established and frequently cited scholar repeatedly avers that “Chinese authors actively writing in Euro-America mainly draw their writing inspiration from their lived experience in the motherland – their writing location is the only feature that marks them differently from their contemporaries on the mainland” (3; 6-7). Chen elaborates that for many “travel writers”, “their writing career had already begun, if not flourished in mainland China” before they relocated to the West (note Chen’s conflation of expedition and migration here) (8). Therefore, even as these foreign-born authors continue to write prolifically in their adopted land, their “writing resources still profit from the literary achievement they have accumulated in their “home country”” (ibid). He marks this phenomenon as a form of “continuity” (yanxu, “延續”) (ibid). According to Chen, “travel writers” in Euro-America “must constantly write back or return to their motherland (China proper) in order to look for elements that could stimulate their writing passion” (10). It is for these reasons that Chen refuses to address Sinophone writers in the West according to their Euro-American nationality and identity.⁵ Even though Shih had revived the coinage of Sinophone in her 2004 article “Global Literature and the Technologies of Recognition” – more than a decade before Chen published his article – the latter still perceives

⁴ This English title is translated by the author himself.

⁵ Citing the Sinophone writer Gao Xing Jian as example despite “China’s official acknowledgment of his French identity”, Chen’s perversion of such fact seems to belie his claim that the citizenship and the land of settlement of migrant authors are of no importance to literary critics’ understanding and categorization of their migrant writings (4-7) – for if that were the case, why did Chen even distort the present identity of Gao?

Euro-American authors' writings outside China as "an organic composition of contemporary Chinese literature" (4).

It is obvious that in Chen's argument, he is oblivious to the presence of the migrant writers' receiving country, arguably a much distinctive social, political and cultural milieu, as well as the foreign-born writers' material conditions in their new homeland. These elements could likewise enhance their intellectual vitality and govern their consciousness as the transplanted authors embark on their writing (even if Chen's concept of "Chineseness" can never be dislodged). Sad to say, by being the spokesperson of migrant writers without any supporting textual analysis and disregards the migrant authors' self-definition, it seems that Chen's elucidation only aims to protect the interest, and to promote the global prominence of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the present era – as if without China, these literate writers (many of whom have gone abroad for postgraduate studies) would never be able to craft a single, meaningful word. In Sau-ling Cynthia Wong's article "Global Vision and Locatedness", she criticizes Sinocentric and genocentric scholars alike as having "less [interest in] learn[ing] about specific works of literature in specific locales than to provide self-flattery to an insecure Chinese ego" (65). While avowing that Sinophone writers in the West and their works of art are indebted *only* to the "resources" of their "natal land" as signaled by the notion of "continuity" cited above (which irrefutably moves in tandem with China's national desire to maximize its influence abroad, possibly to atone for the nation's century of humiliation)⁶, Chen is in turn implying that the transplanted authors' hostland is nothing more than a cultural badlands – from which no

⁶ It is noteworthy that Chen's self-validating claims are not pacifist in the article. In line with the idea of "continuity" touched on above, Chen concludes his argument by transmogrifying what he calls literature produced by Chinese "travel writers" in various foreign countries into an invasive troop of army destined to expand the greatness of contemporary Chinese literature (an embodiment of China) in the global arena – a good reminder that Sinophone writings produced outside China have always been mistreated as a "secondary" class of literature, in this case the class of a subservient pawn awaiting to serve the cultural imperialism of its so-called "motherland" (9-10). Unfortunately, Chen's entire sweeping statement will only provoke grave charges of unassimilability and espionage among foreign-born naturalized Sinophone writers in their land of settlement.

creative impulse and “nutrients” for writing could ever be derived. Yet, as Chen extols the glory of the migrant writers’ “ancestral land”, he also falls prey to what Arien Mack calls “inattentional blindness” in his namesake article, namely “the failure to see highly visible objects we may be looking at directly *when our attention is elsewhere*” (180; emphasis added). In this case, what has been overlooked is the migrant authors’ overt critique of their old homeland in their narratives. Chen’s “inattentional blindness” basically boils down to one thing: literary critics’ failure to acknowledge the fact that transplanted writers do not write back to their historical homeland as the same person anymore – but as a new citizen of a different nation-state whose identity and national commitment are now orienting towards their present homeland, a non-Chinese locale.

Be that as it may, there exists a minority group of literati outside China who seem to think well of the social, economic, political and cultural influence coming from the migrant authors’ new homeland as these authors write (back) about their sending country. However, these slightly objective critics (compared to Chen) only hold on to this conviction momentarily – most of whom are still Sinocentric at heart. For instance, in the “anthology of overseas Chinese writers’ short stories” (海外華人作家小說選) edited by Taiwanese American writer Li Li (李黎) (born in Nanking) in 1983, she first declares in the preface that the common themes found in the oeuvre of “overseas Chinese” writers (comprised of an appreciable number of *liuxuesheng* or foreign students in America and Canada) from 1970 onwards have expanded beyond the authors’ usual depiction of their individual joys and sorrows in the foreign land. While these foreign-born writers continue to recount the fluctuating situations in their new settlement, they are more keen on writing across the Pacific Ocean. That is, writing back to their provenance in Taiwan, Hong Kong and mainland China. According to Li, “the depth of such exploration is determined by *the*

transplanted authors' lived experience in their receiving country", which has facilitated their investigation over the issues of cultural differences, cultural acceptance and nationalism in other settings (2; emphasis added).

Nevertheless, in the following paragraph, Li immediately devalues the potential influence of their adopted land quoted above by stating that "the historical development of China is still the predominant factor" that galvanizes these migrant authors into broadening the thematic concerns of their literary writings (ibid). She explains that a "Chinese person, upon going abroad [in mid-twentieth century, arguably after the Chinese Civil War], will naturally experience the poignancy and anxiety of being a secessionist". This sense of guilt is what triggers the migrant authors' patriotic choice of writing back to their birthplace later on (2-3). Obviously, Li's finding and Chen's judgment are indeed very much alike. She has likewise obliterated the transplanted authors' opportunity and possibility of becoming a naturalized citizen in their adopted country (hence still referring to them as "overseas Chinese" in the title of her book). In Li's four-page essay, the historical and political influence of the foreign-born writers' "ancestral land" (China proper) still loom larger than that of their new homeland in the West.

From Chen's ambitious fortification of a global Chinese cultural pride to Li's ambiguous acknowledgment of the social, political and cultural influence coming from the migrant authors' receiving country, what these literati collectively fail to comprehend is that, "had [these transplanted authors] not gone abroad but remained comfortably in [their] ancestral land, [their] writing productivity would have become questionable", as Li-ching Yu (喻麗清), a Taiwanese American author, confesses in the preface of her Sinophone work *Lan Gan Pai Bian* (闌干拍遍) (1). Another Asian American author Hualing Nieh also comes clean with her interviewer that "without her routes to the US that widen her horizon and enhance her individual experience and

passion for writing, she would not have been able to produce *Mulberry and Peach*” (Yan 18). To answer the question I pose as the heading of this section – “Could there be a home away from “home”?” – most literary critics, as elucidated in the preceding paragraphs, still persist with the orthodox idea that there is only one home where these Sinophone (American) writings outside China are permitted to be crammed into and housed under, namely the hegemonic literary canon of “Chinese literature” (not the global Sinophone literary canon) centering only cultural production from the people’s republic and only texts that use the standard Hanyu (Han-language or Mandarin). To challenge this uncritical practice of Sinocentric scholars in literary and cultural studies, in that literary works as such could also be deemed as a part of other literary canons, I will now turn to discuss Hualing Nieh’s American novel *Mulberry and Peach* in the following sections, one that is replete with depictions of incessant wars in Asia. What prompts me to select Nieh’s writing as my case study is that this sumptuous novel has been generally accepted by critics as “Chinese” and “Taiwanese” literature. Their interpretations are highly comparable to the Sinocentric insights mentioned above. Thus, in showing that *Mulberry and Peach* should be read as an Asian American text, it will also enable me to problematize and refute the limiting assumptions embraced by the intellectuals whom I have raised earlier.

2. The Foreign-born Woman Writes Back

2.1 Why Re-read *Mulberry and Peach*?

Born in Wuhan (mainland China) in 1925, Hualing Nieh migrated to Taiwan with her family members, including her newly wed husband, in 1949. It happened when the Communist Party defeated the Nationalist Party of China in the Chinese Civil War and took over the nation – a year after Nieh graduated from the National Central University in Nanking with a degree in

English. Nieh's family set off from Peking and went southbound. Her father, an official of Chiang Kai-shek's government in Kweichow, was executed by Mao Tse-tung's army amid the political rivalry between the two parties. In Taiwan, Nieh was confronted with another critical form of political repression during what has been usually referred to as the "White Terror" period. Four members of the magazine which Nieh served as the literary editor, *Free China Fortnightly*, have been arrested by the government in 1960 for criticizing Taiwan's social ills and Chiang Kai-shek's regime. After divorcing her Chinese husband, Nieh eventually left Taiwan for the US in 1964 to attend the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop. Since then, Nieh has been living in America.⁷ It is noteworthy that much of these biographical details, particularly Nieh's exilic journey starting from central China to the US as well as her identity shift (from a mainlander to a Taiwanese and an Asian American later) have been incorporated by the author into her well-acclaimed novel *Mulberry and Peach* with appropriate modifications.

Mulberry and Peach is partitioned carefully into four major sections – ostensibly in the form of "diaries" – that span across three distinctive geographical locations, namely mainland China, Taiwan and the US. The first part of the Sinophone novel begins on the eve of China's victory in the second Sino-Japanese war (1945). The female protagonist, Mulberry, is marooned on a boat in a Yangtze River gorge as she attempts to flee the brutality of the war and more importantly, the violence of her own dysfunctional family; the latter consists of a vicious mother and a withdrawn, impotent father. Other refugees accompanying Mulberry on the stranded boat bound for the city of Chungking include Lao-shih (a girlfriend of Mulberry who is erotically infatuated with her), an unnamed Refugee Student (with whom Mulberry copulates *voluntarily*)⁸,

⁷ In 1967, Nieh cofounded the prestigious International Writing Program (IWP) with Paul Engle (her American husband married in 1971) at the University of Iowa. They were nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1976.

⁸ Sheng-mei Ma mistakes the student refugee for Mulberry's "future husband" Chia-kang Shen in his book *Immigrant Subjectivities in Asian American and Asian Diaspora Literatures* (51).

an unnamed conservative Old Man (who relentlessly imposes his patriarchal values on other riders) and Peach-flower woman (en route to confront her youthful husband about his rumored infidelity). Part two of the novel (1948-1949) opens with Mulberry's northbound flight touching down at the besieged city of Peking two months after her father committed suicide⁹; she is the only passenger on board. As the capital city gradually falls into the hands of the Communist Party in this section, the female protagonist also dispassionately marries Chia-kang Shen, the promiscuous son of the bed-ridden Aunt Shen to whom Mulberry has been affianced since childhood. For the safety of Mulberry – who is already pregnant on the eve's of Mao's rise to power – the married couple heed the advice of Aunt Shen and retreat to Taiwan. In part three (1957-1959), Mulberry secludes herself in a stifling, low-ceilinged attic alongside Chia-kang and their daughter, Sang-wa. This is because Chia-kang is wanted by the police for embezzling funds from the bank in which he works. Therefore, their eight-year-old daughter has not been exposed to life outside the rat-infested attic, for Sang-wa has never learned to walk, nor could she stand up straight in the narrow hiding place. The four-tatami-size attic, according to Jean Amato, “functions as a surreal representation of the alienating effects from the intellectually and socially claustrophobic political policies of Taiwan in that period” (39). Mulberry relocates to America alone in the last section of the novel (1969-1970) in search of refuge. The female protagonist renames herself as “Peach” while she dodges the hounding of US Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) officers due to her illicit residency and alien identity.

As Gianna Quach writes in her book review, “Nieh's trajectory of exile from China to Taiwan [and eventually] to the [US indeed] reads very much like her heroine's”, particularly the political factors in each region that engender their resettlement (170). Hence, it is unsurprising

⁹ Information about the death of Mulberry's father is only disclosed to readers in the last section of the novel. I will discuss this textual arrangement further in section three.

that most critics, in their textual analysis, have mistakenly approached the novel as a nativist tale that starts off in mainland China and finishes in America. In doing so, these scholars bifurcate Nieh's subject (Mulberry/Peach) into two clear-cut Eastern and Western absolutes – two divided personas with opposite traits – at the expense of the chronological order of the novel. They arbitrarily attribute Mulberry, who symbolizes mainland China and Taiwan, with purity and decency emblematic of a “virgin” – even though the novel paints no such innocent picture of her – while equating Peach, who embodies her land of settlement (as well as that of the author) in America, with crime, depravity and insanity typical of a “whore”. In Kenneth Hsien-yung Pai's (白先勇) well-known article “The Wandering Chinese”, the literary giant describes Mulberry as “an innocent girl from inland China” and deplores Peach as “a sexual monster who sleeps her way from the Midwest to New York” (210). Pai adds that “with all her traditional values and ethic shattered”, Peach soon sinks “to her spiritual nadir and becoming half-mad” (211). Deriding Peach as a “nymphomania[c]”, Leo Ou-fan Lee recapitulates Pai's derogatory remarks and laments that Peach has been “plunge[d] into a state of “moral and sexual anarchy”” (“On the Margins of the Chinese Discourse” 162). Yu-fang Cho also misconstrues Mulberry as “a guarded, submissive, compliant maiden” and Peach as “an aggressive, rebellious, and sexually uninhibited woman” in her article “Rewriting Exile, Remapping Empire, Re-membering Home” (158). In Shiao-ling Yu's “The Themes of Exile and Identity Crisis in Nie Hualing's Fiction”, the Asian studies scholar likewise abhors Peach as a woman “fall[ing] from grace ... with no sense of shame [and] no moral scruples about her actions” (142-143).¹⁰ It is apparent that this slanted

¹⁰ Other scholars who fall into this trap of misinterpretation include Monica Chiu, Kenny Kwok-kwan Ng and Shu-mei Shih. Chiu notes that “Mulberry/Peach's unhappy journey westward is a descent into madness”, as Peach merely “lives a life of sexual promiscuity ... [after being] liberated from a strict Chinese upbringing of sexual modesty” (3-9). To Ng, Mulberry is “the female victim who suffers from the double abuses of Chinese patriarchy and the opposite sex”, whereas Peach is “gratified in the New World by her erotic adventure in which she sleeps from man to man across the vast geographical continent of America” (134-135). In the brief analysis of *Mulberry*

East/West dichotomy foregrounds the degradation of Mulberry's morality (which is symptomatic of the ideological split between the two regimes of mainland China and Taiwan) *more than* the existence and survival strategy of Peach in America. The latter is demonized in the most superficial sense ever in order for these critics to retrace and recast the dignity of the Chinese nationhood (this result indeed echoes with what Chen Sihe and Li Li have been championing).¹¹ As such, it warrants intellectuals concerned to read *Mulberry and Peach*, in Pai's words, as a "fable of the tragic state of modern China" (210). While some treat the novel as "Chinese" literature or one that is "pro-People's Republic" like certain ardent scholars in mainland China have claimed (e.g. Li Kailing and Chen Zongshu, as stated in Sau-ling Cynthia Wong's insightful article "The Stakes of Textual Border-Crossing" (138)), Pai considers *Mulberry and Peach* as "Taiwanese" literature instead. The former acclaims it as "one of the most ambitious works to have come out of Taiwan" (210). In Pin-chia Feng's article "At Home and Elsewhere", she sees the English subtitle of *Mulberry and Peach* (translated by Jane Parish Yang and Linda Lappin in 1981) – "Two Women of China" – as bewildering because the protagonist has also established herself as a Taiwanese woman in the text (132). Feng's corrective remark has validated Pai's denomination of the novel to some extent at this juncture. Apart from them, I-ping Liang also describes in her article "Women, Maps, Empires" that *Mulberry and Peach* has "returned to its birthplace in Taiwan" following its republication on the island in 1997 (72).

Nevertheless, be it "Chinese" or "Taiwanese" literature, to forcibly squeeze *Mulberry and Peach* into either one of these Sinocentric literary divisions appears to be somewhat covetous, if not erroneous to me for a number of reasons. Firstly, the novel cannot claim full

and Peach provided by Shih in her article "Sinophone American literature", she also outlines that "Mulberry is decorous, reserved, chaste, and speaks Mandarin, while Peach is wild, free, sexual, and speaks English" (334).

¹¹ Regrettably, the misreadings of some Asian Americanists (due to the close affinity between the routes of Nieh and that of Mulberry/Peach) have also inadvertently contributed to this Sinocentric agenda.

membership in the Chinese literary canon (which consists of an undisputed core and a hierarchical structure that disparage the so-called “overseas Chinese” literature) because it was not initially published in mainland China. *Mulberry and Peach* was first serialized in Taiwan’s *United Daily News* in 1970, a year *before* the ROC government of Taiwan lost its legitimate United Nation seat in 1971. Despite that, the novel cannot be rightfully discerned as “Taiwanese” literature either because the serialization in Taiwan was banned by part Three for the story’s “veiled satire of the Nationalist regime and for [overt] “pornographic” accounts of Peach’s sex life” (Wong 132). It was both Ming Pao Monthly (香港明報月刊) and Youlian publisher (香港友聯出版社) in Hong Kong, “then a British colony caught in but not committed to either side of the Nationalist-Communist conflict”, that provided “the neutrality needed for [*Mulberry and Peach*] to first see the light of day in its entirety” (ibid). The former picked up the embargoed serialization while the latter enabled the intriguing narrative to take shape in book form (ibid). To the best of my knowledge, no one has ever discussed *Mulberry and Peach* under the rubric of Hong Kong literature.

On top of that, literati who adamantly regard *Mulberry and Peach* as “Chinese” and “Taiwanese” literature seem to have glossed over the fact that Nieh only began composing the novel some time around 1968 when she was already living in the US (Yan 18) – it was completed six years after her immigration to America. Some even turn a blind eye to the fact that the anglophone version of the novel, re-issued in full length by the Beacon Press of Boston in 1988, has won the 1990 American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation for *its contribution to American literature*.¹² If the Sinocentric classifications of the novel are predicated narrowly on the first three sections of which that detail Mulberry’s exilic journey in

¹² *The Forbidden Stitch* of Shirley Geok-lin Lim, a renowned Asian American author and scholar, also won the award in the same year together with Nieh.

Asia (strictly in mainland China and Taiwan, and perhaps because of these specific settings, the novel cannot be accepted as Hong Kong literature), then, by the same logic, *Mulberry and Peach* can also be regarded as an Asian American text. Not only because the final instalment of the novel likewise enlightens readers about Mulberry/Peach's distinguishing migrant experience in the US, designating the novel as "Asian American" literature is also corroborated by the extratextual factors mentioned above (hence more tenable than any Sinocentric label). To wit: the writing period and writing location of Nieh in the US, as well as the reputable book prize won by the said literary work, which collaboratively reinforce the novel's attachment and belonging to the (Asian) American literary canon.

On the one hand, in the annotated bibliography of Asian American literature published by King-kok Cheung and Stan Yogi (1988), both editors have catalogued *Mulberry and Peach* in the list of Chinese American literary works (Nieh indeed first migrated from mainland China) (46). On the other hand, they still refer to *Mulberry and Peach* as "an epistolary novel depicting the dual personalities of the heroine, *a Chinese woman in exile in America*" (ibid; emphasis added).¹³ The term "exile" is highly problematic here because, as Wong argues, "while the concept of exile appears to be centrifugal and border-transcending, it actually recuperates the notion of a legitimating political and cultural center" ("The Stakes of Textual Border-Crossing" 134). The italicized clause undoubtedly harks back to the "heroine's" purported origin in mainland China instead of illuminating her local experience and her determination to re-root in the adopted land. Ultimately, it only connotes the protagonist's "foreigner/outsider" identity in the US (because of her latent spiritual and psychological attachment to the former place). The editors' thumbnail sketch of the novel indeed lends credence to Sheng-mei Ma's rather defeatist

¹³ Jean Amato also treats the novel as "a 1970s overseas Chinese exile novel that Nieh Hualing wrote in the United States" (32).

assessment of *Mulberry and Peach*. He thinks of it as an “immigrant” text that corresponds to “C.T. Hsia’s infamous coinage of “obsession with China”” because it “amplifies ... Chinese ethnocentrism”, “clings desperately to the past” and “invalidates the possibility of fashioning a new immigrant identity” (47-51). The discourse of these Asian Americanists altogether has, again, opened the door for opportunistic Sinocentric scholars to whimsically displace Nieh’s production into other irreconcilable literary categories – only by corrupting the narrative. The question of how to read *Mulberry and Peach* as a bona fide Asian American novel – one that transposes the America-made Sinophone writing from its peripheral position in both the Asian American and Chinese/Taiwanese literary canons to a more rooted standing in the former category – then arises.

Critics obsessed with reading *Mulberry and Peach* as an allegorical tale that progresses linearly from mainland China to America have either passed over or made light of a number of significant aspects of the novel that qualify it to be read as a legitimate Asian American text, among them: 1) a nine-page prologue (xiezi, “楔子”) that recounts Peach’s audacious conversation with an INS officer in the US setting (which precedes all the four sections), and 2) Nieh’s insertion of a string of letters that criss-cross the narrative proper which has been segregated into “diary” form. Each section of the novel first opens with a taunting letter written by Peach about her exilic journey across the American continent (to avoid being prosecuted by the authority) before it leads readers to “Mulberry’s diary entries” (which take place discretely at the Yangtze River gorge, the city of Peking, the attic in Taipei and eventually, in America). Peach then posts these letters together with the sectional “diary” from various locations within the US to the INS officer in order to lure and exasperate the latter. Simply put, *Mulberry and Peach* does not commence with the narratives of China like how most scholars have based their

analysis on – the Sinophone novel begins with the account of America instead, and it continues to draw readers’ attention back to the US-setting at intervals. If we were to use the logic of Sinocentric critics, these intersecting episodes that portray Peach’s defiant actions in her new homeland should only be incorporated in the final portion of the text – after the titular figure’s successful escape from the Mercy hospital in Iowa (325). As Holly Martin points out, “Peach’s first letter in Part One is written after Mulberry’s last diary entry in Part Four” (351). Yet, because most critics insist on “deriv[ing] meaning solely from Chinese “origin”” (Wong 143), this preoccupation has deterred them from reflecting on the compelling reasons behind Nieh’s unwonted textual arrangement. Are the realignment and interspersing of these selected passages about America merely a rudderless effort that only aims to satiate the demand of aesthetic pleasure and serves no other practical function? What has been brought to light after the Asian American author shuffles the narrative order of her novel, one that steers readers to back-read the story?

In addition, Nieh could have assembled the prologue and the subsequent letters into an independent chapter and placed it at the exposition of the novel, which would likewise serve the purpose of disrupting the linearity of the narrative. However, the author has split the routes of Peach into parts, and slipped them separately and orderly in between the different segments of “Mulberry’s diary”. This obvious feature of the novel, particularly the affinity between the letter (in America) and the “diary” (about Asia) in the same section, has also yet to be dissected by reviewers. Apart from their inattention to the disposition of the prologue and the four letters (which should have been detected by critics earlier because their sequence remains the same in all the anglophone versions of *Mulberry and Peach* – published by New World Press in Beijing (1981), Beacon Press of Boston (1988) and the Feminist Press at the City University of New

York (1998) – as well as in *Sangqing Yu Taohong* circulated in mainland China. Even the incomplete serialization in Taiwan's *United Daily News* also starts off with the prologue and a letter about America), no one has ever questioned the existence and the authorship of the so-called “diary” either (also known as “notebook” in the anglophone editions): is it really written by Mulberry? Taking the first section of the novel as example, it is inconceivable that Mulberry's “diary” could remain intact during wartime when the jade griffin, arguably more solid than her “diary”, has already been broken into half on the grounded boat (86). It is even harder to imagine that Mulberry could still retain her sanity and muster enough strength to illustrate, with clarity, her own feelings as well as her soul-searching interaction with the rest of the boat passengers in her “diary” after she has been starving for days (63) and suffering from hallucination (69). Besides, throughout the descriptions of her arduous journey from inland China to America, Mulberry does not once reveal that she has been keeping a diary with her. Hence, it is imperative to ask: whose words are those? I argue that the subsequent “diary entries” that chronicle Mulberry's movement and displacement in Asia do not exactly belong to Mulberry – they are written by Peach in the hostile American society amid seeking refuge.

2.2 Reading the Novel from the Setting of America back to Asia

On a positive note, relocating the American scenes to the outset of *Mulberry and Peach* permits readers to identify two salient and inseparable possibilities which are typical of migrant writings at large (yet have been deliberately neglected by genocentric and Sinocentric scholars): first, it is the living conditions of Peach in the receiving country, particularly the political situation of America, that become her incentives and motivate Peach to write back to Mulberry's previous homelands. Second, Peach has drawn on her local experience, namely the cultural

practices and values in the US, in her back-writing to depict the Asian women in mainland China and Taiwan in a good light. Mulberry herself is also a fictional character created by Peach in her back-writing. These two facts that emerge from the nonlinear narrative form of the novel have undeniably brought the presence of the migrant author's adopted land (America), particularly its potential impact on one's literary production to the fore. It is only logical that I first examine the local experience of Peach as a migrant in America and the socio-political factors that stimulate her to write back to Asia before I point out the similarity and interconnection between the American and Asian scenes in *Mulberry and Peach* (in the following subsection).

The prologue unfolds with a mysterious INS bureaucrat checking up on Peach in her bedraggled, comfortless room in America, in which there is no furniture while heaps of clothing, paper boxes, beer cans, newspapers and paints are scattered around the room (1-2). The disorderliness of her residence is symptomatic of Peach's inability to settle down in her present homeland due to the constant threat of deportation imposed by the US administration, as the ever-present INS officer(s) symbolizes. The latter turns up abruptly to interrogate Peach about the details in a form filed by Mulberry earlier on for the application of permanent residency. During their heated exchange, his confining questions forcefully lump Peach and Mulberry together (ibid; 7-8), thereby reducing the identity of an Asian American immigrant to that of a mainland Chinese woman despite Peach's constant refutations – a clear sign that the US authority has been apathetic about the ideological differences between localized Chinese Americans and sojourners who (still) harbor a stronger sense of belonging to mainland China, if not the diversities among the so-called “Chinese diasporas”. What demands readers to pay a closer look at this unnamed “man from the Immigration Service” is that apart from sporting a dark suit and a black tie, he has put on a pair of dark sunglasses – even though “the day is

overcast” – to “disguise the only distinguishing part of his face: eyebrows, eyes and the bridge of his nose”, exposing only the anonymous parts such as his bald head and sharp chin to Peach (1). On one hand, his entire outfit displays the professionalism and formality required of government officers. On the other hand, the anonymity of the INS agent, particularly his insistence on wearing his sunglasses even after the protagonist has allowed him into her room (2; 6), also spells his desire to flaunt the superiority of his social class and more importantly, his (the dominant race’s) animosity towards an ethnic minority woman. The fact that the shades can prevent Peach from knowing which direction the INS officer is looking at enables the latter to maintain his authoritative male position and to keep his distance from the immigrant woman whom he seeks to expel. As Monica Chiu elaborates in her article “Trauma and Multiplicity in Nieh’s *Mulberry and Peach*”, the pursuer’s uniform “does not distinguish between one agent or another, melding separate offices into a single institution, stitching together law, ... government, and ultimately *patriarchy* through the sartorial” (10; emphasis added). Throughout the whole scene, the pursuer has been standing and facing downward at Peach (who is sitting on the floor) as they communicate, like a swollen-headed superior giving order to his underling despite the fact that Peach has kindly invited him to take a seat (“桃紅…拍拍身邊的地板。“請坐吧！””) (2). He is unable to humble himself in a woman’s space. The agent’s refusal to sit on par with his generous hostess indeed betrays his sense of male chauvinism.

Given the oppressive environment in America as reflected by the condescending manner of the official, it is no wonder that Nieh has set the loud and piercing cry of Peach (instead of a breathy one) to be the first line of the novel – “I am not Mulberry! Mulberry is dead!” (“我不叫桑青！桑青已經死了！””) (1). It shows Peach exercising, if not reclaiming her power of speech (endowed by the author of course) to negate the misnomer for her, which can be read as her first

step to reformulate her own identity. As Veronica Wang puts it in her article about “Chinese-American woman’s quest for identity”, “[i]n finding herself, [an Asian American woman] must, first of all, find her own voice” (27). Evidently, Peach’s deafening exclamation here has triumphed over the restriction of self-expression inflicted on Asian women in both traditional Chinese and American culture. While feudal Chinese customs demand Asian women to “keep a quiet tongue in the presence of her man”, the “faces” of Asian American women are often perceived by Anglo Americans as shy and “utterly void of expression that [the latter] cannot help but doubt” – as described in the writings of Sui Sin Far.¹⁴ Resisting the acceptable attitude of silence and compliance expected of Asian women in America, Peach’s defensive opening lines that take place right before the antagonistic agent exerts his verbal bullying immediately foretell readers that what they are reading is indeed a feminist text, one that is mapped out from the perspective of an Asian American woman (even though many have arbitrarily read the novel as “nation-serving master narratives” (Wong 138)).

To counteract the unreasonable male pressure of the domineering INS investigator, Peach has scribbled a hodgepodge of subversive and inflammatory words on the walls in her apartment in order to provoke the patriarchal figure when he eventually shows up. These contentious verses in stanza form not only pronounce Peach’s adoption of certain western feminist ideals, they also attest to her self-proclaimed American identity, among them: “A flower but not a flower/ I am the flower/ Mist yet not mist/ I am the mist/ I am Everything” (“花非花/ 我即花/ 霧非霧/ 我即霧/ 我即萬物”); “When women grow beards/ and men bear children/ the world will be at

¹⁴ See Sui Sin Far’s (also known as Edith Maude Eaton) “The Wisdom of the New” and “Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian” in her *Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Other Writings* edited by Amy Ling and Annette White-Parks.

peace” (“女生鬚/ 男生子/ 天下太平矣”); “The head is connected to the thighs/ Genitals grow out of the neck/ normal people” (“頭生腿間/ 陰部生頸上/ 正常的人”) (2-4).

As Su-ching Huang highlights in her article “Female Nomadology” in *Mobile Homes*, much of these controversial lines speak of Peach’s “rebellion against patriarchy” and “its accomplices” (49), by relegating men to the servile role of baby-making machine in which women have been narrowly defined for instance. The hyperbolic description of “women grow[ing] beards” is a sign of Peach trespassing male domain and impinging on male prerogatives. Furthermore, one of the poetic verses also pinpoints Peach’s reluctance to be confined to any kind of vulnerable, sub-human and obscure position purposely constructed for Asian American women, as the imagery of flower and mist indicates. The former evokes the lasting stereotype of Asian American women as “Lotus Blossom Baby”, who has often been portrayed in American cinema as “utterly feminine, delicate, and welcome respites from their often loud, independent American counterparts” (Tajima 309). Yet according to Peach, the traits of Asian American women clearly shine beyond this simplistic fantasy and the victim image conjured up by the dominant race – instead they are “Everything” that one can ever think of. The capitalization of the letter ‘E’ in the English translation (1998) by Yang and Lappin fully captures and foregrounds what Peach intends to convey – that the potential of Asian American women is indeed infinite. Even if an Asian American woman is powerless in confronting the patriarchal forces that suppress her, it should be completely up to her choosing to define herself in her own terms, hence the repetition of “I am” (“我即”) that emphasizes her individual autonomy and freedom of articulation; these qualities are part of the American ideals as well. Moreover, Peach also throws the structure of human body into disarray with a stroke of her pen in order to discredit the stereotypical perception that Asian American women are merely passive

objects (e.g. China doll and Geisha Girl) created for the visual and physical pleasure of men. The position of one's "head" – that holds the beauty of female faces – and "genitals" – that provide sexual pleasure to men – are out of place in her doodle.

The body, as Mary Douglas and Susan Bordo argue, "is a powerful symbolic form, a surface on which the central rules, hierarchies, and even metaphysical commitments of a culture are inscribed and thus reinforced through the concrete language of the body" ("The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity" 90). Therefore, on a more profound level, the dislocation of the normative structures of the body in Peach's scribble also bespeaks the protagonist's firm repudiation of the "central rules" and "hierarchies" inscribed on the "docile body" (Foucault's terms) (91). Arguably, one of the most common and forceful patriarchal "rules" that "have glided so silently into the foundations of our thought" is what Adrienne Rich calls "compulsory heterosexuality", one that serves as the "beachhead of male dominance" because it stipulates that one's body is only allowed to be attracted to the bodies of the opposite sex, which, however, merely reflects "male needs, male fantasies about women, and male interest in controlling women" (633-637). Otherwise, the body is despised as deviant, "unnatural" and "abnormal". In this context, by writing about living bodies whose (sex) organs have been out of their naturally mandated spots and calling them as "normal" or belonging to "normal people", Peach not only renounces the heteronormative codes inscribed on every body by patriarchal culture, she is concurrently exposing the existence of and setting up a new cultural standard of "normal[cy]" for – alternative forms of sexuality and sexual orientations that fall outside the heterosexual framework. In doing so, Peach's writing on the wall also explodes the restrictive assumption that from anatomy follows gender, sex and sexuality. This fluidity between sex, sexuality and gender resurfaces in the first letter Peach sends to the INS officer when she is on the run. In the letter

that details her hitchhiking experience, Peach records that the car that picks her up has already been “filled with all kinds of people: white, black, yellow” (15). However, she is “unable to differentiate the male passengers from the women because all of them are having such long hair” (ibid), which once again underlines the distinction between one’s sex and gender identity.

To strengthen her localized identity as Peach and further reject the diasporic/Chinese identity of Mulberry that forced upon her, the protagonist has made an influential statement to the INS officer during their war of words:

You are wrong. Mulberry is Mulberry and Peach is Peach. They are not the same at all. Their thoughts, manners, interests, and even the way they look are entirely different. For example, Mulberry was an abstainer but I am a drinker. She was fearful of blood, animals and flashing lights. I am not afraid of those things. Mulberry shut herself at home and kept sighing. I go everywhere, looking for thrills ... Sometimes Mulberry wanted to die, sometimes she wanted to live. In the end she died. I would never do that. Mulberry was full of illusions; I don’t have any ... Even if the sky fell and the world turned upside down, I still wouldn’t give up. I want to live. (“不對。桑青是桑青。桃紅是桃紅。完全不同。想法，作風，嗜好，甚至外表都不同。就說些小事吧。桑青不喝酒；我喝酒。桑青怕血，怕動物，怕閃光；那些我全不怕。桑青關在家裡唉聲嘆氣；我可要到外面去尋歡作樂 ... 桑青要死要活，臨了還是死了；我是不甘心死的。桑青有幻覺；我沒有幻覺 ... 不管天翻地覆，我是要好好活下去的。”) (7-8)

In her lengthy clarification, Peach has patently set herself apart from the Asian woman by contrasting Mulberry's coward, submissive and introverted attributes with her own outgoing, recalcitrant and persevering character. To expand their stark differences, Peach goes on to unbutton her blouse and exposes her breasts to the INS investigator as she rolls on the floor after lighting a cigarette (8). In doing so, Peach not only exhibits her audacity that is absent in Mulberry and inexcusable in Asian custom (which likewise signifies her isolation from the inhibited lifestyle of Chinese women)¹⁵, the protagonist is also simultaneously redeeming the female body that has historically been mistreated by men as an object of their masculine desire (the male gaze) or as their charming possession. The fact that the INS agent persistently demands Peach (though calling her as "Mulberry") to "mind her outrageous manners" (ibid) even though his gazes are hidden behind a pair of shades is a case in point – his words only unmasks his instinctive sexualization of her female body and his failure to contain his male sexual urges. Instead of passively condoning his oppressive framing of her body as belonging to an undesirable intruder (Mulberry) unwanted in America, Peach overturns the power structure of man being the perpetual master controlling and enslaving the body of woman – by taking charge of her own body, transforming it into a political tool and directing it to seduce the bureaucrat based on her own will. Peach continues to titillate her pursuer who turns away to close the window by singing that "wind should blow [and] water should flow" (ibid). She also adds that "even if [she] button[s] up [her] blouse, [she is] still naked inside" (ibid). The phrase "water should flow and you can't stop it" (ibid) is somehow emblematic of the natural excretion of her arousal fluid and by extension, her sexual need, which is also a sign of Peach espousing the beliefs of the sexual liberation movement in the 1960s (the sexual revolution had just begun by

¹⁵ Excessive display is a "taboo" for women, as noted in Sandra Lee Bartky's article "Foucault, Femininity and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power" (136).

the time Nieh and Peach arrived (or born again) in the US). Peach's entire discourse certainly functions to undermine the serious mission and the imperious command of the INS agent, turning them into a steamy banter to show that his investigation is really uncalled for in the first place. Failing to overcome her agency and strategy, the officer gives in to the protagonist's assertion – he is willing to address her as 'Peach' at long last. Speaking in a resigned and trembling tone, he implores Peach to cooperate by sharing every detail she knows about Mulberry with him (“移民局的人在風裡打著哆嗦。 “你既然是桃紅，我需要你的合作。請你把桑青的事講給我聽。”) (8-9).

Suffice to say for now that it is – partly – at the request of the INS officer in America that Peach writes back to Mulberry's homelands in mainland China and Taiwan, hence the sensible arrangement of the latter settings in the subsequent sections of the novel. In addition, had the skeptical INS agent really been convinced that Peach and Mulberry are not the same, he would not have asked the former to reveal more information about Mulberry (possibly for himself to argue against the case). Realizing his wariness, Peach continues to play along with (instead of rejecting) the demand of the investigator in order to outsmart him even though she has decided to leave her apartment and chart her own routes in America. She seizes the opportunity provided by the agent only to further exhibit and verify her own Asian American sensibilities and identity in her narrative about Mulberry's life in Asia. Underpinning her back-writing is the hope to be approved of as an “insider” and as part of the “national”; as well as to move from the periphery of American society – where Peach has been seen as an outcast – to a more central and rooted position in it. The prologue thus refutes the sweeping generalization Chen Sihe and Li Li have made about migrant writers and their writings based on their own fervent patriotism to the PRC (as discussed in the previous section) – Peach does not write back to Asia on the basis of

“continuity” (Peach is the sole creator of “Mulberry’s diary” where she only produces it in America). Neither is her initiative triggered by the “lived experience of [Mulberry in her] motherland[s]” nor any “sense of guilt” over separating and betraying the Chinese nation-state. Rather, as the prologue informs us, the backward gaze of Peach is necessitated wholly and fundamentally by the “here and now” in the US (her present homeland), namely the urgency to attend to the political threat of expulsion and the continual suspicion of her Asian American identity by the authority of the non-Chinese soil the protagonist has chosen to put down roots. Readings that suggest Peach’s (or Nieh’s) decision to write back to Asia is firmly born out of her own sense of loss, nostalgia and displacement instigated by resettlement or interpret it as a mere manifestation of her “Chinese” spiritual crisis due to the internal strife that leads to the separation of the nation-states – have blatantly neglected the place-based struggles and challenges faced by Asian American communities, particularly their specific history of resistance and advocacy for racial and ethnic equality since the 1960s.

Moreover, if readers had read the novel more closely and objectively without focusing solely on the (hypothetical) wounded pride of China, they would have perceived that the characterization of Mulberry in Peach’s back-writing has indeed strayed away from her initial description of Mulberry’s obedient personality cited in the foregoing paragraph. Up to the present, no critic has ever looked into this inconsistency and contradiction. For instance, Mulberry does not turn out as a teetotaler like how Peach has reported to the agent. The so-called timid and conservative maiden has already had the first taste of liquor when she is trapped on the boat in inland China, during which she “gulps down several swallow in one breath” that causes “her face to burn and her heart to pound” (“我骨碌一口氣喝了好幾口酒。我第一次喝酒。臉燒起來了。心跳起來了。”) (75). Despite that, the sensation does not stop Mulberry

from drinking; she continues to indulge in alcohol after taking the first sip (78). By right in her “new” homeland, Peach should have been able to conclude the unruly traits and habits of Mulberry with precision (if the story had progressed from mainland China to America), considering that Peach is just a “rebirth” of the Asian woman in the US who has shared the same life in Asia and has been writing the same diary. This incompatibility of information not only calls into question the process time and authorship of the “diary”, it also disproves any reading approach that mythicizes the story as originating from mainland China, if not predetermines the Chinese nation as the only center and more ridiculously, the “root” of the so-called “Chinese diaspora”. Besides, the astonishing and victorious transformation of Mulberry into a free-spirited woman (like Peach) in the subsequent chapters also does not sound in tune with the traumatic split of modern China that serves as the backdrop of the story. Mulberry's forthrightness and the autonomy she enjoys in the US stands out when juxtaposed against the exploitation of the disadvantaged female characters in the war-torn Chinese settings. For instance, in Chapter Two of the novel, Hsing-hsing, a lively and seductive girl living in Peking, has confided in Mulberry that she is indeed full of admiration for her independence and mobility: “I really envy you. You came up here to the North all by yourself ... I’ve never been to the South, but I really want to go. When I think of the South, I think of willow trees” (“我真羨慕你，你可以一人從南方跑到北方... 我從來沒到過南方。我一直想到南方去。我一想到南方就想到柳樹。”) (122). Evidently, as Peach writes *back* about her “original” homeland, she has also integrated her own roaming experience in America to illustrate the trajectory of Mulberry, particularly her freedom to traverse from one city to another without any patriarchal constraint and the company of a male figure, which only goes against the common practice of the Chinese women in the novel. To grasp the discrepancy between the inferior and diffident character of Mulberry in Peach’s initial

description of her with Mulberry's (actual) liberal lifestyle and nonconformist behaviors that arise later in the novel, we have to refer back to the interaction between Peach and the INS officer in the prologue, which once again draws attention to the necessity and accuracy to acknowledge the American scenes in the beginning parts of the novel as the starting point of the Sinophone novel.

It is unfortunate that even though Peach has offered plenty of persuasion to the INS investigator in assuring him of her American identity, towards the end of the prologue, the officer still tacitly treats the Asian American woman with the same degree of male superiority and chauvinism he has implemented to dispirit 'Mulberry' earlier on. This is most obvious when the bureaucrat continues to cover his vision even though he is in a rather lowly position where he must seek permission from Peach to use her bathroom. Amid his request, his sunglasses gradually slide down his nose and disclose his thick eyebrows. Despite that, his eyes remain concealed (“兩片大墨鏡在鼻樑上溜下去了，露出兩叢濃黑的眉毛。仍然看不見他的眼睛。”) (9). Apparently prior to this scene, the investigator has already come across an erotic painting hung by Peach that illustrates the death of Mulberry in her patriarchal homelands. The drawing portrays a “gigantic, swollen penis standing like a pillar on the floor, with a butterfly bow tied around the glans while rose petals are strewn around it” (6). There is a card dangling from the bow in the picture that reads: “Happy Deathday Mulberry” (“桑青千古”) (ibid). As Pai argues, the “enormous phallus [indeed] serves as a tombstone” for Mulberry's “symbolic death” (210).

However, what Pai does not state further is that the firmly rooted position of the penis and its distinctive, solemn decoration also symbolize masculine authority and honor; the latter seems to justify male aggression as “appropriate” and “necessary”. Thus, by burying Mulberry

under the penis, this action signifies nothing less than male domination over women. Despite Peach's objective to remind the INS agent that Mulberry has already been oppressed to death by the phallocentric culture in her "original" homeland (hence he should stop summoning the deceased in America), if we read the drawing from the officer's perspective, the phallic symbol burying Mulberry indeed seems to support and concur with his preceding supercilious demeanor towards the said "Asian woman". Therefore, when the agent re-enforces the same haughty actions on Peach – particularly his insistence on hiding the prominent features of his face from the protagonist – even after he has compromised to call her by her American name, it only gives readers the impression that the American man is simply capitalizing on the hierarchical and patriarchal system in Asia (which has successfully subjugated Mulberry) to exert similar form of emotional pressure and male dominion on the only Asian American woman in the novel. In doing so, the INS officer is metaphorically coercing his new countrywoman to accept her dominated fate like Mulberry and to submit to the absolute patriarchal rules and power in her present homeland. The incessant patronizing attitude of the official surely reflects what has been remarked in *Making Waves* published by Asian Women United of California in 1989:

Asian American women have fought actively against racial stereotyping. And throughout their history they have struggled for what they believed was the best for their families, their communities, and their own survival. Sometimes Asian culture – with its traditional relegation of women to inferior status – has contributed to the difficulties of this struggle. The dominant culture magnified this characteristic in its own stereotypes and came to expect Asian immigrants to accept, not resist, injustices. (347)

Different from Julia Kristeva's postulation in her French article "La Femme, ce n'est jamais ça" ("Woman can never be defined") in which she states that "the problems [confronting] Chinese women ... have nothing to do with the problems of Western women" (139-140), Nieh's writing demolishes Kristeva's stereotypical binary division (that implicitly sets "Third-world abjection" against "First-world progress") by demonstrating to readers that the "inferior status" of Asian women (Mulberry) in the East has indeed impacted, if not taken a heavy toll on the everyday life of Asian American women (Peach) in the West – particularly the latter's endeavor to lay claim to America. This means that in order for Peach to solidify her Asian American identity and to enhance her migrant life in the US, one of the pressing issues she must deal with is to revamp the image of Asian women (in the eyes of American men), especially that of Mulberry whose tragic demise has shored up and re-ignited the INS agent's desire to continue subdue the protagonist. This episode here fully encapsulates Shih's contention that "a Chinese American can [still] be critical of China and the United States" even upon "re-rooting", as the issue at hand – the intersection of racial and gender discrimination in Asian America – has indeed been underpinned by the social norms in Asia.

Thus, in her back-narration, Peach has written *against* the Orientalist perception of Asian women as weak, unguarded, always being victimized and eager to conform to the patriarchal demands of their controlling male counterpart in Asia. It makes clear the statement made by Peach in the letter she delivers to the INS officer, in which the Asian American woman explains that "[she] even knows things about Mulberry which [the Asian woman] didn't even know or remember" ("甚至她自己不知道、不記得的事，我也知道。") (19). This is because Peach has borrowed her local experience (as a migrant) in America, namely the western feminist ideals she has been practising to hit back at the INS officer (which of course are unbeknown to

Mulberry), to remodel the images of the female characters in mainland China and Taiwan. The latter has been shaped into strong-willed and independent figures who are ready to “resist, [not accept,] injustices” and male supremacy. Indeed, if Peach were to write solely about the differences between Mulberry and herself, particularly in terms of their traits, it would just send the wrong message to readers that she was only trying to preserve Asian (patriarchal) cultures and to uphold her exilic identity. This would also contradict with her own resolution to re-root and “start anew” in America which she has uttered to the driver who gave her a lift (“回來重新開始”) (16). Whereas by employing the liberal beliefs Peach has adopted in the US into her back-writing, it will undoubtedly evoke a sense of situatedness that proves her Asian American subjectivity and her sense of belonging to the present homeland to the INS officer. Since the restorative writing itself is time-consuming and intellectually demanding, it is impossible for Peach to provide the details needed by the official in one go. Therefore, upon leaving her apartment, Peach has composed the so-called “diary” in stages and posted them separately to the agent during her escape.

2.3 Rewriting the Images of Asian Women with Asian American Sensibilities

In the first section of the novel that takes place at the Yangtze River gorge, Peach starts by laying bare to readers the traditionally patriarchal and hierarchical Chinese society in which Chinese men generally occupy a higher status. According to Peach, there is a precious jade griffin in Mulberry’s family that serves as the family heirloom. However, this object has only been passed down to the men in the household – from Mulberry’s great-grandfather and grandfather to her father and brother (24-25). Even though Mulberry is the elder daughter in her generation, she is not entitled to inherit the jade. In fact, she is “not even allowed to touch it”

(25). Because of that, Mulberry “used to get so upset and would cry for hours” (ibid). Her mother has once locked her up in a dark attic after she wore the heirloom sneakily and accidentally chipped one of its wings (ibid).

Just when readers thought Mulberry would kowtow to the patriarchal order and put up with her subordinate status in the family after being penalized by her mother, the Asian woman has stolen the jade griffin and run away from the house (24). Evidently, Peach has shaped Mulberry into a feisty and wilful character in accordance with one of the verses she has written on the wall in her American apartment: “When women grow beards/ ... the world will be at peace” (3), which suggests women staking their claim to the advantages and special rights restricted only to men as interpreted earlier. Mulberry’s retaliation here – to retrieve what she has been unjustifiably dispossessed of due to her sex – indeed strikes common chords with the essence of the phrase composed by Peach, for Mulberry has only run off with the griffin which will be bequeathed to her younger brother – not with any other assets kept alongside with the relic “on her mother’s dresser” (25). Her outrageous escape also rebuts downright what Peach has recounted to the INS agent beforehand, that Mulberry only prefers to “shut herself at home and [keeps] sighing” (7). It turns out that the Asian woman has refused to just sit back and mourn like a damsel in distress in the face of such a misogynistic culture that puts men before women. Since her mother is also complicit in perpetuating this sexist custom that centralizes men, it is not surprising that Mulberry has decided to take matters into her own hands and invade the male space of privilege that shuts women out. Clearly, upon exposing the plight and predicament of women in traditional Chinese society, Peach has resorted to her own migrant experience in America to deconstruct the victimhood of Mulberry. Instead of representing the centuries-old doll-like and victimized image of Asian women to the INS agent (which would only further

stiffen his stereotypes), Peach has reconstructed Mulberry into an aggressor in order to avenge and overthrow the gender bias which has been besetting Asian women.

Like how Peach has reclaimed her power of speech to wrangle with the officer over her Asian American identity, Mulberry also regains her own voice to speak out against whatever form of restraint and injustice she encounters throughout her escape route to Chungking. Among the passengers voyaging with Mulberry, Peach has invented a conservative old man from Peiping who revels in foisting his patriarchal convictions on other youthful refugees. Similar to the pompous official in America, this opinionated old man is unnamed as well. Not only has he commanded the refugees on deck to remain attired (“男人不准打赤膊；女人不准敞胸露背”) and stay put in their respective “dormitory” in order to adhere to the conventional code that “men and women shouldn’t mix” (“男女授受不親”) (42), the elder has also repeatedly produced spiteful remarks that belittle women, such as the old Chinese cliché that “it’s a great virtue for a woman to be without talent” (“女子無才便是德”) (48). Unable to withstand the disobedience, if not the independence of Mulberry, the testy old man goes on to threaten her that he will “inform her father to come get [her] and drag [her] home” (“你非回去不可！我要通知你爸爸，叫他把 你押回去！”) (53). Yet Mulberry is not taken aback by his radical rules and vehement cry. Instead of buying his high-handed jargon meekly and holding her tongue slavishly with which Asian women are expected to behave, Mulberry boldly retorts the old man that “[y]ou don’t even know my family’s address!” (“你不知道我家的地址！”) (ibid). The old man is enraged by her quick-witted response and ends up coughing painfully (ibid).

Apart from being able to express herself smoothly in the presence of men and stand up to their verbal assault in Peach’s narrative – which certainly resonates with the self-assurance and assertiveness exhibited by the Asian American woman during her rancorous dispute with the INS

bureaucrat in the prologue – Mulberry is also seen deploying her freedom of articulation endowed by Peach to openly talk about the sensitive and taboo subjects that spring to her mind. For instance, the impotent penis of her father, which is arguably a red line that “an innocent [Asian] girl” (Pai’s description of Mulberry) must not cross. During her conversation with Lao-shih, Mulberry has shed the problematic reticence required of Asian women and confided in her bosom friend that “her father has wounded his “vital part” [namely his genitals] during the campaign against the warlord” (“你自己說的，你爸爸當軍閥時候打仗傷了要害”) (23). It is astounding that Mulberry does not find it necessary to repress or whisper about this risqué detail of her father in order to maintain her modest image. When Lao-shih expresses her approval of her ally’s readiness “to talk about her father’s reproductive organ” (“女兒談談爸爸的生殖器有什麼關係？”), Mulberry also laughs at her own forwardness enthusiastically (“我自己也笑起來了”) (24). The tone of their unfiltered ribald dialogue in inland China does bear some semblance to the sexual repartee of Peach in America, e.g. “wind should blow, water should flow” and “even if I button up my blouse, I am still naked inside” (8). While the emasculation of Mulberry’s father can be read as a metaphor of dismantling the masculine authority of Asian men that suppresses women (which can alternatively be deciphered as Peach’s benevolent intention to recompense the death of Mulberry in her painting in which a hard-on penis has served as her tombstone), by airing the embarrassing failing of her father to another woman, Mulberry’s discourse is also seemingly taking a stand against the first precept of the “Three Obediences and Four Virtues” (sancong side, “三從四德”) derived from Confucianism – which prescribes that a Chinese woman must obey her father at home as stated in Judy Yung’s *Unbound Voices* (103). After all, according to Lao-shih, the patriarch has not once stood up to his brutal wife for ill-treating his daughter (23).

The fact that Mulberry has repeatedly dreamed about herself getting married with the student refugee and building their own family in the back-writing of *Peach* also draws parallels with the Asian American woman's denial to be reduced to any kind of vulnerable, shadowy and subservient position in a male-dominated society as indicated in her scribbles – “A flower but not a flower” and “Mist yet not Mist” (2-3). In her first dream, Mulberry acknowledges the student refugee as the “father” of her child (“他就是孩子的爸爸。”) (28). However, during their wedding ceremony that shows up in her subsequent dream, the bridal sedan is transported to Mulberry instead. Mulberry instantly “runs out of her house to lift up the curtain of the sedan and much to [her] surprise, the student refugee is sitting inside of it” (“花轎在我窗前停下來了。我跑出去掀起花轎的門帘子，坐在裏面的竟是流亡學生！”) (ibid). In my opinion, Mulberry's dreams (devised by *Peach*) are unquestionably a forthright attack on the prevailing patriarchal practice that perceives women as, in Luce Irigaray's (a French feminist scholar) words, “a use-value for man, an exchange value among men; in other words, a commodity” (31). By right in traditional Chinese custom, the heavily-curtained sedan chair is used to pick up the brides (the women) from her house and send her to the residence of the groom's family. The groom will then kick the carriage three times upon her arrival. Such action not only symbolizes that the man has successfully wedded the bride, it also simultaneously signals to the sheltered woman that she is in bondage to the groom and his family now. It is common that most women in feudal Chinese society do not have a say in their marriage at all, for their betrothals are usually liaised between the male figures in both families. Unfortunately, even during the wedding ceremony, the bride is to remain in her usual passive position and await the actions from the groom. Perhaps the only difference is that she has been converted from being the property of her father and brothers – to the property of her husband and her parents-in-law. To protest against this form of absolute male

dominance over women, Peach has reversed the role of Mulberry and that of the student refugee during their wedding ceremony in her back-writing. It turns out that Mulberry is the one who receives the sedan, and by extension, the shielded student refugee *into* her family. In other words, Peach has lifted Mulberry out of the “established commerce” between men (Irigaray 32), if not the encumbrance of tradition that tie the hands of Asian women, and restored her to a much more flexible, autonomous and prominent position than the Asian man. This series of actions irrefutably chimes with the notion of elevating the status of women embedded in Peach’s doodles. The Asian woman can no longer be devalued as the property of man – she has become the active ‘owner’ who calls the shots.

At this stage, we can be certain that Peach has created a number of supporting characters in her narrative to help foreground the aggressive and unrelenting personality of Mulberry to the officer. While Peach tends to pit Mulberry against the Asian men in her community, the Asian American woman has also composed a few female characters who have continuously given assistance to Mulberry and fired her with enthusiasm for change throughout her exilic journey, such as Lao-shih, despite the fact that the INS agent has not solicited Peach for their information. These additional portrayals recapitulate the fact that Peach is not at the service of the government official in her back-writing – she is more concerned with recuperating the images of Asian women at large which have borne upon her migrant life in the US instead of falling into the trap (set up by the agent) of re-claiming the past. If we read the novel meticulously, we will discover that Peach has likewise infused some of her liberal and progressive ideals (her Asian American experience) into her characterization of these supporting characters in Asia. For example, despite the fact that Shih-dan (“史丹”) (Lao-shih’s original name) is only two years older than Mulberry, she has demanded the latter to address her in an offbeat fashion: by adding the adjective “lao”

(老) – which connotes seniority – to the front of her family name “Shih” (“(我十六。她十八。她偏偏要我叫她老史！)”) (21). Lao-shih’s insistence to be called in the respectable manner she desires undeniably echoes with the implication of the repetition of “I am” in Peach’s verses (3), namely the freedom of women to define herself in her own terms. Lao-shih’s forcefulness is evocative of the strident statement made by Peach in the beginning of the novel as well: “I am not Mulberry! Mulberry is dead!” (1).

Moreover, the conduct and dressing style of Lao-shih also restate Peach’s avant-garde idea (in the 1970s) of treating gender as a spectrum while opposing the equivalence between sex and gender identity as I have put forward above. For instance, instead of carrying herself in specific feminine ways, Lao-shih “wears a tight bra and tries to flatten her breasts [even though] they are as large as two hunks of steamed bread” (“(她用緊身背心把胸脯繃得平平的。其實，她的胸脯像兩個小饅頭。)”) (ibid). Her masculinized appearance surely clashes with, if not breaks beyond the inscribed attributes of the female body. In addition, Lao-shih has also taken on some of the physical traits of the male body, such as the habit of patting her (flat) chest when she speaks to Mulberry (ibid). Similar to the gender expressions of the passengers encountered by Peach in America (which befuddle her) when she hitchhikes (15), the ways in which Lao-shih displays her gender identity in mainland China also do not match up with her sex at all – the fixed category that has been assigned to Lao-shih at birth. These depictions indeed function to alert the INS agent to the falsehood of stereotyping the gender identity of Asian women as homogeneous and static, one that keeps them within the “proper” boundaries so that the dominant males can continue to exploit them (after all the INS officer also tends to follow suit such mistreatment of women).

Other than reiterating the fluidity between sex and gender, Peach has also painted Lao-shih as a lesbian figure in her narrative. Writing against the institution of heterosexuality, this strategy mirrors perfectly her own normativization of alternative sexualities as reflected in her scribble analyzed above: “The head is connected to the thighs/ Genitals grow out of the neck/ normal people” (3). In the text, Peach has employed the verb “elope” (“私奔”) to denote the rough crossing of Lao-shih and Mulberry on the Yangtze River gorge (21). Even though both of these Asian women are not united in wedlock by the end of section one, Lao-shih and Mulberry have repeatedly fondled and flirted with each other in front of other passengers on the grounded boat – from “scratching” and “tickling” (47) to “rolling” on the bunk after they “press their faces together [and] curl their legs round one another” (“她 … 抱着我在舖上滾，臉擦臉，腿擦腿，滾過來，滾過去。”) (78-79). While their unreserved erotic actions may be an anathema to some readers, we cannot disregard the truth that it is on the advice of Lao-shih that Mulberry has mustered enough courage to persist with her journey away from home.

When Mulberry is on the verge of tears, during which she begins to doubt the righteousness of her sudden disappearance from her family and becomes guilty of her theft (23-26), Lao-shih willingly lends an ear to Mulberry and attempts to appease her apprehension and self-reproach. Apart from applauding Mulberry’s defiant act of stealing the heirloom and running off from her patriarchal household, which, according to Lao-shih, will also prompt Mulberry’s violent mother to reflect on her unsympathetic “patriarchal bargain” (“小桑，我認為你偷得好！ … 痛快！你媽媽受了這個刺激，也該反省一下，做個好女人了！”) (26), the caring lesbian character also cautions Mulberry about the punishment she will face once she gives up her transgressive plan and returns home: “Your mother won’t forgive you. You know when she was drunk, she would beat you for no reason, until you bled. She will kill you if you go back

now” (“你回去了還有好日子過嗎？你媽媽也不會饒你呀！她無緣無故都會借酒發瘋，把你的腳後跟打得皮破血流；現在你和我一起跑了。她豈不要你的命！”) (23). It is evident that in the back-writing of Peach, the homosexual relationship between Lao-shih and Mulberry has transcended their sexual experience and bodily pleasure – Peach’s narrative does not just stop at manifesting and validating the existence of their marginalized sexual orientations which cannot be suppressed. Rather, their woman-bonding has given rise to an alternative women’s community, if not a form of sisterhood that enables Lao-shih and Mulberry to nurture and evoke the strength in each other in order to further mobilize their resistance against patriarchal oppression. As Adrienne Rich argues in her study of lesbian existence and lesbian continuum (“Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence”), “the erotic in female terms” is “unconfined to any single part of the body or solely to the body itself” (650). It is “an energy not only diffuse but ... omnipresent in “the sharing of joy”, [one that] makes [women] less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of being which are not native to [women], such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial” (ibid). Rich’s explanation of female/lesbian eroticism certainly coincides with Peach’s narrative. In the story, upon listening to Lao-shih’s consolation, Mulberry has been able to rise above her repentance and push on with her adventurous route to Chungking. She declares emphatically to Lao-shih that she “will not go back to En-shih [where her family resides] anymore even if there is an opportunity now” (“現在就是能夠回去，我也不回去了。我要到重慶去。”) (50). Much akin to the principles pledged by Peach in America, Mulberry also proclaims her determination “to live”; the Asian woman has stopped wavering between “dying” and “living” (8). Since Peach is living and fleeing alone in the US, the changing environment has indeed been inexpedient for the Asian American woman to explore the erotic between women. Yet Peach has made use of her narrative

about Asia to expand on what she has originally defended in her verses – by creating an alliance consists only of Asian women to redress the typical patriarchal assumptions (of the INS agent) that women in Asia are inferior and defenseless and thus, they are in need of male guidance and protection. In Peach's narrative, the guidance and protection for women are furnished by the female characters themselves. This also explains the scene in which Mulberry continues to yearn for the companionship of Lao-shih even after she has slept with the student refugee (75).

In Su-ching Huang's *Mobile Homes*, she has taken scholars who fail to read Mulberry's "unboundedness and active sexuality" to task, such as Kenneth Hsien-yung Pai and Leo Ou-fan Lee (45-46). In addition to these male scholars, a number of female critics have also misinterpreted the sexual encounter between Mulberry and the student refugee as "rape", "male sexual violence" and "attack" in their textual analysis (Cho 158, 169-170; Yu 142). By contrast, Huang regards the sexual intercourse between the two characters as "a premeditated act [of Mulberry], one that "indicat[es] both her active female desire and her challenge of the sexual mores of Confucianism" (46). Huang remarks that Mulberry "has always had an attraction or curiosity for Student Refugee. When he first presses her body against his own, smelling his body sets her heart pounding " (ibid). I share the same viewpoint as Huang because the original text has delineated that it is Mulberry who first approaches the student refugee on the boat and prods him into lovemaking (70). Besides, during the dice game that occurs after their copulation, the student refugee has also bemoaned that he "would rather have [Mulberry]! A sixteen-year-old virgin!" as his reward ("我寧可要你這個人！一個十六歲的黃花閨女！") (81). The student refugee's confusing and false remark is clearly triggered by the fact that their fornication is initiated by Mulberry – not him. In this process, the Asian woman has thrown the student refugee to a position of subservience and injured his masculine pride. Hence, the student refugee can

only resort to fantasizing Mulberry as a “virgin” (despite the fact that he has also witnessed Mulberry’s virgin blood tickling down his leg and wiped it off with his own spit (70)) in order for him to re-position himself as the active agent who assumes control in their sex act that exists only in his imagination. I would like to add to Huang’s analysis that both Mulberry’s unbridled expression of her sexual fantasy and her decisiveness to challenge the conventional stigmatization of women’s premarital sex in Asian society have indeed emanated from Peach’s espousal of the practice of sexual liberation in America. Apart from Mulberry, Peach has also created other Asian women who have similarly indulged and taken initiative in their sexual relationships. Their hedonistic actions are virtually the same as how Peach has directed her own body to seduce the INS agent in the prologue (8). For example, Mulberry’s mother has been cuckolding her husband by sleeping with other “hairy men” in her room (“難怪媽媽喜歡有毛的男人”) (23; 46). Peach-flower woman also betrays her husband who is studying in Chungking by giving birth to an illegitimate son (52). Aunt Shen, who appears in the second section of the novel, has likewise been unfaithful to her husband and committed adultery at the store house of the White Cloud Temple (139). She even confesses to Chia-kang that he is “not the true son of the Shen family” (138). Bringing the sexual liberation of these liberal-minded women to new heights is Mulberry’s bisexual orientation, which is also another form of alternative sexuality that Peach has stood up for. In Peach’s narrative, Mulberry is disheartened by the cold shoulder given by Lao-shih after she went to bed with the student refugee. While Mulberry wants to maintain her pivotal intimacy with Lao-shih (who has enriched her life) by sitting next to her on the bunk, she also wishes to sit beside the student refugee (“老史一天沒理我。我想挨着她；又想挨着流亡學生。”) (75). The Asian woman’s sexual attraction and behavior towards both sexes are a testament to what Irigaray has posited in *This Sex Which Is Not One*: “the sexuality

[of woman], always at least double, goes even further: it is *plural*” (28). In addition, Mulberry’s inability to choose between Lao-shih and the student refugee also ties in with Irigaray’s clarification that “woman’s pleasure does not have to choose between clitoral activity and vaginal passivity” (ibid). Again, Peach is only able to explore such boundlessness and plurality of woman’s sexuality when she writes back to Asia – these important features that take shape in mainland China are unmistakably an extension of the western feminist beliefs Peach has adopted in America.

In Kenny Kwok-kwan Ng’s article “The Migrant Voice”, he notes that “[t]he portrayal of Mulberry/Peach [has] unsettle[d] the stereotype of Chinese/Asian Americans as meek and compliant, and that of Asian women as sexy and seductive Orientals” (135). What Ng has commented is unquestionably accurate. While Mulberry and other Asian women have been depicted as somewhat promiscuous and decadent in the first section of the novel – which undeniably stand in stark contrast to their traditional dutiful images – Peach has also presented the chaste side of Mulberry’s character to the INS agent in the second part of the so-called “Mulberry’s diary” that takes place in Peiping, namely the Asian woman’s courage and persistence to reject the sexual advances of men. In other words, Mulberry has become temporarily asexual. This illustration, of course, is also drawn from Peach’s exilic experience in America. In the second letter sent out by Peach to the official, she notifies him that she “has got a ride in Rock Springs, Wyoming” (99). However, the driver has been laughing ceaselessly and making strange orgasmic moans ever since the Asian American woman gets into the car (100). He has also hurled a series of obscene and sexist questions at Peach after sliding next to her seat, which include “Aren’t you afraid of me, Little Woman?” (“你不怕我嗎？噯？小女人？”) and “Do you know how porcupines have sex, Little Woman?” (“你知道豪猪怎麼性交嗎？噯？小

女人！”) (ibid). Thus, once the car enters a gas station, Peach immediately jumps out of the vehicle and waves goodbye to this perverted man even before the vehicle comes to a complete halt (“車子一到站還沒停住，我就跳下車子，向小豪豬擺擺手再見了。”) (ibid). Peach’s sturdy resistance to the sexual harassment of the American man is manifested in her portrayal of Mulberry’s sexual relationship with her husband, Chia-kang.

Before their wedding, Chia-kang has attempted to sleep with Mulberry because she “is too pure and clean” (“青青... 你太乾淨了！我非對你撒野不可！”) (118). Without her consent, Chia-kang pushes Mulberry down on the sofa in her room and begins stripping off her clothes (119). Just as we thought Mulberry would take delight in the intimate moment with Chia-kang given her sexual history with the student refugee, she has resisted his coercion and sat up to warn him, “No, Chia-kang. You must respect me” (“不行，家綱。你應該尊重我。”) (ibid). The underlying message of these lines is that Mulberry does not see herself as one of Chia-kang’s sex objects. Although Chia-kang goes on to assure Mulberry of their marriage and convince her that she “will still remain pure and clean even if they make love before their wedding”, Mulberry is still reluctant to give him the green light to consummate with her (ibid). According to the Asian woman, “even sleeping with [her] own husband is a dirty act” (“就是和丈夫上床，也是很髒的事。”) (ibid). With this principle in mind, Mulberry continues to turn down Chia-kang’s intense request for sex on their wedding night. When “Chia-kang motions at Mulberry” in their wedding chamber, “pointing first at her and then at the bed, Mulberry has refused to move” (“他向我打手勢，指指我，又指指床。我沒有動。”) (143). She does not budge even though Chia-kang has tugged at her dress (“他扯扯我衣服。我仍然沒有動。”) (ibid). It is comical that whenever “Chia-kang undoes a button of her attire, Mulberry will quickly fasten it up again”

(“他解開一顆，我就扣上一顆。”) (ibid). In Yu-fang Cho’s article “Rewriting Exile, Remapping Empire, Re-membering Home”, she points out that Aunt Shen’s “domination” over the “life” of her son and his “sexual activities” is the major cause for Chia-kang’s desperation in “penetrating Chinese women’s bodies, especially [that of] respectable virgins” (176). Cho further adds that “conquering the “virgin land”” not only enables Chia-kang to “reasser[t] his male power” and “rescue his masculinity”, it will “also gran[t] him the status as the head of the aristocratic family” (176-177). Taking Cho’s explanation into consideration, it seems that Chia-kang only treats Mulberry as his sex tool to help him achieve his several male agendas. Concentrating solely on his individual ecstasy and what he would gain from his powerful penetration into women’s body, Chia-kang is ignorant of the mental and emotional aspects of Mulberry, particularly the gratification of her corporeal *jouissance*. Given Chia-kang’s male egocentrism and sexual chauvinism, it is completely justifiable that Mulberry has chosen to walk away from establishing any intimate relationship with her husband – like how Peach has abandoned the vulgar driver in Little America, Wyoming. In this respect, the intersecting letter(s) written by Peach is not just meant to, in I-ping Liang’s words, “provoke” (“挑釁”) the INS agent, where he can only endure her illegal actions (in written words) but has no means to capture her (“看得到，卻追不到”) (73), the letter(s) also serves as a constant reminder to readers (as well as to the official) that “Mulberry’s diary” is indeed crafted by Peach *in* America, as attested by the similarity of their resistance to the sexual advances of men. It is truly an Asian American woman telling the story of an Asian woman with her own Asian American experience and sensibilities.

In the third section of the novel that sets in ROC Taiwan, Chia-kang’s body has become debilitated – he is suffering from heart palpitations, headache, back pain, myalgia and

constipation while being pursued by the police (216). Unwilling to sacrifice her own liberty for the safety of her husband, Mulberry walks out of the attic they have been hiding despite Chia-kang's fierce objection (212). She insists on working as a maid (“傭人”) and a housekeeper (“管家”) for Uncle Tsai, the man who provides lodging for them (225). In this regard, Mulberry not only breaks the second precept of the “Three Obediences and Four Virtues” that compels her to “obey ... her husband after marriage” (Yung 103), the Asian woman also takes on the male role of breadwinner to fend for her husband and daughter. Simply put, Mulberry has become the head of the family, whereas the domestic duty of taking care of Sang-wa in the attic has fallen upon Chia-kang. Such disruption of socially-constructed gender roles is definitely synonymous with Peach's calling for “men [to] bear children” in one of her verses written in the US (3). To a certain extent, Mulberry's secret life in the attic also resembles Peach's narration of her exilic life in America in the accompanying letter she has posted to the officer.

In the third letter, Peach describes that she is living with a Polish Jew (a tree cutter) in a deserted water tower in Des Moines, Iowa (174). The migrant man shares with Peach some of his childhood stories, including how he has almost been killed by a tiger at a circus when he was young (177). Ever since the accident, he has always wanted to “grow up in a hurry and to be as big as Tarzan so that he could kill tigers” (ibid). Upon listening to his story, Peach immediately resolves to settle down and give birth to her baby in the water tower. The Asian American woman even makes it clear that she “adores kids who want to kill tigers” (“我喜歡要殺老虎的孩子。我就在水塔住下了。我打算在水塔裏生下我的孩子。”) (178). Surely, Peach has made the decision for her unborn baby – she wants her child to take after the bravery and the positive outlook of the tree cutter, hence she has chosen to stay together with him. Peach's expectation for her unborn child has been carefully weaved into her portrayal of the mother-

daughter relationship between Mulberry and Sang-wa. When Peach writes about Taipei (in the attachment), her concern does not just rest on the well-being of Mulberry alone. Peach also illustrates the ways in which Mulberry has patiently guided Sang-wa to overcome her hesitation in stepping out of the attic and her fear of betraying her father. In the novel, Mulberry first pulls Sang-wa up on her feet (235). Then, she carefully leads her battered daughter down the stairs by walking ahead of her (ibid). Whenever Sang-wa is stunned and turns around to go back to the attic, Mulberry will jerk her hand and pull her forward until the young girl reaches the yard (ibid). Eventually, Sang-wa is able to leave the attic and explore the outside world on her own at night (236). This section ends with Sang-wa pointing the police to the attic in order for them to prosecute Chia-kang who has been shackling her (“兩個警察彎著身子和桑娃講話。她指指閣樓。所有的電光刷的一下一齊向閣樓掃來。”) (ibid). Evidently, by following in her mother's footsteps, the taste of independence has stirred up Sang-wa's long-suppressed resentment against her father. Under Sang-wa's instruction, both Mulberry and her daughter are free at last. Although in reality (in the setting of America) Peach is forced to split up with the Polish Jew because the people living around the water tank have reported about their questionable background and identity to the police (as recounted in the fourth letter) (243-244), Peach's feminist desire to nurture the young one into valiant and upright figure capable of rebelling against life's injustices has already been realized in her narrative about Asia. The characters in the Taiwan setting have fulfilled what Peach has wished for, but has not been able to achieve in the US.

Contrary to Chen Sihe's flimsy generalization that most migrant writers from China “mainly draw their writing inspiration from their lived experience in the motherland”, my textual analysis above has shown that much of Peach's discursive empowerment of the Asian women in

mainland China and Taiwan indeed derives and evolves from her western feminist beliefs in America.¹⁶ The former settings are rife with Peach's Asian American sensibilities and the Asian women, energetic and aggressive, are really not as "innocent" and "submissive" as critics of the novel have assumed. In other words, the "writing resources" of Peach lies mostly in her new homeland instead of Mulberry's ancestral land(s). Her present homeland in the US is certainly *not* a cultural badlands, as opposed to Chen's insinuation in his Sinocentric article: apart from Peach's western feminist ideology, the threat of deportation as well as the racial hostility and gender discrimination of the INS officer in the prologue have collectively contributed to Peach's representation of Asia and Asian women. As we can see, the prologue and the intersecting letters set in America are truly integral to the novel – these segments that propel the narratives of Asia indeed cannot be simply ignored, sidelined or re-structured arbitrarily by readers and critics. Neither can we single out the so-called "Mulberry diary entries" and read them independently. As my reading has demonstrated, we need to appreciate the Asian settings in the text in relation to the American scenes in order for them to become more understandable and meaningful. Arguably, without Peach's immediate migrant experience in the US, she would have portrayed the images of Mulberry and her counterparts in mainland China and Taiwan in a different light. It is also possible that the Asian American woman would not have found the urge to write back to Asia. Given the significance and far-reaching impact of the American scenes, it is unjust to leave *Mulberry and Peach* outside the canon of Asian American literature or simply deposit the novel at the periphery of it.

¹⁶ This is not to say that Nieh is simply valorizing Western humanism and moral supremacy. After all, the comradeship between Mulberry and Lao-shih, the plurality of women's sexuality and the impressive transformation of Sang-wa have proven to us that women in the Asian settings are indeed as active as, if not more competent and capable than the western woman, Peach. The former has been able to accomplish and push forward the frontiers of what the latter can only dream of in the West. Furthermore, we need to bear in mind that in the novel, Peach does not write back to Asia for her Asian women readers or aim to provide a blueprint for them. Her targeted audience is always the INS agent as she only delivers her letters and the so-called "Mulberry's diary entries" to him.

In *Sangqing Yu Taohong*, the publisher in mainland China (Zhongguo Qingnian Chubanshe in Beijing) has censored a series of Peach's feminist actions which she has plotted to defy the investigation of the INS agent in the prologue (of *Mulberry and Peach*). Among them, the provocative verses scribbled by Peach in her apartment; the erotic painting hung by Peach to inform the officer about Mulberry's death; the exposure of her breasts in order to seduce the bureaucrat and her sexual repartee with him (3; 5-6). Yet the censorship does not stop here. The publisher has also expurgated most of the defiant and subversive actions undertaken by the Asian women in mainland China and Taiwan that reflect their strong and independent images. For instance, the dressing style of Lao-shih (14); the wedding ceremony between Mulberry and the student refugee in her dream in which she receives him into her family (20); the flirtation between Mulberry and Lao-shih (35); Mulberry's voluntary fornication with the student refugee on the boat (52) and Mulberry's constant rejection of Chia-kang's sexual advance in Peiping and Taipei (84; 104), to name but a few. This in turn means that the Asian women in *Sangqing Yu Taohong* continue to live under the dictatorship of men and conform to their patriarchal ideals. It goes without saying that while it is common among foreign-born writers to integrate their current aspirations and forward vision inspired by their new settlement into the narratives of their previous homelands (as exhibited by Peach in the story), the cultural values and ideologies of their adopted land do not always fit well with the cultural context of their "original" homelands – some of the "new" ideas and cultural practices in the former are indeed antithetical to the cultural expectations and approbation of the latter. In view of the abovementioned censorship, it would be unscholarly of us to insist on calling *Mulberry and Peach* a Chinese literary text when its given form has been vigorously rejected in mainland China. The label is only suitable for *Sangqing Yu Taohong*; *Mulberry and Peach* is a Sinophone text that blossoms outside of

mainland China. No doubt it is upsetting to see that a substantial part of the examples I have cited above have been horribly bowdlerized in *Sangqing Yu Taohong*. Nevertheless the excision of these significant scenes in the setting of mainland China and Taiwan has also reaffirmed my argument above that Peach's feminist ideals adopted in America has indeed formed the basis for the feminist resistance of the Asian women in mainland China and Taiwan – whoever approves of the censorship is arguably aware of this salient aspect of the novel (but cannot bring themselves to accept the fact) – hence the former has to be removed together with the latter in order to sustain the coherency and comprehensibility of the novel. As much as the publisher in mainland China desires to, in Rey Chow's words, “emphasize the Chinese dimension” (45) of the novel by sanitizing almost every America-related scene in the Asian setting, its strategy only sheds more light on the Americanness of *Mulberry and Peach* and further distinguishes *Sangqing Yu Taohong* from the source text. The line of demarcation between these two texts becomes even clearer if we compare the last portion of the writings. The publisher of *Sangqing Yu Taohong* has deleted the entire section four featured in *Mulberry and Peach* in which Peach finally writes back to her present homeland in America.

3. Asia as a Foil, America as Home

Readers who have access to the final section of *Mulberry and Peach* (the final part of “Mulberry diary” written by Peach) would probably grapple with this question: Why didn't Nieh begin the novel with section four instead, since the narrative is set in America and precedes the American scene in the prologue (thus she could have lumped these two parts together)? In my opinion, this deliberate reversion to the setting of America is meant to enlighten readers on the shifting sense of belonging and the changing social allegiance of foreign-born Asian American

authors that veer towards the United States. In Amy Ling's article "Chinese American Women Writers", the late literary critic of Asian American studies remarks that most immigrant and sojourner Chinese American female writers "see their role in the West as interpreters and ambassadors of good will and understanding for China" (64-65). Since "their sensibilities were shaped in their homeland, [these foreign-born female writers] have what seems a stable, single center" (64). This clarifies the observation that immigrant and sojourner writers from Asia "seek primarily to explain and justify China and Chinese ways to the Western world" through their stories (ibid). No doubt Nieh also did not arrive in the US tabula rasa (like Helena Kuo (郭鏡秋) and Tai-yi Lin (林太乙) cited in Ling's article). Yet in *Mulberry and Peach*, the migrant author seems to show us that her "center" is in Asian America instead – not in her previous homelands in mainland China and Taiwan.

This can be seen from Peach's strategy of withholding some of the information about the Asian characters in the previous sections, for example the suicide of Mulberry's father (250) and the tragic demise of Lao-shih, who has been beaten to death on a path on campus (267). Both of these incidents had happened before Mulberry took her flight to Peiping in section two. Instead of documenting them earlier, Peach only reveals these significant details in the final segment of the novel ("Mulberry's diary entries") when the narrative has reverted to America. To a certain extent, the abrupt emergence of these events in part four functions to load readers' memory of the female agency, liberty and mobility savored by the Asian women in the previous chapters. To briefly recap, even when Mulberry's father was alive, her rebelliousness was not bound by his presence – Mulberry has stolen the family heirloom (a symbol of patriarchy) and run away from the house. When she was on the boat with Lao-shih, Mulberry has been able to exercise her freedom of expression, explore her potential as a woman and more importantly, exhibit the

unboundedness of her sexuality. It is essential to evoke the high level of autonomy and independence of Mulberry in Asia to the “real” INS officer who keeps running after Peach in the physical world. This is because in the same section of her back-writing, Peach has also written about an investigator from the Immigration Service of America (a fictional character created by Peach) stripping Mulberry of all the pleasures and privileges she has experienced in Asia the moment she touched down in the US (from Taiwan).

Firstly, the investigator disallows Mulberry to call herself “Sangqing”. He demands her to “use the name Helen Mulberry Shen” even though Mulberry has declared to him earlier that she “has not used [such name] for a long time” (248-249). While depriving Mulberry of her rights to define herself, the investigator also keeps pestering Mulberry about her sexual history with the men she has encountered prior coming to America, for instance: “Did you commit adultery with [Chao Tien-kai]?” (“你和他犯過通姦罪嗎?”); “Whom did you commit adultery with?” (“你和誰通姦?”); “In Taiwan, did you commit adultery with [Uncle] Tsai?” (“在台灣你和蔡承德先生通過姦嗎?”) (254). Even after Mulberry admits to the investigator that she “has been intimate with [Uncle] Tsai for a time”, the American officer still takes umbrage at her choice of diction and forces her to adopt his discourse instead, which is tantamount to silencing her: “You cannot use generalizations like “was intimate” ... You must use a definite “yes” or “no” in reply to my questions” (ibid). The investigator continues to pin Mulberry down on her sexual practice with Uncle Tsai and violently converts her to heterosexuality: “How many times did you have sexual intercourse with [Uncle] Tsai?”; “How often did you both have sexual intercourse?”; “How long did the intercourse last each time?” (255-256). Instead of assisting Mulberry in her application of permanent residency in the US, the sanctimonious officer has abused his official power to intrude her private life and fault Mulberry on so many levels: her rights of articulation, her

ability to act for herself and the liberal lifestyle she espouses, particularly her practice of sexual liberation. The officer's coercive and authoritative tone as well as the frequency and harshness of his irrelevant questions throughout his interrogation have put Mulberry in a helpless and victimized position. Unlike the police in Taiwan who have helped to emancipate Mulberry and Sang-wa from patriarchy by capturing Chia-kang, the investigator in America is only interested in arousing Mulberry's guilty conscience rather than giving her confidence to live in America (Mulberry does feel embarrassed and guilty in a later scene when she realizes Tan-hung's husband, Jerry has been staring at her naked body from the doorway. She condemns herself for not closing the bathroom door and wishes herself to be "dead" (300)).

Apart from the malevolent investigator, other American residents have also been antagonistic to Mulberry's presence in the US. Chiang I-po's American wife, Betty has provided the secretive love letters composed by Mulberry (to her Chinese-American spouse) to the officer (281). Betty even describes to the latter that Mulberry has behaved like a "prostitute" to her husband (ibid). The landlady of Mulberry's apartment has likewise reported about her dubious relationship with I-po to the investigator (288). Fearful of losing his "teaching position" and his "dignity" in front of his friends, I-po refuses to move in with Mulberry; instead he persuades Mulberry to abort their baby immediately in New York (263-264). With the institutional racism and hostility from all sides, Mulberry is unable to chart a new course of life in her present homeland and make new beginnings possible. Without the means and metaphors to express her feminist values and desires, she soon plunges into the abyss of schizophrenia.

It is at this point that the rehash of Mulberry's Asian experience by Peach comes into play. The feminist principles and self-indulgent ways of living which Mulberry upholds and embraces in the preceding settings of Asia are indeed part of "the American ideals" – after all

she has inherited them from Peach – such as “democracy, freedom, equality, the primacy of individual, the inalienable rights and freedom of expression” (Wang 28). Yet when Mulberry attempts to demonstrate these ideals as well as her sexual and social agency in her adopted land, they have been precluded ironically by the persisting ethnocentric and xenophobic sentiment in the US as elaborated above. This scene undoubtedly explodes the myth of a pluralist country. Whatever restriction Mulberry has pushed back against in Asia is surfacing again in America. By recalling some of Mulberry’s “gains” in Asia and juxtaposing them with her “losses” in America, Peach is indeed drawing the INS agent’s attention to the promise of liberty and justice pledged by the nation – particularly its double standards – to its immigrants. Instead of granting immigrants like Mulberry “unalienable rights” to “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” in her new homeland (as proclaimed in the United States Declaration of Independence), the lingering of racial supremacy of the dominant race in the novel has triggered the broken relationship between Mulberry and I-po, Mulberry’s recurring dilemmas about abortion as well as her psychosomatic illness, to the detriment of her determination and qualification to lay claim to America. This writing strategy of Peach also makes clear the laborious time and efforts she has spent on representing and empowering the Asian women to the INS agent in the previous chapters: apart from dismantling the Anglo stereotypes of Asian women that affect her localizing process in America, Peach’s narratives about Asia also function to critique the nation’s history of racial exclusion and the facade of the American Dream which have been plaguing immigrants in America. According to Peach, her adopted country has yet to live up to its founding ideals. The first three segments of Asia are intended to be read as a foil to Mulberry’s excruciating experience in the US – it is Peach’s hope that upon reading the last part of “Mulberry diary” and comparing it with the previous sections, the INS bureaucrat would stop pursuing her in the

physical world. Hence, in the final letter she posts to him (242-245), Peach has omitted the sentence which she has employed to vex the official in the first three letters: “If you want to chase me, come on” (“要追你就來追吧”) (15; 98; 174). Instead, Peach ends her fourth letter by reminding the INS agent that she “has come in peace for all mankind” (“我對全人類是懷著和平而來的”) (245). Besides, in her back-writing, Peach has also shown the INS agent that despite having the odds stacked against Mulberry, the latter is nevertheless resolute in her decision to remain in America. This fact is attested by Mulberry’s endeavor to escape from the hospital after being admitted into it for her involvement in a car accident. She does so to avoid being detained by the official. Simply put, Peach is using her narrative to tell the agent that even if he insists on coming after her, she will not give up escaping from him like Mulberry.

It is noteworthy that Mulberry remains unattached in the end of Peach’s story. She does not move in to reside with I-po (after Betty’s death) or get married with Xiao Teng. This is because the former still regards himself as a Chinese man and claims that the moon-landing of the US astronaut is unrelated to him (“美國人登陸月球和咱們中國人有什麼關係?”) (261); the latter has also vowed to bring Mulberry back to mainland China and work for their country after tying their knot (“我要娶你，我們一起回大陸，我們一起為國家工作”) (323). Little did these men know that Mulberry’s ultimate aspiration is to settle down in the US and become an American. This explains why Mulberry has “stammered and couldn’t say a word” after listening to Teng’s confession (“我結結巴巴說不出話來”) (ibid). Perhaps Mulberry’s “disloyalty to China” (her firm refusal of returning to a “redemptive” Chinese center) and her allegiance to the American government (which she has sworn to the investigator during his interrogation (“你忠於美國政府嗎？是的。”) (256)) is one of the reasons that induces the publisher of *Sangqing Yu*

Taohong to delete the entire section four of *Mulberry and Peach* altogether. Since both Peach and Mulberry indeed share the same goal of putting down roots in America, it is no wonder that Nieh has linked these two women together with the conjunction “and” and made it the title of her illustrious work.

All in all, my textual analysis above has highlighted a few important points about *Mulberry and Peach*: 1) it is the threat of deportation as well as the racial hostility and gender discrimination of the INS officer (also symbolizing the dominant race) in America that drive Peach to write back to Asia; 2) to strengthen and convince the agent of her Asian American identity, Peach has employed her western feminist ideals adopted in her present homeland (her Asian American sensibilities) to reconstruct the images of Mulberry and other Asian women in her back-writing; 3) instead of ending the novel with the setting of Asia, Peach’s narrative has reverted to the setting of America to show (the American agent) her concern towards her present homeland (in a way also to disclaim the previous settings which have been claimed by many as her “original” homelands). Whatever Peach has written about Asia indeed serves as a critique of the deep-rooted institutional racism which has been unsettling the immigrants in her local place of residence, including herself. In short, while Peach would not have written back to Asia *without* America, we can also say that Peach has written back to Asia *for* America. Either way, it is America that takes center stage in Hualing Nieh’s *Mulberry and Peach* and thus, I contend that *Mulberry and Peach* should be recognized as an Asian/Sinophone American novel.

CODA

Disentangling Sinophone American literature from Chinese literature is the primary mission of this thesis. Indebted to and in dialogue with Shu-mei Shih's Sinophone theory, this dissertation has demonstrated how Geling Yan's *Fu Sang* and Hualing Nieh's *Mulberry and Peach* can be read as Asian American literature and by extension, should be incorporated into Asian American literary canon.

In Chapter One, I have borrowed the words of several Asian Americanists, namely Elaine Kim, King-kok Cheung, Marlon K. Hom, Shirley Geok-lin Lim and Sau-ling Cynthia Wong to explain the necessity and urgency of studying Sinophone literary production in America. These works had its genesis in the nineteenth century, with the arrival of a considerable number of male laborers from Guangdong Province in southern China seeking success in what they called the "Gold Mountain". Apart from that, I have also elucidated the relevance and strength of Shu-mei Shih's Sinophone theory in examining this field of work. A diverse range of scholarship has been employed in this chapter, including theories on diaspora; Sinophone studies; cultural criticism; and Asian American literary history, in order for me to justify the objectives of my research, the structure of my thesis and my selection of authors and texts.

In Chapter Two, I have discussed the significant notion of "Claiming America" in Yan's *Fu Sang* in order to foreground the deep local commitments of Sinophone American authors to their new homeland in the United States. This progressive political subject matter has been contested within the field ever since it came into being in the late 1960s. It is certainly not a popular topic discussed in the literary circle of Chinese literature and because of that, Geling Yan's *Fu Sang* should be treated as an Asian American novel. My textual analysis compares the different readings of Yan's novel, particularly various readers' impressions of the female

protagonist Fusang, and strives to demystify her character by looking at the interaction between the narrator and the titular figure. The narrator's voice has been ignored by most critics of the novel in their interpretation. I have tried to make up for this neglect in my thesis.

In Chapter Three, I have investigated how Hualing Nieh's *Mulberry and Peach* that narrates predominantly about Asia can indeed be acknowledged as an Asian American text. Most scholars (till today still) claim that the novel begins in the setting of Asia instead of America upon reading it. Different from them, I have analyzed the novel according to its non-linear narrative form featured in its first edition published in British-Hong Kong, wherein the narrative first drifts from the American shore back to the regions of mainland China and Taiwan, and eventually reverts to America, in order to show that it is Asian America that takes center stage in the text. I maintain that this complex novel should be recognized as an Asian American production.

My textual analysis in the previous chapters have demonstrated that both authors are writing with a renewed perspective which they have gained in their present homeland in America. Apart from enriching the common themes found in most Asian American literary works, Yan and Nieh have also employed their American perspectives to write back about their lived experience in China. In doing so, it allows them to be critical of the various forms of oppression and discrimination which are still alive in both sending and receiving countries. In retrospect, as a Malaysian examining these two Sinophone American novels, this phenomenon also seems to suggest that these two works, apart from belonging to (Asian) American studies, could likewise be claimed by the global Sinophone community. The production, circulation, consumption and criticism of these texts have undeniably corroborated the existence of this transnational Sinophone network. While Sinophone American oeuvres have not yet been institutionalized,

Sinophone Malaysian literature has also yet to gain official recognition in Malaysia – and it is such unjust condition(s) that holds each member in the transnational Sinophone network together. For instance, readers and critics of Sinophone Malaysian literature will arguably find Yan’s and Nieh’s project of “Claiming America” empowering and pertinent to their lived experience (since both parties are indeed ethnic minorities in their respective country). It will also inspire them to read the novels in relation to their own efforts of claiming their own voices and fighting for their own causes in their own homeland. Despite the limited knowledge I have at this stage of my postgraduate studies, this thesis is the only written work in academia that mainly discusses Sinophone American novels composed by women writers. However, given the purview and the word limit of this thesis, I have not been able to include more Sinophone novels penned by Asian American writers as well as Asian Canadian writers into my study (I have already introduced some of them in Chapter One), which could otherwise point towards a more inclusive North American identity. Nevertheless I am certain that this will be the direction of my future research.

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