

THE “DEAR DIANE” LETTERS AND THE ENCOUNTER OF CHINESE YOUNG  
WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICA

By

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## **Abstract**

Focusing on the “Dear Diane” advice letters, both the English and Chinese texts, this dissertation explores a group of young Chinese immigrant women as they encounter American culture as Chinese Americans were reshaped by new immigration and radical demographic changes in the 1980s. By utilizing assimilation theory as a framework for analyzing Chinese immigration, this work examines several important dimensions and aspects of young Chinese American women’s adaptation to American life. This study also compares the “Dear Diane” letters with the Jewish “Bintel Brief” letters in order to explore some common characteristics of the female immigrant experience in the United States. The writer identifies a number of issues that young Chinese American women including the intensifying generational conflict and identity dislocation. Moreover, the writer finds that both groups of letters reveal that Chinese young women faced similar issues as their counterparts—other ethnic Asian and Jewish women. With a strong desire to Americanize, young Chinese American women often faced conflict with both their parents and mainstream society. Therefore, assimilation for young Chinese women was problematic, painstaking, and a prolonged process.

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## Introduction

That was aimed at younger [Asian] girls,  
primarily immigrants, who didn't have enough  
resources, and we just thought it was important to  
help the young girls.

Diane Yen-Mei Wong (Interview)

That is how Diane Yen-Mei, the writer of *Dear Diane: Questions and Answers For Asian American Women*, a former Commissioner of the Office of Asian American Affairs in the state of Washington, described in a 2009 interview why she conducted research on young Asian-American women.<sup>1</sup> It can be reasonably assumed that Diane Yen-Mei Wong used “we” to mean that the “Dear Diane” book was actually a result of a collective enterprise which involved many parties; and “to help the young [Asian] girls” implied that young (Asian) immigrant girls did not have adequate resources as they adjusted and adapted to American life.

The book *Dear Diane: Questions and Answers For Asian American Women* appeared in 1983 in three editions: English, English-Chinese, and English-Korean. In the Chinese and Korean language editions, the title reads *Dear Diane: Letters From Our Daughters*.<sup>2</sup> The “Dear Diane” book was a collective enterprise. The publisher was Asian Women United (AWU) of California, an organization founded in 1976 by a group of Asian American women in the San Francisco Bay Area with a mission to “explore the many facets

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<sup>1</sup> Diane Yen-Mei Wong, telephone interview with the author, October 7, 2009 (abbreviated as Wong Interview hereafter).

<sup>2</sup> Diane Yen-Mei Wong, *Dear Diane: Questions and Answers For Asian American Women* (Oakland, California: Asian Women United of California, 1983) (English Edition); Diane Yen-Mei Wong, *Dear Diane: Letters from Our Daughters* (Oakland, California: Asian Women United of California, 1983) (Chinese and Korean Edition). They are abbreviated as the “Dear Diane” book or letters hereafter unless specified otherwise.

of Asian American women's experiences and varied cultural heritages through publications and video productions.”<sup>3</sup> The “Dear Diane” project was also launched by AWU under the leadership of its director, Elaine Kim, the co-founder and former president at AWU. The writer, Diane Yen-Mei Wong, wrote all the answers to the letters from Asian-American women, primarily young Chinese and Korean women.

The “Dear Diane” book in English consists of 96 letters and the “Dear Diane” books in Chinese and in Korean include 50 and 49 letters, respectively, selected from the English ones which are tailored to the needs of Chinese and Korean immigrant families that lack fluent command of English. The “Dear Diane” letters were based on a survey conducted in the San Francisco Bay Area by Asian Women United of California between 1980 and 1981 among over six hundred immigrant and American-born Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, and Korean American female students in urban and suburban middle schools, high schools, colleges, and universities. According to Kim, one of the goals of this survey was to “determine how they feel about themselves, what their aspirations are, and how they perceive their parents and family lives.”<sup>4</sup>

According to Diane Yen-Mei Wong, although Chinese and Korean immigrants were the prime immigrant populations in the early 1980s in the San Francisco Bay Area, there was “so little available that was written in Chinese, written in Korean for the immigrants to help the immigrant population find their way through America.” As a result, the “Dear Diane” book was translated into both Chinese and Korean languages.<sup>5</sup> The Chinese translators of the “Dear Diane” book were Vanessa Lam of Chinatown Youth Center in the

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<sup>3</sup> Asian Women United (AWU), “Asian Women United of California,” accessed March 31, 2011, <http://www.asianwomenunited.org/>.

<sup>4</sup> Elaine Kim, “A Note To Parents” in Diane Yen-Mei Wong, *Dear Diane: Letters...*, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Wong Interview.

San Francisco Bay Area and Shirley Liu of the Oriental Languages Department at the University of California at Berkeley. The Korean translator of the “Dear Diane” book was Han Tzol Yun of the Korean Community Center of the East Bay. The Chinese and Korean translations were specifically targeted at those young Chinese- and Korean-American women whose English was not well developed and whose parents could not read English well.<sup>6</sup>

The publication of the “Dear Diane” book reflected a much-changed Chinese immigrant population in the United States. In the history of Chinese immigration, to some extent, the period after World War II proved to be a turning point. The immigration laws passed in the 1940s, 1950s, and, especially, the 1960s, profoundly changed the Chinese community from the previous “bachelor society” to a more family-oriented community. For example, in 1943, the U.S. Congress repealed previous Chinese exclusion acts, including the 1882 *Chinese Exclusion Act*. The *War Bride Act* (1945), the *G.I. Fiancées Act* (1946), and the *Refugee Relief Act* (1953) further eased Chinese immigration. However, the 1965 immigration law, which abolished the overall immigration quota system, had a more powerful influence on Chinese immigration. One immediate result of the passage of these acts was that the number of Chinese women in the United States increased significantly, from 20,115 in 1940 with the total Chinese-American population (77,504) to 398,496 in 1980 with the population (806,040). As a result, the male-female sex ratio dropped from 285 in 1940 to 102 in 1980.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Wong Interview.

<sup>7</sup> For Census purposes, the term “Chinese” in both the 1940 and 1980 Census referred both to people who were born in China or who claimed Chinese ancestry. Accordingly, this also applies to the term “Chinese” discussed in this dissertation unless it is specified otherwise. See U.S. Census Bureau, “Facsimiles of Respondent Instructions and Questionnaire Pages,” accessed May 31, 2012,



For Chinese immigrants, the removal of immigration barriers coincided with a rising political consciousness, ethnic awareness, and an Asian-American movement inspired by the black power movement in the 1960s and 1970s. The founding of Asian Women United of California in 1976 and the “Dear Diane” project reflect a “self-help” spirit and group solidarity of Asian immigrants helping Asians, similar to developments in African-American communities. To some extent, the project’s concern over young Asian women also reflects feminist influences from the American Women’s Movement in the 1960s. In her interview with me, for example, Diane Yen-Mei Wong stressed this strong ethnic awareness by pointing out that “all of us [who] were involved in the project were concerned that a lot of young Asian American girls, especially immigrant girls, did not have enough resources to help them address some of the questions that might come up in their growing up... [and] all of us involved in the project consider ourselves Asian Americans.”<sup>8</sup>

Turmoil and revolution in China spurred emigration, leading to a massive influx of Chinese immigrants in the United States. After World War II, the Chinese Civil War broke out in 1946. The communist military forces, led by Mao Zedong, defeated the nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek and founded the People’s Republic of China in 1949. However, the ensuing heated political, economic, and cultural struggles in the new China eventually led to the so-called Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976. All the tumultuous years of war and

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<http://www.census.gov/history/pdf/1980instructions.pdf>; U.S. Census Bureau, "Instructions to Enumerators," accessed May 31, 2012, <http://www.census.gov/history/pdf/1940instructions.pdf> ; United States Department of Commerce, *Population: Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Characteristics of the Population, Vol. II* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1943), 19; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *1980 Census of Population, United States Summary, PC80-1-B1 (Vol.1, Ch.B, Part 1)* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1983), Table 38, 1-20; The U.S. Congress also passed other immigration laws to facilitate Chinese immigration during this time. For example, the passage of the *Displaced Persons Act in 1948* and the *Refugee Relief Act of 1953* allowed a few thousand Chinese women to immigrate to the United States. See details in Huping Ling, *Surviving on the Gold Mountain: A History of Chinese American Women and Their Lives* (Albany, New York: State University of New York, 1998), 113-115.

<sup>8</sup> Wong Interview.

dramatic internal changes produced hundreds of thousands of refugees, a significant number of whom fled to the United States, and this flow of Chinese immigration was greatly reinforced by China's new "Open Door" policy, which was launched by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 after the normalization of Sino-American relations in 1972.<sup>9</sup>

The new Chinese immigration to the United States has several distinct characteristics. Two of them, however, are most noticeable. First, the immigrants, on average, were better educated than their earlier counterparts, who were mostly illiterate or had scant education. This was a result of the much-changed nature of Chinese female immigration. During the pre-World War II era, female immigrants who emigrated from China to the United States were heavily influenced by family factors –often arriving either as family dependents or young girls sold by their poor parents. In contrast, during the post-World War II era, Chinese female immigrants to the United States came for a greater variety of reasons, such as seeking new jobs and for educational opportunities. Second, the number of female Chinese immigrants increased significantly.<sup>10</sup> For example, the total number of Chinese females in the United States increased from 20,115 in 1940 to 398,496 in 1980.<sup>11</sup> These changes in immigration motivation and population would play an important role in Chinese-American women's adjustment and adaptation to American life.

The new immigration differed from the previous one in several ways. While the old immigration created a "bachelor society," composed primarily of men, families and women

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<sup>9</sup> It is widely agreed that Deng Xiaoping's "Open Door" policy produced a powerful, far-reaching impact on Chinese immigration, especially the continuous influx of Chinese student immigrants to the United States. Although the exact student numbers since 1978 cannot be obtained due to the contradictory reports by different news agencies and government reports, according to Qian Ning, *Chinese Students Encounter America*, trans. T.K.Chu (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), "All sources agree that the number of Chinese students studying abroad increased every year from 1978 to 1989." See page 56 for the detailed numbers.

<sup>10</sup> Ling, *Surviving on the Gold Mountain*, 114-115.

<sup>11</sup> See Note 7.

were a much more prominent part of the Chinese immigrant stream to the United States in the postwar era. In this fundamentally changed situation, Chinatowns, Chinese communities, and Chinese Americans were very different in the postwar era than before. With the new immigrants heavily concentrated on the West Coast, especially in the San Francisco Bay Area, Seattle, and Los Angeles, new immigrants were a major and noticeable presence. Because scholars of immigration and Chinese-Americans have thoroughly explored this new immigration, this dissertation focuses on only one aspect: young, Chinese-American women and their experiences in contemporary American culture as reflected in the “Dear Diane” letters.

The “Dear Diane” project should be situated in the context of advice columns (the question-and-answer format), such as “Dear Abby” and Ann Landers, in American newspapers. Actually, advice columns started as early as 1690 in Britain, when English bookseller John Dunton originated the advice column format in his *Athenian Mercury*. Somewhat later in America, in 1722, Benjamin Franklin created the character of Silence DoGood, in his brother James’s newspaper, *New England Courant*, to offer the reader practical advice.<sup>12</sup> According to David Gudelunas, “although advice columns were stylishly modeled on interpersonal correspondence,” the advice column facilitated group communication and “in its origin, then, is really more of a mobilization of the public sphere than simply a site of salacious tales of boys and girls and their problems.”<sup>13</sup> As Gudelunas has shown, such features provide advice on resolving personal, social, and cultural dilemmas in a changing society. Such advice columns have been especially directed toward new immigrants. For example, the well-known “Bintel

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<sup>12</sup> David Gudelunas, *Confidential to America: Newspaper Advice Columns and Sexual Education* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2008), 21; Walter Gieber, “The Lovelorn Columnist and Her Social Role,” *Journalism Quarterly*, 37(1960): 499-514.

<sup>13</sup> Gudelunas, *Confidential to America*, 22.

Brief” letters in the Yiddish-language newspaper *Forward* established on January 20, 1906,<sup>14</sup> were useful to immigrants, their children, and parents in bridging not only their native and American cultures but also generational differences. According to the AWU, the “Dear Diane” book was written in a “Dear Abby” format.<sup>15</sup> It sought to assist first- and second-generation Asian-American women immigrants as well as their parents. And when the Chinese and Korean translations of the “Dear Diane” book are placed alongside the English version, it is clear they are also intended not only to reach parents, but also, more important, to seek to bridge the differences between generations and cultures. Elaine Kim expressed this succinctly in “Dear Diane:” the book attempts “to facilitate better and better communication and understanding between Asian parents and daughters, particularly in immigrant families, where anguish and confusion often results when cultures and customs collide.”<sup>16</sup>

This dissertation is essentially a qualitative study of the “Dear Diane” letters, adding a comparative context. By using assimilation theory,<sup>17</sup> it examines the experiences of young Chinese-American women as they adjusted and adapted to, and resisted American society and culture; and, by drawing comparisons between the experiences of young Chinese-American women and the encounters of Jewish-American women with American society at similar stages, it intends to extend the depth and breadth of American immigration studies.

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<sup>14</sup> Isaac Metzker, ed., *A Bintel Brief: Sixty Years of Letters from the Lower East Side to the Jewish Daily Forward, Volume One* (New York: Behrman House Inc., Publishers, 1971), 12.

<sup>15</sup> Elaine Kim, “Dear Diane,” Publications, Asian Women United, accessed on March 28, 2010, <http://www.asianwomenunited.org/dear-diane/>.

<sup>16</sup> Elaine Kim, “A Note to Parents,” 3.

<sup>17</sup> This study is mainly focused on young female Chinese girls, most of whom are unmarried students. In this case, my use of assimilation theory is mainly focused on their cultural assimilation and different aspects of structural assimilation. Marital assimilation is also discussed wherever necessary in this study.

The major themes that are explored in the “Dear Diane” letters are family, school, work, personal concerns, relationships, and motherhood.<sup>18</sup> Many of the issues on which they focus are new, recent phenomena in Chinese immigration. For example, issues arising from family conflicts reflect problematic mother-daughter relationships that were less prevalent in the previous “bachelor society.” Likewise, the young female Asian Americans’ experiences at school and work reflect that they are still subject to new forms of discrimination or stereotypes. Moreover, the second-generation Chinese immigrants encounter conflicts with their parents during their adaptation and assimilation to American life. The phenomenon in which Chinese children were instilled with Chinese culture at home but encounter a culturally different—and often conflicting—public sphere contributes to identity problems and a strong sense of “double consciousness.”<sup>19</sup> Because these dominant themes embodied in the “Dear Diane” letters can reflect issues relating to acculturation, adaptation, and assimilation as well as gender, generational conflict, and family issues, a close coding and decoding of the “Dear Diane” letters from different perspectives will reveal the increasing complexities of the Chinese immigrant experience, particularly among young Chinese-American women adapting to and even resisting American society and culture.

This dissertation has five chapters. Chapter 1 discusses the literature and history of Chinese immigration to the United States. Specifically, it provides the reader with the historical background of Chinese—particularly women’s—immigration and explores the different characteristics of Chinese female immigration in different time periods. It also

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<sup>18</sup> In the English edition of the *Dear Diane* book, all 96 letters are placed in different categories: 1. Family, letters 1-25; 2. School, letters 26-40; 3. Work, letters 41-55; 4. Personal Concerns, letters 56-62; 5. Relationships, letters 63-78; 6. Motherhood, letters 79-96.

<sup>19</sup> See details for the “double consciousness” as exhibited in young Chinese-American women in Chapter 2.

examines some distinctive phenomena in the history of Chinese immigration such as “sojourners” and the “bachelor society.” It also views Chinese immigration to the United States within the global patterns of Chinese migration.

Chapter 2 examines the importance of the late 1970s and early 1980s for Chinese women’s immigration to the United States. This was a time when the persistent sex-ratio imbalance among Chinese immigrants began to even out and the younger generation of Chinese American women had different experiences than did the older generation. Also, it examines the influence of the ameliorating Sino-U.S. relations on new Chinese immigration. In addition, the chapter explores the frustrations, anxieties, and worries common among Chinese young women as they adjusted, assimilated, or even resisted American society and culture. It also uses such literary works as Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior, Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* and Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club*.

Chapter 3 examines and discusses the major theoretical conversations that shed new light on Chinese female immigration. In particular, it examines sojourning theory, transnationalism, and assimilation theory within the context of Chinese immigration to the United States, and then, from an assimilation perspective, codes and decodes the “Dear Diane” letters to identify some major characteristics in young Chinese women’s encounters with contemporary America. It also compares and contrasts the different generational or intergenerational responses to social and personal problems that can be found in the “Dear Diane” letters.

Chapter 4 places a strong emphasis on the Chinese translations of the “Dear Diane” letters. It argues that translation in the context of globalization has a special and important role in defining one’s identity construction. For this, the Chinese translations of the letters are examined carefully in cultural, political, and linguistic contexts. Specifically, this chapter compares and

contrasts the differences in meaning between the original English letters and their Chinese translations. It finds that such differences result from not only the linguistic differences between English and Chinese, but also from the cultural clashes found in the Chinese translators' understanding of the "Dear Diane" letters.

Chapter 5 is a comparative analysis of the "Dear Diane" and the "Bintel Brief" letters. It first presents an overview of the "Bintel Brief" letters and then examines the dominant themes in the translated published letters, which were written by Jewish-American women at similar stages of adjustment and adaptation to American culture. It then explores the major themes of the "Dear Diane" letters. After comparing and contrasting the major themes found in both sets of letters, it concludes that the encounters and experiences of Jewish- and Chinese-American women with American society and culture are more similar than they are different. To a large extent, their experiences reflect the process of assimilation.

The conclusion gives some major findings of this research and my further reflections on the experiences of young Chinese-American women during their adjustment, adaptation, and assimilation to contemporary America. In the end, it highlights the importance of this study and points out the limit of this research and further work to be done beyond the "Dear Diane" letters.

## Chapter One

### An Historiographical Examination of Chinese American Women

The ABC, who constantly faced conflicting values and had to deal with various assimilation problems, generally led a dual life and bore feelings of ambivalence.

Shih-shan Henry Tsai  
(*The Chinese Experience in America*)

Shih-shan Henry Tsai's characterization of American-born Chinese (ABC) was made in 1986. It was a significant time—slightly more than a hundred years after the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882—when the imbalanced sex-ratio of the “bachelor's society” was changing because of the passage of new post-World War II and later immigrant laws; and when Chinese Americans were replacing Japanese Americans as the largest Asian American ethnic group in the United States.<sup>20</sup>

Did all these changes occur simply as a natural evolution in the history of Chinese immigration? What unique characteristics can one find with Chinese immigrants? What was the historical image of Chinese women in America? How would scholars view Chinese female immigration? Are there any missing elements in the current scholarship on Chinese women? Based on such questions, this chapter explores the history and literature of Chinese immigrant women to discuss some significant characteristics of Chinese immigrant women and to create a context in which to conduct a broader and deeper analysis of urban young Chinese American women in the following chapters.

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<sup>20</sup> Huping Ling, *Surviving on the Gold Mountain: A History of Chinese American Women and Their Lives* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 129.



In the current scholarship on Chinese American women, scholars and researchers tend to lump both male and female Chinese immigrants together in their studies. As a result, women's voices are largely ignored. Although some scholars have studied the history of Chinese women, they only pay attention to the history of Chinese women's racial discrimination in the United States, thus ignoring how Chinese women encountered and responded to changes in American society and culture and, in doing so, assimilated and/or resisted American society and culture.

Specifically, in this chapter, I will explore the history of Chinese immigration with a focus on some most significant periods. Also, I will critically discuss the current literature on Chinese women. Specifically, I will examine the development of literature about Chinese women with a focus on the time period since the 1970s and 1980s in order to find what elements are missing in research on Chinese women. To study Chinese women in a broader context, I will also look at some relevant historical and theoretical approaches in American women's history.

### **1-1 An Historical Exploration of Chinese American Immigration**

In recent decades, mainly spurred by globalization, scholars like Laurence J. C. Ma, Ronald Skeldon, and Adam McKeown examine Chinese immigration in the context of global migration.<sup>21</sup> In this case, by studying Chinese immigration, one not only can gain a deep insight into the diversity of American immigration, but also understand the Chinese diaspora in a specific context. As scholar Gordon H. Chang argues, Chinese immigration to the United States is "significant for the study of diaspora because the spread of Chinese people across the globe

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<sup>21</sup> Laurence J.C. Ma, "Space, Place, and Transnationalism in the Chinese Diaspora" in *The Chinese Diaspora: Space, Place, Mobility, and Identity*, eds. Laurence J. C. Ma & Carolyn Cartier (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 1-50; Ronald Skeldon, "The Chinese Diaspora or the Migration of Chinese Peoples?," *The Chinese Diaspora*, 51-66; Adam McKeown, "Global Migration 1846-1940," *Journal of World History* 15:2 (2004): 151; Ronald Skeldon, "Hong Kong in an International Migration System" in *Reluctant Exiles?: Migration from Hong Kong and the New Overseas Chinese*, ed. Ronald Skeldon (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1994), 21-51.

has created one of the greatest diasporas in human history.”<sup>22</sup> Indeed, from the first noticeable arrival of the Chinese in California in 1849 to the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, from the regained Chinese immigration of the World War II era to the 1965 Immigration Act and to China’s initiating its opening policy in 1978, Chinese immigration has displayed a unique pattern that reflects not only social changes within the United States, but also changes in the global Chinese diaspora.

According to scholar Laurence J. C. Ma, the Chinese diaspora (waves of Chinese emigration) began centuries ago. Lynn Pann also points out that “flows of population punctuate China’s long history.”<sup>23</sup> However, given the specific factors, such as the population movements, policy changes both in the sending and receiving countries, and other relevant factors, the Chinese diaspora can be roughly divided into the old Chinese diaspora (before the mid-1960s) and new Chinese diaspora (since the mid-1960s). In the old Chinese diaspora, the Chinese mainland—southern China with Guangdong and Fujian in particular—had been the sole homeland for the Chinese abroad. And Southeast Asia had primarily been an attractive receiving place for the majority of Chinese sojourners and settlers.<sup>24</sup>

Since the mid-1960s, the characteristics of the Chinese diaspora have changed significantly “in terms of population size, geographical distribution, varieties of migrants, their spatial interaction, settlement patterns and the vexing issues of citizenship and identity.”<sup>25</sup> As compared with the old diaspora, the new Chinese diaspora is more dynamic in its migration movements and more multidimensional in its destinations. Also if the pre-1960s diaspora was

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<sup>22</sup> Gordon H. Chang, “Writing the History of Chinese Immigrants to America.” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 98:1-2 (1999): 135-142.

<sup>23</sup> Lynn Pan, (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 46.

<sup>24</sup> Ma, “Space, Place, and Transnationalism in the Chinese Diaspora,” 1-50.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

more trade-based, then the post-1960s Chinese diaspora is more diverse in nature because they have “different spatial characteristics, and other basic attributes: a cultural diaspora and a clandestine diaspora.”<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the composition of the Chinese population includes not only Chinese overseas who are emotionally and culturally attached to China but also new immigrants in which intellectuals and students are noticeable in number in the recent decades.<sup>27</sup>

Such changes, according to Ma, have been largely spurred by the immigration policies which have been made far less harsh than before the mid-1960s in the receiving countries, such as the United States, Canada, Australia, Russia and the United Kingdom. However, equally important, globalization has brought about fundamental political and economic changes in mainland China since the late 1970s, and the globalization of products and much improved transportation and technology in the late twentieth century have greatly facilitated the global flow of the Chinese.<sup>28</sup> For example, by 1997, there had been as many as 32.8 million Chinese living overseas. Asia, North America and Europe were the first three largest number of receiving regions of the Chinese, 25.5 million, 3.6 million, and 1.9 million respectively, out of which the United States hosts a Chinese population of 2.7 million.<sup>29</sup>

Thus Chinese immigration to the United States is essentially part of this larger Chinese diaspora. Scholar Adam McKeown places it within the global migration between 1846 and 1940. According to McKeown, migrations across the globe during this time period were “broadly comparable in size and timing.”<sup>30</sup> Similarly, scholar Kingsley Davis believes that from 1800 to 1950, there was a widespread world trend of population movement, and world trade and

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<sup>26</sup> Ma, “Space, Place, and Transnationalism in the Chinese Diaspora,” 21.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 12.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 13-16.

<sup>30</sup> McKeown, “Global Migration 1846-1940,” 155.

urbanization development had played a large role in it.<sup>31</sup> Davis's argument was reinforced by Frank Thistlethwaite, who argued powerfully that the nineteenth-century emigration was predominantly economic in motivation and international in scope.<sup>32</sup> According to Thistlethwaite, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there was not only an active intra-European migration, but also a large-scale dynamic trans-oceanic migration underway. Due to the importance of technology in the industrialization of the countries of immigration, "the greatest migrations were not to the grasslands, but to the concentrations of coal and iron where industries were being established."<sup>33</sup>

In this context, the population migration was dynamic in the world. Indeed, while as many as 58 million European migrants were chiefly stimulated by the prospect of industrialization and expansion into America's frontier and immigrated to the Americas between 1846 and 1940, Asian migration was also active in the frontiers of Northeastern Asia, in the rice fields and rubber plantations of Southeast Asia, and in the mines and plantations of America, Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>34</sup>

For the bulk of Chinese immigrants, Southeast Asia (the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, Thailand, etc.), North Asia, and Central and South America had eventually become the three main destinations. For example, from 1846 to 1940, over 19 million Chinese migrated to Southeast Asia. Due to new transportation technologies and other social and economic factors in the late 1880s, up to 2.5 million migrants from South and East Asia migrated to the Americas, out of which the Chinese occupied a noticeably larger proportion and this would

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<sup>31</sup> Kingsley Davis, "The Origin and Growth of Urbanization in the World" in *Population Movements in Modern European History*, ed. Herbert Moller (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964), 69.

<sup>32</sup> Frank Thistlethwaite, "Migration from Europe Overseas in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" in *Population Movements in Modern European History*, ed. Herbert Moller (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964), 82-84.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>34</sup> Mckeown, "Global Migration 1846-1940," 155-158.

increase before the decline of indentured labor recruitment and the rise of anti-Asian hysteria.<sup>35</sup>

And again due to the Qing government's loosening policies against population movement into Manchuria after 1860, Russia's emancipation of serfs in 1861, and the railroad construction in the 1890s, "between 28 and 33 million Chinese migrated into Manchuria and Siberia..., along with nearly 2 million Koreans and over 500,000 Japanese."<sup>36</sup> However, in the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, the numbers of Chinese migrating to the United States were relatively small. This is in striking contrast to other (primarily European) migrant streams to the United States, in which the United States was either the leading emigration destination or close to it. This was especially so during what scholar Douglas Massey would term the "classic" era of mass European immigration (1880-1930), during which as many as 28 million immigrants entered the United States, with the peak occurring in 1907 when around 1.3 million immigrants arrived.<sup>37</sup>

Many scholars believe that the Chinese landed on the continent of America at least one thousand years before Christopher Columbus landed in 1492. It was, however, not until the late 1840s that the Chinese came in noticeable numbers.<sup>38</sup> Most of Chinese immigrants in the nineteenth century came to America from the south of China, particularly from the Pearl River Delta where Guangdong and Fujian were located. These two provinces had ideal geographical advantages. They were close to the South China Sea and enjoyed good marine climate all year around. Since there were more crops and more rivers in this area than elsewhere, the local peasants were very good at agriculture and fishing.

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<sup>35</sup> Mckeown, "Global Migration 1846-1940," 157.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>37</sup> Douglas S. Massey, "The New Immigration and Ethnicity in the United States" in *Majority and Minority: The Dynamics of Race and Ethnicity in American Life*, ed., Norman R. Yetman, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999), 462.

<sup>38</sup> Kananur V. Chandras, (ed.), *Racial Discrimination against Neither-White-Nor-Black American Minorities: Native Americans, Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and East Indian Americans* (San Francisco: R & E Research Associates, 1978), 19.

### Map of Guangdong Province, China



Source: New World Encyclopedia

Primarily, Chinese immigrants to the United States in the nineteenth century came from three districts of Guangdong province: San Yi (the Three-County District: Panyu, Shunde, and Nanhai), Si Yi (the Four-County District: Taishan, Kaiping, Xinhui, and Enping), and Zhongshan, a county itself.<sup>39</sup> All these districts were close to Guangzhou, the capital city of Guangdong province. As Guangzhou had been the only port in China opened to foreign merchants since the Tang Dynasty (618-907), the people in Guangzhou and its neighboring districts had more contacts with foreign businesses and in one way or another “were more familiar with seafaring than were China’s inland residents.”<sup>40</sup> According to historical records, the southern Chinese began to do business with western countries as early as the sixteenth century. Before 1842, China had already had business activities with major western countries, such as Spain, Portugal, Russia, America, and Britain.<sup>41</sup> With the local geographical positions and foreign

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<sup>39</sup> Xinyang Wang, *Surviving the City: The Chinese Immigrant Experience in New York City, 1890-1970* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001), 19-20.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>41</sup> David M. Brownstone, *The Chinese-American Heritage* (New York: Facts on File, 1988), 21.

businesses combined, the people in this area, on average, lived a more prosperous life than most of the people in the other parts of China.<sup>42</sup>

A number of “push” factors, however, motivated Chinese immigration to America in the nineteenth century. From the late eighteenth century on, southern China suffered from severe natural disasters and internal and external crises. Also, political unrest occurred in this area. After the collapse of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), many of its former officials and soldiers fled to southern China and established the Triad Society, preparing to restore the Ming Dynasty from the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), and drove the Manchu people out.<sup>43</sup> What was worse, corrupt Qing officials, natural disasters, and the people’s growing resentment of the government due to the heavy taxation and exploitation often led to peasant uprisings which disrupted society. For example, the White Lotus Rebellion broke out in 1796 and lasted until 1804. Then followed the large-scale Taiping Rebellion, which lasted from 1851 till 1865 and caused 20 million deaths and many more wounded. All this set in motion many local revolts and caused great suffering and turbulence to the local people.<sup>44</sup>

Coupled with the natural disasters and the worsening social and political order was the imperialists’ colonization and exploitation of the weakness of the Chinese central government in the first half of the nineteenth century. For example, the British government declared war on China in 1839—the Opium War. In 1842, China lost the war and signed the Treaty of Nanjing with the British government. According to this treaty, China had to “open five ports (Guangzhou, Xiamen, Fuzhou, Ningpo, and Shanghai) to British merchants; to grant foreigners

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<sup>42</sup> Liping Zhu, *A Chinaman’s Chance: The Chinese on the Rocky Mountain Mining Frontier* (Niwot, Colorado: The University Press of Colorado, 1997), 19.

<sup>43</sup> Wang, *Surviving the City*, 19-20; 33.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

extraterritoriality, to cede Hong Kong; and to pay Britain a heavy indemnity (21 million Spanish silver dollars)".<sup>45</sup> This event made other western powers follow suit rapidly. For example, in 1844, China signed the Treaty of Wangxia with the United States and the Treaty of Huangpu with France. Again, the second Opium War (1856-1860) resulted in China's signing the Treaty of Tianjin with Britain, France, Russia, and the United States in 1858, which demanded that China open new ports to trading and give foreign travelers and missionaries freedom to travel and preach Christianity in China. Comparatively, Great Britain's victory in the Opium War gave it more extraordinary powers in China than any other foreign powers. And all this added to the internal disruptions in China.

In the face of natural disasters, domestic rebellions, and particularly China's loss of wars with foreign powers, many southern Chinese began to seek stability and prosperity in the countries of the so-called "barbarians" or "foreign devils."<sup>46</sup> The idea of seeking sanctuary from the intense conflicts and starting a new life abroad was substantially spurred by the discovery of gold at the John Sutter's Hill in California in 1848. In the eyes of Chinese immigrants, California was Gum San, the Chinese word for the mountains of gold. The news of the discovery rapidly spread to Asia, and Chinese adventurers from Guangdong joined the stream of immigrants to California. By the end of the 1850s, the number of Chinese Americans in California totaled four thousand. Thereafter, Chinese population increased rapidly and by 1882, when the American Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, the Chinese population numbered about 300,000,

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<sup>45</sup> Wang, *Surviving the City*, 22.

<sup>46</sup> David Brownstone, *The Chinese-American Heritage* (New York: Facts on File, 1988), 7; Victor G. & Brett de Bary Nee, *Longtime Californ': A Documentary Study of an American Chinatown* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 108.



though many of them would return later.<sup>47</sup> Most of them departed from Hong Kong, Guangzhou, and Macao. With the help of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, Chinese immigrants, after a long journey on the sea, could usually sail across the 7,000 miles and land on the west coast of America, particularly in San Francisco.<sup>48</sup>

In the early nineteenth-century Chinese emigration, there were two kinds of immigrants: coolies and free immigrants. In the 1840s, due to the great need for labor throughout South and Central America after the Spanish Republics enforced measures against the slave trade, colonial companies began to induce and transport cheap and hardworking Chinese labor to work in the Western Hemisphere—primarily the Caribbean and South America—and in Southeast Asia. The coolie system “involved emigrants signing term contracts of service in foreign lands in return for their passage.”<sup>49</sup> In the United States, the coolie trade was outlawed by laws in 1862 and later.<sup>50</sup> Literally, coolies meant “bitter strength” in Chinese.<sup>51</sup> The coolies—the contracted laborers—were primarily from some poor regions of Fujian. As compared with the coolies, many immigrants came to the United States under the “credit-ticket” system in which “passage money was advanced to the emigrant who then repaid his debt after arrival in the new land.”<sup>52</sup> They were mainly from Guangdong and could often gain freedom after their passage cost was paid through work in the United States. In this sense, they were just like the European immigrants to the United States of the day.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Brownstone, *The Chinese-American Heritage*, 2; 27.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>49</sup> Stanford M. Lyman, “The ‘Chinese Question’ and American Labor Historians,” *New Politics*, 7 (Winter 2000): 126.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Min Zhou, *Contemporary Chinese America: Immigration, Ethnicity, and Community Transformation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), 28.

<sup>52</sup> Lyman, “The ‘Chinese Question’ and American Labor Historians,” 126.

<sup>53</sup> Brownstone, *The Chinese-American Heritage*, 31-32.

The Chinese immigrants to the United States were predominantly male, young, and without much education. They did unskilled jobs in mining and laundry. As scholars Victor Nee and Herbert Wong conclude, the typical Chinese immigrants lived a lonely life in America, working hard to save money to remit back to villages and “accumulate sufficient capital to enable him to return to his village to retire as a returned overseas Chinese.”<sup>54</sup>

Scholars have pointed out that most early Chinese in America were sojourners who lived in Chinese communities that were “bachelor’s society” due to the lack of Chinese women. They were sojourners, who, according to scholar Stanford Morris Lyman, “temporarily abandon their own society in order to take advantage of opportunities elsewhere; they intend to return home at a later date, having made their fortune, to enjoy the fruits of their efforts in a life-style hitherto unavailable to them.”<sup>55</sup> Indeed as Lyman finds, about 360,000 Chinese emigrated to the United States between 1820 and 1892, but in the same period as many as 270,000 returned to China.<sup>56</sup>

Indeed, when discussing this “sojourner” characteristic of Chinese immigrants, Benson Tong believes that Chinese were “bound by traditional customs not to plant their roots in the “devils” country....”<sup>57</sup> Also, Erika Lee states that “Chinese immigrated to the United States for a variety of reasons, but many often came as sojourners—immigrants who worked abroad temporarily with the intention of returning home...; sojourning benefited both the immigrant and the family and community he left behind.”<sup>58</sup> Again, scholar Shih-Shan Henry Tsai defines the

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<sup>54</sup> Victor Nee & Herbert Y. Wong, “Asian American Socioeconomic Achievement: The Strength of the Family Bond,” in *Sociological Perspectives* 28:3 (1985): 289.

<sup>55</sup> Stanford Morris Lyman, *Chinatown and Little Tokyo: Power, Conflict, and Community Among Chinese and Japanese Immigrants in America* (New York: Associated Faculty Press, Inc., 1986), 37.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>57</sup> Benson Tong, *Unsubmissive Women: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco* (University of Oklahoma Press: Norman, 1994), xvi.

<sup>58</sup> Erika Lee, *At America’s Gates* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 116.

sojourners to be “China-oriented and non-English-speaking, [and they] suffered from persistent inequality, racial conflict, alienation, and subordination.”<sup>59</sup>

In the first studies of early Chinese immigrant history, scholars looked at it from different perspectives.<sup>60</sup> In recent decades, however, mainly influenced by the ideas of transnationalism and globalization, scholars like Laurence J. C. Ma, Carolyn Cartier, Ronald Skeldon, and Adam Mckeown prefer to examine Chinese immigration in a global context.<sup>61</sup>

The immigration of Chinese women to the United States began in the nineteenth century in the West. According to scholar Huping Ling, the first Chinese immigrant woman, Afong Moy, arrived in New York in 1834. After that, Chinese female immigration gradually increased. They settled mainly in California, Nevada, Hawaii, and Idaho. By 1870, in California alone, there were more than three thousand Chinese women,<sup>62</sup> but, compared to the number of Chinese men, this number was very small. Few Chinese females accompanied the many young, single, and little-schooled Chinese male immigrants who came to America. By 1870, out of 63,199 Chinese residents, there were only 4,556 Chinese women (See Table 2-1, p. 4, chapter 2). This highly disproportionate sex ratio between the Chinese male and female immigrants persisted throughout

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<sup>59</sup> Shih-shan Henry Tsai, *The Chinese Experience in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), xiv.

<sup>60</sup> Some earlier scholars like Mary Roberts Coolidge, in her book entitled *Chinese Immigration* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1909, vii) and Elmer Clarence Sandmeyer, in his *The Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1939, 4) examine Chinese Americans mainly from a social and economic perspective; other scholars like Harry H.L. Kitano and Daniel Rogers, in their book *Asian Americans: Emerging Minorities*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1995 ) study Chinese immigrants primarily with a historical and socio—cultural focus, as indicated by the Book Description, accessed on April 30, 2012 [http://www.amazon.com/Asian-Americans-Emerging-Minorities-Edition/dp/013790486X/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1335807481&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Asian-Americans-Emerging-Minorities-Edition/dp/013790486X/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1335807481&sr=1-1). Still some others chiefly represented by Stanford Lyman (*Chinatown and Little Tokyo: Power, Conflict, and Community among Chinese and Japanese Immigrants in America* (Millwood, N.Y.: Associated Faculty Press, 1986, 4) research Chinese immigration from a sociological and cultural perspective. Moreover, scholars like Andrew Gyory, the writer of *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998, 1-2) research Chinese immigration from a racial and political point of view.

<sup>61</sup> Ma and Cartier, *The Chinese Diaspora*, 12, 52; McKeown, “Global Migration 1846-1940,” 151. Also see note 2.

<sup>62</sup> Huping Ling, “A History and Historiography of Chinese American Women” in *American Studies* 1, No.1, (1977), 127.

the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>63</sup> To a large extent, the lack of Chinese female immigrants in the beginning of Chinese immigration to America immediately triggered the formation of a “bachelor’s society” within the Chinese communities.

After Chinese women arrived in America, like their male counterparts, they underwent a variety of challenges and hardships. The jobs available to them were limited. They were often found in Chinese “men’s industries,” such as mining, construction, and laundry. To their employers, Chinese women were submissive and quiet. They were also the cheapest labor. Chinese women were subject to a series of racial and sex discrimination acts passed from 1870s to the 1920s, such as the 1870 “An Act to Prevent the Kidnapping and Importation of Mongolian, Chinese, and Japanese Females for Criminal and Demoralizing Purposes,” and the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act.<sup>64</sup>

Despite the cultural restrictions, racial and gender discrimination, and labor exploitation, as scholar Judy Yung noticed, Chinese women in the early twentieth century were active in their efforts to improve their situation, both in their parent country and in the United States. According to Yung, the 1911 revolution in China provided Chinese women opportunities to unbind their feet, a symbol of Chinese women’s subjugation, to be “new women,” and to show their support of the revolution in different ways.<sup>65</sup> Also, the socio-historical conditions in the twentieth century in the United States further provided Chinese women an opportunity to free themselves from boundaries and struggle for a better life.<sup>66</sup> For example, Chinese female immigrants were greatly inspired by Christianity, Chinese nationalism, the Social Gospel

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<sup>63</sup> Ling, “A History and Historiography of Chinese American Women,” 129.

<sup>64</sup> Ling, *Surviving on the Gold Mountain*, 4-8.

<sup>65</sup> Judy Yung, “Unbound Feet: Chinese Women in the Public Sphere,” in *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women’s History*, Third Edition, eds. Vicki L. Ruiz & Ellen Carol DuBois (New York: Routledge, 2000), 262.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

movement, and Progressivism in the United States, so much that they began “to unbind their feet and their lives, to reshape gender roles and change their circumstances for the better.”<sup>67</sup>

In the Chinese women’s struggle for self-improvement and for equality and freedom, a growing number of educated middle-class Chinese women began to take the first steps toward social activism in their communities. Most of them were wives and daughters of merchants and Chinese Christians. Their involvement in church activities and, especially, the help and support from Christian organizations serving Chinese American women, for example, the Chinese YWCA, expanded their gender roles far beyond custom and tradition. Indeed, according to Yung, although Chinese women’s clubs developed later and differently from those of white women, Chinese women’s efforts to organize their own organizations paralleled those of the white and black women’s club movements.<sup>68</sup> For example, inspired by Christianity, Chinese nationalism, and Progressivism, Chinese women established the first major Chinese women’s club in America- the Chinese Women’s Jealeab [Self-Reliance] Association in 1913.<sup>69</sup>

According to scholar Huping Ling, female Chinese students were also involved in this kind of social activism. Most of them came to America as students sponsored and financially supported by Christian missionaries or by the Chinese government. Though they were few in number, they participated actively in extracurricular activities, such as YWCA programs, prayer meetings, and club meetings. They also played an active role in student organizations in many

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<sup>67</sup> Yung, “Unbound Feet: Chinese Women in the Public Sphere,” 257.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

American universities and colleges. All this shows that “Chinese female students were concerned about their country and conscious of their future roles in China.”<sup>70</sup>

Chinese women’s situation improved significantly in the twentieth century. World War I and, especially, World War II not only provided women of color an opportunity to participate in the political, social, cultural, and economic life beyond their own communities, but also challenged discrimination and exclusion. In this broader context, the persistent hostility and discrimination against Chinese immigrants began to give way as the federal government ended complete immigration exclusion. For example, Congress annulled the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943, thus allowing some (albeit very limited) Chinese immigration. After World War II, the War Brides Act of 1947 provided opportunities for women married to American citizens to enter the country. Finally, the landmark Immigration Act of 1965 opened the doors much more widely. All these acts facilitated Chinese women’s entry to the United States, helped maintain family unity, and allowed a more balanced sex ratio (males per 100 females) in the Chinese population in the United States. For example, the sex ratio in 1940 was 285, in 1970, 111, and since 2000, mainly due to the sharp sex ratio decline of the age groups from 5 to 19 years and from 25 to 69 years, the sex ratio of Chinese alone has even been reversed—from 93.7 in 2000 to 87.8 in 2010.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Ling, “A History of Chinese Female Students in the United States, 1880s-1990s,” 88.

<sup>71</sup> When compared with 2000 Census Data, the sex ratio decline of the top four age groups in 2010 was 22.3 (5 to 9 years), 22.1 (10 to 14 years), 12.50 (40 to 44 years), and 9.90 (35 to 39 years), respectively. See Table 3 in Chapter 2; U.S. Census Bureau, *American FactFinder, Age Groups and Sex: 2010, 2010 Census Summary File 2*, accessed on May 1, 2012,

[http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=DEC\\_10\\_SF2\\_QTP1&prodType=table](http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=DEC_10_SF2_QTP1&prodType=table;);

*Age Groups and Sex: 2000, Census 2000 Summary File 2 (SF 2) 100-Percent Data*, accessed on May 1, 2012, [http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=DEC\\_00\\_SF2\\_QTP1&prodType=table](http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=DEC_00_SF2_QTP1&prodType=table).

The stream of Chinese immigrant women to the United States was not just a result of changes in American immigrant laws. Actually it was an outcome of many influences. The pre-1960s Chinese community, primarily a result of the Chinese exclusion laws (1882-1943), was mainly a “trade-based” pattern in which merchants or immigrants engaged in business activities dominated. Their families, students, and diplomats could also enter the United States. A striking feature about the old Chinese immigration is that many Chinese entered the United States illegally as “paper sons” and “paper daughters,” who claimed native-birth citizenship and entered the United States through false documents. This was especially so after the San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906, which destroyed the San Francisco Hall of Records. Between 1920 and 1940, as many as 71,040 Chinese, comprising 91.7 percent of the total Chinese American population of 77,504 in 1940, entered the United States as derivative citizens, who “gained entry by posing as persons who were legally admissible, often with fraudulent certificates identifying them as merchants or by claiming to be American citizens by native birth or as the China-born sons of U.S. citizens.”<sup>72</sup> The illegal Chinese immigration later was further encouraged by the Chinese Revolution of 1949 and the arrival of the Cold War in the global context. As a result, “at least 25 percent of the Chinese American population in 1950 was unlawfully present in the United States.”<sup>73</sup>

Since the mid-1960s, Chinese immigration has displayed new characteristics “in terms of population size, geographical distribution, varieties of migrants, their spatial interaction, settlement patterns and the vexing issues of citizenship and identity.”<sup>74</sup> Compared with the

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<sup>72</sup>Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 204-205; Ling, *Surviving on the Gold Mountain*, 115

<sup>73</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 204.

<sup>74</sup> Ma and Cartier, *The Chinese Diaspora: Space, Place, Mobility, and Identity*, 12.

earlier Chinese immigration, the new Chinese diaspora is large and more varied in its destinations. According to scholar L. Ling-chi Wang, “Chinese-American communities across the United States have become more diverse, dynamic, and divided, with the arrival of new waves of Chinese immigrants from throughout the world creating both new conflicts and opportunities that are uniquely Chinese-American.”<sup>75</sup> Moreover, the Chinese diasporic population includes not only overseas Chinese, such as Vietnamese and Filipino, who are ancestrally, emotionally, and culturally attached to China, but also new immigrants among whom intellectuals and students are a noticeable presence.<sup>76</sup> For example, benefitting from the relaxation of the immigration policies both in the United States and China (as discussed below), the Chinese American population has increased significantly in number and most of them entered the United States in the late twentieth century. In 1990, for example, the total foreign-born Chinese American population was 1,142,582, comprising 69.3 percent of the total Chinese American population of 1,648,696, of which 649,214 entered the United States between 1980 and 1990.<sup>77</sup> Again, the Chinese American population reached 2,564,190 in 2000 and soon 3,535,382 in 2010, comprising almost one quarter of the total Asian American population.<sup>78</sup> Coinciding with such phenomenal population growth is the wider geographic distribution of the Chinese American population. For example, in 2010, though California and New York retained their preeminence as states with the largest Chinese populations, claiming 36.2 and 15.4 percent

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<sup>75</sup> L. Ling-chi Wang, “Chinese in the United States,” in *Encyclopedia of Diasporas: Immigrant and Refugee Cultures Around the World, Volume 1: Overviews & Topics*, eds. Melvin Ember, Carol R. Ember, and Ian Skoggard (New York: Springer Science+Business Media, Inc., 2005), 780.

<sup>76</sup> Ma and Cartier, *The Chinese Diaspora*, 21.

<sup>77</sup> U.S. Bureau of Census, Table 1, General Characteristics of Selected Asian and Pacific Islander Groups by Nativity, Citizenship, and Year of Entry: 1990, accessed on May 2, 2012, <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen1990/cp3/cp-3-5.pdf>.

<sup>78</sup> Elizabeth M. Hoeffel, Sonya Rastogi, Myoung Ouk Kim, and Hasan Shahid, *The Asian Population: 2010: 2010 Census Briefs*, Table 6: Asian Population by Detailed Group: 2000 and 2010, March 2012, 18, accessed on June 1, 2012, <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-11.pdf>.



of the total Chinese population in the United States, Hawaii, Texas, and New Jersey also had 5.0, 4.6, and 3.7 percent, respectively. Other states claimed the remaining 35.1 percent.<sup>79</sup>

In addition to all the “pull” factors as mentioned above, increased Chinese immigration to the United States since the end of World War II is also an outcome of the “push” factors. For example, right after the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, a large number of refugees fled to the United States. Similarly there was an exodus of refugees from the economic turmoil and Cultural Revolution in the 1950s and 1960s. Again, since Chinese policies allowed outmigration in 1978, more and more Chinese have come to the United States. Accompanying the arrival of new Chinese immigrants were some fundamental changes in the socioeconomic composition of Chinese immigration. As compared with their early counterparts who were mostly illiterate, sex-ratio skewed, contracted as coolies or workers, restricted to the mostly male communities—“bachelor societies” on the West Coast for meager job opportunities in the low-wage physical jobs, such as in the garment industry, in restaurants, and in service industries, the new Chinese immigrants had the human capital resources—education and skills—that would greatly facilitate the occupational change and upward social mobility of Chinese Americans in postwar America. One result of such changes is that, due to their higher educational attainment, the new immigrants can often find far better jobs than those in the past, such as in private companies, civil service offices, and professional fields. Also, with a more balanced sex-ratio, Chinese immigrants now can move to live with families and work outside of Chinatowns in suburbs or metropolitan areas. With their hard work ethic from Chinese culture, the new Chinese immigrants have made remarkable socioeconomic progress. For example, according to the 1970 census, the median family income of Chinese surpassed that of white Americans, which was

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<sup>79</sup>Hoeffel, Rastogi, Kim, and Shahid, *The Asian Population: 2010*, Table 6.

\$1,000 higher than the U.S. median family income. Again, the 2000 census showed that a higher percentage of Asian Americans (63.9 for Asian Indians, 48.1 for Chinese, 43.8 for Korean, 43.8 for Filipino, and 41.9 for Japanese) had completed a four-year college education than had black, Hispanic, and white Americans. For example, the figures were black (14.5), Hispanic (10.4), and white (26.1).<sup>80</sup>

Coinciding with the improvement of socioeconomic conditions of Chinese Americans is a pronounced phenomenon among Chinese Americans of increased intermarriage—marriages involving members with different racial (interracial) or ethnic (interethnic) affiliations. As recent studies show, intermarriage is at a high level among Asian Americans, especially when compared with African Americans. Among most Asian-American groups, Asian women are more likely than men to marry outside their group. For example, about 15 percent of married couples with an Asian American partner were interracial or interethnic in 1990, as compared with only about 6 percent for African Americans.<sup>81</sup> For Chinese Americans, as scholar Morrison G. Wong finds, there has been an increase in interracial marriage among Chinese Americans since the 1930s, before which Chinese marriages were basically endogamous. However, after the discriminatory laws against interracial marriage, especially between Chinese and whites, were annulled finally in the 1960s, by 1980, over 30 percent of Chinese marriages were exogamous marriages, among which most of them were to white Americans.<sup>82</sup> As Jacobs and Labov find from the 1990 census, the out-marriage for Chinese Americans was 11.2 percent for Chinese

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<sup>80</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Educational Attainment by Sex: 2000: Census 2000 Summary File 4 (SF-4)-Sample Data*, accessed on May 4, 2012, [http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=DEC\\_00\\_SF4\\_QTP20&prodType=table](http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=DEC_00_SF4_QTP20&prodType=table).

<sup>81</sup> Sharon M. Lee, “Asian Americans: Diverse and Growing,” *Population Bulletin*, 53 (June 1998): 22.

<sup>82</sup> Morrison G. Wong & Charles Hirschman, “A Look at Intermarriage Among the Chinese in the United States in 1980,” *Sociological Perspectives*, 32 (Spring 1989): 87-107.

men and 16.06 for Chinese women, only next to 23.72 percent for Japanese men and 43.82 percent for Japanese women, and 19.26 percent for Filipino men and 36.57 for Filipino women.<sup>83</sup> And intermarriage among Chinese Americans is especially high on the West Coast. For example, in California, the percentage of Asian intermarriage was as high as 35.6 in 1980.<sup>84</sup> Likewise, interracial marriage in New York City remained 27 percent of the total marriages both in the 1970s and 1980s<sup>85</sup>.

Mainly because of their seemingly impressive success in their assimilation (socioeconomic, special, and marital) to the mainstream society, Chinese and other Asian Americans were dubbed the “model minority” as early as the 1960s and then again in the 1980s.<sup>86</sup> However, the “model minority” image of Chinese and Asian Americans is essentially a stereotype since it has misrepresented the true reality of Chinese and other Asian Americans’ hard lives during their adaptation to American society and culture and “...in fact [it] worked as a new form of racial and cultural prejudice against Chinese and other Asian Americans.”<sup>87</sup>

In the history of Chinese immigration to the United States, according to Ling, World War II was a turning point for Chinese American women because since then Chinese American women have moved upward professionally.<sup>88</sup> Different than earlier Chinese immigrants, the

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<sup>83</sup> Jerry A. Jacobs & Teresa G. Labov, “Gender Differentials in Intermarriage Among Sixteen Race and Ethnic Groups,” *Sociological Forum*, 17 (December 2002): 621-646.

<sup>84</sup> Larry Hajime Shinagawa & Gin Yong Pang, “Intraethnic, Interethnic, and Interracial Marriages among Asian Americans in California, 1980,” *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, 33 (1988), 95-114.

<sup>85</sup> Betty Lee Sung, *Chinese American Intermarriage* (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1990), 10-11.

<sup>86</sup> In January 1966, William Peterson published an article in *New York Times Magazine* to praise Japanese Americans’ success in the mainstream society and it would soon be followed by *U.S. News and World Report* in December of the same year to praise the socioeconomic success of Chinese Americans in the United States. This popular press image of “model minority” thus surfaced. And it later would be emphasized again by President Ronald Reagan in his congratulatory speech delivered to a group of Asian Americans in 1984. See Ling, *Surviving on the Gold Mountain*, 167-168.

<sup>87</sup> Ling, *Surviving on the Gold Mountain*, 169.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

second generation of Chinese-diaspora women, due to their average higher education levels, higher skills, and longer adaptation to American life, were more likely to become career women and advance professionally. Chinese American women's achievements became clear in the 1960s when large-scale social and political movements were raising the awareness of gender, class, race, religion, and identity. According to Ling, it was during this time that Chinese women began to break through racial prejudice and discrimination and steadily enter the mainstream society.<sup>89</sup> For example, the Columbia Broadcasting System employed Connie Chung to host a TV Show in 1971 and the George H. W. Bush administration named Elaine Chao, a first-generation immigrant, to be the Assistant Secretary of Transportation in 1989, the highest-ranking position ever held by a Chinese immigrant until then. Chao subsequently married Kentucky Republican Senator and Minority Leader Mitch McConnell and became Secretary of Labor in the George W. Bush administration [2001—09], marking the first appointment of an Asian-Pacific woman to a presidential cabinet. Despite these symbolic achievements and the expansion of Chinese and Chinese-American women in higher education, there was still a significant gap in jobs and pay between men and women.

The noticeable achievements made by Chinese American women were also reflected in the development of Chinese women's scholarship. According to scholar Huping Ling, the historiography of Chinese American women should be divided into three periods. The first period started from the late-nineteenth century and ended in 1960s. During this period, historians simply neglected the experiences of Chinese women. The second period lasted from the 1970s and 1980s. During this time, the Chinese women's experiences were included as part of Chinese

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<sup>89</sup> Ling, "A History and Historiography of Chinese American Women," 132.

American history. The third period, starting from the 1980s, has seen independent works on Chinese American women.<sup>90</sup>

In the first period, due to anti-Chinese hysteria and exclusionary laws, American scholars analyzed the so-called “Chinese problem.” Mary Coolidge’s book *Chinese Immigration* (1909) focused on an analysis of how the anti-Chinese hysteria and exclusion laws had their base in California. Similarly, Stuart Creighton Miller’s book *The Unwelcome Immigrant: the American Image of the Chinese: 1875 – 1882* (1989) pointed out that the image of Chinese Americans, to a large extent, was the real cause of Chinese exclusion. Gunther Barth’s classic study, *Bitter Strength: History of the Chinese in the United States 1850 – 1870* (1964) argues that the unique sojourning nature of Chinese experiences kept Chinese immigrants from being assimilated into the mainstream culture. In a different approach, S. W. Kong, in *Chinese in American Life: Some Aspects of Their History, Status, Problems, and Contributions* (1962), focused on Chinese immigrant culture and emphasized Chinese immigrants’ special contributions to the sciences and humanities. In discussing the overall Chinese immigration, all these books have, in one way or another, only incidentally, if at all, explored the life and experiences of Chinese women in America.<sup>91</sup>

The second period, influenced by immigration reform and the women’s movements that challenged a male-dominated society, included women’s struggles for equality with men in the fields of education, employment, housing, and politics. Scholarship on the importance of Chinese

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<sup>90</sup> Ling, *Surviving on the Gold Mountain*, 11.

<sup>91</sup> Mary Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration* (New York: Holt and Company, 1909); Stuart Creighton Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant: the American Image of the Chinese: 1875-1882* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969); Gunther Barth, *Bitter Strength: History of the Chinese in the United States 1850-1870* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964); S. W. Kung, *Chinese in American Life: Some Aspects of Their History, Status, Problems, and Contributions* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1973).

women and family prospered. Rose Hum Lee's *The Growth and Decline of Chinese Communities in the Rocky Mountain Region* (1979) explored Chinese family organization and social institutions in Chinese communities. Stanford Lyman's article "Marriage and the Family Among Chinese Immigrants to America, 1850-1960" (1968) enabled the reader to gain a deeper understanding of the Chinese family and marriage and community organizations and he developed these themes more fully in his book *Chinese Americans* (1974). Similarly, Loren W. Fessler's *Chinese in America* (1983) not only gave a complete overview of how social, economic and political factors influenced American attitudes towards Chinese, but also explored such issues as family and marriage. Moreover, Shih-shan Henry Tsai also gives some examination on Chinese women in urban Chinese communities since the 1960s in his book *The Chinese Experience in America* (1986).

The third period, further inspired by American women's political, cultural and intellectual movements and achievements in the late 1970s, finally witnessed the appearance of scholarly work focusing primarily on Chinese women in America. Since then, scholars have published extensive books and articles discussing how Chinese Exclusion Acts affected the Chinese American women's experiences from 1870 to 1943. In 1979, for example, Lucie Cheng Hirata's article "Free, Indentured, Enslaved: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century America" (1979) discussed Chinese prostitution in the nineteenth century. By analyzing Chinese patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrifocal culture, Hirata argues that Chinese women worked as prostitutes to support themselves and their families. Likewise, George Anthony Pepper's article "Forbidden Families: Emigration Experience of Chinese Women under the Page Law, 1875 - 1882" (1986) discussed the nature and impact of the Page Law on Chinese women, which banned the entry of Chinese, Japanese, and "Mongolian" contract laborers, and women for the

purpose of prostitution. Peffer's view was later echoed in Sucheng Chan's article "The Exclusion of Chinese Women, 1870-1943" (1991). In the meantime, a new generation of scholars focus on the Chinese sources in the United States to research Chinese American women. For example, scholar Sucheng Chan ranks among the first scholars to use Chinese language sources to study Chinese communities.

## **1-2 The Historiography of Chinese American Women's History**

The rapid development of Chinese women's scholarship, however, is not a unique development. It is closely related to new work in American scholarship on women. Between World War I and the 1960s, individual scholars such as Ivy Pinchbeck in England, Mary Beard in the United States, and Leo Abensour in France began to write "pioneering works whose structure and preoccupations laid out the initial lines along which the field would develop."<sup>92</sup> In her book *Woman as Force in History: A Study of Traditions and Realities*, published in 1946, Beard argued that women have been agents in history. They "have always been a major, if unrecognized, power in the construction of society and culture."<sup>93</sup>

However, it was with the arrival of the second wave of feminism in the late 1960s and 1970s that U.S. women's history underwent a profound change.<sup>94</sup> Feminist activism that lay at the heart of social, cultural, and political movement influenced academic scholarship. According to Downs, this made women's history part of a developing intellectual movement.<sup>95</sup> Women's

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<sup>92</sup> Laura Lee Downs, *Writing Gender History* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2004), 9.

<sup>93</sup> Linda Gordon, "U.S. Women's History" in *The New American History*, ed. Eric Foner (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 259.

<sup>94</sup> Mainly inspired by the movements in the 1960s, the second wave of feminism from the early 1960s to the late 1970s did not address as much the legal obstacles to equality, a major concern of the first wave of feminism, as those current issues, such as different forms of inequalities, sexuality, and the workplace.

<sup>95</sup> Downs, *Writing Gender History*, 21.

historians founded women's history courses in the universities and called for a "woman-centered" history and a balanced examination of women's oppression and women's power. Consequently, according to Downs, there emerged two distinct approaches: the socialist-feminist approach and the study of women's culture. The former emphasized the "articulation between class and gender, between capitalist and patriarchal modes of domination," while the latter depended on cultural anthropology and examined the optic of separate spheres, emphasizing that "all human societies divide social space into dichotomous and gendered realms of public and private."<sup>96</sup> By the late 1970s, according to historian Nancy Hewitt, the author of the 1985 article of "Beyond the Search for Sisterhood," the women's culture model had become "the most widely used framework for interpreting women's past in the United States."<sup>97</sup>

For feminist scholars, one of the tasks was "to excavate the precise meanings that femininity and masculinity have carried in the past, to demonstrate the evolution of those meanings over time, and so reveal the historically constructed nature of these concepts in our present world."<sup>98</sup> This was the best expressed in the turn of women's to gender history in the 1980s. Due to the influence of poststructuralist theory since the late 1970s, historians began to use new tools of historical analysis. In 1986, Joan Wallach Scott published her influential article "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis." According to Scott, "gender is a 'constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes,'" and gender is also "a primary way of signifying relationships of power... one of the recurrent references by which political power has been conceived, legitimated and criticized."<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Downs, *Writing Gender History*, 24.

<sup>97</sup> Hewitt, quoted in Downs, *Writing Gender History*, 44.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>99</sup> Scott, quoted in *Ibid.*, 93.



The concept of gendered history has significantly influenced women's history as an academic discipline. It provides historians of women a new tool of analysis. By emphasizing the historical and mutual construction of maleness and femaleness and using gender as a universal category, historians can explore the history of masculinity as well as femininity from a new perspective and thus provide a strong impetus to the development of women's history, which gained substantial epistemological support in the mid-1980s. It also reflects the degree to which "male" and "female" are both constructed and interrelated.

By the late 1980s, due to the limits of the earlier social-science and Marxist perspectives, scholars paid increasing attention to the relationship between representation and social reality. With the rise of post-structuralism, women's history experienced profound changes. Poststructuralists believe that different aspects of social life can be constructed and deconstructed in multiple ways. Categories can be constructed discursively. And social construction became an important tool of historical analysis. Social history was turning to the cultural and discursive analysis of individual behavior. For example, according to Scott, social history established women as historical subjects. "Her-history" asserts that gender explains the different histories of men and women, but, since it does not theorize how gender operates historically, its stories can be assumed to be uniquely about women and "can be read in too separatist a manner."<sup>100</sup> This, to some extent, was a fundamental change because in social history, historians examine more closely individual behavior in the context of social and economic structures, while in the cultural and discursive analysis historians explore individual behavior more in the context of micro-historical contexts.

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<sup>100</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 22.

Further, with the development of colonial studies in the 1980s, especially with Edward Said's publication of *Orientalism* in 1978, women historians began to stress an analysis of the binary oppositions which underpin colonial rule and imperial ideology, such as Orient and Occident, tradition and modernity, feminine and masculine, and savage and civilized. This significantly expanded the scope of women's studies and promoted deeper thinking of the issues in U.S. women's and gender history. Deeply influenced by the new intellectual movement, women historians began to examine the real meaning of some concepts in the study of women. For example, in his book, Said called on a strong opposition to "falsely unifying rubrics" and "collective identities." And this theory influenced women historians so much that they began to deconstruct the male-oriented representation of women. In their eyes, the western gaze on the exotic Middle East has parallels in male gaze on women because both treat their focus as "objects," not subjects.<sup>101</sup>

Inspired by the above-mentioned scholarship, in the 1980s scholars began to examine Chinese women from a gendered perspective.<sup>102</sup> The scholarship on Chinese women immigrants developed rapidly and with distinct characteristics. From the three periods as mentioned earlier, one can find that the works during the first period focused exclusively on Chinese immigrant men, and women are only treated as subordinates. And the themes of this period are predominantly related to the "Chinese problem" as represented in politics and reflected in Mary Coolidge's book *Chinese Immigration*. Since the second period on, inspired by the achievement

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<sup>101</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1978), xxviii.

<sup>102</sup> See Stacy Guar-Hong Yap, *Gather Your Strength, Sisters: The Emerging Role of Chinese Women Community Workers* (New York: AMS Press, 1989); Xiaolan Bao, *Holding Up More Than Half the Sky: A History of Women Garment Workers in New York's Chinatown, 1948-1991* (New York: New York University Press, 1991); Judy Yung, *Chinese Women of America, A Pictorial History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986); and Huping Ling, *Surviving on the Gold Mountain: Chinese American Women and Their Lives* (Albany: State University of New York, 1998).

of the U.S. women's scholarship, Chinese American women's scholarship has developed rapidly and the works produced by Chinese American scholars have made women a focus, whether in terms of number, breadth, or depth. The three most representative works during this period are *Surviving on the Gold Mountain: A History of Chinese American Women and Their Lives* (1998) by Huping Ling, Judy Yung's *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (1995) and Benson Tong's *Unsubmissive Women: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco* (1994). These works, to a large extent, substantially explore a multitude of aspects of Chinese women's experiences in the United States and thus fill in the gap between the past and present history of Chinese female immigration. And this gave Chinese women a presence in Chinese-American history.

As mentioned earlier, in the recent scholarship on Chinese women, some scholars tend to study Chinese immigration in the context of globalization. Accordingly, this is a focus on transnationalism.<sup>103</sup> As a social movement in origin, transnationalism grew out of the heightened interconnectivity between people and the loosening boundaries between countries. The term transnationalism was coined by Randolph Bourne in his essay *Trans-National America* (1916) to describe a new way of thinking about relationships between cultures. According to Bourne, "America is coming to be, not a nationality but a trans-nationality, a weaving back and forth, with the other lands, of many threads of all sizes and colors."<sup>104</sup> To some extent, in the study of

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<sup>103</sup> In her study of new immigrants, scholar Deborah Dash Moore finds that the resumption of immigration which brought a large number of immigrants mainly from Asia and South America to the United States has produced new models of migration theory, out of which the most notable is the concept of transnationalism, "which in turn has raised anew questions about the children of immigrants, the second generation." Deborah Dash Moore, "At Home in America?: Revisiting the Second Generation" in *Immigration, Incorporation and Transnationalism*, ed. Elliot Robert Barkan (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2007), 143-154.

<sup>104</sup> Randolph S. Bourne, "Trans-National America" in *World War Issues and Ideals: Readings in Contemporary History and Literature*, eds. Morris Edmund Speare and Walter Blake Norris (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1918), 348.

immigration, transnationalism has designated a recent shift in migration patterns, where a point of departure and a point of arrival have turned into an ongoing movement between two or more social spaces. Facilitated by global transportation and telecommunication technologies, immigrants have increasingly developed strong transnational ties to their home countries, thus bringing the social space and geographical space together.

According to scholars Richard Alba and Victor Nee, transnationalism recognizes and analyzes ethnic pluralism in the contemporary world. A transnational model focusses on the ways in which immigrants and perhaps the second and later generations maintain significant relationships with their homeland (real and imagined) and with the relatives and towns that hold a special place in their hearts and memories. Scholars who embrace a transnational model concur that “in the contemporary world, the choice to live in an ethnic social and cultural matrix need not be associated with the loss of the advantages once afforded almost exclusively by the mainstream.”<sup>105</sup> In other words, primary ethnic social and cultural relations in the contemporary world extend beyond the limits of a particular or single border and residential place.

Despite the influence of transnationalism on the scholarship on Chinese American women, some scholars continue to research how assimilation still plays a large role in immigrants’ adaptation to America’s mainstream society and culture and how transnationalism and assimilation might influence immigrants’ eventual adaptation to American life. Actually, to some extent, transnationalism explores the balance between assimilation and resistance as immigrants adapt to the host society.

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<sup>105</sup> Richard Alba & Victor Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003), 6.

Assimilation theory has developed considerably since its birth in the early twentieth century. It once argued that distinctive minority cultures would eventually disappear and the minority's cultural values, social institutions, and ethnic identity would eventually give way to those of the dominant group.<sup>106</sup> As early as 1926, Robert Ezra Park advanced his theory of assimilation—his classic “race relations cycle” from “contact,” “competition,” “accommodation,” and, eventually, “assimilation.”<sup>107</sup> Later in 1961, however, in his article “Assimilation in America,” Milton Gordon greatly enriched and redefined the theory of assimilation by arguing that the previous theories of “Anglo-conformity,” “melting pot,” and “cultural pluralism” were too idealized concepts to be the acceptable paradigms. Instead, he suggested, the concept of assimilation should be viewed more broadly and comprehensively. According to Gordon, assimilation is by no means a single phenomenon. Rather, it involves many different types and stages, the three most important of which are cultural assimilation, structural or social assimilation, and marital assimilation. Cultural assimilation refers to the minority group's acquisition of the cultural characteristics of the dominant group and structural assimilation looks at social interaction among individuals of different ethnic and racial backgrounds. In addition, marital assimilation involves intermarriage among different ethnic or racial groups.<sup>108</sup> This was later further developed by other scholars, such as Herbert Gans and Neil Sandberg, who predicted increasing assimilation in a sequence of generational steps.<sup>109</sup>

In 1995, in his article “Revisiting Assimilation,” Russell Kazal found that after the collapse of the idea of an Anglo-Saxon “core” American society in the 1960s, to which everyone

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<sup>106</sup> Norman Yetman, “Patterns of Ethnic Integration in America,” in *Majority and Minority: The Dynamics of Race and Ethnicity in American Life*, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition, ed. Norman Yetman (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999), 229.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 238-239.

<sup>109</sup> Alba and Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 27.

was presumed to assimilate, there was an urgent need for scholars to pursue an answer to new questions about assimilation.<sup>110</sup> Again, Richard Alba and Victor Nee have, for the first time, substantially analyzed the current immigrant assimilation since Stanley Lieberson published his book *A Piece of a Pie: Black and White Immigrants Since 1800* in 1980, in which Lieberson made a systematic comparative study of immigrant assimilation.<sup>111</sup> In their book, Alba and Nee define assimilation as a form of ethnic change. In other words, they believe that assimilation is “the decline of an ethnic distinction and its corollary cultural and social differences.”<sup>112</sup>

According to them, the traditional European immigration pattern has given way to the new mass immigration pattern that began in the late 1960s. In contrast to the old immigration pattern, “the new immigrants hail predominantly from the developing societies of Latin America, Asia, and the Caribbean Basin.”<sup>113</sup> By comparing the experiences of the immigrants to the United States in the late nineteenth century (from Europe and East Asia) and the twentieth century (from Latin America, Asia, and the Caribbean Basin), Alba and Nee find that assimilation is still a continuing pattern in shaping the immigrant experience.<sup>114</sup>

In the last decades of the twentieth century, however, some scholars began to apply diaspora theory to migration studies. Diaspora often refers to the massive expatriation of people from their homelands to new territories, voluntary or forced. It is mainly applied to Jews, Armenians, Chinese, and Indians. It also works as a concept that can be applied to different academic studies, such as political science, anthropology, sociology, religious studies, history,

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<sup>110</sup> Russell Kazal, “Revisiting Assimilation: The Rise, Fall, and Reappraisal of a Concept in American Ethnic History,” in *Majority and Minority*, ed. Norman Yetman, 285-311.

<sup>111</sup> In this book, Lieberson employs a historical perspective and qualitative method to look at the white and black immigrants since 1800 in their attainment in employment, education, residence, and political representation. Lieberson concludes that cultural and normative explanations cannot account for the differences in their assimilation but the “structure of the situation” in the North.

<sup>112</sup> Alba and Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 11.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, ix.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

and religious studies. According to scholar Tololyan, who argued in the first issue of the journal *Diaspora*, the concept of diaspora has picked up myriad meanings, including global processes of de-territorialization, transnational migration and cultural hybridity.<sup>115</sup> It opposes the traditional concepts in migration studies, such as “locality,” “regions” and “nations” and argues for hybridity and multiple belonging. In this context, diaspora theory has challenged integration and assimilation theory and focuses on multiple identities and cross-border networks. Essentially, it argues against complete assimilation.<sup>116</sup>

Diaspora theory has had a strong influence on migration studies, particularly in the United States, since it is now dominated by a terminology of mobility, transnational relations, and the dissolution of local boundaries.<sup>117</sup> Despite its influence, however, scholars still debate the limitations of diaspora as a paradigmatic theory in migration studies. For example, some scholars believe that diaspora is a term of self-designation and is “closely related to the increasing relevance of representations of ‘identity’ and ‘culture’ in international politics.”<sup>118</sup> Moreover, some scholars, such as James Clifford, Mihran Dabag, and William Safran believe that both as a term of reference and as a concept for research, “diaspora” is still vague in meaning and can be contested in many ways. For example, Safran believes that diaspora may mislead scholars’ underestimating the ever-existent forces in diaspora, such as persecution and violent expulsion.

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<sup>115</sup> Waltraud Kokot, Khachig Tololyan and Carolin Alfonso, introduction to *Diaspora, Identity and Religion: New Directions in Theory and Research*, eds. Waltraud Kokot, Khachig Tololyan, and Carolin Alfonso (New York: Routledge, 2004), 1.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>118</sup> Kokot Tololyan and Alfonso, *Diaspora, Identity and Religion*, 2.

Similarly, Clifford called on scholars to examine “the constructive potential of diasporas as ‘mediating cultures’ instead of implications of forced dispersal, exile and loss.”<sup>119</sup>

But when looking at the literature on Chinese American women, whether it is during the first, second, or third period, one can find that most scholars lack either a diasporic, transnational, or assimilation perspective in their research. And the literature, despite its increasing number, is still limited in breadth and depth. As scholar Shelley Fisher Fishkin points out, the literature on the Chinese, especially on the early history of Chinese American immigrants is mostly built up on the American side. However, they still need the primary materials that could be found in mainland China to make it complete.<sup>120</sup>

For example, Huping Ling’s book *Surviving on the Gold Mountain: A History of Chinese American Women and Their Lives* explores the history of Chinese women in the United States from the early nineteenth century to the late twentieth century.<sup>121</sup> For this, Ling draws heavily on the U.S. archives and on English-language and Chinese-language newspapers published in the United States in her research. However, since Ling fails to engage in any primary materials of the time from China, it still lacks completeness. Likewise, Judy Yung’s book *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* and Benson Tong’s *Unsubmissive Women: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco* locate their sources exclusively in the United States and consequently lack breadth in scope.<sup>122</sup> So in this

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<sup>119</sup> Kokot Tololyan and Alfonso, *Diaspora, Identity and Religion*, 2.

<sup>120</sup> Shelley Fisher Fishkin, “Challenges in the Field: An American Perspective,” (paper presented at American Studies Network Annual Conference 2004, Fudan University, Shanghai, China, June 14-16, 2004).

<sup>121</sup> Ling, *Surviving on the Gold Mountain*, 9 ( In her book, Huping Ling broadens the scope of her study and explores the history of Chinese women in the United States by looking at different time periods of Chinese female immigration from the mid-nineteenth century to the late twentieth century).

<sup>122</sup> In their books, Judy Yung and Benson Tong explored Chinese American women in San Francisco as a case study and drew heavily on the primary materials available in the United States. While doing so, they seemingly did not



case, it is understandable for Fishkin to ask questions like “How can the proverbial pushes and pulls that drew Chinese women to the U.S. in the nineteenth century be understood without factoring in perspectives drawn from Chinese archival sources about their place in Chinese society and their sense of their options in life? And without mining any extant letters they may have sent home recording what they encountered in the U.S.?”<sup>123</sup> Unfortunately, that is also true for Chinese scholars whose works have not combined sources in China and in the United States. This has seemingly become a task for Chinese American scholars on both sides.

To some extent, the writers as mentioned above have either delineated a general history of Chinese American women as found in Ling’s book or located the study of Chinese women in the United States in a certain period or certain geographical location as explored in Yung’s book. However, their works have not explored the new emerging characteristics of the second-generation Chinese American women, which have become more and more salient since the 1970s and 1980s.

Another thing that deserves a special mention here is that in their works, most scholars of Chinese American women need new methodologies to study their subject in a broader context. For example, most of their research is limited to Chinese women in the United States. They still need to compare women of different ethnic groups so that they can find the universal commonalities between women immigrants of different color and origin. And they also need to look at various stages of the life cycle in their adaptation to American society and culture.

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explore the inevitable connection between how Chinese American women were influenced by Chinese society and culture prior to their arrival and how they struggled in the United States by drawing on the materials particularly in southeastern China, which were the largest sending area of Chinese immigrants to the United States in the nineteenth century.

<sup>123</sup> Fishkin, “Challenges in the Field: An American Perspective.”

In this context, my study of the “Dear Diane” letters, focusing on young women on the San Francisco Bay area in California, and by comparing their letters with the Bintel Brief—letters in the Yiddish *Forward*—examines the adaptation process of Chinese women in America and suggests a comparative focus to understand their experiences. By doing so, I hope that my research can make some contributions to the literature on Chinese women.

## Chapter Two

### **A Mixed Racial Identity: the “Double Consciousness” of Young Chinese Women during Their Assimilation to Contemporary America**

Chinese female immigration did not undergo dramatic social, economic and demographic changes until the post-World War II era. The changes in U.S. immigration policies in the 1960s had a dramatic impact on Chinese immigration. One of the most immediate results was the rapid increase of Chinese female immigrants to the United States, which would eventually alter the long-skewed sex ratio in Chinese immigrant communities. Coinciding with this change was that Chinese women immigrants began to face new problems during their adjustment and adaptation to American society and culture. With this in mind, this chapter attempts to explore the social, economic and demographic changes in Chinese female immigration from a historical perspective and how these changes affected the lives of Chinese women immigrants as they encountered American life.

According to researchers on Chinese American women, such as Huping Ling, Iris Chang, Judy Yung, and Gordon Chang, the increase of Chinese immigration in the twentieth century was the inevitable outcome of various “push and pull” factors in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (as discussed in Chapter One).<sup>124</sup> Chinese immigrants encountered many problems in the United States. One of the most noticeable phenomena was the skewed sex ratio. The scarcity of Chinese women in the United States was a result of both Chinese cultural practices against

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<sup>124</sup> Huping Ling, *Surviving on the Gold Mountain: A History of Chinese American Women and Their Lives* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 20; Iris Chang, *The Chinese in America: A Narrative History* (New York: Viking, 2003), vii; Judy Yung, Gordon H. Chang, and Him Mark Lai, eds., *Chinese American Voices: From the Gold Rush to the Present* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2006), xx.

women and America's anti-Chinese immigration policies. Unlike the Japanese, whose immigration to the United States came largely after the Chinese immigration had peaked in the late nineteenth century, few Chinese men sought to maintain families in the United States. Restricted by Confucian definitions of their roles, women were considered different from and inferior to men. While men were encouraged to travel the world in search of adventure and riches, women were taught that their goals should be to manage the household, look after their parents-in-law, and raise their children.<sup>125</sup> For nearly a century, these differing definitions of gender roles strongly influenced the two primary features of Chinese-American life. On the one hand, the practice of male emigrants venturing abroad led to the characterization of Chinese immigrants in the United States as sojourners—temporary residents who would send remittances home to support their families and then, after accumulating their fortunes, hoped to return to their families in China. On the other hand, these cultural norms, combined with laws that would restrict Chinese immigration to the United States, contributed to the establishment of a “bachelor society” comprised disproportionately of men, as has been empathetically described by Victor and Brett deBary Nee in *Longtime Californ'.*<sup>126</sup> The data in Table 2-1 reveal the overwhelming presence of males and the extraordinarily high sex ratio among the Chinese in the early years of their immigration to the United States.

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<sup>125</sup> Judy Yung, *Unbound Voices: A Documentary History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 106-112; Ling, *Surviving on the Gold Mountain*, 18-19; 26-27.

<sup>126</sup> Victor G. and Brett de Bary Nee, *Longtime Californ': A Documentary Study of an American Chinatown* (New York: Pantheon Book, 1972), 11-56.

**Table 2-1 Chinese Population in the United States, by sex, 1860, 1870, and 1880**

Year	Total	Male	Female	Percent Female	Sex Ratio <sup>127</sup>
1860	34,933	33,149	1,784	4.5	1858
1870	63,199	58,633	4,556	7.2	1284
1880	105,465	100,686	4,779	5.1	2107

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, A-19; C-11, in Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, "Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals By Race, 1790 to 1990, and By Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For The United States, Regions, Divisions, and States," accessed on December 3, 2011,

<http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0056/twps0056.html>;

Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "Split Household, Small Producer and Dual Wage Earner: An Analysis of Chinese-American Family Strategies," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 45 (February 1983): 38.

As the data in Table 2-2 indicates, although the Chinese population increased between 1860 and 1880, it was still relatively small compared to other immigrant

**Table 2-2 American Foreign-Born Population, 1880 (In thousands)**

Total	Europe	North America	Latin America	Africa	Asia	China
6,680	5,752	788	107	2	108	104

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Table 4, in Campbell J. Gibson and Emily Lennon, "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-born Population of the United States: 1850-1900," February 1999, revised on October 31, 2011, accessed on December 2, 2011, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0029/tab04.html>.

<sup>127</sup> Sex ratio is defined as the number of males per 100 females within the same population of a given locale, expressed in equation as  $\text{sex ratio} = \frac{M(\text{population males})}{F(\text{population females})} \times 100$ . See Kenneth C.C. Kammeyer, *An Introduction to Population* (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1971), 38-40.

and foreign-born groups in the United States, comprising less than 2 percent of the total *foreign-born* population in 1880. Nevertheless, because they tended to be concentrated in western states (California, Oregon, Washington, Nevada), they were perceived as competing for labor in these frontier states and territories, which led to widespread private discrimination and numerous state and federal laws and regulations to restrict their presence. In 1882, the U.S. Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which suspended Chinese immigration for ten years and prohibited Chinese immigrants from being naturalized as U.S. citizens. In 1892 the act was extended for another ten years. The result was the virtual halt of legal Chinese immigration to the United States. The phenomenon of the Chinese bachelor society and the extremely distorted sex ratio was further reinforced.

This unbalanced sex ratio continued until the late twentieth century (See Table 2-3). For example, in 1910, the total Chinese-American population was 71,531, of which only 4,675 were women, producing a sex ratio of an astronomical 1431 to 100. By comparison, the total U.S. population in that year was 91,972,266, of which 47,332,277 were males and 44,639,989 females, resulting in a sex ratio of 106 to 100. The scarcity of Chinese women in the United States was not fundamentally changed until after World War II. As late as 1940, of a total Chinese American population of 77,504, there were only 20,115 women. Although the Chinese sex ratio had declined significantly by 1940, it still remained very high (285), a reflection of the continuing presence of the Chinese “bachelor society.”<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Nee, *Longtime Californ*’, xxii.

**Table 2-3 Sex Ratio for Overall and Chinese Populations in the United States, 1900, 1910, 1940, 1970, 1980, Selected Years**

Year	Overall	Chinese
1900	104	1385
1910	106	926
1940	101	224
1970	95	111
1980	94	102

Source: Frank Hobbs and Nicole Stoops, A-14, Table 6: Population by Sex for the United, Regions, and States: 1900 to 2000, *Demographic Trends in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Special Reports, November 2002, accessed on May 6, 2012, <http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/censr-4.pdf>; 1980 Census of Population, Characteristics of the Population, *General Population Characteristics, United States Summary, PC80-1-B1*, 1983, Table 40: Race by Sex: 1900-1980, accessed on May 6, 2012 [http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1980/1980censusofpopu8011u\\_bw.pdf](http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1980/1980censusofpopu8011u_bw.pdf).

The scarcity of Chinese women, to a large extent, determined the lifestyle of early Chinese male immigrants. In most cases, Chinese men took on the jobs that Chinese women traditionally held, such as cooking, washing, and sewing. In addition, as scholar Stanford M. Lyman found, the Chinese in America had strong roots in their homeland. They came to the United States only to stay temporarily and to take advantage of opportunities to make their fortune. Most of them intended to return home. So the Chinese in America were sojourners. According to Lyman, about 360,000 Chinese emigrated to the United States between 1820 and 1892, but in the same period as many as 270,000 returned to China.<sup>129</sup>

Considerable demographic changes in Chinese immigration began with the onset of World War II. In 1941, after the United States declared war against Japan as a result of the Pearl

<sup>129</sup>Stanford Morris Lyman, *Chinatown and Little Tokyo: Power, Conflict, and Community Among Chinese and Japanese Immigrants in America* (New York: Associated Faculty, 1986), 41.

Harbor attack, a large group of Japanese Americans, citizens and Japanese nationals, were relocated and interned. Coinciding with America's counterattack on Japan and the internment of the Japanese in America, China became an ally of the United States. Consequently, the American government sought to make at least symbolic improvements in the immigration policy toward the Chinese. In 1943, the Chinese Exclusion Repeal Act replaced the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, but it allowed only a minimal number—105—of Chinese to immigrate to the United States every year as compared, for example, to a quota of more than 65,000 for the British Isles. Also, the U.S. drafted into the army more than 20 percent of the Chinese males living in the United States.<sup>130</sup>

Subsequently, the U.S. Congress passed a series of immigration acts affecting Chinese immigrants. In 1945, the War Brides Act permitted the immigration of foreign wives, husbands, fiancés, and children of U.S. Army personnel. One immediate result of this was that by 1947, as many as 6,000 Chinese women had entered the United States as the wives of American servicemen. In addition, the American government enacted the Displaced Persons Act in 1948. As a result, by 1950, the Chinese American population numbered 117,629, of which 40,621 were female, creating a sex ratio of 190. To a large extent, it was only after the end of World War II that the Chinese sex ratio began to approach a more normal distribution.<sup>131</sup>

The real fundamental changes to Chinese female immigration, however, did not occur until the 1960s. Influenced by the American civil rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s, the U.S. Congress began to pursue more liberal immigration policies. In 1952, the Walters-

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<sup>130</sup>“Chinese American Immigration Timeline,” *China Insight*, accessed on March 17, 2011, <http://www.chinainsight.info/culture/chinese/202-chinese-american-immigration-timeline.html>.

<sup>131</sup> Ling, *Surviving on the Gold Mountain*, 115.



McCarran Immigration and Naturalization Act revoked the 1924 Asian Exclusion Act, while the Immigration and Nationality Act permitted individuals of all races to apply for naturalization. However, the legislation did not bring immediate changes, as it retained the very small—and highly discriminatory—quota for Chinese immigrants. In 1953, the U.S. Congress passed the Refugee Relief Act and offered unlimited immigrant visas to refugees from China. Again the Kennedy Emergency Immigration Act of 1962 granted 5,000 Chinese immigrant status and by June 30, 1966, 15,111 Chinese refugees were admitted.<sup>132</sup>

However, it was the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act that played the most decisive role in creating opportunities for Chinese immigrants to enter the United States and, with it, the transformation of the Chinese American sex ratio. In essence, it rejected “national origins” quotas as a basis for allowing immigrants into the United States. The 1965 act established a ceiling of 20,000 immigrants from any one country.<sup>133</sup> This immediately opened up and encouraged Chinese immigration. For example, in 1970, there were as many as 431,583 Chinese living in the United States, of whom 204,850 were women, reducing the sex ratio to 111. By 1980, with a total population of 806,040, the Chinese had replaced the Japanese as the largest Asian ethnic group living in the United States. And, following the shift of the U.S. gender composition from a majority male population to a majority female population around the middle of the twentieth century, it was also during this period that the sex ratio of Chinese male and female immigrants became nearly balanced—102 (see Table 2-3).

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<sup>132</sup> John Soennichsen, *The Chinese exclusion Act of 1882: Landmarks of the American Mosaic* (Santa Barbara, California: Greenwood, 2011), xiii; Victor G. and Brett de Bary Nee, *Longtime Californ': A Documentary Study of an American Chinatown* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 410.

<sup>133</sup> Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 227.

While the relaxing of entry barriers to Chinese immigration was vital, the “push” factors in mainland China were significant. Since the American government joined hands with the Nationalist Party of China against the Communist-led government, after the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, many Nationalist Party supporters, such as landlords, businessmen, capitalists, and soldiers were suppressed and purged by the new government in Beijing. As a result, many of the Nationalists fled from mainland China to Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the United States. The number of Chinese refugees increased rapidly due to a series of social, political and economic revolutions in China, such as the “Great Leap Forward” movement (1958-1960), which intended to stimulate economic development and eventually failed; the “Suppression of Landlords and Conservatives” in the 1950s; and the “Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)” which called on a radical suppression of all kinds of Rightist groups and those opposed to the development of socialism.

Though there are no official records of how many refugees fled to other countries, the number of the refugees was probably large. One can see this from the passage of a series of acts by the U.S. Congress. In 1949, the American government gave refugee status to 5,000 highly educated Chinese nationals with the passage of the Central Intelligence Agency Act; in 1953, the Refugee Relief Act allowed unlimited immigrant visas to Chinese refugees; in 1962, the KEIA Act granted 5,000 Chinese immigrants entry to the United States. According to scholar Mae M. Ngai, between 1944 and 1960, as many as 10,376 refugees entered the United States.<sup>134</sup>

These demographic changes began to shift the characteristics of the Chinese female immigrant population. Unlike the earlier Chinese female immigrants, who had immigrated to the United States mainly for family reasons, the new post-World War II immigrants came to

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<sup>134</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 333.

America more to fulfill their individual dreams, such as seeking a better education and better job opportunities. In addition to immigrating to the United States because of a severe lack of economic opportunities in China, a large number of Chinese women immigrants fled to the United States as political refugees. Again, while most of the late nineteenth-century immigrants were poorly educated and subservient to men, a large number of new Chinese immigrant women were well educated and independent. And most of them anticipated living a life of freedom, democracy, equality, and opportunity in the United States. To some extent, they were more western-minded and more eager for participation in America's social, political, and economic life. One example was that new women immigrants joined the intellectual efforts in the United States to establish the first Asian American studies programs in 1968 at San Francisco State University, and other schools in California soon followed.<sup>135</sup>

The new Chinese female immigrants also differed in their choice of residence. Historically, Chinese immigrants had preferred to live in their own ethnic neighborhoods, which came to be known as Chinatowns. These ethnic communities often provided new immigrants with safety, warmth, and a relief of nostalgia, especially at times of racial hostility and economic challenges, and during Chinese holidays. After the new Chinese women immigrants arrived in the United States, though, most of them, like their earlier counterparts, chose to settle initially in the traditional ethnic enclaves—such as Chinatowns in Los Angeles and New York— but some began to move out of urban ethnic communities to the suburbs, such as the Monterey Park and Walnut Creek areas in California. This geographical expansion out of the traditional Chinese communities, to some extent, shows that new Chinese immigrants tried to break through

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<sup>135</sup> Huping Ling, "Editor's Preface," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 14 (June 2011): v-vi.

traditional barriers on Chinese residency for an equal opportunity in American life.<sup>136</sup> What deserves a special mention here is that the black Civil Rights Movement had spawned equal housing legislation that banned residential discrimination, opening up new neighborhoods to Chinese-Americans.

As they moved beyond Chinatowns, so too did new immigrants leave the limitations of traditional occupations, such as laundry and the garment industry, and aspire to upward social and economic mobility. For example, many Chinese American women worked in private companies, government offices, and professional fields. According to Huping Ling, a scholar on Chinese- American women's history, some American-born Chinese women even entered the entertainment industry and served in the U.S. Army. By the 1960s, 44.2 percent of Chinese American women worked outside the home for wages as compared with 33.6 percent of white women.<sup>137</sup>

The different characteristics of Chinese female immigrants in terms of their motivation to immigrate and their varied life and work experiences in the United States could seemingly facilitate their process of assimilation, adaptation, and adjustment to American society and culture. Nevertheless, they still faced great difficulties, which were apparent in the new immigrants' lives. For example, though they moved out of Chinatowns, most Chinese immigrants still clustered together in areas close by, as in San Francisco and Seattle. Also, though some of the new first-generation immigrants had a better education than previous immigrants, many of them could not speak fluent English. Though they worked hard, most of

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<sup>136</sup> Timothy P. Fong, *The First Suburban Chinatown: The Remaking of Monterey Park, California* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 31; Michel S. Laguerre, *The Global Ethnopolis: Chinatown, Japantown and Manilatown in American Society* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 33.

<sup>137</sup> Ling, *Surviving on the Gold Mountain*, 121.

them still faced job discrimination, limiting them to work as secretaries or clerks. Similarly, though the second-generation Chinese women had better educational levels and could speak English fluently, they still faced barriers at work and were blocked from job advancement. One reason was that many other Americans stereotyped them as “docile,” “subservient” and “quiet on the job.”<sup>138</sup>

During their encounters with American culture, second-generation Chinese American women experienced hardships. Though they received a higher education, they felt increasing pressures both from home and society. At home, there was an inevitable generational conflict between parents and daughters. Since parents had grown up in China and had been deeply influenced by Chinese culture, they often identified themselves as Chinese in America. They lived a Chinese way of life: speaking Chinese, wearing Chinese clothes, eating Chinese food, and attempting to educate their children in Chinese culture.

However, because their children were American born, raised, and educated, they identified as Americans: speaking English, eating western food, wearing western clothes, and learning western culture. Though different than their parents, they still lived in a constant dilemma: they “looked” Chinese but identified as American. Unfortunately, their American identity was often ignored by their Chinese parents and would often be denied by a racist white society. In this situation, neither their parents nor many whites would regard them the way they saw themselves. Thus to many, they remained Chinese or Chinese-Americans in American society. This “banana” phenomenon experienced by the second- or third-generation Chinese American women—that is, “yellow” on the outside, and “white” on the inside—would often

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<sup>138</sup> Ling, *Surviving on the Gold Mountain*, 121.

trigger many problems, such as generational and identity conflicts. Indeed, all this combined to prevent them from achieving full assimilation and becoming Americans without a hyphen.

Bicultural conflicts and generational relationships and other kinds of problems with the second-generation Chinese American women are vividly portrayed in such best-selling novels as *The Woman Warrior*, *Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (1976) by Maxine Hong Kingston and *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) by Amy Tan. Both novels were popular because they transcend Chinese American culture as they deal with universal themes of mother-daughter conflict and cultural adaptation.<sup>139</sup> In their works, both Kingston and Tan describe stories from their mothers vividly and meaningfully. Specifically, *The Woman Warrior* relates the conflicts between the domineering Chinese mother, who is passing on family stories and customs to her American daughter, and her daughter, who is trying to gain independence from her family traditions by resisting her mother's will. Kingston also explores identity among Chinese American women. According to her, in each of the "ghost" stories related, a woman is both victim and victor, and these two identities are closely intermingled and inseparable from each other. Again, by discussing the generational conflicts between mother and daughter, Kingston directs the reader's attention to the "double consciousness" of the second-generation Chinese women. Moreover, Kingston tries to break the stereotypes of Chinese women in the United States. For example, both the mother's and daughter's birth year of the dragon (dragon lady) is actually an image of strength, of will and courage. In this way, Kingston's book provides the reader with a rich site

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<sup>139</sup> After its publication, over 2,000,000 copies of *The Joy Luck Club* were sold and the book has been translated into 17 languages. Similarly, *The Woman Warrior* won the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1976.

where the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, and identity are tested, constructed, and explored.

Similar to Kingston's book, Amy Tan's novel also explores the problematic generational relationship between Chinese mothers and American daughters. In this work, eight characters—mothers and daughters from four different families—reveal a bifurcation along generational lines between mothers and daughters. Each of the families tells stories in turn while playing mahjong. The stories comprise the four main sections of the novel. By describing the mothers' stories about China and their daughters' experiences living in America, Tan describes how mothers possessively try to hold fast and how daughters struggle for autonomy.

The mother-daughter conflict is actually centered around the prevailing identity issue in Chinese-American families. In Tan's book, by telling Chinese stories to their daughters, the mothers are reinforcing their Chinese identity and in their eyes, Chinese culture is inheritable. However, their daughters react in an American way since they have an "American" heart and have a different identity from their Chinese mothers. Although the mother-daughter conflict seems to derive from bicultural conflicts within the family, it is actually the direct result of Chinese female immigrants' experiences in the United States.

When viewed from a social and historical perspective, Chinese American women live in a society where white supremacy and patriarchal power have been exerted over minorities and women for a long time. In this context, minority women are inevitably subject to America's racial gender discrimination, generating both racial and gender problems. As members of a racial minority and as men's "subordinates," they are both victims of America's persistent racial thinking and Chinese culture. In other words, Chinese American women are racialized as the

“other” in a racist society. But what makes this even worse is that they are suffering from a continued sense of identity crisis. In addition to being identified as Asian by their physical appearance, they are socialized in the Chinese way at home. Thus second-generation women might not fully understand the real meaning of being Chinese in the United States, but they believe that it is highly important to develop and maintain their American identity. After they realize that they are still treated as Chinese both at home and in society, despite their efforts to be fully American, they realize that their identity is unstable: they want to be American yet neither their parents nor a racist American society recognize their American identity. In this case, they experience a double consciousness similar to what that W. E. B. Du Bois explored in his famous treatise, *The Souls of Black Folk*, as early as 1903.

According to Du Bois, double consciousness involves a sense of how to look at another through oneself and how to identify oneself through others. As he defines it, “One feels his twoness, --an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideas in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”<sup>140</sup> Specifically, it means that in American society, white stereotypes often arbitrarily define a minority’s group identity. Also, racism has the power to exclude racialized others from the mainstream society and culture. Again, this produces the effect on any minority group of being and not being an American simultaneously. And Du Bois believes that this double consciousness is true not only for black Americans, but also for Asians, Africans, and other ethnic groups in America, since “The Problem of the Twentieth century is the problem of the color-line, --the

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<sup>140</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, (1903) 1994, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co. Reprint, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1994. Citations refer to the Dover edition), 2.



relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea.”<sup>141</sup>

Du Bois’ theories about the “double consciousness” of black Americans shed light on the position and identity of second-generation Chinese American women, who throughout the twentieth century have been stereotyped. For a long time, Chinese American women have been misrepresented in the contexts of language, art, images, movies, and propaganda. They live with a “veil” imposed by stereotypes. In a racist society, Chinese women are often stereotyped as the “shy lotus blossom” or the “dragon lady,” a typical version of the Mary and Eve dichotomy in western stereotypes of women in general. This image is actually fluid by nature and white racists apply it for their own benefit. When Chinese women in the United States are marginalized, they are viewed as “submissive, delicate and soft-spoken,” but when attacked, they turn “sinister, evil and wily.” In either case, Chinese American women are alienated and excluded from the mainstream of American society and culture. They are only the “Other.” Consequently, this racial and gender discrimination subjugates Chinese women to living life behind a “veil” and suffering from a strong sense of “double consciousness.”

All this provides a lens through which to view Kingston’s and Tan’s books. In *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*, Kingston portrays a daughter’s struggles to find herself between her Chinese mother, who often fills her childhood with ghost stories, and her American world of plastic and neon; between her expected Chinese-girl shyness before strangers and her American education with its emphasis on assertiveness and independent

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<sup>141</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, (1903) 1994, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 9.

thinking; and between the extremes of woman within Chinese culture as a victim and woman as a victor.

What is special in this kind of double consciousness is that, in addition to the traditional imposed stereotypes from a racist white culture, the second-generation Chinese American women experience intra-racial cultural discrimination or rejection. It arises because traditional Chinese culture is in conflict with many elements of American culture, such as the emphases on assertiveness, independence and individualism. Since the young girl identifies herself as American due to her birth and education in the United States, she is subconsciously discriminated against or opposed by her Chinese mother, who has long internalized her Chinese identity though she lives in the United States. In this case, the mother-daughter confrontation is natural and unavoidable.

An example of this generational difference is that, in the *No Name Woman*, the first story in the *Woman Warrior*, Brave Orchid—Maxine Hong Kingston's mother—told her daughter (Maxine) a story about how Maxine's aunt, who was then back in China, jumped into a family well and killed herself because of the birth of an illegitimate baby. After hearing her mother's story, Maxine thought that "those of us in the first American generations have had to figure out how the invisible world the emigrants built around our childhoods fits in solid America."<sup>142</sup> In this case, in Maxine's eyes, her mother is the "other" and is different from "us" Americans. Though racially and physically different, Maxine would rather claim her American heritage than the "other" Chinese identity because of her American education and experiences. However, in Brave Orchid's eyes, her American-born daughter is still Chinese both by birth and

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<sup>142</sup> Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (New York: Vintage, 1976), 5.

culture and therefore Maxine should heed her story without any doubt or independent thinking. In this context, it is inevitable that cultural tensions arise.

One can also find such conflicts resulting from double consciousness in Amy Tan's book, *The Joy Luck Club*. Holding varying perceptions of each other, the four mothers—Suyuan Woo, An-mei Hsu, Lindo Jong, and Ying-ying St. Clair—and the four daughters—Jing-mei “June” Woo, Rose Hsu Jordan, Waverly Jong, and Lena St. Clair—define each other differently. One can see this clearly from the “Two Kinds” story by Jing-mei Woo in which Woo described how she responded to her mother's anger with her one day when her mother found that she was not playing the piano as expected but watching TV:

“Turn off TV,” she called from the kitchen five minutes later. I did not budge. And then I decided. I didn't have to do what my mother said anymore. I wasn't her slave. This wasn't China. I had listened to her before and look what happened. She was the stupid one.<sup>143</sup>

From this quotation, one can see that the mother expects to train her daughter in the Chinese way. In her mother's culture, the daughter must listen to her unconditionally. To the mother, the daughter is Chinese and should be reared in Chinese ways. The mother's Chinese identity has been internalized through her life experiences in China. However, for the daughter, American born and educated, independence and equality are far more valued than her mother's assertive words. The end of this quotation shows that the daughter has a strong sense of being an American: since they live in America, her mother should view her as an American and treat her as an equal and independent being, not like a slave.

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<sup>143</sup> Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club* (New York: Putnam's, 1989), 141.

Since their publication, Amy Tan's and Maxine Hong Kingston's books have been widely read and researched. They are important works in Chinese American literature and in women/gender studies, immigration, sociology, and cultural studies. When talking about her book, Amy Tan believes that her writing has larger concerns. It is not only about Chinese or Chinese Americans. Rather, it is about relationships and family. Like Kingston, Tan hopes that the reader would read her book in order "to feel more deeply, to see more clearly, to know what questions to ask, and to formulate what we believe."<sup>144</sup> It is clear that Tan actually intends to present the reader with a larger picture of the life of the Chinese women in the United States.

Indeed, *Woman Warrior* and *Joy Luck Club* have become important books to view some critical issues in the lives of the Chinese women in the United States today. That both books have enjoyed critical and popular success shows that the themes explored—such as identity, mother-daughter relationships, love, loss, expectations and reality, and bicultural clashes—are often encountered by Chinese in America. But far beyond the influence on Chinese in America, the two books open up thinking about Chinese women immigrants in the broader context of history, culture, gender, identity, ethnicity, immigration, and place. In this case, both books contribute to understanding Chinese women, especially, of second-generation Chinese women in modern America.

In sum, due to the post-World War II immigration policies and, especially, the new immigration laws passed by the U.S. Congress in the 1960s, Chinese female immigration increased significantly in the second half of the twentieth century. This demographic change not only eventually eliminated the persistent sex-ratio imbalance among Chinese immigrants that

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<sup>144</sup> See "Amy Tan 'The Joy Luck Club'," accessed on December 13, 2004, <http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/cs6/tan.html>.

had persisted for nearly a century, but also remade Chinese American communities given the new Chinese female immigration. The Chinese female presence redefined Chinese-American experiences and also added new problems in their lives in the United States. This was especially true for second-generation Chinese American women.

During their assimilation or adjustment to American society and culture, most second-generation Chinese explore a strong sense of double consciousness. They view themselves as Americans and hope that they are perceived as Americans both by their parents and by the mainstream society. However, in reality, they struggle against stereotypes to win recognition of their American identity. This struggle takes place everywhere; at home, they resist traditional Chinese matriarchal and patriarchal power and authority by showing independent spirit and claiming equality. In the broader society, they attempt to transcend stereotypes and barriers to full American assimilation. That they have an American heart but a Chinese face limits their self-claimed identity: they are often viewed either as Chinese or as Chinese-American, but rarely as fully American. The result is a process that makes their adaptation or acculturation excruciating.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Coding and Decoding the “Dear Diane” Letters:**

#### **Race, Gender, and Culture**

This chapter is composed of two parts. First, it will take a critical look at each of three important theories in immigration studies—sojourning, transnationalism, and assimilation—concluding that assimilation theory is the most applicable to my research project. Second, it will examine the “Dear Diane” letters carefully with assimilation theory as a frame of reference.

### **3-1 A Critical Examination of Sojourning, Transnationalism, and Assimilation Theory**

#### **3-1-1 A Sojourning Theory**

In the study of Chinese Americans, scholars have intended to employ different theoretical approaches to gain insight into the characteristics of a multifaceted Chinese America. It seems, however, that no single theory explains every historic stage of Chinese immigration and settlement in the United States. In the earlier studies of Chinese Americans, such scholars as Paul C. P. Siu, Rose Hum Lee, Gunther Barth, and Stanford M. Lyman used sojourning theory as a paradigm in the study of Chinese Americans.<sup>145</sup> This was particularly so for the earlier Chinese immigration before the two world wars. Basically, sojourning theory argues that most Chinese came to reside in the United States only temporarily and as a direct result of the worldwide

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<sup>145</sup> Paul C. P. Siu, “The Sojourner,” *American Journal of Sociology* 58 (1952): 34-46; Rose Hum Lee, *The Chinese in the U.S.A.* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960); Gunther Barth, *Bitter Strength: A History of the Chinese in the United States, 1850-1870* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), Stanford M. Lyman, “The Chinese Diaspora in America, 1850-1943 in *The Asian in North America*, Stanford Lyman (Santa Barbara: ABC Clio Books, 1977), 11-24. Also, according to Sucheng Chan, it was sociologist Paul C.P. Siu who first used the term sojourner to characterize the Chinese in America. See Sucheng Chan, “European and Asian Immigration into the United States in Comparative Perspective, 1820s to 1920s” in *Immigration Reconsidered: History, Sociology, and Politics*, ed. Virginia Yans-McLaughlin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 37-78.

Chinese diaspora which began as early as the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The diaspora Chinese sought economic opportunities in the countries of their sojourn, intending to return to China with wealth and to establish their life in their permanent country.<sup>146</sup>

Most of the sojourners were men, forming the long period of the Chinese-American “bachelor society.” This skewed sex-ratio phenomenon among the Chinese was not fundamentally changed until the late twentieth century when the U.S. Congress enacted immigration policies that enabled larger numbers of Chinese to enter the country. Similarly, due to their clinging to their ethnic culture and orientation towards their homeland, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most of the Chinese Americans were essentially sojourners. Those who stayed concentrated their lives in the Chinese ethnic enclave—Chinatowns. Yet most scholarly literature on this period focused more on attitudes toward Chinese immigrants and their occupations, ignoring much of Chinese-American life and experiences.

After the United States changed its immigration policies, post-1965 Chinese immigration and the Chinese American population to the United States took on many new characteristics. For example, it has experienced fundamental demographic changes and social transformation. According to the 2010 Census, the total number of Chinese alone had reached 3,347,229, comprising 1.08 percent of America’s total population and 22.81 percent of Asian alone population, still remaining the largest ethnic Asian group.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Min Zhou, *Contemporary Chinese America: Immigration, Ethnicity, and Community Transformation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), 31; Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini, eds., *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 6.

<sup>147</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *2010 Census Summary File 2, Table PCT1*, accessed on May 31, <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>.

One of the immediate results is that, according to scholar Min Zhou, the distinctive “bachelor society” gave way to a family community and a Chinese ethnic community that was characterized by “tremendous intragroup diversity in terms of place of origin, socioeconomic background, patterns of geographic settlement, and trajectories of social mobility.”<sup>148</sup> What is more, beyond the demographic changes, residential and cultural patterns changed as well. According to the 2010 Census, Chinese immigrants continue to concentrate in the West and in some other historical urban areas such as Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco. For example, the five states with the largest Chinese population are California (1,253,102), New York (576,952), Texas (156,820), New Jersey (134,442), Massachusetts (122,957); and the five cities with the largest Chinese population are New York City (487,532), San Francisco (172,181), Los Angeles (66,782), San Jose (63,434) and Chicago (43,228).<sup>149</sup>

According to the AAT and NCC Joint Release, corresponding with the changes in Chinese Americans’ population, intragroup diversity and residential concentration are two other characteristics. One is that, in terms of job, income, and education, there is a distinctive bimodal distribution displayed among Chinese Americans. On the one hand, a large number of Chinese Americans are found in highly skilled and professional fields such as management, software development, medical services, and accounting. On the other hand, however, a prevailing number of Chinese Americans are blue-collar workers, such as cooks, waiters, and waitresses. Similarly, on the national level, Chinese American households have a higher level of income than the average of American households; but the poverty rate was 9.6 percent in 2009, higher

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<sup>148</sup> Zhou, *Contemporary Chinese America: Immigration, Ethnicity, and Community Transformation*, 47.

<sup>149</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *2010 Census Summary File 2, Table PCT1*, accessed on May 30, 2012, <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/searchresults.xhtml?refresh=t>.



than the 8.1 percent for white people. Moreover, although more than 51.8 percent of Chinese Americans over 25 received college and graduate education, as many as 18.7 percent did not graduate from high school, higher than 15.4 for the average American education.<sup>150</sup>

Thus, Chinese Americans exhibit a distinctive bimodal distribution in their levels of education and often receive low returns on their education. According to the AAT and NCC Joint Release, Chinese Americans spent a great amount of time and money on education. The data, however, show that, on average, they receive lower returns on education than those for the average and white Americans. In other words, the time and money spent on education do not guarantee Chinese Americans an equal socio-economic status with white Americans. Although the returns on education are higher for Chinese American women with college educations, it is more related to their higher level of education and hard work. Even for them, the high returns on education cannot be maintained long because of some key factors. For example, age is a critical one. On average, after they are over 35, the returns are obviously lower because of their gender, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, which would often make them more subject to prejudice and discrimination on the job.<sup>151</sup>

The new characteristics as reflected in Chinese Americans in terms of the demographic and social changes have made the Chinese American population quite different from the earlier Chinese immigrants. In this much changed situation, it is apparent that, though some Chinese still come to the United States as sojourners—mostly students whose number has increased rapidly and enormously as a direct result of China's launching its opening policy in 1978—

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<sup>150</sup>Xiaoning Ma “21 世纪全美华人形象调查一点五代华人最成功” (An Image Investigation of Chinese Americans in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Proves That the 1.5 Generation Are the Most Successful), accessed March 10, 2011, <http://world.people.com.cn/GB/13895324.html>. Also, in this situation, the age is a key factor for consideration.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

others, traditional immigrants who come to America for an opportunity to seek wealth and a better life, become permanent settlers in the United States. This is especially so since the Chinese American society has turned into a family-oriented community in the late twentieth century. In this context, sojourning theory no longer accounts for the complex phenomena of Chinese immigration to the United States today.

### **3-1-2 A Transnational Theory**

One inevitable outcome of the post-1965 Chinese immigration, joined by such driving forces as multiculturalism and globalization in the late-twentieth century, is that Chinese immigration to the United States needs to be examined more broadly and deeply, not only the traditional social and cultural explorations, but also more spatial or geographical ones—across borders and space. Indeed, due to the rapid globalization of transportation, information, and economic markets, Chinese immigrants, like other ethnic groups in the United States, have maintained a much closer relationship than in the past with their homeland and their family members and friends far away. This is why, in part, so many scholars began to resort to a transnational model to understand more recent American immigration and immigrants. Steven Vertovec produces an excellent summary of transnationalism. By drawing on scholar Gustavo Cano's findings, Vertovec argues that since the 1980s, interest in the economic, social, and political linkages among people, places, and institutions across nation-borders and institutions has increased so much that transnationalism has become a common theory utilized in many

disciplines, from sociology, geography and political science to race and ethnic, gender, and migration studies.<sup>152</sup>

While transnationalism connects people across the borders of nation-states, it has simultaneously prompted a so-called “diaspora consciousness” which is often characterized by dual or multiple identifications.<sup>153</sup> “Diaspora Consciousness” refers to individuals linked to more than one nation or place. One result is that individuals can have different kinds of consciousness, memory, identity, and awareness. Transnationalism has inevitably made individual identity more fluid and more dynamic in migrants’ lives than before. For this phenomenon, as early as 1994, James Clifford found that “The empowering paradox of diaspora is that dwelling here assumes a solidarity and connection there. But there is not necessarily a single place or an exclusivist nation.... [It is] the connection (elsewhere) that makes a difference (here).”<sup>154</sup>

However, when transnationalism stresses the linkage between home and new cultures and crosses borders, it overlooks some important factors in immigration. For example, if technology, such as the internet and electronic mail, could help new immigrants maintain their ties to their homelands, would this still pertain to older immigrants or their descendants who migrated to the United States in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century? Also, as the global economy, culture, and politics change rapidly and immigrants move on, to what extent can transnationalism explain immigrants’ connections with their places of origins or settlement or even with the “imagined” home in their heart? Can transnationalism help explain an obvious decline of language, culture, identity and nationality in their host society where the mainstream language

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<sup>152</sup> Steven Vertovec, *Transnationalism: Key Ideas* (New York, Routledge, 2009), 1.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>154</sup> James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 269.

and culture often prevails over their own? And can transnationalism explain the patterns of adaptation of the next generation? And to what extent can transnationalism account for their diasporic and hybrid cultural identities when they encounter mainstream society and culture?<sup>155</sup>

### **3-1-3 Assimilation Theory**

Given that transnationalism cannot explain some essential aspects concerning immigrant experiences, especially those of second- or third-generation of immigrants, one needs to look elsewhere to best explain the experiences of migrants and immigrants. Comparatively, whether in terms of its history or present development, assimilation theory is still the most useful paradigm in the study of the complexities of immigrant life in the United States. Richard Alba and Victor Nee point out that the progressive changes brought about by institutions, combined with different forms of capital—social, financial, and human—that immigrants bring with them, makes assimilation the most common immigrant group experience. In this context, “assimilation is likely to remain a central social process in the adaptation of immigrants and their descendants” and “encompass divergent outcomes in American society.”<sup>156</sup>

It is important to note that, with the dynamic changes of American immigration, assimilation theory has also changed over time in terms of its concepts and applicability. In the early twentieth century, Robert E. Park proposed a famous “race-relations cycle,” which includes “contact, competition, accommodation, and eventual assimilation” and this process, to Park, was progressive and irreversible.<sup>157</sup> This concept had been the paradigm of immigration studies until the emergence of the post-World War synthesis represented by Milton Gordon, who argued that

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<sup>155</sup> James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, 10.

<sup>156</sup> Richard Alba & Victor Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 59.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

“‘assimilation’ is a blanket term which in reality covers a multitude of subprocesses” and proposed a multidimensional concept of assimilation.<sup>158</sup> In his work, Gordon pointed out the subtle difference between “behavioral assimilation”—the “absorption of the cultural behavior patterns of the ‘host’ society” (what often scholars have termed acculturation) and “structural assimilation”—“the entrance of the immigrants and their descendants into the social cliques, organizations, institutional activities, and general civic life of the receiving society.”<sup>159</sup> He argued that, above all, behavioral assimilation or acculturation is inevitable for American immigrants. In addition, Gordon identified six other dimensions of assimilation—structural, marital, identity, prejudice, discrimination, and civic.<sup>160</sup> Later in his classic book, *Assimilation in American Life*, published in 1964, Gordon further proposed a “linear” assimilation theory in which immigrants encounter orderly three-stage assimilation from acculturation, structural assimilation, to marital assimilation.<sup>161</sup>

There are two important concepts in Gordon’s assimilation theory. One is that, in the process of the minority group’s adoption of the host culture, the mainstream culture often remains largely unaffected. The other is that structural pluralism is more appropriate to describe immigrant group assimilation because the United States consists of ethnic subsocieties in which ethnic and racial groups spend most of their social lives.<sup>162</sup> As a response to structural pluralism, Herbert Gans and Neil Sandberg proposed that the salient characteristics of immigrants would fade more and more with each new generation’s adjustment to the host society until they

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<sup>158</sup> Milton Gordon, “Assimilation in America: Theory and Reality,” in *Daedalus, Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 90 (Spring 1961): 279.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 263-285.

<sup>161</sup> Douglas S. Massey and Magaly Sanchez R., *Brokered Boundaries: Creating Immigrant Identity in Anti-Immigrant Times* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2010), 2.

<sup>162</sup> Gordon, “Assimilation in America: Theory and Reality,” 263-285; Alba and Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 27.

eventually assimilate. For example, Gans believed that acculturation and assimilation continued to take place among third- and fourth-generation immigrants. Since ethnic identity needs are not so intense as for first generation immigrants, subsequent generations “resort to the use of ethnic symbols. As a result, ethnicity may be turning into symbolic ethnicity, an ethnicity of last resort, which could, nevertheless, persist for generations.”<sup>163</sup> Again, in 1967, Peter Blau and Otis Dudley Duncan suggested that structural assimilation—integration into primary groups—would give way to socioeconomic assimilation. They believe that assimilation and social mobility are closely related to each other. It would be measured not by the index of the integration into primary groups or intermarriage as found in marital assimilation, but rather by status–attainment, which often includes such indicators as education, occupation, and income. Likewise, Douglas Massey proposed a spatial assimilation theory to draw people’s attention to the significance of geography and residence in particular in the concept of assimilation because spatial assimilation follows acculturation and social mobility, and is an intermediate step on the way to structural assimilation.<sup>164</sup>

What this project intends to draw heavily on, however, is the new developments in assimilation theory offered by Richard Alba and Victor Nee. In their argument, assimilation is not a universal outcome of a “straight-line” assimilation—from immigrants’ time of arrival to their merging into the middle class. Instead, it is “the attenuation of the distinctions based on ethnic origin.... [It] proceeds incrementally, usually as an intergenerational process, stemming both from individuals’ purposive action and from the unintended consequences of their

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<sup>163</sup> Herbert J. Gans, “Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America,” in *Nationalism: Critical Concepts in Political Science*, Vol 4, eds., John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (New York: Routledge, 2002), 1217.

<sup>164</sup> Alba and Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 29.

workaday decisions.”<sup>165</sup> Further, they state that assimilation involves a variety of mechanisms, proximate and distal, operating at different levels, and thus the process or extent of assimilation for ethnic or racial group varies from case to case, both individually and collectively.

What is most noteworthy about the new assimilation theory is the change in the concept that assimilation is almost exclusively one-sided, usually a result of the notion of ethnocentrism, to an interactive, dynamic one. In other words, during the minority’s adoption of mainstream culture, the majority culture changes too. Similarly, instead of the traditional argument that assimilation is inevitable and irreversible, new assimilation theory emphasizes assimilation as “a contingent outcome stemming from the cumulative effect of individual choices and collective action in close-knit groups, occurring at different rates both within and across ethnic groups.”<sup>166</sup> In this case, assimilation, according to Douglas S. Massey and Magaly Sanchez R., is essentially about “the restructuring of group identities and the redefinition of social boundaries so that immigrants and their descendants are perceived and treated by natives as ‘us’ rather than ‘them.’”<sup>167</sup>

To some extent, all three theories can contribute to comprehending the complex phenomenon of American immigration. However, when one utilizes the diaspora or transnational theory, one has to face the challenge of significant differences in immigration and immigrant experience over time. Likewise, when transnationalism became the primary theoretical model in the context of globalization, it would be hard to explain the experiences of earlier immigrants. Assimilation theory, on the other hand, has continued to evolve in response to the dynamic social

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<sup>165</sup> Alba and Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 29.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>167</sup> Massey and Sanchez R., *Brokered Boundaries*, 14.

and historical process of American immigration, and it has been rethought, revised, and updated as times change. In this sense, it remains a more dynamic and insightful theory to understand American immigrants, especially the second- or third-generation of immigrants.

### **3-2 An Examination of the “Dear Diane” Letters**

With changes in the Chinese American population, social agencies within and outside of the Chinese community began to adapt their services to meet evolving and new needs. During the exclusion years from 1882 to 1943, Chinatowns emerged as the places of refuge and Chinese culture, in which different organizations emerged to assist the excluded Chinese, such as the family, district (*hui guan*, 会馆), and the merchant associations (*tongs*, 堂).<sup>168</sup> After World War II, however, with a new immigration—men and women, old and young, and new permanent settlers not only from China but also from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese communities, institutions and societies adjusted their programs to meet the needs of the new, younger Chinese American communities that included many families and young women. Foremost among those serving young women was the Asian Women United project, founded in 1976 and headed by Elaine Kim and Diane Yen-Mei Wong, whose work led to the “Dear Diane” book.

The “Dear Diane” book employs an “advice” format—providing answers to letters concerning dilemmas that young Asian-American women faced. The effect of this advice column format is potentially powerful because, as David Gudelunas has argued, it can develop “a paradoxical intimate relationship between the reader and the advisor while simultaneously

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<sup>168</sup> Stanford M. Lyman, *Chinese Americans* (New York: Random House, 1974), 29-46; Kuah-Pearce Khun Eng and Evelyn Hu-DeHart, eds., *Voluntary Organizations in the Chinese Diaspora* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006), 231-252.



maintaining a parallel relationship between the reader and the larger community.”<sup>169</sup> By employing the advice column format, Wong, a successful career Asian American woman and former Chinatown Youth Center Executive director, can not only give her special expertise to Asian American girls during their acculturation, but more important, can be a role model for the younger Chinese and other Asian American girls in their struggles to achieve their aspirations and dreams in the United States. Because they were sojourning, had extremely low levels of literacy and Chinese language proficiency, faced limited economic opportunity, and lived in segregated enclaves, early Chinese immigrants had very limited exposure to Chinese media in the United States until the late 1970s.<sup>170</sup> The few Chinese newspapers published in America prior to this time mainly functioned as a medium for information and carried virtually no such “advice” columns for Chinese immigrants. Again, due to the decades of political and cultural revolutions in mainland China, Chinese mainstream newspapers did not have special advice columns for overseas Chinese either before Wong’s project. Similarly, Chinese scholars rarely write books just in order to provide advice for Chinese immigrants, especially for the young and female. In this case, Wong’s project was of high importance and value.<sup>171</sup>

The “Dear Diane” letters focus on San Francisco Bay Area. Traditionally, according to U.S. Census Bureau statistics, California has had the largest concentration of Chinese

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<sup>169</sup> David Gudelunas, *Confidential to America: Newspaper Advice Columns and Sexual Education* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2008), 22.

<sup>170</sup> Min Zhou and Guoxuan Cai, “Chinese Language Media in the United States: Immigration and Assimilation in American Life,” *Qualitative Sociology*, 25 (Fall 2002): 421.

<sup>171</sup> There were some Chinese newspapers then in Chinatowns, but they mainly carried news or services for male immigrants. In my readings of the major Chinese newspapers in the United States published in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, Houston, Washington D.C. and Kansas City so far, I have not found that the local Chinese newspapers have such an “Advice” column.

immigrants since the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>172</sup> Diane Yen-Mei Wong's project uses the "question-and-answer" advice column format to explore how young Asian women in the Bay Area "feel about themselves, what their aspirations are, and how they perceive their parents and family lives" and provides corresponding advice and suggestions. To some extent, the form itself is an effective way to reach the new young people and changed population. And indeed, what makes this project important is not only its advice format, but also its attempt to adapt to the changing demographic, social, cultural, and educational nature of the immigrant and Chinese American population.

In order to study how parents and their daughters communicate in their family and to help young urban Chinese women get rid of the confusions and worries about their American life when "cultures and customs collide,"<sup>173</sup> in 1981, Asian Women United of California (AWUC), led by Elaine Kim, conducted a survey of over 600 immigrant and American-born Chinese and other Asian American girls in San Francisco Bay Area urban and suburban middle schools, high schools, colleges, and universities.

According to Diane Yen-Mei Wong, many letters collected in the "Dear Diane" book were "constructed" on the basis of this survey since not many young girls wrote letters to them.<sup>174</sup> The project of AWUC had focus groups with girls, with parents, with teachers, with psychologists, and counselors, and community activists. After that, to address the questions and concerns of young urban girls, AWUC decided to collect and "construct" the several hundred letters

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<sup>172</sup>For this statement, the writer has consulted the related books, encyclopedias, and online data released by U.S. Census Bureau in different years.

<sup>173</sup> Diane Yen-Mei Wong, *Dear Diane: Letters from Our Daughters* (Oakland, California: Asian Women United of California, 1983), 3.

<sup>174</sup> Author's interview with Diane Yen-Mei Wong, October, 2009 (abbreviated as Wong Interview hereafter).

generated from this project and invite Dian Yen-Mei Wong to answer them—the questions selected from the focus groups in the “Dear Diane” book.<sup>175</sup>

According to Elaine Kim, this project reveals that, during young urban Asian American girls’ gradual adaptation to mainstream American society and culture, parents have the greatest individual influence on them and mothers are more influential than fathers. Peers, older sisters, and teachers are other important influences. The project also divides communication between daughters and their parents into three categories: the “two-way” communication, in which both parents and daughters are involved in discussing issues equally; “one-way” communication, in which parents give commands and orders to their daughters; and “indirect” communication, in which the girls have to guess what their parents really want.<sup>176</sup>

*Dear Diane: Letters from Our Daughters* is an outcome of the establishment of Asian American studies program all across America in the 1980s.<sup>177</sup> Supported by Asian Women United of California (AWUC), in 1983, Wong published *Dear Diane: Questions and Answers for Asian American Women* in English. The immediate purpose of this publication, according to Kim, is to “...facilitate better and better communication and understanding between Asian parents and daughters, particularly in immigrant families, where anguish and confusion often

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<sup>175</sup> In her interview, Dian Yen-Mei Wong pointed out the purpose of this AWUC project was to “help young Asian American girls address some of the questions that might come up in their growing up...” and the “Dear Diane” book “was aimed at younger girls, primarily immigrants, who didn’t have enough resources, and we just thought it was important to help the young girls.” Also, in her interview, Wong implies that the survey was conducted with focus groups, such as the young girls and new immigrants. To answer their questions, there was a need to provide suggestions and advice in form of a book. For example, in her interview, Wong said: “we definitely pretty much talked about the kind of issues they were facing, like the counsels they received, the kinds of issues with their parents being in a new country, and after that, they would ask how would you suggest solving this issue? What can you suggest?”

<sup>176</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Letters...*, 1.

<sup>177</sup> Huping Ling, *Surviving on the Gold Mountain: A History of Chinese American Women and Their Lives* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998) 140.

result when cultures and customs collide.”<sup>178</sup> In order to help parents who had a problem in learning English to read the book together with their daughters and to attract a larger group of readers, such as parents, children, counselors, teachers, and social workers from different ethnic Asian groups,<sup>179</sup> AWUC also simultaneously published a selection of some letters with Chinese and Korean translations, entitled *Dear Diane: Letters From Our Daughters*. The English version contains 96 letters and responses, and the Chinese one includes 50 letters and responses. Most of these “constructed” letters were written by young urban Chinese women, followed by the Filipino, Korean, Japanese, and other Asian women.<sup>180</sup>

The English “Dear Diane” book is entitled *Dear Diane: Questions and Answers for Asian American Women*. The editor made a careful selection from several hundred letters under 6 categories—Family (1-25); School (26-40); Work (41-55); Personal Concerns (56-62), Relationships (63-78); and Motherhood (79-96). Despite the different categories, all the letters thematically overlap in one way or another. Just as the project director Elaine Kim stressed in the forward to the book, the selections “do not by any means represent all of the questions people raised, nor should the answers be seen as the sole and comprehensive way to address the problem. Rather, all of the letters and responses should serve as a starting point for fruitful discussions of some of the concerns of Asian American women as students, employees, mothers, wives and lovers, and members of the community at large.”<sup>181</sup>

The “Dear Diane” book is an important window through which to view young urban Chinese immigrant women. The “Dear Diane” letters provide a special opportunity to examine

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<sup>178</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Letters...*, 3.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid. 1.

<sup>180</sup> This figure was based on my own calculations of all the collected letters in the “Dear Diane” book.

<sup>181</sup> Elaine Kim, forward to *Dear Diane: Questions and Answers For Asian American Women* (Oakland, California: Asian Women United of California, 1983), front page.

the adjustment and adaptation to American society and culture of young urban Chinese American and other Asian American women. In interviewing Dian Yen-Mei Wong about her research on young Asian immigrant women, she said that her project was originally intended to empower Chinese American and other Asian American women during their adaptation and adjustment to American life. Also, by publishing her book with Chinese and Korean translations, Wong aimed to bridge the gap not only between the immigrant mother and American-born daughter for a better “two-way” communication, but also among those from other Asian cultures.<sup>182</sup>

What deserves a special mention here is that the particular characteristics demonstrated by young urban Chinese immigrants in adapting to American society and culture are common experiences among Asian American women. Recognizing this was a result of a special time and place. Inspired by the Pan Asian movement in the late 1970s and 1980s in the United States, it reflected a particular political consciousness among activist Asian Americans. Put in this context, Asian Women United of California and Wong’s project was of a distinctive political nature. Indeed, in order to help young Asian immigrant women grapple with their concerns and frustrations during their adaptation to mainstream society and culture, and in order to highlight the “mission” character of the women’s organization, AWUC launched this project, which led to the “Dear Diane” letters “on the basis of their survey of over 600 Asian American young women.

In this context, it is strongly hoped that a close reading of the “Dear Diane” letters will enable one to gain insight into different aspects of young Chinese women’s family and social life, and then situate it within the context of the study of immigration, ethnicity, and gender. In other

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<sup>182</sup> Wong Interview.

words, the process of coding and decoding these letters will enable one to see a large family and social picture in which young Asian American women's adaptation occurs within a context of conflicts at home, at school, or at work. To accomplish this goal, it is necessary to approach the "Dear Diane" letters through some common categories that characterize the "Dear Diane" letters. Specifically, they are "Family," "Motherhood," "School," "Work," and "Identity."

*Family—a haven of Chinese culture versus American values*

As U.S. Census Bureau statistics indicated, the West Coast has the largest concentration of Asian American immigrants. As the most numerous ethnic Asian group, the Chinese have the largest immigrant population in this region, particularly in California. In addition to the largest Chinatown outside of Asia in the San Francisco Bay area, there are some newer "Chinatowns" in Los Angeles, Oakland and San Jose, California. The Chinese ethnic enclave—Chinatown—often functions as a special place for Chinese immigrants. On the one hand, it provides immigrants with some traditional service jobs, such as in the food and laundry industries. On the other hand, it works as a haven where Chinese immigrants can speak their own language, eat genuine Chinese food, and buy Chinese newspapers, etc.<sup>183</sup> However, in recent years, due to a much changed situation, many newer immigrants have begun to live in suburban and even rural areas, and older immigrants and second-generation Chinese Americans have mostly moved out of Chinatowns. In this case, Chinatown is more an iconic haven to Chinese immigrants.

To some extent, Chinatown's role in providing Chinese immigrants with cultural and spiritual comfort and ease is often counterbalanced by a combat of cultures between the older

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<sup>183</sup> I have visited the Chinatowns in Los Angeles, Chicago, New York and Washington, D.C. over the past few years with a special interest in the Chinese way of life there.

and younger generations at home. For Chinese Americans, especially for young Chinese American girls, home can often provide them with a special sense of safety, where they can seek emotional and physical comfort and relief. But often, to young Chinese American women, especially to the second- and third-generation Chinese Americans, home is also a place where different cultures and values clash and conflict.

The letters are not actual copies of ones written by young women but according to Wong, were “constructed,” since “we ... didn’t have many young girls writing letters to us.”<sup>184</sup> Nonetheless, the “Dear Diane” letters reveal both how Chinese parents and their daughters share a sense of care and love and their conflicting cultures and values. As the site of conflict, the home becomes a place for the “tiger mother” to sing “battle hymns” and the daughter to resist and fight back.<sup>185</sup> For example, Letter 5 reads:

Dear Diane: I’m in high school and my problem is that my parents always work. They are from Hong Kong, and they hold two jobs each. My mom works in the daytime as a hotel maid, and in the evenings, she does piece work sewing. My dad cooks during the week and works as a janitor on weekends. To tell you the truth, I miss them. How can my sister and I convince them that we need them more than the money?

Parents At Work<sup>186</sup>

In this letter, the young Chinese American girl expresses concerns about her parents’ working all the time and not spending much time with her after school. She does not like her

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<sup>184</sup> Wong Interview.

<sup>185</sup> In her *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2011), the author Amy Chua calls herself a tiger mother, very strict with her two daughters by instilling them with a Chinese style of parental education; also, in the “Dear Diane” letters, many young girls complain about their mothers’ educating them with Chinese culture and some even rebel against their parents openly. See Letter 13, 77, and 79 in Wong, *Dear Diane: Questions...*, 10, 64 and 66.

<sup>186</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Questions...*, 5. For convenience, the number of the letters used in this chapter is the same as that given in the English “Dear Diane” book, unless otherwise specified. Also, note Appendix 1: Letter Summaries of English “Dear Diane” Letters for further reference.

parents' always working hard. Instead, she and her sister want their parents to be home to spend time with them. If one goes further, however, one could find two important issues within this Chinese immigrant family. One is that the girl's parents have to work long hours so that they can keep their jobs and meet their family's expenses. Due to their lack of English skills, which is quite common among the older immigrant generations, they do menial service jobs. This is also true of many first-generation Chinese Americans, who often do such menial and/or service jobs as cooking and laundry. However, lack of English language fluency cannot account for the parents' hard work alone. Actually, in Chinese culture, a rigorous work ethic is highly valued. For example, the Chinese idioms praising the virtue and ethic of work abound in Chinese culture. Such expressions as "Work brings one good health and longevity" (劳动使人健康、长寿) and "Work brings one a sense of glory" (劳动光荣) illustrate the importance of hard work in Chinese culture and serve to instill and convey philosophical meanings to one's life.

The other issue is that, as a high school student, the writer of this letter feels desperately lonely without her parents' being around. As a minority student, perhaps she might be lonely at school due to cultural or value differences. At home, the absence of her parents deprives her of opportunities to connect with them for emotional support, or to get some guidance from them or share her experiences with them, such as by talking with her parents about her school work and other experiences. Obviously, this letter is representative in some ways. First of all, it reflects a feeling that the young woman is being left alone to cope, which is a common pattern with many Chinese American families. Second, this girl, like many other Chinese American daughters, relies psychologically on her parents for companionship in her life. This natural need for parents being around is the very basis on which better and deeper parent-child relationships can be



developed. Third, despite this girl's natural need for parental care and love, she feels confused about how she can convince her parents that their love is more important than money. Again, this shows conflict within Chinese families in which parent-child relationships are often obstructed by the parents' very long work hours, to meet the family's material need and the children's need for their parents' companionship.

To help ease this conflict, Wong replies that the girl should understand her parents for their hard-earned job opportunities and appreciate their hard work for the family. Wong also suggests that this girl should save some money for her family. As Wong responds:

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If you or your sister can find a part-time job, even that small extra income could take some of the pressure off your parents. Or you could try to reduce or eliminate some of your own expenses. Do you really need that new blouse, or that new album?<sup>187</sup>

Implicit in this letter and Wong's responses is that, due to material pressures, the working immigrant parents do not have direct communication with their daughter. However, on the daughter's side, during her adolescence, while testing independence from her parents, she also looks to them for guidance, support, and companionship. And the lack of "two-way" communication, in this case, prevents more intimacy between parents and daughter, and interaction that could ease the daughter's adjustment either to her American school life or even back to more traditional Chinese culture.

Although the letter above represents a common phenomenon in the immigrant Chinese family that material and other pressures reduce the possibility for parents and daughters to

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<sup>187</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Questions...*, 5.

establish effective and dynamic “two-way” communication during the daughters’ acculturation, a large number of “Dear Diane” letters show that, even though the parent-daughter communication is established, the “one-way” communication is usually ineffective and unhelpful as daughters acculturate and assimilate. Sometimes, the parent-dominated “one-way” communication can even cause serious problems for their children. This can be best demonstrated by Letter 9 in which a girl writes:

Dear Diane: I’m 16 years old and have a big problem. Last year, I ran away from home three times. I couldn’t stand my parents’ nagging: change your friends, go to school, stop talking on the phone so long, turn off the TV. When it got bad, I just split and spent a few nights at a friend’s house....

Home For Good<sup>188</sup>

To some extent, this pattern of conflict between parents and daughters is usually an inevitable result of the conflict between Chinese culture and American culture. On the parental side, as Alba and Nee stress, older immigrants often “act in accordance with mental models shaped by cultural beliefs that mold perceptions of self-interest”<sup>189</sup> In this case, the parents obviously live in the dogma of Asian/Chinese culture and intend to educate their daughter with their own cultural values of asking their daughter to make what they consider appropriate friends, value her educational opportunities and become successful in the future and save family expenses, all of which are highly cherished and valued in Chinese culture. It is believable that the parents are doing this for their daughter’s sake.

On the other hand, second- or third-generation Chinese women, usually American-born or raised, do not always want to adhere totally to Chinese culture as they Americanize. This is

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<sup>188</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Letters...*, 19.

<sup>189</sup> Alba and Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 39.

because, according to Herbert J. Gans, the descendants of the immigrants usually do not stick to their parents' values and cultures as they become American. Instead, with the passage of time, their ethnic identity needs are "neither intense nor frequent," and eventually "ethnics resort to the use of ethnic symbols. As a result, ethnicity may be turning into symbolic ethnicity...which could... persist for generations."<sup>190</sup>

This cultural conflict is also demonstrated clearly in Letter 1:

Dear Diane: I'm a high school senior and, like with many of my friends, my main problem is my parents. They accept nothing except straight "A's" from me. Last report card I got a "B," and why couldn't I have gotten a higher grade. They're so critical of me. I can't remember a single time when they have told me they were proud of me or that I did a good job. I'm getting so discouraged. What can I do to get them to change?

Discouraged Student<sup>191</sup>

This letter indicates two things—one, the daughter is unhappy about her parents for their being very critical of her grades; and two, she wants them to change. Situated in Alba and Nee's theory, the parents cannot change their way of thinking because they live mostly in Chinese culture. As widely believed, Chinese culture places a high value on success and education is often regarded as a means to success. More than this, Chinese parents have high expectations of their children; one reason is that children's successes bring honor to the family or even hometown. It should also be mentioned that in Chinese culture, parents often resort to "fear" stories or legends to warn or punish their children. As Wong explains in her advice, in Chinese or other Asian cultures,

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<sup>190</sup> Alba and Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 27; Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity," 1217. Gans hypothesized that adherence to the immigrant or ethnic culture was only symbolic; it had no substantive meaning. Alba and Nee modify this as did Gans in his later article, "Symbolic Ethnicity," in *Nationalism: Critical Concepts in Political Science*, Vol 4, eds., John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (New York: Routledge, 2002), 1217.

<sup>191</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Questions...*, 1.

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In some traditional Asian cultures, it was considered bad luck to give your child too much praise because you might draw the attention and envy of the gods, who would then steal your child or cause her to fail next time. Maybe your parents believe they're keeping you safe. Or, maybe they're hoping you won't become conceited and instead will keep trying to improve.<sup>192</sup>

From Wong's advice, one can realize that, by not praising their children's academic accomplishments, Chinese parents feel that they are actually protecting their daughters by being critical and strict with them. While doing so, however, they might have overlooked some essential aspects pertaining to their daughter's adaptation or acculturation, such as her sense of achievement, honor, and confidence. Obviously, the Americanized daughter wants her parents to behave more like Americans so she wants them to change. But the question is whether the older generation could change to please their child. Parents are more likely to expect their daughters to change rather than themselves. After all, high respect for seniority is highly valued in Chinese culture.

In this case, the conflict between the daughter and parents is actually an intense conflict of different cultures and values in which neither of the parents nor the daughter can win over the other party easily. On the daughter's side, she is becoming American, which values highly individualism, democracy, opportunity, and freedom. Facing her critical parents, she desires to be an equal to her parents. Unable to change them, she writes Diane to express her problems. From her letter, it is obvious that she does not want to give up her efforts to change her parents' way of family education; she wishes to be a "real" American.

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<sup>192</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Questions...*, 2.

On the parents' side, however, they adhere closely to Chinese culture, which emphasizes children's obedience to parents, strict parenting, and family honor through education.<sup>193</sup> To Chinese parents, whatever they do to their children is justifiable because they love them. As Annie Murphy Paul found in the story of the "tiger mother," love and compassion, plus punishingly high expectations are the key to Amy Chua—a Yale law professor's—parenting.<sup>194</sup> Under this thinking, the Chinese parents feel it compulsory and legitimate to be hard on their daughter for a better grade, even if it were achieved at the cost of their daughter's confidence, dignity, and happiness. Therefore, in this context, cultural conflicts are unavoidable and inevitable, resulting in the deadlock in which neither can the daughter persuade her parents to change, nor can the parents convince their daughter to accept their love, compassion, and expectations.

#### *Motherhood—love versus hatred*

Among the conflicts one can read in the "Dear Diane" letters is that of mother-daughter. Different from an intimate mother-daughter relationship, Chinese immigrant mothers and their American-born daughters are frequently not on good terms with each other because of cultural and value conflicts. Among the "Dear Diane" letters, one seldom finds letters in praise of a considerate mother or an obedient daughter. Instead, in the selected letters, almost all daughters complain about their mothers being too Chinese to understand their American heart, either in terms of their studies at school or their work. Similarly, almost all mothers show great disappointment and concern with their daughters' American behavior, such as playing with white boys or speaking only English to them at home. In this context, mother's love, with strong

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<sup>193</sup> Annie Murphy Paul, "The Roar of the Tiger Mom," *Time*, January 31 (2011): 34-40.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

Chinese values, often turn out to be unbearably alien to the American daughter and this would in turn cause the daughter's misunderstanding, complaints, or even hatred of her mother. One of such examples (Letter 93) is as follows:

Dear Diane: My parents, who came to America many years ago, live nearby and seem to want to run my life, even though I am 34 years old and have three children of my own. They telephone several times a day and nag me about every little thing imaginable. I'm getting sick of it and feel like ripping the phone out of the wall or just letting it ring. How can I get them to stop bothering me?

Grown Up Already<sup>195</sup>

From this letter, one can find that the daughter's relationship with her parents is really troublesome. And the parent-child relationship is not improved with the passage of time. Although the daughter is 34 and already a mother of three children of her own, she still does not want her parents to bother her with their cultural values and beliefs.

According to assimilation theory, one of the benchmarks for acculturation and assimilation is the decline of the ethnic group's native language.<sup>196</sup> That is true for the second- or third-generation Chinese women in the United States. During Americanization, Chinese-American girls increasingly speak English and use it as a living or survival tool in mainstream society. Since language and culture are closely related to each other, as the daughter picks up English, it is inevitable for her to adopt its culture and related values. This is mirrored in the mother-daughter conflict. For example, Letter 79 from a mother reads:

Dear Diane: Our whole family immigrated to America from China four years ago. While the older children read and write Chinese fluently, the younger ones can't speak well. Worse yet, they even seem to be taking deliberate steps to

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<sup>195</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Questions...*, 78.

<sup>196</sup> Alba & Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 20.

abandon all that they once knew. I try to tell them that it is important for them to keep up their Chinese so that they can fit in and do well when we go back to China. They're just not even interested in this kind of talk. When I speak to them in Chinese, they answer me in English. One of these days, we may not even be able to hold a conversation with each other. How can I convince them to keep up their Chinese? My words seem fruitless.

Chinese American Mother<sup>197</sup>

From this letter, one thing is clear—mother's love and concern yield no fruit and, even worse, the mother and her youngest daughters cannot even hold a conversation in the end. Although the mother did not mention why her daughters do not speak Chinese at home, it is reasonable to assume that, to children, living in an English-speaking world at school and in the streets, an achievement in itself, they naturally use it at home.

Although the mother believes that her children “deliberately” abandon their Chinese language, to a large extent, it probably is more an immediate result of her children's subconscious acculturation to American society than a deliberate act to reject their mother. That is also why Wong suggests to the mother that she let her children develop their English since, to her children, the American way of life is “more real and more necessary to learn than the Chinese one.”<sup>198</sup> Thus, in this context, acculturation and assimilation can occur among immigrants regardless of their age, gender, background, or subjectivity.

*School—a testing place of mainstream culture versus Chinese values*

According to the U.S. Census statistics from 1970 to 2010, one can find a steady increase in the percentage of young Chinese women with four or more years of education. For example,

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<sup>197</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Questions...*, 66.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 67.

during this time period, the percentage of Chinese American women with four or more years of college education ranked the second highest among that of the following ethnic and gender groups—black women, white women, white men and Chinese American men (see Table 3-1). For example, in 1970, the percentage of Chinese American women with higher education was 16.5 percent; with black women, 4.6 percent; white women, 8.4 percent; white men, 15.0 percent; and Chinese American men, 30.8 percent. Twenty years later, in 1990, the percentage for Chinese American women increased sharply to 35.0 percent, with black women, white women, white men and Chinese American men at 11.7 percent, 18.4 percent, 25.0 percent and 46.7 percent, respectively. In 2000, the percentage of Chinese American women with higher education continued to rise significantly, reaching 44.0 percent, as compared with 24.1 percent for white women; 15.2 percent for black women and 52.6 percent for Chinese American men. In 2010, the percentage for Chinese American women increased to 49.3 percent, with black women, 19.8 percent; white women, 28.9 percent; white men, 30.2 percent; and Chinese American men, 54.7 percent (see Table 3-1). Again, according to the 2000 U.S. Census, 73 percent of U.S.-born Chinese Americans between ages 25 and 34 have attained at least a bachelor's degree, with African Americans at 15 percent and non-Hispanic whites at 30 percent, ranking only next to 74 percent of U.S.-born Asian Indians.<sup>199</sup>

The high percentage of Chinese American women and men with college educations originated from the strong emphasis on education in Chinese culture, which is often viewed as an important factor in achieving economic success.

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<sup>199</sup> Yu Xie & Kimberly A. Goyette, *A Demographic Portrait of Asian Americans* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation and Washington, D.C.: Populations Reference Bureau, 2004), 10.



**Table 3-1 Chinese American Women with Four or More Years of College Compared with Other Groups, 1970-2010 (by percentage)**

Year Race and Sex	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
Chinese American Women	16.5	25.6	35.0	44.0	49.3
Black Women	4.6	8.3	11.7	15.2	19.8
White Women	8.4	13.3	18.4	24.1	28.9
White Men	15.0	21.3	25.0	28.2	30.2
Chinese American Men	30.8	43.8	46.7	52.6	54.7

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census, *PCT 64, Sex by Educational Attainment for the Population 25 Years and Over*. Census 2000 Summary File 4 (SF 4)-Sample Data; S0201, Selected Population Profile in the United States, 2010 American Community Survey—1 Year Estimates, accessed on June 1, 2012, <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productiveview.xhtml?src=bkmk> and <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productiveview.xhtml?src=bkmk>; U.S. Bureau of Census, *Japanese, Chinese and Filipinos in the United States (PC(2)-1G)*. Census of Population and Housing: 1970 Census, accessed on June 4, 2012, <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/1970cenpopv2.html>; U.S. Bureau of Census, *Asian and Pacific Islander Population in the United States: 1980 (PC80-2-1-E)*. Census of Population and Housing: 1980 Census, accessed on June 4, 2012, [http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1980/1980censusofpopu21e\\_S1\\_bw.pdf](http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1980/1980censusofpopu21e_S1_bw.pdf); U.S. Bureau of Census, *Asians and Pacific Islanders in the United States (1990 CP-3-5)*. Census of Population and Housing: 1990 Census, accessed on June 1, 2012, <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen1990/cp3/cp-3-5.pdf>.

Usually, the more education one has, the greater occupational opportunities and economic success. Chinese culture stresses the importance of education so much that even as early as the Song Dynasty (960-1279), the saying that “Nothing would be so important as learning (万般皆下品, 唯有读书高)” was widely believed by almost every household. Further inspired by the feudal imperial examination started with the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), in

which those who passed were always guaranteed a high government position and a rich life, one's pursuit of knowledge was highly admired and piously pursued.

In his study of immigrant and ethnic enterprise in North America, scholar Ivan Light distinguishes between class resources (cultural and material) and ethnic resources, which include orthodox cultural endowments, relative satisfaction, reactive solidarities, and a sojourning orientation.<sup>200</sup> In other words, the formal cultural achievements, comparable satisfaction, responsive solidarity in face of the pressure, and sojourning attitudes can be all the sources of the whole ethnic group. The cultural side of class resources includes values, attitudes, and knowledge while on the material side, class resources refer to private property, human capital, and money to invest.<sup>201</sup> In the case of the high percentage of young Chinese women with higher education, it should be noted that, besides reflecting traditional cultural values, it also reflected their backgrounds: many from Hong Kong, for instance, brought with them both material capital and high educational attainments (human capital) which allowed them to afford the pursuit of knowledge in higher education.

Although the Chinese emphasis on education would find its place in the younger generation of Chinese American women's desire for higher education in America, there are still primary differences between Chinese and American education. For example, while Chinese family culture disciplines its children to accept its primary values and beliefs, such as obedience and filial piety, American school culture encourages its students to be more equal and independent and helps students to fulfill their potential. In this context, the two systems of values

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<sup>200</sup> Ivan Light, "Immigrant and Ethnic Enterprise in North America," in *Majority and Minority: The Dynamics of Race and Ethnicity in American Life*, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition, ed. Norman R. Yetman (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999), 340.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

and beliefs often result in cultural conflict. In the American system, Chinese American students study curricula and take classes from teachers within an American cultural context. This contributes to their being more Americanized and successful than their parents as both struggle between the mainstream American and Chinese cultures.

Indeed, since Wong's book was based on the AWUC survey with more than six hundred Asian female students, most of the letters in her book clearly convey the impression that American schools serve not only as a site for learning, but also as a source of conflicts and challenges arising from the clash of cultures and values. For example, in Letter 29, a young female student says:

Dear Diane: As a student in Taiwan, I did well in and enjoyed many different types of classes; math, science, art, literature. But when I came to the U.S., though, I had to spend most of my time just trying to learn English.

I hated those English classes; they were torture and the teachers were impatient. I began to spend more time in math because it didn't require a lot of English skills. My math teacher was nice and even encouraged me to major in math.

I'm now in computer science in college, but I often wonder how different my life would've been if I had been encouraged in some of the other classes. Why does being Chinese limit so many opportunities?

Limited<sup>202</sup>

Explicit in this letter is that the student chose math as a major in college because it required less mastery of English. She complains that her lack of language skills further limited her career choices. But the issues run deeper. This problem, I suggest, is actually related to the influences from her home. Her limited choices resulted from her being Chinese and conflicts between American and Chinese cultures.

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<sup>202</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Questions...*, 23.

First, she took it for granted that, if she were a good student in many classes in Taiwan, she would similarly be a successful student in the United States. In thinking this way, she might have ignored the obvious differences between American and Taiwanese educational systems. For example, she ignores that inadequate English could be a barrier to success in the classroom. As a result, her time studying English left less time for other classes.

Second, the young immigrant girl complained that being Chinese limits many opportunities for her. To some extent, this still represents a clash in school between mainstream and minority cultures. It is well accepted that, in Chinese culture, students rely heavily on teachers for success in their study. This practice and expectation, undoubtedly, reduces the importance of the individual's initiative and independence. And the girl's complaint that her English teachers were impatient with her is a good example. In Chinese culture, the teacher is often given many roles—parent, friend, doctor, and social worker, to mention a few. Many Chinese expressions demonstrate it, such as “Once a teacher, a parent forever;” (一日为师, 终身为父) “A good teacher, a good friend;” (良师益友) “Effective medicine tastes bitter but cures a disease,” (良药苦口利于行) which often implies that when a teacher criticizes his/her student, the student should accept it because the words can help the student improve, just like taking a doctor's prescribed medicine can cure a patient's illness. In America, however, individualism, initiative, and independence are highly cherished values. Teachers and students expect to be more independent and active in acquiring knowledge and studying. This cultural difference underlies the girl's complaints about English, American teachers, and herself being Chinese.

*Work—paradise versus hell*

One of the core ideas put forward by Alba and Nee pertaining to the process of adapting to American society is that the nuances of assimilation sometimes are unnoticed. However, they believe that immigrants assimilate into mainstream society and culture in their pursuit of familiar goals—a good education and a good job, a good apartment to live in, for example. They all represent specific means of assimilation.<sup>203</sup> As we have seen, Chinese American women as a group achieve a higher level of education than other American groups. And some even find better jobs. Nonetheless, it by no means guarantees them a smooth adaptation or assimilation into mainstream society. In most cases, due to the racial and cultural differences, Chinese immigrant women cannot fulfill their potential at work. In other words, the workplace could be a site in which a “marginal” minority woman struggles by herself among her white co-workers. Even worse, the alienated woman, having worked with her white co-workers can neither find her “counter assimilation” into her Chinese minority group an easy one. For example, Letter 44 reads:

Dear Diane: I was born and raised in a Chinese community, surrounded by Chinese American schoolmates, friends, and relatives. Now I’m working for a company where almost all of the employees are white. I feel so isolated and alienated, especially at lunch or at office parties. I suppose I can bury myself in work, but somehow that doesn’t seem to be too appealing.

To make things even worse, I feel like I don’t really fit in with the Chinatown scene and with my Chinese American friends anymore. What can I do?

All By Myself<sup>204</sup>

This letter demonstrates that the young Chinese woman finds herself isolated among white colleagues. It seems to be a dilemma for her: being able to find a job and working with white

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<sup>203</sup> Alba & Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 41.

<sup>204</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Questions...*, 35-36.

people shows that she has adapted or assimilated to one dimension—occupational—of mainstream society and culture. Yet instead of any joy, she feels more isolated and alienated. What is worse, she finds herself culturally estranged from her familiar Chinese community. This phenomenon typically shows that, though she can achieve secondary structural assimilation, one form of assimilation to American life, this young Chinese American woman cannot fully adapt to American culture because of her consciousness of being the “other,” arising because she is rejected by her white coworkers. And even worse, her being culturally different and estranged from her Chinese friends further perpetuates the phenomenon that the Americanized Chinese often has a “yellow” face but a “white” heart. Also, this loss of ethnic identity can support Herbert Gans and Neil Sandberg’s argument that acculturation and other dimensions of assimilation are a gradual process that continues for several generations.<sup>205</sup>

*Identity—an “honorary white” versus “perpetual foreigner”*

As the preceding question suggests, what seemingly perplexes young Chinese American women, especially those U.S.-born or –raised Chinese American women, is that, even after achieving some specific forms of assimilation and being granted almost all of the rights of white people, they are still regarded as a permanent “other”—ethnic minority people; and by other Asians as “bananas”—yellow on the outside and white on the inside. In this dilemma, it is believed that they would have to identify themselves with either “white” or “yellow.” In this subtle situation, according to Min Zhou’s findings, the younger generation of Chinese Americans experiences a more serious identity crisis than the older ones. On the one hand, young Chinese immigrant women model themselves after mainstream people and culture and achieve social

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<sup>205</sup>Alba & Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 27.

success and status. However, on the other hand, they still cannot become fully “white” so they replace “becoming white” with “becoming American.”<sup>206</sup> By “becoming American,” they attempt to maintain their American identity separate from their Chinese one. This clearly shows that the interplay between individual, family, community, and societal factors during young Chinese women’s adaptation to American life could result in their internalizing the disadvantages deriving from their awareness of their inferior racial status in the dominant society.<sup>207</sup>

To some extent, this sense of an identity crisis results from racial perceptions as well as cultural differences. The “Dear Diane” letters reveal that some young Asian American women have an inferiority complex, believing that they are not so beautiful and attractive as their white counterparts. For example, Letter 57 reads:

Dear Diane: As far as Asian Women go, I guess I’m pretty average. But compared to the women I see in magazines and on TV, I don’t even come close. I feel ugly and awkward.

I just started an exercise class where I’m just about the only non-white. Those women fill out their leotards (if you know what I mean) and move so gracefully. What’s wrong with me? I’m already 24, so I may not have too much time left to get it together.

Unglamorous<sup>208</sup>

In this letter, the woman is pretty confident about her appearance among Asians.

However, she feels sad and disappointed about her physical appearance when she compares herself to TV and magazine (white) women. This sense of “physical

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<sup>206</sup> Zhou, *Contemporary Chinese America: Immigration, Ethnicity, and Community Transformation*, 233.

<sup>207</sup> Min Zhou and Yang Sao Xiong, “The Multifaceted American Experiences of the Children of Asian Immigrants: Lessons for Segmented Assimilation,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28 (November 2005): 1119-1152.

<sup>208</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Questions...*, 47.

dislocation” can also be found in ethnic, cultural, or even gender differences. For example, the writer of Letter 50 offered:

Dear Diane: I am a young Asian American attorney, and though I’ve been in practice for over five years, I find that many of the people I interact with just don’t know how to deal with me. For about the fourth time this year, one of the opposing attorneys asked me when the firm was going to assign a “real” attorney to the case! And I’m not even counting the number of time the judge has asked me when my firm started letting the secretaries represent clients in court! Is it because of my age, my race, or my sex? What can I do?

Not One of The Guys<sup>209</sup>

As the letter indicates, this young Asian woman has achieved a form of structural assimilation—a good job and high-level socio-economic status as an American attorney in the dominant group. However, as she states in her letter, others do not accept her as a “real” American attorney. Although Chinese or Asian culture emphasizes the gender and age differences between men and women, race is obviously a sensitive word to her in the United States.

Implied in her use of “race” in this letter is that this young woman is subject to *racial* discrimination from the dominant group in which, though she is already an American attorney, she is not regarded as a “real” one by that American judge. In this case, to a large extent, her simply “being Asian” autonomously excludes her from being a “real” American attorney. Thus she is regarded as the racial “other” in mainstream society and culture.

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<sup>209</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Questions...*, 39-40.



More complex than the “race” issue, however, is that she also mentions two other factors that made the judge not count her as a “real” American attorney—age and gender. Being a young, successful career woman has negative meaning, implying inexperience and denying professional status. One reading of this case shows that this woman’s concern with the age issue is a mirror reflection that, if it were hard for a young woman to achieve career success at a young age in the dominant group, it would be even harder for her to gain and maintain her professional identity after achieving success.

Equally important as the issue of age is that of gender. According to the letter, “being a woman” might be a very important reason why this young woman cannot be counted a “real” attorney in the eyes of the judge. In this case, the gender issue goes beyond race and age to such an extent that it has some striking universal characteristics. Whether white, black, or Asian, women experience gender discrimination. However, this Chinese American is young, Chinese, and female. With the three factors combined, this case reveals how it could be excruciating for a young successful minority professional woman to work in the dominant society because of her gender, age, and race.

Yet, as the letter indicates, this young woman does not know exactly why she is not counted as a “real” attorney. To her, it could be any reason, such as race, age, gender, or others. That she is not certain about the reason also shows the complexity of the issues and the uncertainty they generate. The young woman’s response to this issue clearly shows that, in a time when there is no obvious institutional discrimination

against minority women, attitudinal discrimination still exists and it could be very subtle or complicated when many factors are combined.

From this letter, it is reasonable to conclude that as the young woman adapts to American life, she still faces prejudice and discrimination and psychological consequences from that. Though the discrimination is subtle, she still experiences a discrimination “complex,” which affects minority women’s assimilation. This issue could become possibly worse if other factors were considered, such as age and gender. And gender alone would make minority women’s adaptation and assimilation to American life more difficult and painful than their male counterparts.

In sum, as the “Dear Diane” letters indicate, young Chinese American women encountered a multitude of problems during their acculturation, adaptation or assimilation to American life. The generational conflict between the immigrant mother and American-born or –raised daughter arises most clearly at home. The immigrant home is not a place of harmony and unity; rather, it is often a battlefield of conflict between values and cultures represented by the Chinese mother and her American daughter. This is a new post-World War II phenomenon because there had been so few immigrant families among Chinese Americans previously.

Moreover, this conflict appears in other sites, whether at school or work. Empirical studies show that the younger generation women can usually break through the boundaries of Chinese culture and adapt more easily to American society and

culture than the older generation of women.<sup>210</sup> More fluent in English and with greater educational achievement, young urban Chinese American women can find better jobs than their mothers. However, it seems that, though even were they to prevail at home, they are often at a disadvantage in American society where they encounter prejudice or discrimination arising from their ethnic background, gender, or culture. During this process of acculturation and assimilation, many experience an identity crisis. As a result, they do not want to be fully “white” nor fully “yellow.” Instead, they only want to be “American.”

Finally, the new assimilation theory best explains the experience of young urban Chinese American women. Again, as Alba and Nee point out, though individuals striving for an American dream seldom view themselves as assimilating, they are nonetheless doing so, however, because they are in practice, assimilating when they acquire a good education, a good job, and economic security. By this standard, young urban Chinese American women are adjusting and assimilating to American society, even though the process is most often gradual and contingent.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Huping Ling, *Surviving on the Gold Mountain: A History of Chinese American Women and Their Lives* (Albany, State University of New York, 1998), 139-157.

<sup>211</sup> Alba & Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream*, 66-67.

## Chapter Four

### The Chinese “Dear Diane” Letters: A Social and Cultural Exploration

#### 4-1 The Construction of the “Dear Diane” Book—An Introduction

In her “A Note to Parents,” Elaine Kim—the project director of the book *Dear Diane: Letters from Our Daughters* explained that “We have placed the English language materials directly opposite the Chinese so that the questions and answers can be read together by parents and their daughters.”<sup>212</sup> What is implied in her statement is that, by providing such a bilingual book, Kim hopes to bring together Chinese immigrant parents, who can only read Chinese, and their daughters, who can read English more fluently than their parents, to understand and communicate with each other more easily and directly. While doing so, however, Kim also provides the reader with an opportunity to compare and contrast the linguistic and cultural differences between the English and the translated Chinese letters. More important, however, the letters—both English and Chinese—can be regarded as useful artifacts to understand Chinese immigrants in the United States. Also, a careful comparison between the English letters and Chinese translations can enable the reader to grasp the special role of translation in facilitating the first- generation Chinese immigrants’ adjustment to American life in an era of globalization.

Different both in title and in the number of selected letters from the English “Dear Diane” book,<sup>213</sup> the English-Chinese edition is entitled *Dear Diane: Letters from Our Daughters* and it

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<sup>212</sup>Elaine Kim, introduction to *Dear Diane: Letters from Our Daughters*; or, A Note to Parents, by Diane Yen-Mei Wong (Oakland, California: Asian Women United of California, 1983), 3.

<sup>213</sup>As Chapter 3 describes, the English “Dear Diane” book is entitled *Dear Diane: Questions and Answers for Asian American Women* (Oakland, California: Asian Women United of California, 1983). It selected 96 letters in all and

only carries fifty English letters and their corresponding Chinese translations. Out of the fifty letters, as many as 24 are selected from the first part of the English edition, entitled *Family*; 12 letters from the *School* section, 2 from the *Relationships*, and 1 from the *Motherhood*, respectively. The themes and frequency of these letters range widely, from general issues common to almost every household, such as the family conflicts primarily arising from the differences of cultural values, to the specific ones such as drug-taking, sexual orientation, and pregnancy. Many letters overlap thematically. However, the fifty English-Chinese letters can be put under the following six categories—*Parents-Daughter Relationships*, *Interracial Relationships*, *Intra-racial Relationships*, *Social Problems*, *Misconduct*, and *Identity* for the sake of this study (see Table 4-1).<sup>214</sup>

The six categories that are mentioned above sort the “Dear Diane” letters into categories reflecting several dimensions of assimilation theory. For example, some of the “relationships” letters describe interracial relationships and thus provide the context for such relationships found in neighborhoods, the workplace, at school, informal associations, and friendships, and this is essentially about spatial assimilation, secondary structural assimilation, primary structural assimilation, or marital assimilation. As one can find, some letters describe the writers’ encountering identity and social problems and aspiring to acquire English, American values, and beliefs. This is fundamentally related to cultural assimilation. Some letters talk about the writers’ problems and relationships in their jobs, at schools, and in their neighborhoods, and this can be

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the editor classified them into 6 categories—Family (1-25); School (26-40); Work (41-55); Personal Concerns (56-62), Relationships (63-78); and Motherhood (79-96).

<sup>214</sup> For the sake of this study, the writer classified all the letters into six categories because each of them contributes somehow to the analysis of some major problems in young Chinese American women’s adjustment, adaptation, and assimilation to American society. The letters carried in the English and Chinese “Dear Diane” books are all numbered. For the discussion of the letters in this chapter, the numbers used are those given in the Chinese “Dear Diane” book unless otherwise specified. Also, note Appendix II: Letter Summaries of Chinese “Dear Diane” Letters for further reference.

put under secondary structural assimilation. Also, some writers talk about their different relationships with their friends and families and this can be examined in the context of primary structural assimilation. Although most of those represented are young, single Chinese women, their attitudes, especially their parents' attitudes toward intermarriage can also reflect another critical aspect of assimilation—marital assimilation.

**Table 4-1 Chinese “Dear Diane” Letters By Dominant Theme**

<i>Category</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Parent-Daughter Relationship	28	56
Interracial Relationship	8	16
Intra-racial Relationship	5	10
Social Problems	5	10
Identity	4	8

N=50

As many as 56 percent of the letters concern the problematic parent-daughter relationship (see Table 4-1). It reflects that, in their acculturation or cultural assimilation to American life, Chinese young women have inevitably encountered difficulties with their parents at home. In other words, the Chinese family is the most-contested place where Chinese and American cultures clash. Consequently, this cultural battle affects the parent-daughter relationship most strongly, and is a dominant theme in a majority of the letters.

Another big concern for Chinese young women is that (see Table 4-1) as many as 16 percent of Asian young women focuses on issues relating to interracial relationships. This reflects that during encounters with other ethnic groups, Chinese young women often meet resistance, prejudice, or even discrimination from non-Chinese groups. These problematic interracial relationships result either from Chinese young women's voluntary distance from other ethnic groups or because they encounter existing and historic stereotyping.

While it is understandable that Chinese young women would have interracial concerns, it is surprising that as many as 10 percent of the letters focus, as a dominant theme, on anxiety, confusion and concern with the subtleties of intra-racial relationships. Ten percent of the letters deal primarily with that theme (see Table 4-1). Comparatively, this is a new issue with young women in Chinese-American communities and institutions since historically the communities were nearly exclusively male. Societal, family, group, and individual pressures cause some young Chinese women to turn to or experiment with non-traditional or even extreme styles of life, such as drug-taking. They become pessimistic, discouraged, and adrift. As the letters indicate, this is a problem not only for Chinese but also other Asian women.

Likewise, in the Chinese "Dear Diane" letters, 8 percent relate to confusion about identity. Identity is a major concern for Chinese-American young women. In adjusting to American life, young Chinese women often find that they are subject to attitudinal or institutional discrimination and have to fight against persistent stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination at school or in the workplace as avoidance, rejection, verbal attacks, lack of opportunities, and

inequality with white and male colleagues.<sup>215</sup> For example, Letter 42 in the Chinese edition reveals that a young Chinese girl is called “Chink” and other racial names at school; the girl feels she should tell those people they are wrong but her mom does not agree. Similarly, in the English edition of the “Dear Diane” letters, Letter 44 expresses the writer’s frustration about being isolated and alienated at work where almost all of the employees are white. This young Chinese woman even feels the same about her Chinese friends. Again, Letter 45 (English edition) describes a woman who complains about not being treated equally with her male colleagues at her advertising agency. Similarly, in the English “Dear Diane” book, Letter 50 expresses a young woman’s complaint about not being treated as a real attorney at work because of her age, race, and sex. Identity problems also arise because the young women find themselves caught between the pulls of Chinese and American cultures. As one can also perceive, reflected in Letters 15 and 79, what is especially noteworthy is that in their parents’ eyes, young Chinese women are still Chinese, not American, and thus they are expected to receive and follow Chinese tradition and culture while they Americanize. All these internal and external problems make identity issues more complicated, subtle, and problematic.

The Chinese “Dear Diane” letters, though originally concerned with women from different Asian ethnic groups, represent the general concerns of Chinese young women in adjusting to American life. Given that Asian Americans share many commonalities in tradition and culture, these selected letters are specifically translated for Chinese parents—first generation Chinese immigrants who do not read English well. It is reasonable to assume that the problems

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<sup>215</sup> According to Norman Yetman, “Attitudinal discrimination refers to discriminatory practices that stem from prejudicial attitudes;” and “institutional discrimination refers to organizational practices and societal trends that exclude minorities from equal opportunities for positions of power and prestige.” Norman R. Yetman, ed., *Majority and Minority: The Dynamics of Race and Ethnicity in American Life*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999), 29, 33.



reflected in these selections are actual concerns of the young Chinese women and their parents as well. Therefore, it is highly important for both Chinese parents and daughters to sit together and read the letters to improve “two-way” communication. While talking about this, Elaine Kim also mentioned that “We have placed the English language materials directly opposite the Chinese so that the questions and answers can be read together by parents and their daughters.”<sup>216</sup>

Comparatively, the Chinese “Dear Diane” letters aim more at Chinese parents. However, what deserves special mention here is that it might be wrong to assume that this bilingual edition is only intended to help Chinese parents and daughters to gain a mutual understanding of each other. Rather, it also provides a special opportunity for Chinese parents—the first generation of Chinese family immigrants to adjust to American life—to learn about American culture through the Chinese translation of the letters. In this case, the Chinese “Dear Diane” letters have special significance for Chinese parents and their daughters during their own acculturation and adaptation to American life.

Out of the fifty letters, as many as 56 percent of the writers did not specifically mention their ethnic identity—that is, whether they were Chinese, Korean, Filipino, Japanese, or Vietnamese. In the rest of the letters, however, the combined Chinese and Korean letters comprise 28 percent, with another 16 percent being Japanese, Filipino and Vietnamese. Since all these letters are translated into Chinese, it is apparent that both Elaine Kim and Diane Yen-Mei Wong, the writer and the editor of the “Dear Diane” letters, respectively, intend to convey to Chinese parents that there is common ground among Chinese and other ethnic immigrant families. These ethnic and cultural similarities highlight the common experiences that both

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<sup>216</sup> Kim, introduction to *Dear Diane: Letters...*, 3.

Chinese and other Asian ethnic groups face as they adapt, acculturate, or even resist American society and culture.

#### **4-2 The Chinese Translation of the “Dear Diane” Letters—A Social and Transcultural Perspective**

The Chinese translators of the “Dear Diane” letters are Vanessa Lam of the Chinatown Youth Center and Shirley Liu of the Oriental Languages Department at the University of California, Berkeley. As mentioned earlier, the Chinese translations are for Chinese parents with limited English, and designed to be read together with their daughters. Nonetheless the translations *themselves* reveal subtle differences between American and Chinese social and cultural values and beliefs. In other words, a close examination of these translated letters provides a special opportunity to compare the social and cultural differences and explore more deeply the experiences of young Chinese women’s assimilation to American society and culture. In this sense, their translations can be studied in the context of what scholar Peter Newmark defines as “social translation,” which “is essentially concerned with individuals and groups (and often brings home the moral of a literary allegory), but, like non-literature, its purpose is to describe them factually and accurately.”<sup>217</sup> Also, according to scholar Roger Bell, since the translation process is “a conjunction of text analysis and text synthesis,”<sup>218</sup> a close reading of the translated Chinese “Dear Diane” letters enables the reader to perceive how the Chinese translators understand and synthesize the English and Chinese texts and how the meaning of language can shift subtly between different linguistic contexts (English and Chinese).

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<sup>217</sup> Peter Newmark, “No Global Communication Without Translation” in *Translation Today: Trends and Perspectives*, eds. Gunilla Anderman and Margaret Rogers (Buffalo, New York: Multilingual Matters Ltd., 2003), 57, 62.

<sup>218</sup> Roger Bell, *Translation and Translating: Theory and Practice* (London and New York: Longman, 1991), 44-60.

Furthermore the Chinese translation can actually be read as a form of dynamic cultural response and adjustment between Chinese and the target language—English. In other words, the rendered Chinese reflects strongly the influence of English in its social and cultural contexts.

Newmark supports the notion that there is an inseparable relationship between language and culture that is revealed through translation. According to him, translation is “a dynamic reflection of human activities.”<sup>219</sup> Put in this matrix, the process of translating the “Dear Diane” letters, therefore, is not personal, passive, and mechanical. Rather, it is social, active and creative. For example, the translation of the “Dear Diane” letters is very straightforward and creative. The translators had a strong sense of social “mission” to “facilitate better communication and understanding between Asian parents and daughters, particularly in immigrant families, where anguish and confusion often results when cultures and customs collide.”<sup>220</sup> And this is consistent with the distinctive political nature of the “Dear Diane” project, which was more an immediate result of political activism.

Indeed, translation plays a unique role in the age of globalization when objects, ideas, images, and people are moving constantly. Put in the context of post-colonial and transnational scholarship, for example, according to a leading Irish translator, Michael Cronin, translation is “ideally placed to understand both the transnational movement that is globalization and the transnational movement which is anti-globalization.”<sup>221</sup> For example, in the case of translating the “Dear Diane” letters, the translations would not only help Chinese immigrants understand that their adaptation to American life was actually part of the global population movement but

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<sup>219</sup> Newmark, “No Global Communication Without Translation,” 57.

<sup>220</sup> Kim, introduction to *Dear Diane: Letters*..., 3.

<sup>221</sup> Michael Cronin, *Translation and Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 1.

also enable them to understand that their adaptation and acculturation to mainstream culture would not be an easy or smooth journey because of inevitable cultural clashes. Likewise, scholar Stuart Hall considers globalization as translation. He argues that “It may be tempting to think of identity in the age of globalization as destined to end up in one place or another: either returning to its roots or disappearing through assimilation and homogenization. But this may be a false dilemma. For there is another possibility: that of ‘translation’”<sup>222</sup>

Again, in opposition to those who ignore the special role of translation in globalization, scholar and researcher Lawrence Venuti, in his major work *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference*, argues that the role of translation has been degraded as a discipline. Translation in the age of globalization, he suggests, is not just substituting one language for another. Instead, it negotiates the differences between cultural and linguistic differences and involves an intercultural collaboration. He states that “translation, like any cultural practice, entails the creative reproduction of value.”<sup>223</sup> Again, a translator does not mechanically substitute words from one language to another. Translation is a form of personal expression; the translator engages in “a collaboration between divergent groups, motivated by an acknowledgement of the linguistic and cultural differences that translation necessarily rewrites and reorders.”<sup>224</sup> Put in this context, the Chinese translation of the “Dear Diane” letters provides a special opportunity to conduct a discourse and textual analysis of both the English and Chinese letters and gain a deeper insight into a larger picture in which Chinese female immigrants battle

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<sup>222</sup> Stuart Hall, “The Question of Cultural Identity” in *Modernity and Its Futures*, eds., Stuart Hall, David Held and Tony McGrew (London: Polity Press, 1992), 310.

<sup>223</sup> Lawrence Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethnic Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 1.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

with different conflicting cultural values, even as they assimilate to and resist American society and culture.

When discussing the primary role of the practitioners of translation, scholar Marshall Morris argues that “Translators must remain mentally, and I think also physically, alert to their own experience and expression as well as to that of others.”<sup>225</sup> This holds true for the two Chinese translators of the “Dear Diane” letters. Actually, the Chinese translation of the “Dear Diane” letters reflects the translators’ efforts to combine language and culture with their own experiences and expressions in order to convey useful information to the Chinese reader.

Throughout their translation, the translators remain very close and loyal to the original English letters. However, at the same time, in the process of replacing the representation of one language with another, they have put their own understanding, experience, and feeling into their work. Primarily with the first generation in mind, their translations are plain, free, and efficient. For example, while translating the following paragraph from Diane Yen-Mei Wong’s response to Letter 38, they showed their creativity and flexibility in translation. The original English text goes like this:

... Because she’s got more experience, and because she’s your mom, carefully consider what she has to say. She may not always be right (although you’ll probably find it hard to convince her of that), but she can always give you something to think about.<sup>226</sup>

In their translation, the part “what she has to say” is translated into “她说的话” (her words) in order to skip the real meaning of “have to” or “must” in English and soften

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<sup>225</sup> Marshall Morris, “With Translation in Mind” in *Translation Today: Trends and Perspectives*, Gunilla Anderman and Margaret Rogers, eds., (Buffalo, New York: Multilingual Matters Ltd., 2003), 90.

<sup>226</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Letters...*, 61.

the tone in Chinese; and the last part “but she can always give you something to think about” is translated into “可她的话你总得考虑吧” (at least it is not bad to reason about her words) and the Chinese translation ends with an exclamatory character “*ba*” (吧) to show their own advice for the daughter to be patient and listen to her mother since respect for parents or seniority is highly valued in Chinese culture. In this case, the meaning of the translation is clear and appropriate. For clarity and convenience, the English and Chinese versions can be expressed in the following diagram:

English	Chinese
“what she has to say”	“她说的话”
“but she can always give you something to think about”	“可她的话你总得考虑吧”

The title of the Chinese “Dear Diane” letters is full of meanings. At a basic level, the English title—*Dear Diane: Letters from Our Daughters*—conveys to the reader two meanings: 1) Dear Diane is the person the letters are addressed to; and 2) the letters are from “our daughters.” However, in its Chinese translation, these two meanings are changed in a fundamental way. For example, “Dear Diane” is figuratively translated to “*dai an xin xiang* (Diane’s Mailbox); and “our daughters” is changed to “*shao nu men* (young girls).” Although the translation is different from the original, it does have some strong implications—care, intimacy, and safety.

From the linguistic aspect, “mailbox” denotes a special meaning of a place where one receives letters and packages on a regular basis. However, the deeper textural meaning, especially when opposed to the letters from the young ladies, denotes a special message about the place—mailbox--where the young ladies can gain a special sense of safety, a feeling of love

and care, and a special opportunity “to be able to pour out their heavy-laden hearts.”<sup>227</sup> Likewise, by changing the semantic symbol of “our daughters” to “young ladies,” the translation has generalized the meaning of “our daughters” to everybody’s daughters so that the specific questions and answers from Diane can be more general and inclusive.

Indeed, the linkage of the “mailbox” and “young ladies” serves ideally as the title of the Chinese “Dear Diane” letters. As often found in modern Chinese culture, the word “*xin xiang* (mailbox)” often conveys an intimacy between space and people. In other words, people, especially young ladies, can perceive this site as interactive and an outlet for pouring out their feelings and heart. “*Xin xiang*” often creates some special feeling of expectation and anticipation in people. For example, modern Chinese newspapers, magazines, radio and TV stations, and even some internet websites often run some special columns or programs called, literally, “Reader’s Mailbox,” “Listener’s Mailbox” and “Viewer’s Mailbox.” They use the term “Mailbox” to create an interactive and intimate relationship between the host or hostess and the audience both in time and in space. Thus, the translation creates a dynamic responsive movement between the place—the mailbox-- and the people—the young ladies.

In the selected Chinese “Dear Diane” letters, the parent-daughter relationship is a prevailing theme. The letters reflect differences between Western and Eastern cultures and the clashes between Chinese parents and their Americanizing children over social values and norms. For example, while Western culture allows more freedom and choice for children, the Eastern one, through expectations and discipline of children, restrains their freedom. Letter 38 can illustrate this marked difference to some extent:

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<sup>227</sup> Isaac Metzker, ed., introduction to *A Bintel Brief: Sixty Years of Letters from the Lower East Side to the Jewish Daily Forward, Volume One* (New York: Behrman House Inc., Publishers, 1971), 13.

Dear Diane: My mom and I always fight. Last week it was about my room; last night about my grades. I try to understand and make compromises with her, but the more I given in, the more she wants from me. She never tries to understand my position. Instead, she just declares that since she has more experience, I should obey her. Now that I'm 15, I'm getting tired of arguing with her. How do we stop?

Blue In The Face<sup>228</sup>

From this letter, one can find that the mother-daughter generational relationship can be problematic. On the one hand, the mother demands her daughter's obedience and employs a distinctive way of Eastern parenting—wanting her daughter to be always perfect in every aspect of life. On the other hand, the American-educated girl challenges her mother's matriarchal power with American values and concepts—independence, freedom, and equality. In such cultural clashes as demonstrated in the letter, neither the mother nor the daughter compromised. In this case, home is no longer a cozy and harmonious place but a place full of generational conflicts and quarrels. While such generational conflict is common in any culture, the adjustment process in American society, institutions, and relationships creates new and unique generational conflicts among the parents and children that make it a major theme in the letters.

In their translation, Vanessa Lam and Shirley Liu capture this subtle generational conflict and try to translate the linguistic text both from a social and non-fiction perspective. In other words, the translators of the “Dear Diane” book treat the selected letters as a kind of factual writing and translate them in order to help Chinese immigrants and their children adapt more easily to American life. This can be best reflected from their translation of a paragraph given by Diane Yen-Mei Wong when she answers a question asked by a middle-school girl student in Letter 1. The original letter is as follows:

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<sup>228</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Letters...*, 61.



Dear Diane: I'm a high school senior and, like with many of my friends, my main problem is my parents. They accept nothing except straight "A's" from me. Last report card I got a "B" in English and they immediately asked me why I only got a "B," and why couldn't I have gotten a higher grade. They're so critical of me. I can't remember a single time when they have told me they were proud of me or that I did a good job. I'm getting so discouraged. What can I do to get them to change?

Discouraged Student<sup>229</sup>

And part of the response given by Wong is as follows:

It would be nice to have parents who can give you support and praise for your achievement. Many Asian parents, however, aren't used to acting like that. Their wanting you to be "perfect" is their way of showing their love and their concern for you....

Be patient with them, though; this is a whole new area for them, and they're going to have to learn some totally new behavior. While you're at it, when they do something nice, try giving them some encouragement, too. For instance, if they pat you on the back, give them a hug in appreciation.<sup>230</sup>

Obviously, in this letter, the middle-school daughter told Wong that her main problem is her parents are too critical of her. They always expect perfect performance from her. To reflect this tough-to-please parenting practice and its effect on this daughter, the translators altered the original meaning of the English letter to such an extent that they simply omitted the original sentence: "Their wanting you to be 'perfect' is their way of showing their love and their concern for you." (他们要求你完美就是他们对你表示爱和关心的方法) Instead, they replaced it with this following Chinese sentence which can be literally translated into: "Their parents didn't do this to them and why they should do this to you differently now?" (他们自己父母也未尝如此对待他们, 为什么他们会有不同的做法呢?)

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<sup>229</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Letters...*, 7.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

From this translation, one can see that the translators took out the English word “love” and “concern” in the Chinese translation. Instead, they replaced them with “their parents” and “why they should do this to you differently now.” Such translation has several cultural and social implications. First of all, the translators themselves might think that the teenage daughter would not believe that such tough-parenting can be a real expression of their parents’ love and might not accept it readily. So they omit “love” and “care.” Second, as compared with their intention of showing love and concern to their daughters, Chinese parents would be more likely to accept the current translation because if their parents did not do that, why should they do this to their children now? Third, by referring to the grandparents’ generation, the translation implies that this practice is passed down from Chinese tradition and culture. Everyone should follow and observe it. There is no exception. Therefore, this translation has a potentially binding force on both sides—parents and daughter. Fourth, the word “love” as used here reflects an American cultural context; thus it speaks to the English-reading child. Tough standards and expectations of perfection is a traditional Chinese cultural standard, which speaks more to the parents, and hence makes greater sense in Chinese.

Parental strictness with and higher expectations of their children, especially in performance in school, are commonly associated with Chinese households, either in China or in the Chinese diaspora. When discussing this traditional “Chinese parenting” phenomenon, Yale law professor Amy Chua—the “Tiger Mom” who wrote the 2010 memoir, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*--reaffirmed this with her own story of making her father furious and feeling disgraced simply because she received second prize at an awards assembly. In raising her own two daughters, she had followed the tough parenting she inherited and attributes to Chinese culture. For example, she called her older daughter “garbage” when she behaved disrespectfully.

Also, she forced her younger daughter to practice playing the violin for hours with no breaks for water or even the bathroom until she learned how to play it.<sup>231</sup> And like their mother, Chua's two daughters—Sophia, 18, and Lulu, 15—when interviewed, say that they will follow their mother's parenting role and become a strict mother one day too.<sup>232</sup> This exemplifies a distinct tradition of “Chinese parenting,” one passed down from generation to generation, which has become a core part of many Chinese-American parenting practices today.

Indeed, traditionally, Chinese parents seldom laud their children for their excellent performance or express love for their children overtly, either in private or in public. As Amy Chua explains, this is because Chinese parents emphasize the importance of hard work and often believe that too many compliments of the kids' intelligence would lead to them “more likely to turn down the opportunity to do a challenging new task that they could learn from.”<sup>233</sup>

Chinese parents' being taciturn about love and praise is also echoed in Wong's answers, which are provided more like tempting fate:

In some traditional Asian cultures, it was considered bad luck to give your child too much praise because you might draw the attention and envy of the gods, who would then steal your child or cause her to fail next time.<sup>234</sup>

A major point to be mentioned here is that, in addition to Chinese parents' lack of verbal expressions of “love,” they seldom show physical intimacy with their children either. To deal with this, the translation of Wong's response to the letter previously cited is quite free and creative in style. For example, the part “if they pat you on the back, give them a hug in

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<sup>231</sup> Amy Chua, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2011), 3-76; Annie Murphy Paul, “The Tiger Mom Manifesto,” in *Time*, January 31 (2011): 34.

<sup>232</sup> Paul, “The Tiger Mom Manifesto,” 39.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Letters...*, 7.

appreciation” is not completely translated. Instead, it is translated as “You pat them on the shoulder, give them a hug in appreciation.” Although the translation is not quite appropriate in meaning to Chinese parents because in Chinese culture, usually it is the elderly who pat the young on the shoulder and it is usually between father and son, it does convey a message here to the Chinese parents that, even if their daughter pats them on the shoulder, not the other way around, they should accept it as an American way of showing love and appreciation, not as an act of disrespect. Implied here is that the Chinese parents should also change their attitude toward their children and behave like an American in the new era and new place. From this example, one can also find that what is especially noteworthy about their translation is that the translators have gone beyond the role as translators: they actually help the writer to persuade or even educate Chinese parents by enabling them to understand their daughters’ Americanized lives and at the same time make their daughters understand and adjust to some major differences between Chinese and American cultures.<sup>235</sup>

In the selected Chinese “Dear Diane” letters, many young ladies express their concern about their relationship with other groups. It is not hard to understand this within the American racial and ethnic context. Indeed, in a country like the United States, with a long history of racial discrimination, where historically naturalization was reserved for whites only, and where Chinese immigrants were excluded from the United States under the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, it is not surprising that Chinese immigrant women are inevitably subject to a myriad of

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<sup>235</sup> Throughout the translation of the “Dear Diane” letters, the translators expressed their feelings with their own expressions very freely. For example, to express the real meaning of the letter, they change, omit or replace the original with their own expressions. Such examples abound in their translations. For example, in Letter 50, part of the letter reads: “At my schools there was a group of ‘in-people’. Even though it wasn’t allowed, they formed a sort of secret club....” To express their feeling of “disdain” or “disapproval,” the translators added two Chinese characters “所谓” (*suo wei*, literally “so-called”) before “in-group” and another two “什么” (*shen mo*, a word given for emphasis on strong disapproval) before “secret club.” See the whole letter in Wang, *Dear Diane: Letters...*, 79.

stereotypes and racial and sexual prejudices and discrimination while adapting to American life. For example, as scholar Huping Ling concluded in 1998, in American popular culture, Chinese American women “have remained [docile] exotic and seductive creatures....”<sup>236</sup>

Given these contexts, the Chinese “Dear Diane” letters also reveal to the reader some major social issues and concerns in America society. In the selections, Letter 26 expressed a young woman’s dilemma—she falls in love with a white boy but because her mother warned her to avoid white boys because she told her they think Chinese girls are inferior, she does not know what to do next. The first part of this letter states:

Dear Diane: My mom always told me as I was growing up that when white boys look at you, they’re thinking no good of you and that I should avoid them at all costs.

....

Maybe he just finds me exotic. What should I do?

Loving Chemistry<sup>237</sup>

In this sentence, obviously, the main idea lies in the first part—the mother told her daughter to shun white boys. The translators also noticed this and in their translation, in order to emphasize the mother’s words of warning, they translated them, literally, into: “Any idea in their mind about you is nasty and so you should avoid them in whatever way.” In this linguistic context, the translation is actually turned into an implicit warning to stay away from white boys. In this way, the translation conveys the parents’ purpose perfectly.

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<sup>236</sup> Huping Ling, *Surviving on the Gold Mountain: A History of Chinese American Women and Their Lives* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 6.

<sup>237</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Letters...*, 43.

However, what is also important to mention here is that the translators did not translate the sensitive word “exotic” directly into its literal meaning—“foreign” or “alien” but also alluring. Instead, they gave it a little more descriptive translation like: “Maybe he finds me as an oriental girl, he feels me different and refreshing” (或者他只是因为我是东方人而觉得很新奇). In using the word “refreshing,” the translation conveys attraction, an alluring part of the meaning of “alien.” It is obvious that the translators emphasize both the physical and cultural difference between the Western boy and Eastern girl. At the same time, the translation highlights the girl’s confusion and the possibility that the white boy may not really love her but only feels that she is exotic and alluring and wants to take advantage of her.

Similarly, Letter 39 expresses the daughter’s confusion about her mother’s prohibiting her from bringing a black friend home for a visit but allowing her white friends to visit her at home. For example:

Dear Diane: One of my good friends from school is black. She’s really nice, but my parents won’t let me bring her to our house to visit. They let my white friends come over, but not her. What’s wrong with them? Why are they acting this way? What can I do?

Friendly<sup>238</sup>

From this letter, one can see that, on the mother’s side, she is very cautious about black people; while on the daughter’s side, the black girl is among her good friends. However, a closer reading of this letter suggests that this letter involves racial relations between majority and minority peoples in the United States. Since in this letter, the Chinese daughter contrasts her mother’s attitude toward her black and white friends, and given her Chinese ethnic background, it assumes

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<sup>238</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Letters...*, 61.

that her mother disapproves of the daughter's ignoring racial differences. In responding, Diane Yen-Mei Wong notes:

Your folks' differential treatment of your friends because of their race is not fair, but many young people have the same problem you have. Many older Asians retain some of the suspicions and cautions about people who look different from them or who come from a different culture.

Given their own preferences, they would rather mingle only with persons of their own ethnic group, or if necessary, with other Asian. When it comes to non-Asians, however, a different factor comes into play.

Often, persons who feel that they are in a weaker position—because they are new, guests, or have less money or prestige—begin to adopt the values of the dominant culture. Here in America, this means that many minorities, including Asian, begin to think and act like the majority white culture.

When they interact with whites, or read and see white-dominated media, they adopt the white dislike of black. On a ratings scale, then, Asians would rank high, whites medium, and blacks low....

Without putting too much pressure on your parents, see if you can have your friend over for just a few minutes the first time—maybe to pick up some homework. The next step may be working on a homework assignment or project together....<sup>239</sup>

From Wang's responses, one can draw three general conclusions about interracial relationships between Chinese Americans and other ethnic groups. First, the older-generation parents are more conservative about interracial relations than the younger ones. Second, because of the dominant influence of the white majority, they tend to adopt the prevalent white prejudice against black people and try to instill this in their children. Third, the younger generation tended not to share race-based stereotypes and tried to persuade the older generation to accept their new attitude towards race relations.

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<sup>239</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Letters...*, 61-63.

The translation of Wong's responses also reflects the spirit of Wong's advice to young Chinese women in this situation. For example, in translating the first sentence "... because of their race is not fair, but...", the translators added a strong Chinese adverb "很 (literally, very or extremely)" to emphasize that her mother was absolutely wrong. Also, the translation of the first sentence of the second paragraph "Given their own preferences, they would rather mingle only with...", the Chinese translation becomes very strong in meaning, with more emphasis on "一定 (literally absolutely or definitely)." Such emphasis on the definite tones runs throughout the whole translated letter, thus encouraging the reader to further explore race relations.

It is necessary to point out that the parents' attitude toward their daughters' friends is not limited to Chinese Americans. Similar attitudes are found among other Asian Americans, such as Japanese, Korean, Filipino, and Vietnamese. As Letter 2 says:

Dear Diane: My parents are second-generation Japanese Americans. When I was nine, we moved to an almost all-white suburb. All my classmates are white and so were the guys I started dating.

Now that I'm 17, my parents have suddenly decided that I should date and marry only other Japanese Americans. I think they've taken an unreasonable position. First, there are no other Japanese Americans in the neighborhood. My parents are the ones who chose to move here, not me. Second, they're always talking about how everyone in America is equal. Their new position contradicts this. They seem to be telling me that only Japanese are good enough for me to marry.

What can I say to them? Aren't they being unreasonable?

Caught Between Contradictions<sup>240</sup>

Though the nisei parents (the second-generation Japanese immigrants) have lived in the United States for a long time and now live in an almost all-white suburb, they are still

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<sup>240</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Letters...*, 7-9.



culturally isolated and feel cautious and conservative about their sansei (the third-generation) daughter's relationship with and possible marriage to a white person. To them, it is obviously the best for their daughter to limit herself to persons of their own ethnic group and marry within the race, which parallels the older generation of the Chinese parents discussed in the previous example. This demonstrates a kind of commonality within the older Asian Americans that they want their children or grandchildren to socialize and marry within their own ethnic group or other Asians.

For this sansei girl's question, Diane Yen-Mei Wong gave her own advice, also from a perspective of an Asian American:

...

Since you haven't had the chance to meet other Asian American young people, use this time to do that. Make this a priority. Get involved with some Asian community groups or activities back in the city. Once you do, you'll find that Asian Americans can be as fun and interesting as anyone else. You may even find that you feel closer to them than to your white friends because you all share a common history and cultural background.

Give yourself, your parents, and all your potential friends a break: get to know some Asian Americans, and then make a decision about who to date or not. If you can show your parents that you are at least willing to meet some Asian American guys, they may be more willing to listen to your request to go out with your other friends every once and a while!<sup>241</sup>

In her response, as a Chinese American herself, Wong encourages this sansei girl to make friends with other Asians beyond her neighborhood and this is similar to the nisei parents' suggestions. These letters seem to indicate a dominant feeling among Asian

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<sup>241</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Letters...*, 9.

Americans that their daughters should only socialize and marry Asians, and whites socialize with whites, blacks with blacks, etc.

The translation of the last paragraph, unfortunately, omitted the whole first part of this sentence: “Give yourself, your parents, and all your potential friends a break” and directly moved to emphasize the second part: “get to know some Asian Americans, (你可以逐渐认识一些亚洲朋友).” For the translators, perhaps the missing part is not important because they want their translation to be direct advice or an order. Similarly, in their parents’ culture, Asian girls are expected not to date at an early age. To avoid the sensitive word “date” in the sentence “and then make a decision about who to date or not,” the translators avoid offending the Chinese reader, by not conveying the exact Chinese meaning of the English word “date;” instead, it becomes “深交(literally, “further your friendship”). All this shows that in the process of translation, the translators contextualize Chinese cultures and values and thus made their translation practical.

Although different than the interracial problems, which are often more complicated due to different ethnic and cultural relationships, the intra-racial relationship is equally problematic. As Letter 2 demonstrates, intragroup conflict is true not only for the Chinese but also for other Asians. However, this can still create problems for young Asian women. For example, in the letter above, the sansei’s parents only allow their daughter to date and marry other Japanese Americans. Also, as Letter 32 shows, a Filipino girl finds that “The Asians in my school never seem to spend time with people outside of their own ethnic groups. The Chinese stay with the

Chinese; the Vietnamese with the Vietnamese. It's the same for the Koreans, Filipinos, and Japanese, too."<sup>242</sup>

This is also true for Chinese young women. For example, Letter 28 relates a Chinese girl whose parents won't let her marry her fiancé because they have the same last name "Chin." Indeed, in traditional Chinese culture, people with the same family name are often believed to have the same ancestor in their family history and therefore marriage between family members is equivalent of incest and therefore illegitimate. Apparently, from the answers given by Diane Yen-Mei Wong in response to the letter selected informs Chinese parents of American values and laws related to marriage:

This is a very old belief that may be very hard—but not impossible—to overcome. Inform them that in America, what makes a marriage legal or not is determined by the laws of the state in which you live.<sup>243</sup>

In their translation of this sentence, Vanessa Lam and Shirley Liu focus on the social role of translation and they translated this sentence to provide daughters with information that would help bring parents around. Literally, their translation reads: "This idea has existed for a long time and it is really hard to change it. But it does not show that you won't have a way to deal with it. Tell your parents that America's marriage laws are different from those in many other Asian countries." Note that the translators omitted the last part of the quote above—that is, "what makes a marriage legal or not is determined by the laws of the state in which you live." Instead, to make Chinese parents recognize that, in America, all Asian cultures and customs should give way to American ones, this part is changed to "Tell your parents that America's marriage laws

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<sup>242</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Letters...*, 51.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

are different from those in many other Asian countries.” By emphasizing the difference between America’s marriage laws and those of Asian countries, the translation is plain, straightforward and effective, both linguistically and culturally.

As the “Dear Diane” letters reveal, the social problems confronting Chinese young women in Chinese-American communities and institutions, such as Chinatowns and schools, are different from those that their parents encountered. These social problems demand more attention from parents and social workers than ever before. In the Chinese “Dear Diane” letters, for example, some young women mention previous or current misconduct, such as running away from home, skipping school, having nontraditional sexual relations, or taking drugs such as marijuana, Quaaludes, and other downers. As Letter 9 states:

Dear Diane: I’m 16 years old and have a big problem. Last year, I ran away from home three times. I couldn’t stand my parents’ nagging: change your friends, go to school, stop talking on the phone so long, turn off the TV. When it got bad, I just split and spent a few nights at a friend’s house....

Home For Good<sup>244</sup>

Letter 45 reveals exploration of drugs:

Dear Diane: Some of my friends got hold of some Quaaludes and other downers. They asked to come over next weekend and try them out. So far, I’ve only smoked a little marijuana, but I’m curious about this other stuff. Is there anything wrong with finding out about them through personal experience? My friends say it’s the only way. I don’t plan to be an addict, so what’s the harm?

Eager To Learn<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Letters...*, 19.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

Letter 41 raises the issue of a pregnant unmarried teenager:

Dear Diane: How can I tell my parents that I'm pregnant? I'm in my junior year in high school, and they think that I'm still the sweet little girl used to. The father of the baby doesn't know, and I don't want to tell him.

Two Months Along<sup>246</sup>

Diane Yen-Mei Wong responded empathetically, and, as she emphasized in my interview with her, gave responses from an Asian perspective which, she would consider, is pretty much “Western perspective.”<sup>247</sup> From a Western but not Eastern perspective, Wong is actually more concerned with helping young Asian girls to adapt or assimilate into American society and culture. For example, Wang responds to Letter 9 with the following:

DEAR HOME FOR GOOD: It takes only a few months to lose your parents' trust, and sadly, it takes much longer to regain it. Both you and your folks have been through a lot, and you deserve a big pat on the back for your decision to go “straight.” It's not going to be an easy road, but stay on it. It'll get you to the right place in the end....

Actions speak louder than words, even though you speak the words from your heart. Show them just how serious you are about making the change by working out “contracts” or agreements with them about chores you should do, attending school regularly, keeping your phone calls short, and other acts that caused problems in the past...

Over time, they'll realize you've turned over a new leaf, and they'll appreciate the commitment you've made. Till then, good luck and don't give up! You'll be okay.<sup>248</sup>

Likewise, part of Wong's responses to Letter 45 is as follows:

DEAR EAGER: No one plans to be an addict. Most persons who become addicts ended up that way accidentally; it hit them before they really know it. Some still aren't even aware of, or willing to admit to, their reliance on drugs or other substances...

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<sup>246</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Letters...*, 65.

<sup>247</sup> Author's interview with Diane Yen-Mei Wong, October, 2009.

<sup>248</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Letters...*, 19.

Being young and being Asian can be pretty rough. You may be having a hard time talking with guys, getting along with your parents, or just surviving. Rather than falling into drugs as the answer, talk with your parents, your teachers, or other adults whom you know and admire. They can help you though some of these rough times, or they can direct you to who can, including where you can get more information about drugs. Your city may have a counseling or drug center whose staff can give you guidance. Use your resources....<sup>249</sup>

Wong's response shows her understanding of the young girl's frustrations and hardships as young and Asian in the United States. To cope with these problems, Wong suggests that the girl take the initiative and talk with the adults in her life, including her parents, teachers, or counselors. However, this is seldom encouraged in Asian culture where, in this case, the girl does not even dare to speak frankly but only receives sharp criticisms from her parents and teachers. In this case, if the older-generation parents were not to accept this "Western perspective," the situation could be even worse for the young woman.

Again, Wong responds to Letter 41:

DEAR TWO MONTHS ALONG: Whether or not you tell your parents, pretty soon they'll be able to see for themselves that something is happening to their "sweet little girl." If you can, tell them as soon as possible....

If you can't tell them alone, or if you feel they would rather have someone neutral present, ask a school counselor, minister, doctor or someone from a community agency or clinic to talk with you and your parents....

Be prepared to hear your parents tell you how disappointed they are in you, and how ashamed they are.... Help them direct their anger and love into figuring out what all of you can do as a family....

By the way, if you intend to continue to have sexual relationships and want to avoid this type of situation, please ask your doctor about contraceptives.

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<sup>249</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Letters...*, 71.

One small act of passion can lead to years of regret.<sup>250</sup>

To a large extent, the advice given above bears much resemblance to the last two responses to Letters 9 and 45. All three responses suggest that the “problem” girls should communicate actively with their parents in order to get their parents’ understanding and figure a way out together. However, in reality, it is very difficult for a “problem” daughter to gain her parents’ understanding. Actually, the last sentence of the above-given response “One small act of passion can lead to years of regret” is very much like what Chinese/Asian parents might say to a “problem” daughter in this situation. In other words, the last sentence sounds more like a typically Chinese warning than a piece of advice from a caring and considerate adult. In this regard, it might be safe to say that, though Wong emphasizes her Asian American ethnic background and Western perspectives in providing responses to the young Chinese/Asian American women, she seems to tailor some advice within Chinese/Asian cultures and values, as does “Tiger Mom,” Amy Chua in training her two daughters, discussed earlier in this chapter.

All these above examples show that, during their adaptation or assimilation to American life, young Chinese/Asian American women encounter many new problems and create new concerns for Chinese parents and their young daughters as well. To resolve these problems would require effective communication between the daughter and parents which, however, is dependent on the degree to which the younger and older generations can respect and mingle American and Chinese/Asian cultures and values. In

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<sup>250</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Letters...*, 65.

this situation, the issue of how to resolve the conflicts between generations actually becomes sensitive, subtle, and complicated.

In many respects, though Chinese-American women have been historically stereotyped, the images of young, urban, second-generation Chinese women are more related to the “model minority” stereotype than to social problems like drugs and prostitution. Nonetheless, social problems are a reality among some Chinese-American young women. When discussing the reasons for this, as in her responses to Letter 45, Diane Yen-Mei Wong points out: “Being young and being Asian can be pretty rough,” and “some young Chinese women would rather rely on drugs to handle life.”<sup>251</sup>

Letter 45 holds special significance for Chinese parents and their young daughters. First, the selected letter and its translation can help Chinese parents to understand that their daughters’ lives are by no means easy because they have to face stereotypes and difficulties as they adapt to American life. In this regard, parents’ care and love are highly important and necessary. Second, it also conveys to Chinese/Asian young women that taking drugs cannot solve the problems they face. This can also be seen clearly in the rhetorical questions that Wong raises at the end of her answers:

...When you have the full story, and when you are strong enough to make your own decisions, then you are ready to decide your relationship with drugs. Will you abstain, use, or abuse them? A decision that could affect the condition of your mind and body should not be made lightly.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Letters...*, 71.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.



What deserves special mention here is the contrast between Wong's response and the translation tone. The responses make clear that the editors of the "Dear Diane" letters do not absolutely condemn drug taking. They employed this attitude because it serves to align them with the young women by showing empathy and being less judgmental. Indeed, they are not playing the role of substitute parents. In this case, they are more like supportive counselors.

To match Diane Yen-Mei Wong's answers in Chinese, the two translators put it into the following Chinese:

当你对药物有清楚的认识, 而且有坚强的力量来作决定的时候, 你就可以决定你是不是要吃药了, 你会禁止自己不吃药吗? 你会服药吗? 或者你会毫无限制地胡乱吃药吗? 这个决定关系重大, 会影响你的身体和心理, 你要小心决定才好。<sup>253</sup>

In this case, the Chinese translation literally is:

You will decide whether you still want to take it or not only after you are thoroughly clear about the nature of drug and are strongly determined to make a decision. If so, will you still restrain yourself from taking drugs, using drugs or taking drugs unlimitedly? This is a big decision because it will affect your body and mind. You should be extremely careful.

From the Chinese translation, however, one can find that the translation sounds more eager to advise young ladies to shun drugs than Diane Yen-Mei Wong's original English response. This is because the translators had the readers—Chinese parents and their daughters—in mind throughout translation. It is reasonable to believe that they intended to shape the translated text to gain the parents' confidence as they advise the young women on issues, such as drug taking. In this regard, their translation is effective.

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<sup>253</sup> The Chinese pinyin for this translation is: *dang ni dui yao wu you qing chu de ren shi, er qie you jian qiang de li liang lai zuo jue ding de shi hou, ni jiu ke yi jue ding ni shi bus hi yao chi yao le, ni hui jin zhi zi ji bu chi yao ma? Ni hui fu yao ma? Huo zhe ni hui hao bu xian zhi de hu luan chi yao ma? Zhe ge jue ding guan xi zhong da, hui ying xiang ni de shen ti he xin li, ni yao xiao xin jue ding cai hao.*

In the Chinese edition of “Dear Diane” letters, a major issue for young Chinese women is their identity in American society, which is also true for other Asian American young women. From the selections, one can derive that some young women have a crisis over identity; many are caught between the conflicting pulls of ethnicity and family on the one hand and their peers and engagement in American society in school, at work, and other places outside the home. It leads to ambiguous identities, and some shift their identities as they identify more as Americans and less as Asian or Chinese, or more as Chinese-Americans and less as Chinese. For example, as Letter 40 shows, a young woman feels totally frustrated about her identity when she claims her American identity but it is not accepted by her parents because they believe that only white people are truly American:

Dear Diane: My parents just recently came to America, and whenever they say “Americans,” they refer only to non-Asians, especially whites. I was born in this country, so aren’t I an American? I know a lot more about America than about any Asian country.

Made In The U.S.A.<sup>254</sup>

Another woman in Letter 5, facing a similar problem because she does not know whom she should listen to—her school teachers, who encourage her to challenge what they say, or her parents, who are just the opposite, expresses:

Dear Diane: At school, teachers tell us to ask questions and to challenge what they say. At home, though, it’s just the opposite. Whenever I offer an opinion that is different than what my folks think, they say I’m rude and disobedient. I suppose that I can remain silent in front of them, but isn’t there a way that I can express my opinions without them raising the roof?

Opinions Not Wanted<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Letters...*, 63.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

Again, a half Filipino and half black girl is uncertain about her identity when people treat her as neither an Asian nor a black. As Letter 21 describes:

Dear Diane: I'm half Filipino, half black. Some of my school friends are also mixed, primarily Japanese and white. At our high school, most of the other students are either white or black.

Sometimes, we don't seem to fit anywhere. People treat us based on what we look like more than on who we are as people. During Black History Week last month, I tried to get involved in the activities, but the blacks wouldn't accept me because I was Asian. When I visit my Asian friends, at their homes, however, their parents tell them that they shouldn't spend time with blacks.

One of my Asian/white friends tries to pass for white. I don't like that, but we're all pretty lost and at least she's found an alternative! What identity can we claim for ourselves?

Lost Between The Cracks<sup>256</sup>

On the other hand, some young Chinese women seek to be more Chinese culturally. While Americanizing, she not only begins to study Chinese, but also calls on others to maintain their native language and ethnic identity. As Letter 23 shows:

Dear Diane: When I was little, my parents tried to force me to learn Chinese, but I always resisted. I guess that I was too concerned about being 100% American like all my friends.

Now that I'm 25, I realize that maybe I should've listened to my mom a little more. I've never been able to share my feelings with my parents or talk with my grandparents. Since they are getting older, I feel like I'm missing out on all of what they have learned.

I've decided to take language classes myself, but I just want to encourage other young people to try to maintain their family's language. Don't succumb to the pressures that I felt about trying to be American. You can be an American and bilingual, too.

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<sup>256</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Letters...*, 37.

This selection has special meaning since as they acculturate to American life, a large number of Chinese young women concentrate on improving their English, especially colloquially. They desire to be Americanized linguistically; few would go against this trend. However, in this selection, the editors of the “Dear Diane” letters imply that there is no contradiction between being American and being able to speak Chinese. That is, in the young woman’s word, “You can be an American and bilingual, too.” This is especially important for Chinese young women because, in learning Chinese, they would possibly achieve a better balance between maintaining their Chinese culture while still being Americanized. This would reduce some of the pressures on Chinese young women, especially in terms of generational conflicts and identity problems, and help them adjust more easily and smoothly to American life.

Among all the “Dear Diane” letters, Letter 23 bears the shortest response from Diane Yen-Mei Wong, which is given as follows:

It’s great that you’re going to take some classes to learn the language. You’ll never regret it. Thanks for sharing your lesson, and hang in there.<sup>258</sup>

In this short response, Wong implies that she agrees with this young woman. Wong’s approval could be interpreted as a calling to every Chinese young woman to learn Chinese and be American at the same time. To emphasize this, the translators put the responses into the following Chinese:

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<sup>257</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Letters...*, 39-41.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

太好了! 你自动自发要上中文课, 一定不会后悔的, 谢谢你与大家分享你的经验, 继续前进.

Literally, the English translation is given as follows:

Wonderful! You are voluntarily and automatically going to take Chinese class. You'll surely feel no regret. Thank you for your sharing your experiences with us all. Continue to make progress.

The Chinese text and the literal English translation support and encourage Chinese-American young women to maintain their parents' culture/language by learning Chinese. Either from the linguistic expression itself or their addition of and emphasis on "voluntarily," "automatically," and "Continue to make progress," their translation offers a path to bridging the generational and cultural conflicts through bilingualism.

In conclusion, translation has a purpose that is often related to social and cultural exchanges. As global human activities increase more and more rapidly, the role of translation and translators is more significant than ever before in global communication.<sup>259</sup> In this context, it is believed that transnational and cross-cultural messages and values transmitted via translation can help change people's ideas and attitudes towards life.

The translation of the Chinese edition of "Dear Diane" letters functions to bridge the gap between the first generation Chinese parents and their daughters. The translators translated the "Dear Diane" letters with a special sense of "mission" to help young Chinese women and their parents during their adjustment to American life. In the process of translating the "Dear Diane" letters, they are active and creative participants. It might be safe to say that their translation is plain and informative. By employing different translation skills, they have made their

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<sup>259</sup> Newmark, "No Global Communication Without Translation," 55.

translations a more revealing discourse for analysis, a rich linguistic text to explore deeper meanings, and a special tool to facilitate the exchanges of human activities in an increasingly transnational era.

## Chapter Five

### The “Bintel Brief” and the “Dear Diane” Letters in Comparative Perspective

Immigrant minority women have been an important object of research in recent scholarship on race, gender and ethnicity. Since the passage of the new immigration laws in the 1960s, this has been especially pronounced with the influx of a large number of immigrants into the United States. Studies of immigrant women also involve a broader context of relevant research. As scholar Donna Gabaccia argues, studies of immigrants, ethnics, and women share “common roots in some ways” and there has been a flowering research on immigrant women since the 1970s.<sup>260</sup> This “intersectional” study of immigrants is also echoed in scholar Justin Allen Berg’s recent research, in which he points out the importance of studying immigrants by combining race, class, gender, and social space together.<sup>261</sup>

Women’s/gender studies, particularly influenced by feminism, post-structuralism, and post-ethnic theories and methodologies, has developed a multifaceted and ever-changing discourse. With the arrival of the second wave of feminism in the late 1960s and 1970s, as feminist scholar Laura Lee Downs argues, “women’s history was transformed from a minority strand in historical practice to a widespread intellectual movement.”<sup>262</sup> With the traditional women’s history turning into the gender history in the 1980s, scholars began to look at the new tool of historical analysis. They argue that different aspects of social life can be constructed and deconstructed in multiple ways and categories can be constructed discursively. In 1986, Joan

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<sup>260</sup> Donna Gabaccia, “Immigrant Women: Nowhere At Home?,” *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 10 (Summer 1991): 61-87.

<sup>261</sup> Justin Allen Berg, “Race, Class, Gender, And Social Space: Using an Intersectional Approach to Study Immigration Attitudes,” *The Sociological Quarterly*, 51(Spring 2010): 278-302.

<sup>262</sup> Laura Lee Downs, *Writing Gender History* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2004), 21.

Wallach Scott published her influential essay “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis.” According to Scott, gender is a “constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes” and gender is also “a primary way of signifying relationships of power....”<sup>263</sup> In this context, research on women and gender really provides scholars with a rich site in which to discuss the meaning of such important concepts as “immigration,” “sexuality,” “culture,” “race,” and “ethnicity.”

The study of minority women is often related to the study of entire ethnic groups. In other words, the study of how minority women adjust, adapt, or assimilate into American society and culture is inherent in the study of minority groups. The results of such studies often apply to the study of women/gender and, consequently, they expand one’s vision and deepen one’s understanding of the distinctive characteristics that different immigrant women groups share.

Although one seldom lumps the study of Chinese and Jewish women together because of the apparent difference in their ethnic backgrounds and different times of arrival in the United States, they share many common experiences. For example, both groups of women immigrants encountered difficulties during the process of adapting to American society and culture. Although different in many other aspects, such as immigration history, language, culture, traditions and customs, both Jewish and Chinese American women expressed similar frustrations, anxieties, and hopes during their immigration, adaptation, and assimilation to American life. What deserve a special mention here is that one can find both of their “voices” in published letters—the “Bintel Brief” (letters to the editor; a bundle of letters) that editor Abraham Cahan instituted as a regular column in the *Jewish Daily Forward* in 1906 and the *Dear Diane: Letters*

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<sup>263</sup> Downs, *Writing Gender History*, 93.



*From Our Daughters*.<sup>264</sup> As discussed earlier, the “Dear Diane” letters also convey what Harry Golden emphasizes are human stories that involve “a man, and a woman and children, their joys and their sorrows, their pleasures and their tribulations.”<sup>265</sup> Besides, both the “Dear Diane” and the “Bintel Brief” letters carry the editors’ responses to the dilemmas that the letter writers posed. A close examination of their responses suggests that they are more than just an adviser giving perfunctory counsel. They act as teachers and preachers, providing an instructive lecture for the reader.<sup>266</sup> In this context, the letters provide insight into the lives of Chinese and Jewish immigrants to America, and a comparative study of these letters allows one not only to restore the ignored voice in history, but also, more important, helps map out the common territories of their immigrant experiences.

The writers of the constructed letters carried in the *Dear Diane* book are all young Asian urban females born in the United States. Although some of the writers of the “Bintel Brief” letters are new immigrants, many were second- or even third-generation writers seeking advice about the dilemmas they confronted growing up in the United States. In both cases, the writers provide the reader with a rich site for research, as both groups of immigrant women seek to Americanize. However, the process of their adaptation, acculturation, and assimilation to American life proves often long, challenging, and frustrating.

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<sup>264</sup> Diane Yen-Mei Wong, *Dear Diane: Questions and Answers For Asian American Women* (Oakland, California: Asian Women United of California, 1983); Harry Golden translated the “Bintel Brief” into “letters to the editor” while Metzker gave its equivalent “A Bundle of Letters.” For the former, see Harry Golden, forward to *A Bintel Brief: Sixty Years of Letters from the Lower East Side to the Jewish Daily Forward, Volume One*, ed. Isaac Metzker (New York: Behrman House Inc., Publishers, 1971), 19-36; for the latter, see Isaac Metzker, editor’s introduction to *A Bintel Brief: Letters to the Jewish Daily Forward, 1950-1980, Volume. II*, ed. Isaac Metzker (New York: The Viking Press, 1981), vii-x.

<sup>265</sup> Golden, forward to *A Bintel Brief, Vol. One*, 36.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

## 5-1 The Construction of the “Bintel Brief” Letters

The “Bintel Brief” letters were originally printed in the newspaper *Der Forverts* (*The Jewish Daily Forward*), which was founded in 1897 to help the Eastern European Jewish immigrants adjust to American society. Although it had been primarily a workingman’s newspaper, the *Forward* became “the biggest, most influential Yiddish newspaper in America,”<sup>267</sup> On January 20, 1906, it began publishing a personal–advice column carrying human-interest stories and soon generated “a flood of emotional letters to the editor from Jews.” With “the personalized tone and human interest reporting of the Yiddish press,” the “Bintel Brief” soon evolved into “a trademark of the newspaper” and “an authority on urban living.”<sup>268</sup>

The ongoing column of the “Bintel Brief” was essentially a response to Jewish immigration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Between the years 1899 and 1914, more than one million Jews from Eastern Europe migrated to the United States. The influx of Jewish immigrants during this period was the second largest in number, ranking second only to those from Italy. Different than early Chinese immigration, which was predominantly characterized by a “bachelor society,” the Jews came with their families. According to Sydney Stahl Weinberg, like the immigrants of other ethnic groups, “Jewish immigrant men focused on the world outside the home—the synagogue or workplace—while women defined themselves within the domestic sphere regardless of whether or not they worked for wages.”<sup>269</sup> Jewish immigrant women also shared a common cultural heritage that deeply affected their lives in

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<sup>267</sup> Metzker, ed., *A Bintel Brief*, Vol. One, 10-12.

<sup>268</sup> Andrew R. Heinze, *Adapting to Abundance: Jewish Immigrants, Mass Consumption, and the Search for American Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 153.

<sup>269</sup> Sydney Stahl Weinberg, *The World of Our Mothers: The Lives of Jewish Immigrant Women* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), xx.

America, in which the values of family, work, and education were considered most important.<sup>270</sup> Between 1914 and 1920, however, Jewish immigration to the United States was virtually closed because of the Great War. After that, it continued to increase until 1922 when the U.S. enacted new immigration laws, which were not effective until the mid-1920s, to establish restrictive quotas “to limit Eastern European Jewish immigrants (as well as immigrants from other countries deemed unsuitable for Americanization).”<sup>271</sup> While Chinese immigrants primarily concentrated in California, Jewish immigrants mainly settled in northeast coast cities, especially New York City, where they concentrated in the Lower East Side.<sup>272</sup>

As new arrivals in the United States, Jewish immigrants encountered many difficulties and problems arising from language, culture, and customs. There was a need for them to express their frustrations, anxieties, and worries about their encounters with different problems during their adaptation to American life and seek advice and consolation from somebody “in order to maintain their sanity and dignity in the face of unforeseen and often agonizing problems with spouses, children, lovers, neighbors, bosses, and landlords.”<sup>273</sup> In this context, the “Bintel Brief” in the Yiddish *Jewish Daily Forward* provided them with such an opportunity. As Issac Metzker argues, the *Jewish Daily Forward* had a tremendous impact, and its contents represent “a true epical history of the Jewish mass immigration and the immigrants’ adaptation to life in this country.”<sup>274</sup> Many scholars and researchers have written about the “Bintel Brief” letters, including Richard F. Shepard, Vicki Gold Levi, George M.D. Wolfe, Irving Cutler, and Andrew

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<sup>270</sup> Sydney Stahl Weinberg, *The World of Our Mothers*, xx.

<sup>271</sup> Richard S. Levy, *Antisemitism: A Historical Encyclopedia of Prejudice and Persecution, Volume 1* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2005), 343.

<sup>272</sup> Heinze, *Adapting to Abundance*, 15-16.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>274</sup> Metzker, ed., *A Bintel Brief, Vol. One*, 11.

R. Heinze.<sup>275</sup> Issac Metzker has published two collections of translated letters in *A Bintel Brief: Sixty Years of Letters from the Lower East Side to the Jewish Daily Forward, Volume One*, with a forward by Harry Golden (1971); and *A Bintel Brief: Letters to the Jewish Daily Forward, 1950-1980, Volume II* (1981).<sup>276</sup>

The first volume of *A Bintel Brief* contains 115 letters published by the *Forward* between 1906 and 1967; the second volume includes 104 letters that the *Forward* carried from 1950 to 1980.<sup>277</sup> Different than the “Dear Diane” letters, which are the letters collected only from young Asian American women in the early 1980s, the “Bintel Brief” letters are written by Jewish male and female immigrants of different professions and ages. Within contrast to the “Dear Diane” letters, the “Bintel Brief” letters cover a much wider range of topics, from seeking “the basis of all civil rights” in the beginning to later problems “of old age and retirement, changing neighborhoods, assimilation and intermarriage, children and grandchildren who have moved far away, and about the wide gulf separating the elderly, the middle-aged, and the young.”<sup>278</sup>

Referring to the *Bintel Brief*, Abraham Cahan, the author and editor of the *Jewish Daily Forward*, wrote in his 1920 memoirs:

People often need the opportunity to pour out their heavy, laden hearts. Among our immigrant masses, this need was very marked. Hundreds of thousands of people, torn from their homes and dear ones, were lonely

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<sup>275</sup> Richard F. Shepard and Vicki Gold Levi, *Live and Be Well: A Celebration of Yiddish Culture in America* (New Brunswick: Hilltown Press, Inc., 1982); George M.D. Wolfe, “A Study in Immigrant Attitudes and Problems: Based on an Analysis of Four Hundred Letters Printed in the ‘Bintel Brief’ of the ‘Jewish Daily Forward’” (PhD diss., The Training School for Jewish Social Work, New York, 1929); and Irving Cutler, *The Jews of Chicago: From Shtetl to Suburb* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996); and Heinze, *Adapting to Abundance*.

<sup>276</sup> Isaac Metzker, *A Bintel Brief: Letters to the Jewish Daily Forward, 1950-1980, Volume II* (New York: The Viking Press, 1981).

<sup>277</sup> Isaac Metzker arranged all these letters in chronological order in his books. The total number of the letters is my own calculation. Also, in his works, Isaac Metzker selected only the letters that “depict the true story of the immigrants, uprooted from the Old World, who came here determined to build a new life.” See Metzker, introduction to *A Bintel Brief*, ed. Isaac Metzker, *A Bintel Brief, Vol. One*, 17.

<sup>278</sup> Isaac Metzker, editor’s introduction to *A Bintel Brief, Vol. II*, x.

souls who thirsted for expression, who wanted to hear an opinion, who wanted advice in solving their weighty problems. The ‘Bintel Brief’ created just this opportunity for them.<sup>279</sup>

Cahan’s words clearly suggest that, like the Chinese immigration discussed earlier, Jewish assimilation or adaptation to American life was not an easy process. Jewish immigrants suffered heavily from loneliness and family separation. They were eager to tell people their stories and get “advice in solving their weighty problems.” In this sense, the birth of the “Bintel Brief” letters was a natural outcome of Jewish immigrants’ encountering America.

## **5-2 A Comparative View of the “Dear Diane” Letters and the “Bintel Brief” Letters**

Although the “Dear Diane” book differs from *A Bintel Brief* in many significant ways, such as its history, influence, and readership, both of them show the editors’ great efforts to publish Chinese and Jewish immigrants’ problems and concerns during their encounters with American society and culture. As mentioned earlier, the “Dear Diane” letters were constructed on the basis of the survey conducted by Asian Women United of California (AWUC) in 1981 since not many young girls wrote to them.<sup>280</sup> Similarly, as quoted in Metzker’s *A Bintel Brief*, Abraham Cahan, editor of the *Jewish Daily Forward*, mentioned: “Many of the letters we receive are poorly written and we must correct or rewrite them. Some of the letters are not written directly by the people who seek the advice, but by others who do it for them.”<sup>281</sup>

As both groups of letters show, Chinese and Jewish immigrant women share some common characteristics in their acculturation and adaptation to contemporary American society

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<sup>279</sup> Metzker, introduction to *A Bintel Brief*, Vol. One, 13.

<sup>280</sup> Author’s interview with Diane Yen-Mei Wong, October, 2009 (abbreviated as Wong Interview hereafter).

<sup>281</sup> Metzker, introduction to *A Bintel Brief*, Vol. One, 13.

and culture. For the sake of this study, I focused on the fifty letters carried in the English-Chinese “Dear Diane” book and decoded them on the basis of their problems of relationships encountered in family, school, and work.<sup>282</sup> I also selected fifty letters from the book *A Bintel Brief* that best demonstrate Jewish women’s similar experiences to those of the Chinese young women during their Americanization. In my selection, I paid special attention to some comparable items, such as age, gender, and relationship problems both Jewish and Chinese women encountered. Although I focus on the second-generation women’s letters from both books, to achieve a broader comparative view, my selection also includes letters from the first-generation women because their questions often concern the same problems the second generation experienced. Since both books carry “human-interest” stories, it is my belief that, by studying the letters under the theme of “relationships,” I can find some commonalities and differences among Jewish and Chinese women’s encounters with America. It is my hope that, by comparing and contrasting both sets of letters, I can find and analyze some important factors that involve Chinese and Jewish young women’s assimilation and adaptation to American life, such as identity crises and intermarriage. Rather than analyze every letter in each book, I have selected only the letters that best represent the purpose of this study.

In my study of these letters, I find that they all can be categorized by the status of the participants discussed: parent/child, husband/wife, in-law, peer, relative, society, and teacher relationships. Although the “Dear Diane” letters carry “letters from our daughters” and the “Bintel Brief” includes letters of different ages, Table 5-1 reveals that, out of the seven

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<sup>282</sup> As mentioned previously, the English “Dear Diane” letters are put under the following themes, “Family,” “School,” “Work,” “Personal Concerns,” “Relationships,” and “Motherhood.” The letters of the English-Chinese “Dear Diane” book are mostly selected from the English letters under the theme of “Family.”.

relationships, the “Dear Diane” letters only concern three (parent/child, peer, and teacher); while the “Bintel Brief” letters cover almost all of them except one (teacher).

Of all the letters, those mentioning family relationships occur most frequently. Table 5-1 shows that, in the “Dear Diane” letters, more than three-fourths (76 percent) of the letters discuss relationships with parents. Letters discussing relationships with peers comprise 20 percent. Fewer of these letters concern relationships with teachers and school work. Likewise, in the “Bintel Brief” letters, the single most frequently addressed issue involved the parent-child relationship, but, when compared with the “Dear Diane” letters, only about one-third (32 percent). The letters mentioning the husband-wife relationship comprise 22 percent. “In-law relationship” letters comprise 18 percent. Together with another 8 percent of letters discussing relationships with relatives, 80 percent of the letters concern family issues. Like their Chinese counterparts, Jewish American women also show a concern over relationships with peers, although they only comprise 12 percent.

A close reading of both groups of letters, however, reveals that both Chinese and Jewish women have encountered similar problems during their adjustment to American life and that all the letters can be studied under the theme of “problems.” Table 5-2 reveals that the writers of both groups of letters encountered eight major problems in their immigrant life. Specifically, they are the problems of parent/child, identity, marriage, hardships, loneliness, sex-orientation, sibling relationships, and drugs. Out of these categories, the most frequently addressed problems encountered by both groups involved parent-child relationships and identity—95 percent for the young Chinese American women and 62 percent for Jewish American women. Because of some different experiences primarily arising from age—the Chinese American women are mostly young school-aged students and the Jewish are older and married—neither of the two parties

**Table 5-1 Frequency by Status of Participants of “Dear Diane” and “Bintel Brief” Letters**

Party Involved	The “Dear Diane” Letters		The “Bintel Brief” Letters	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Parent/Child	38	76	16	32
Husband/Wife			11	22
In-law			9	18
Peer	10	20	6	12
Relative			4	8
Society			4	8
Teacher	2	4		
Total	50	100	50	100



**Table 5-2 Frequency of Categories of Major Problems in the “Dear Diane” and “Bintel Brief” Letters**

Problem	The “Dear Diane” Letters		The “Bintel Brief” Letters	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Parent/Child	24	48	17	34
Identity	23	46	14	28
Marriage			9	18
Hardships			6	12
Loneliness			4	8
Sex-Orientation	1	2		
Sibling Relationship	1	2		
Drug	1	2		
Total	50	100	50	100

shared any one of the other’s three remaining categories of problems—sex-orientation (2 percent), sibling relationships (2 percent), and drug problems (2 percent) for the Chinese American women, and marriage (18 percent), hardships (12 percent), and loneliness (8 percent) for the Jewish American women.

One noticeable thing about these categories is that some problems overlap thematically. Indeed, it is hard to distinguish one problem, such as marriage, from the other, for example, the parent-child problems that often involve parents' opposition to the daughters' decision to have an interracial marriage. However, this is more obviously expressed in the Jewish American women's letters than by their young Chinese counterparts. It does not mean that young school-aged Chinese American women would avoid an essential factor of assimilation—intermarriage. Instead, how they express their disapproval of their parents' opposition to friendships can also be used to infer their attitudes on intermarriage.

For both Chinese and Jewish American women, the most frequent problems with which they express concern are the difficulties in mother-daughter (generational) relationship. For example, a Chinese daughter expresses her feelings about her parents' being assertive and bossy in their relationship in her letter to Dian Yen-Mei Wong:

Dear Diane:

At school, teachers tell us to ask questions and to challenge what they say. At home, though, it's just the opposite. Whenever I offer an opinion that is different than what my folks think, they say I'm rude and disobedient. I suppose that I can remain silent in front of them, but isn't there a way that I can express my opinions without them raising the roof?

Opinions Not Wanted<sup>283</sup>

In her answers, Diane Yen-Mei Wong writes:

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<sup>283</sup> Diane Yen-Mei Wong, *Dear Diane: Letters From Our Daughters* (Oakland, California: Asian Women United of California, 1983), 13. For a comparative study, some selected letters already discussed earlier may appear again in this chapter but just with a different perspective of analysis.

Dear Opinions: When you are raised in two cultures—Western and Asian—you must often walk a thin tightrope. Going back and forth between the assertive-style Western way of communication and the more passive-style traditional Asian way can be very frustrating. It's not an easy thing to do! Don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

There are some steps you can take to minimize the number of times you get rebuffed. First learn to read your parents' moods....

Second, explain to them that if you disagree, you don't mean to upset them or sound disobedient. Rather, you are trying to learn more through discussing it with them.

Third, there are many different ways to assert opinions. If you make your parents feel that their way of thinking is wrong, they're going to be defensive and argumentative.... Tell your parents, "I understand what you're saying, but how about this?" Then present your own view—not as the correct answer, but merely as another suggestion.

You may sometimes feel like you are talking to a wall, but who knows, there may be someone listening on the other side!<sup>284</sup>

In the above letters, although there are issues over which parent-child conflicts arise, the most important are the problematic parent-child communication and the clash of different cultural values and traditions. One can see most clearly how this conflict played out in the first example. On the parents' side, they are heavily influenced by Chinese culture. In Confucianism, showing filial piety towards one's parents is a standard by which parents can judge a good child from a bad one. This cultural value automatically puts parents in an authoritative and domineering position in the parent/child relationship. Thus, if the child challenges what his/her parents say or think, the child will often be regarded as "rude" and "disobedient." This cultural thinking often

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<sup>284</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Letters...*, 13.

makes parents assertive and dominating and the child “polite” and “obedient” in the parent-child relationship.

From the child’s perspective, however, the parent-child relationship is unequal and hierarchical. As the daughter complains in her letter, at school, she receives an American education which encourages her to challenge what her teachers say. But at home, if she questions her parents, she is regarded as “rude” and “disobedient.”

Growing up and educated in American culture, which values the concepts of equality, democracy, individualism, and opportunity, this daughter has become Americanized—that is, she has become culturally assimilated to mainstream American values. She tries to be informal, casual, and free as a result of American cultural influence. She seeks equality with her parents in the parent-child relationship. She even calls them “my folks” in her letter. Although there is no way of telling whether her parents would be able to read their daughter’s letter, they might not like to hear their daughter call them “my folks” instead of “my parents.” Also, it might be equally hard for them to accept their daughter as their equal.

The editor’s responses deserve special attention. As she emphasized in my interview with her, Dian Yen-Mei Wong identifies herself more as Asian American and, accordingly, gives her advice from a Western/American perspective.<sup>285</sup> A close reading of her responses reveals that Wong encourages this young woman to embrace American political and cultural values, such as equality, freedom, and independence. Although she recognizes the difficult situation in which one is raised in two cultures—Western and Asian—she does not want this young woman to give up. Instead, throughout her responses, she insists that it is nothing to fear for this young woman

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<sup>285</sup> Wong Interview.

to talk with her parents and even if it does not work, but “who knows, there maybe someone listening on the other side!” The advice offered is positive and encouraging in tone by American standards. It seems that it is reasonable, according to the editor, for the second-generation women to identify themselves with American culture and values and resist traditional Chinese parenting culture. As a whole, Wong’s responses are considerate, understanding, and instructive.

Likewise, a Jewish mother also expresses her disappointment with her two sons and one daughter:

Worthy Editor:

I consider myself a progressive woman who thinks there should be no difference between Jews and Christians.... Now, however, when my daughter has fallen in love with a Gentile, I have become one of those mothers who interferes because I am against this match. I am not one of those fanatic parents who warn their children that they will disown them because of it, but I’m trying with goodness to influence my daughter to break up with the boy. My daughter argues with me: “why? You always used to say that all people are equal.” She is educated, she knows how to talk to me, and often I have no answers to her arguments. But I feel this is no match for my daughter. Her friend comes here often, and as a person he appeals to me, but not as a husband for her....

Respectfully,

A Mother<sup>286</sup>

The editor’s answer is as follows:

Answer:

You yourself answered everything in your letter, and our opinion is the same as yours. Your daughter should also understand that the match is not a good one. But

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<sup>286</sup> Metzker, *A Bintel Brief, Vol. One*, 149-150.

she is infatuated with the young man. And when one is in love, then all the sensible arguments are worthless.<sup>287</sup>

The above letter expresses the mother's anxiety about her daughter's falling in love with a "Gentile" (a person of non-Jewish faith) and her daughter's ignoring her advice. However the different intergenerational perspectives on interethnic relationship play a big role in the Jewish mother-daughter relationship. As the letter reveals, the mother-daughter conflict is mainly triggered by different ethnic viewpoints. Although the mother in the letter considers herself a "progressive woman who thinks there should be no difference between Jews and Christians" and believes that "as a person he appeals to me," this does not mean that she can accept this appealing Christian man to be her son-in-law.

Obviously, the Jewish American mother cannot accept the differences between Jews and Christians in her real life. To some extent, she still harbors negative opinions of Christians in her heart. Her own religious commitment makes her oppose her daughter's marriage with the Christian man. However, on her daughter's side, she is fully aware of the meaning of the pursuit of happiness. Also she is more tolerant than her mother of religious differences. Growing up under the influence of American culture, this daughter does know how to argue with her mother. To achieve her own happiness, the daughter even attempts to persuade her mother to agree with her decision. Unfortunately, even if she is unable effectively to answer her daughter's arguments, the mother still does not give up her ideas and would try "with goodness to influence my daughter to break up with the boy."

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<sup>287</sup> Metzker, *A Bintel Brief, Vol. One*, 150.

The Jewish American mother's letter shows that when Jewish immigrant women encounter America, intergenerational conflicts are unavoidable. For the Jewish mother, it is unbearable to accept the "boy" as her son-in-law, simply because he is a Christian. For the daughter, however, marriage with a Christian is an acceptable form of assimilation to American life.

This letter contrasts with the "Dear Diane" letter above in that the Jewish daughter is more independent and free in speech and behavior. Despite her mother's resistance, for example, the Jewish American daughter insists that she should still continue her relationship with the Gentile and to justify it, she uses her mother's words "All people are equal," which essentially reflect American democracy and equality. However, the young Chinese American woman cannot be free to do so since in Chinese culture, it will be considered "rude" and "disobedient" for children to do so to their parents. The two letters above suggest that, though both the young Chinese and Jewish women are educated in American culture and both feel restricted by their own ethnic culture, comparatively, the young Jewish American woman still has more freedom and independence than her Chinese counterpart. Thus, it can be inferred that the young Chinese woman has experienced greater difficulty arising from her own ethnic culture than the Jewish American woman during her assimilation or adaptation to American life.

Noticeable with this letter is the editor's answer. While reading it, one can feel the strong tone of the editor's approval of the Jewish American mother's opinion. By saying "our opinion is the same as yours," the editor conveys to the mother his empathy but points out the futility of opposing the daughter, since as he advises, love will dominate. Yet, it indicates that, since this letter was written in 1928, Jewish immigrants also encountered similar generational problems as

did second-generation Chinese Americans and to a large extent, the problems are often a result of conflicting cultural and ethnic values. This was especially so when the second-generation immigrants came of age.

Aside from parent-child conflicts, identity issues are another concern for both young Jewish and Chinese American women. For example, in the “Dear Diane” letters, as many as 23 out of 50 mention identity problems, comprising 46 percent of the total. Within contrast to Chinese women, only fourteen Jewish American women talk at all about identity crises, comprising 28 percent of the total. However, identity problems occupy second place both in the Jewish and Chinese American women’s letters. Some examples:

Dear Diane:

When I was little, my parents tried to force me to learn Chinese, but I always resisted. I guess that I was too concerned about being 100% American like all my friends.

Now that I’m 25, I realize that maybe I should’ve listened to my mom a little more. I’ve never been able to share my feelings with my parents or talk with my grandparents. Since they are getting older, I feel like I’m missing out on all of what they have learned.

I’ve decided to take language classes myself, but I just wanted to encourage other young people to try to maintain their family’s language. Don’t succumb to the pressures that I felt about trying to be American.

Going To Be Bilingual<sup>288</sup>

Wong’s responds like this:

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<sup>288</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Letters...*, 39.



Dear Going To Be: It's great that you're going to take some classes to learn the language. You'll never regret it. Thanks for sharing your lesson, and hang in there.<sup>289</sup>

Again, another Chinese American student writes:

Dear Diane:

As a student in Taiwan, I did well in and enjoyed many different types of classes: math, science, art, literature. But when I came to the U.S., though, I had to spend most of my time just trying to learn English.

I hated those English classes: they were torture and the teachers were impatient. I began to spend more time in math because it didn't require a lot of English skills. My math teacher was nice and even encouraged me to major in math.

I'm now in computer science in college, but I often wonder how different my life would've been if I had been encouraged in some of the other classes. Why does being Chinese limit so many opportunities?

Limited<sup>290</sup>

In her answer, Wong writes:

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As for yourself, it's good to learn from the past, but don't let it consume you. If you keep wondering what life might've been like, you'll become stuck there and won't be able to move on. You may not have been encouraged to go into some of the other areas in which you did well in Taiwan, but now is a perfectly good time to resume your interest in those areas. Look to what your college has to offer.

Life should be a continuous time of learning. Just because you couldn't pursue certain areas in public school doesn't mean that you can't go after them now.

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Go for it.<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Letters...*, 41.

<sup>290</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Questions...*, 23.

Like the two young Chinese American women's concern with their identity, a Jewish American mother also expresses her disappointment with her daughter-in-law, who was too concerned about own American identity and image to allow her mother-in-law to visit her grandchildren in her house. The Jewish mother complains:

Dear Editor,

I am writing you, with my dear husband's permission, about the resentment we feel over our daughter-in-law, and I ask your advice.... Our daughter-in-law was never too friendly toward us, but we overlooked a great deal. A short time ago, when my husband and I went there, she suddenly announced that she wanted us to visit our grandchildren only once in two weeks, and that we should avoid coming to them on weekend when they have guests.

I didn't know at first what my daughter-in-law meant, but she explained that, as her children were growing up, she didn't want them to learn from us to speak English with a Jewish accent. Our dear daughter-in-law wasn't even ashamed to tell us that we didn't fit in with her group of friends who were real Americans, while we were foreigners.

It's true we're not American-born (we came to this country over forty years ago) and our English is not "perfect," but we are very hurt by our daughter-in-law's remark. I answered her then that in our youth we had no time to learn the English that was spoken in high society because we had to work hard to raise a college-educated husband for her. I told her my husband often had to work overtime in order to be able to send our son to college, to make him a professional man....

We ask you, is this right? Should children act this way? What can we do, dear Editor, since we miss our grandchildren so? We are hurt and want to know whether we must obey these rules laid down by our daughter-in-law. Please answer soon.<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Questions...*, 23-24.

<sup>292</sup> Metzker, *A Bintel Brief, Vol. One*, 204-205.

The Jewish editor responds:

You are rightfully bitter. Your son should be blamed even more that your daughter-in-law. He should never have permitted her to make such an arrangement. It is also natural that you should feel offended by your daughter-in-law's statement. The behavior of your daughter-in-law is ridiculous and contrary to the American tradition. Many great men, active in American government, education and business, were brought up by immigrant parents who didn't speak English correctly, but this did not keep them from having successful careers. And these successful children of immigrants are not ashamed of their fathers and mothers who came to America from across the oceans. Just the opposite, they take every opportunity to mention their parents and grandparents with pride, and they stress the fact that these immigrants who speak English with a Jewish accent have enriched their lives.

We feel that someone in your family should explain this to your son and daughter-in-law, and they may see that they are wrong. We also feel that at present you should visit your grand-children, your son and daughter-in-law, not as often as before, since a prolonged estrangement will do you more harm than them.<sup>293</sup>

The above examples suggest that the younger generation of Chinese and Jewish women had strong identity issues. The young woman in the first example refuses to learn Chinese in order to be "100% American" like all her friends. In her eyes, to achieve and maintain an American identity, she should not learn Chinese. In this sense, the Chinese language becomes a benchmark by which one can be judged as an American or not. But when she grows older, this young woman begins to feel as if she had missed out on what her grandparents and parents had learned, so she decided to take Chinese language classes herself. To some extent, she assumes a dual identity—being Chinese and American. However, this dual identity might make her become neither Chinese nor American as is the case with a half Filipino, half black girl who finds no identification with either one or the other.<sup>294</sup> This example indicates that identity is essentially fluid in meaning, and the daughter has limited choice when growing up. Indeed, according to

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<sup>293</sup> Metzker, *A Bintel Brief*, Vol. One, 205-206.

<sup>294</sup> Appendix 1: Letter Summaries of English "Dear Diane" Letters, Letter 34.

scholars Min Zhou and Jennifer Lee, though today young Asian Americans often adopt a number of different identities—ethnic hyphenated-American, pan-ethnic, or multiracial, Asian American youth have limited choices of their identities since “nativity, generational status, bilingualism, gender, neighborhood context, and perceptions of discrimination are important factors in determining the identity choices among today’s Asian American youth.”<sup>295</sup>

Different than the first Chinese young woman who learns Chinese to better understand her parents, the woman from Taiwan has seemingly lost her Chinese identity as an immigrant in the United States. Yet she doesn’t fit in because she does not command the necessary English skills. The letter shows clearly that the language barrier virtually deprives her of an opportunity to assimilate in her school life. Her lack of English language capability makes her identify more as a non-American. No wonder she hates English classes, and asks in the end: “Why does being Chinese limit so many opportunities?”

In her response, Diane Yen-Mei Wong shows her genuine understanding of the two young Chinese women’s identity issues. In the first case, for example, she approves the girl’s decision to learn Chinese and, in some way, keep her Chinese ethnic identity; while in the second case, Wong encourages the young woman to study English well and this can be understood as Wong’s encouraging this young Chinese American woman to have a better cultural adaptation to her American life by commanding English skills.

Both cases show young Chinese Americans’ concern with their identity. Indeed, on the one hand, the younger generation of Chinese American women was born and grew up in the

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<sup>295</sup> Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou, eds., *Asian American Youth: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 21.

United States. Most of them can get a good education, and they desire to be the same as their American counterparts. In other words, they want to assimilate—both culturally and structurally—into American mainstream culture. But on the other hand, because of their parents’ cultural and ethnic differences, they are still inevitably linked to their family lineage, heritage, and tradition. They are still Chinese Americans.

Likewise, the third example indicates that in growing up, Jewish American women also experience identity issues. Although the “Bintel Brief” letters do not mention ethnic/racial differences as often as their Chinese counterparts, this does not mean that Jewish women take it for granted that they are fully American. Some elements of their heritage, such as religion and language, play a role in Jewish and Chinese American women’s cultural and structural assimilation to American society and life. From the woman’s reaction to her parents-in-law in this example, one can conclude that maintaining her children’s American identity through accent-free English is valued even if it means alienating her parents-in-law from her family.

The editor’s response sounds very considerate and instructive in tone. As found in many other letters, the editor often gives his empathy to the Jewish American women for their opinions and perspectives. To some extent, it is not merely a show of his understanding of the immigrant woman, but rather a show of his identification with Jewish culture and tradition in the context of Jewish women’s Americanization. The last part of his answers sounds more like instruction telling the complaining mother to continue her family relationship with her daughter-in-law and her family. This reflects that though family sometimes is like a battlefield where different cultural and generational conflicts happen, but family is still the most valuable place where one can seek peace, love, and true self.

The cited letters mentioned above show the dilemmas in the young Chinese and Jewish American women's efforts to assimilate into American society and culture. On the one hand, since they were born and grew up in America, they would like to be treated like "real" Americans, not foreigners. But as they grow older, the more they realize that they are still hyphenated Americans. This is particularly true for Chinese American women. As compared with Jewish American women, the Chinese have another obstacle in their assimilation process: their physical differences. However, to assume and keep their American identity, the younger Chinese American generation must break away from the influence of their parents' culture and thus family conflicts arise. Similarly the Jewish daughter-in-law in her treatment of her parents-in-law engendered family conflict.

In the "Bintel Brief" letters, marriage problems rank the third highest out of all the categories involving Jewish American women. Although few of the English "Dear Diane" letters directly address marriage problems because of the Asian American women's younger age, several letters express concerns with intermarriage.<sup>296</sup>

For example, one letter writes:

Dear Diane: My mom always told me as I was growing up that when white boys look at you, they're thinking no good of you and that I should avoid them at all costs.

I'm 19 and have just met my Chemistry Lab teaching assistant. He has blond hair and the most beautiful blue eyes. He's got the kind of personality that I have found only in Caucasians, and not in Asians. I like him a lot, but I'm also very conscious of what my mom told me about whites. Maybe he just finds me exotic. What should I do?

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<sup>296</sup> Appendix 1: Letter Summaries, Letters 38, 64, 77, 92.

In her responses, Wong writes:

Dear Loving Chemistry: Beware of relationships that are based only on physical characteristics or on a stereotyped personality. You say that you have just met him, so you don't know very much about him and what he is like on the inside. Yet, you say he has characteristics that Asian guys don't. You're not only treating Asian men on the basis of a stereotype, but you're also doing it to your instructor.

Neither what your mom said about whites nor what you have said is necessarily true.

What may be even more dangerous is that your instructor may do the same to you, and see you only as a stereotypical Asian American woman—exotic and mysterious. If he does anything more to you than that, you may find this type of relationship a bit shallow and boring in the long run.

Instead of making broad generalizations about Asian men, or snap judgments about blue-eyed blonds, take your time and give each man a chance to show you his true colors.

Don't jump into this relationship solely on the basis of your body chemistry!<sup>298</sup>

Similarly, a "Bintel Brief" letter to the editor:

Dear Friend Editor:

We've live through a lot, and now we face another problem.

My husband and I are not religious, but we lead a traditional Jewish life. Therefore, it was a blow for us when our daughter, without telling us, married a non-Jew.

When she came to tell us what she had done, she kept promising us that she and her husband, who is a learned man, planned to keep some of the Jewish tradition in their home. We were angry with her, but since we didn't want to become estranged from our daughter, we accepted the inevitable.

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<sup>297</sup> Wong, *Dear Diane: Questions...*, 53.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-54.

Not long ago I was at my sister's home and I was told that since my daughter's husband is not Jewish, they cannot make a *brith* [ritual circumcision]. We don't know if this is so, but we, and especially our daughter, are very upset. She hopes to have a son and wants him to be named for her grandfather, who was a religious man and whom she loved dearly. Our non-Jewish son-in-law is not religious, but she loves our daughter very much and wants to do everything he can to make her happy.

I ask you not to delay giving us your answer because the time is short.

With thanks and respect,

B.R.<sup>299</sup>

The editor replies:

Though the "Bintel Brief" column doesn't print letter about this type of problem, we will make an exception in your case, which shows the confusion in Jewish life today.

We don't give advice on religious matters because, first, we don't know all the details, and second, there are, thank goodness, enough rabbis here who can handle these questions. Therefore, it would be advisable for you to consult a rabbi about this. Finally, we want to note that many children of mixed marriages are very disturbed when they grow up, because when they are asked whether they are Jews or Christians, they don't know what to answer.<sup>300</sup>

Both letters concern the issue of intermarriage, though the difference is that the young Chinese American woman likes a white man because of his physical beauty, while the Jewish American daughter married a non-Jew against her parents' wishes. In regards to their daughter's attitude toward a man of another ethnic group, it is surprisingly similar yet there is a marked difference between the first-generation and second-generation Chinese and Jewish immigrants. For example, the first generation still has close connections to their homeland and culture and do not encourage their daughter to marry somebody from a different ethnic group. In the Chinese mother's case, she is assertive saying that white men

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<sup>299</sup> Metzker, *A Bintel Brief*, Vol. II, 87-88.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 88.



are no good and her daughter should stay away from the white teaching assistant; in the Jewish American mother's case, though she and her husband are not religious people, Jewish tradition and culture do not accept outmarriage. Since their daughter has already married, they have to "accept the inevitable." Both cases reflect that neither Chinese nor Jewish culture, religion, and values encourage exogamy and this is most evident among first-generation immigrants.

It is also surprising to find that the editors' responses share almost the same characteristics—caution and warning. For example, in Wong's responses, though she seems to be objective about making an assertive statement about whites, she uses the words "Beware of relationships that are based only on physical characteristics or on a stereotyped personality" and "Don't jump into this relationship solely on the basis of your body chemistry!" to warn the young Chinese woman that her love for the white man might be an illusion and won't last long, therefore indirectly supporting her mother's words about whites. In the "Bintel Brief" editor's answer, this "cautious" tone is more clearly demonstrated. The editor first points out that the "Bintel Brief" column does not print this kind of letter because it shows "the confusion in Jewish life today." Then the editor refuses to give any advice on religious matters but at the end of his answer, the editor's word: "... many children of mixed marriages are very disturbed when they grow up, because when they are asked whether they are Jews or Christians, they don't know what to answer." This sounds more like a warning rather than advice. So it is reasonable to believe that, in providing answers, perhaps both editors identify strongly with their own ethnic group and thus answer the questions from a mixed perspective involving their own ethnic culture and American culture.

As the parents and editors share similar views, so too do the daughters in both letters. Obviously, the Chinese American woman desires to establish a good relationship with the white man while the Jewish young woman realized this with her marriage. In this context, a close reading of how an important dimension of assimilation—marriage—is received among the second-generation immigrants enables one to gain an insight into the process of assimilation among young Chinese and Jewish American women in the United States.

According to scholar Milton Gordon, marital assimilation is the final stage of the assimilation process, in which “the minority group ultimately loses its ethnic identity in the larger host or core society.”<sup>301</sup> Actually intermarriage can occur among different ethnic groups and intermarriage rate “were most pronounced among the third generation and among the youngest adult members of each ethnic group.”<sup>302</sup> Between 1970 and 2001, the intermarriage rate among Jewish Americans had increased steadily from 13 percent before 1970 to 28 percent (1970-1979), 43 percent (1985-1990), and 47 percent (1996-2001), respectively. According to the National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01, among all married Jews, 31 percent were intermarried and the intermarriage rate among men (33 percent) is slightly higher than among women (29 percent). The survey also found that intermarriage is “more frequent among younger than older adults, consistent with the increasing rate of intermarriage over time.”<sup>303</sup> Similarly, there was a major increase in intermarriage among Chinese Americans. For example, by 1980, intermarriage among Chinese Americans had increased to over 30 percent of Chinese marriages and by 2010,

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<sup>301</sup> Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 80

<sup>302</sup> Norman R. Yetman, (ed.), *Majority and Minority: The Dynamics of Race and Ethnicity in American Life, Sixth Edition* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999), 251.

<sup>303</sup> The Mandell L. Berman Institute, *The National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01: Strength, Challenge and Diversity in the American Jewish Population*, 16-19, September 2003, accessed on June 2, 2012, [http://www.jewishfederations.org/local\\_includes/downloads/4606.pdf](http://www.jewishfederations.org/local_includes/downloads/4606.pdf).

when Asian Americans, along with Hispanics, had the highest rates of intermarriage, with more than 25 percent of Asian newlyweds marrying a non-Asian, the rates of intermarriage among Chinese American men had reached 36.1 percent, out of which 12.9 percent of all marriages were to other Asians; 19.2 percent to whites, versus 47.6 percent among Chinese American women, out of which 9.9 percent of all marriages were to other Asian Americans and 31.9 percent to whites.<sup>304</sup>

### 5-3 A Summing-up

The “Dear Diane” and “Bintel Brief” letters are essentially concerned with “human-interest” stories about Chinese and Jewish American women. Both groups of letters revealed some major problems that Chinese and Jewish American women experience during assimilation and adaptation to American life. Different than the young Chinese American women who are mostly students and express their anxieties and frustrations during their growing up in America in a given time period—the 1980s, the Jewish American women in the “Bintel Brief” letters are older and mostly married. Like their male counterparts, Jewish American women have expressed in their letters a wider concern with numerous problems during their encounters with the turmoil of World War I, the Russian Revolution, the rise of Communism, and the Nazi German holocaust, many of which

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<sup>304</sup> Yetman, *Majority and Minority*, 252; Carol Morello, “Intermarriage Rates Soar as Stereotypes Fall,” *The Washington Post*, February 15, 2012, accessed on June 12, 2012, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/intermarriage-rates-soar-as-stereotypes-fall/2012/02/15/gIQAvyByGR\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/intermarriage-rates-soar-as-stereotypes-fall/2012/02/15/gIQAvyByGR_story.html); Chinese Americans refer to those “U.S.-raised” or the second generation or the 1.5 generation or foreign-raised Chinese Americans. See Asian Nation, Asian American History, Demographics, and Issues, accessed on June 2, 2012, <http://www.asian-nation.org/interracial.shtml>.

involved human rights issues, such as life, equality, and freedom.<sup>305</sup> These issues have deeply affected Jewish American women's lives in America.

Jewish and Chinese American women in both letters share several commonalities with each other in their encounters with America. In other words, the process of Americanization has affected them and their families in a similar way. First, the generational parent-child problems exist in both cases. In the "Dear Diane" and the "Bintel Brief" letters, it is either the daughter who complains about the relationship with her parents—usually her mother—or the mother who shows dissatisfaction with her daughter. Such conflicts pervade almost every aspect of their lives. Usually these generational problems arise from different cultural influences on the parts of parents and daughters.

Second, due to cultural, ethnic, and religious influences, the conflicts in the letters cannot be avoided and resolved. The older generation has been strongly influenced by their home cultures and traditions. Though they are in America, they cannot give up their traditional culture and practices—in other words, cultural and structural assimilation is more difficult for them than for their children. Rather, they would like their daughters to inherit and pass on their own cultures to the third or the fourth generations.

However, since the younger generation of women was born and raised in America, most of them can get a better American education than their parents. They want to treat their parents in the way that a "real" American treats his or her parents, that is, with a truly equal, free, and independent spirit. This spirit can often lead to a direct conflict with first-generation parents. Neither of the two parties gives in to each other.

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<sup>305</sup> Metzker, introduction to *A Bintel Brief*, Vol. One, 14.

Third, letters from both Jewish and Chinese American women reveal a sense of identity crisis. As both groups of letters of the generational conflicts reveal, the younger generation of women often identify themselves more as American than their parents do, but they feel lost when they find that their American identity is neither recognized by mainstream society nor by their parents.

## Conclusion

### Afterthought to the “Dear Diane” Letters

America is a nation of immigrants. For many decades, scholars and researchers, both at home and abroad, have explored and examined American immigration from different perspectives and with different theoretical approaches and research methods. The study of immigration has become increasingly important again in an era of multiculturalism, transnationalism, and globalization and when America’s racial and ethnic diversity has grown significantly because of immigration.<sup>306</sup>

This study of the “Dear Diane” letters focuses on some aspects of recent Chinese immigration, including those relating to acculturation, adaptation, and assimilation as well as gender, generational conflict, and family issues. Since the post-World War II era, Chinese American life has changed significantly, and this is obvious in the experiences of young Chinese-American women and their families, as reflected in my exploration of the “Dear Diane” letters.<sup>307</sup>

The “Dear Diane” letters convey many aspects of the everyday lives of Chinese Americans. The letters written by Chinese and other young Asian women show the multitude of problems and hardships they have encountered in adjusting and acculturating to American life.

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<sup>306</sup> “2010 Census Shows America's Diversity,” U.S. Census Bureau, accessed March 25, 2011, [http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/2010\\_census/cb11-cn125.html](http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/2010_census/cb11-cn125.html). According to the 2010 Census, while the non-Hispanic white alone population is still the largest racial and ethnic group in the United States, its growth rate is the slowest. More than half of the total U.S. population increase between 2000 and 2010 was because of the increase of the Hispanic population. Since 2000, Hispanic and Asian populations have grown considerably, making up 16 percent and 5 percent respectively of the total U.S. population of 308.7 million.

<sup>307</sup> In my dissertation, for convenience, I use the term Chinese young women to include both 1.5 generation and the American-born daughters of Chinese immigrants.

As the Chinese family structure has changed, from the previous group-oriented life in the “bachelor society” and Chinatowns to individualism among young women and in their families, new approaches are needed to account for the complexities of present Chinese-American experiences in the United States.

Recent developments in assimilation theory, taking account of new immigration trends and experiences, are useful in exploring the experiences of young Chinese-American women in adapting to American culture.<sup>308</sup> One indication is the contentious relationship between parents and daughters that reflects not only the generational gap existing in American families but also, as shown in the “Dear Diane” letters, the cultural conflicts between the Chinese traditions of parents and the Americanization of their daughters. To a great extent, the daughters seek to break free from their parents’ influence. In some sense, this tension in mother-daughter relationships is also a reflection of the clashing cultural values embodied in the proverb “While in Rome, do as the Romans do,” followed by the daughters’ generation, and “East or West, home is the best,” which is upheld tenaciously by the parents’ generation.

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<sup>308</sup> The post-1965 immigration to the United States has stimulated more debate about assimilation theory. Milton Gordon in his classic *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), proposed a multidimensional model of assimilation involving acculturation, primary (the ethnic integration of primary relationships such as those found in religious communities and family relationships, etc.) and secondary structural assimilation (the ethnic integration of impersonal secondary relationships, such as jobs and schools, etc.), and marital assimilation. Facing the increasing complexities brought about by the post-1965 immigration, scholars started to develop and modify assimilation theory in different ways to retain it as a dominant theory in the study of immigrants today. For example, while Herbert Gans developed the notion of “symbolic ethnicity,” which predicted increasing assimilation with each succeeding generation and argued that symbolic ethnicity may persist for generations among immigrants, Alejandro Portes proposed that assimilation was a “segmented” process in which “pathways of adaptation and integration were systematically channeled in different directions depending on the characteristics of the immigrants, their history of immigration and settlement, and the nature of their official and unofficial welcome.” See Douglas S. Massey and Magaly Sanchez R., *Brokered Boundaries: Creating Immigrant Identity in Anti-Immigrant Times* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2010), 5. Again, Richard Alba and Victor Nee emphasize the importance of assimilation theory in a diverse and ethnically dynamic society by “theorizing assimilation as a social process stemming from immigration.” See Richard Alba & Victor Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 9. Obviously, all such assimilation scholars have greatly enriched and expanded assimilation theory in modern times.

The appearance of new family-related issues deserves special attention and study today. Post-World War II immigration has produced a strong impact on Chinese-American life. With the influx of Chinese women immigrants and the increased number of native-born Chinese offspring, the persistent imbalanced sex ratio of Chinese immigrants changed significantly in the 1980s and 1990s. However, as family life became the norm among Chinese immigrants, it brought new family issues, such as Chinese young women's social problems, identity crises, and generational conflicts. These new tensions affect not only traditional family relations, but also transcend the family to influence the experiences of young Chinese women and characterize aspects of Chinese-American communities. Clearly, they impact the young Chinese-American women's adjustment and adaptation to American society and culture. This is especially important today when as many as 36 percent of Chinese Americans are second generation and beyond.<sup>309</sup>

This project finds that young Chinese-American women have a strong desire to assimilate to American life. Second-generation Chinese-American women, born and educated in the United States, differ greatly, as Vivian Louie finds in her study, from first-generation Chinese Americans, born and educated overseas, and from most of the 1.5 generation Chinese Americans who were born overseas but partially educated in the United States. Although the 1.5 and second-generation Chinese Americans have many things in common with respect to education and the family, "the second generation [Chinese Americans'] experience is also about the processes of Americanization that children undergo that have little to do with mobility and

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<sup>309</sup> Xiaoning Ma, "21 世纪全美华人形象调查一点五代华人最成功" (An Image Investigation of Chinese Americans in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Proves That the 1.5 Generation Are the Most Successful), accessed March 25, 2011, <http://world.people.com.cn/GB/13895324.htm>.



opportunity and that nonetheless also involve their parents in some way.”<sup>310</sup> Although they have similar levels of education and Chinese influences from their parents at home, second-generation Chinese-American women are more likely than the 1.5 Chinese Americans to identify themselves as American. Nonetheless, though born in America, they are still regarded as only “hyphenated Americans.” Actually, their assimilation to mainstream society is not restricted by their social mobility or job opportunity, but by their ethnic identity. Because of their parents’ teaching and influence at home, their assimilation into mainstream society is very difficult. In this situation, in order to achieve full American identity, second-generation Chinese Americans would most likely resist Chinese parenting and distinguish between “we” [second-generation Chinese Americans] in the mainstream society and “they” [their Chinese parents] at home.

Thus, for young Chinese-American women, acculturation and adjustment to mainstream culture is not an easy path. The problems and conflicts involved in assimilation are reflected in almost every aspect of their family and social life. At home, Chinese parents rear their children with Chinese parenting methods which emphasize parental dignity and power and expect children to be submissive and obedient. This so-called “politically incorrect” parenting is inevitably met with resistance from the young generation of Chinese who grew up in the United States where freedom and independence are fundamental aspirations.<sup>311</sup> Despite their resistance, American-born daughters are inevitably influenced by their parents at home. When talking about this, Maxine Hong Kingston asks:

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<sup>310</sup> Vivian S. Louie, *Compelled to Excel: Immigration, Education, and Opportunity among Chinese Americans* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004), xxiii; xxxiii.

<sup>311</sup> According to the *Time* magazine, even before the publication of Amy Chua’s book *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* in January 2011, her parenting methods had started the ferocious buzz and attracted heated debate on Chinese parenting methods. The online version of her story, by January 31, 2011, had been read more than 1 million times and attracted more than 7,000 comments. Details can be found in Annie Murphy Paul’s article “The Tiger Mom Manifesto” in *Time*, January 31(2011), 36.

Chinese-Americans, when you try to understand what things in you are Chinese, how do you separate what is peculiar to childhood, to poverty, insanities, one family, your mother who marked your growing with stories, from what is Chinese? What is Chinese tradition and what is the movies?<sup>312</sup>

Similarly, Amy Chua, an American-born Chinese mother, parents her two American-born daughters the way she had been raised. When an interviewer spoke to the daughters, she was surprised that Amy Chua's daughters said they would also be strict parents with their children.<sup>313</sup>

The generational conflicts arising mainly from Chinese and American cultural differences have had a strong impact on Chinese daughters' social lives. As revealed in the "Dear Diane" letters, either at school or at work, young Chinese-American women have encountered myriad problems, ranging from identity crises and academic pressures to conflicts in peer relationships, social problems and other issues related to difficulties in their assimilating to mainstream culture.

One of the many concerns of young Chinese-American women is their identity. Young Chinese-American women live in Chinese-American as well as American cultures with a strong sense of double consciousness. On the one hand, they claim their American identity and desire full assimilation into American society and culture; on the other hand, they win full recognition neither from their Chinese parents nor from their American peers. This seeming paradox, to a large extent, influences their conduct both at home and in society.

This study argues that advice columns in American newspapers, such as the "Dear Abby" format, and the well-known "Bintel Brief" letters in the Yiddish-language *Forward*, are an avenue that bridges generational and cultural differences. It is highly important because they

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<sup>312</sup> Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (New York: Vintage International, 1989), 5-6.

<sup>313</sup> Annie Murphy Paul, "The Tiger Mom Manifesto," in *Time*, 39.

offer advice on assimilating while still trying to honor the traditional culture and their parents' traditional values. Also, it shows similarities in the process of adapting to change and Americanization, whether it involves twentieth-century Jewish immigrants in the "Bintel Brief" letters or native-born Americans adapting to class, social, urban and other differences in American society as in "Dear Abby." For Chinese-American women, the "Dear Abby" format as used in the "Dear Diane" project also reflects a strong spirit of ethnic awareness: Asian-Americans help Asian-Americans as African-Americans help African-Americans.

In the Chinese "Dear Diane" letters, young Chinese and other Asian-American women poured out their hearts and expressed their frustrations, anxieties, and struggles as they adjusted to American life. Some letters are very personal and specific, others are quite general. However the letters may be categorized, they are useful artifacts in the history and experiences of Chinese-American women. A close reading and analysis of the "Dear Diane" letters provide a window into the lives of young Chinese Americans and Chinese-American communities in post-World War II America.

The "Dear Diane" books, sponsored and published by the Asian Women United (AWU) of California in the early 1980s, also reflected an era when feminism and other progressive movements grew rapidly in the United States. It is in accord with the mission of the AWU, which seeks "to explore the many facets of Asian American women's experiences and varied cultural heritages through publications and video productions," as is its subsequent publications *Making Waves: Writing By and About Asian American Women* (1989) and *Making More Waves:*

*New Writings By Asian American Women* (1997).<sup>314</sup> In addition, in terms of the book translators, the Chinese translation of the “Dear Diane” letters is a further reinforcement of these concerns.

A comparison of the experiences of young Chinese-American women as reflected in the “Dear Diane” letters and Jewish immigrant women in the “Bintel Brief” letters reveals many similarities. The similar experiences of Chinese and Jewish women in adapting to American culture, especially the prominent generational conflict, support the contention that the problems that young Chinese-American women faced are not particular only to Chinese Americans. As they adapted and assimilated to American society and culture, Chinese- and Jewish-American women shared many common experiences.

The “Dear Diane” letters reveal the encounters of young Chinese/Asian-American women with American life in the 1980s. Although many decades separate the Chinese and Jewish immigrant women’s experiences, many of the dilemmas confronting young Chinese-American women in assimilating have not changed significantly. The tensions associated with assimilation, peer relationships, and identity crises endure. For example, when I interviewed fifteen Chinese women students at the University of Kansas, the interviewees’ responses to the questions about adaptation, peer relationships, and interracial marriage were almost identical to the concerns of the young Chinese-American women in the “Dear Diane” letters, suggesting that in encountering American society and culture, some dominant immigrant issues are similar from generation to generation.<sup>315</sup> I expect that these phenomena will not change in the foreseeable future.

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<sup>314</sup> Asian Women United (AWU) of California, accessed March 26, 2011, <http://www.asianwomenunited.org/>.

<sup>315</sup> I interviewed fifteen University of Kansas women students in the fall semester of 2006 for the seminar Race, Ethnicity and Religion instructed by Professor David Katzman. Although Chinese students were not classified into Chinese Americans, strictly speaking, they still had many things in common with the young Chinese-American

My study of the “Dear Diane” letters attempts to contribute to the study of Chinese-American women and their encounters with America by focusing on young Chinese-American women, their identities, the processes of assimilation, and their relationships with peers and families. It does not claim to exhaust the issues. For example, though important, my study does not attempt to assess the influence of and relationship to their male counterparts. It would be important to explore influences from male family members—fathers, husbands, brothers or even sons. Studying both male and female Chinese Americans would provide a more complete picture of Chinese-American adjustment to American culture and society and provide a better understanding of Chinese-American community life. But that involves a distinctly separate study.

This is increasingly important as the Asian population in the United States continues to grow. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, the Asian-ethnic population comprises 4.8 percent of the total U.S. population of 308.7 million, reaching 14.7 million, of which the Chinese remain the largest single Asian ethnic group with a population of 3.6 million, comprising 1.2 percent of the entire U.S. population and 24.5 percent of Asian Americans.<sup>316</sup> Although the Asian population is much smaller than the 16 percent of the U.S. population that declares themselves Hispanic (regardless of race), like the influence of the Hispanic population, Asian influence is increasing.<sup>317</sup> In this context, in a rapidly changing American society where racial and ethnic diversity is greater than ever, we can assume that all these factors in turn impact the processes of adaptation as immigrant and second-generation Chinese-American women seek to assimilate into

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women in the “Dear Diane” letters: young, Chinese, students, and living in the United States. In my follow-up work, I found that only two of them returned to China upon their graduation while the others stayed. One of them was married to an American white man.

<sup>316</sup> “2010 Census Shows America’s Diversity,” U.S. Census Bureau, accessed March 28, 2011, [http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/2010\\_census/cb11-cn125.html](http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/2010_census/cb11-cn125.html); Asian American Studies Program, University of Maryland and the National Council of Chinese Americans, “A New Profile of Chinese Americans in a New Century,” in *2011 Chinese Lunar New Year Preview*, 2, accessed on May 7, 2012, [http://www.aast.umd.edu/lib/downloads/newprofile\\_ca\\_2011.pdf](http://www.aast.umd.edu/lib/downloads/newprofile_ca_2011.pdf).

<sup>317</sup> Asian American Studies Program, “A New Profile of Chinese Americans in a New Century,” 1.

American culture and society. For example, Amy Chua's memoir, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, and her interviews in the *New York Times* and on NPR have generated attention and triggered heated discussions about Chinese culture and Chinese-American parenting.<sup>318</sup> On the surface, the discussions are about how to raise American children and prepare them for their future appropriately. At another level, they invite comparison and contrasts about Chinese and American cultures. In other words, the discussion on the individual level reflects some people's pronounced doubts and anxieties about current parenting patterns in American culture.<sup>319</sup>

In addition, although I have employed assimilation theory to account for the experiences of Chinese-American women, I admit that assimilation theory alone cannot explain all the increasing complexities of Chinese-American women and their encounters with American society and culture. It is important to keep in mind that even among its leading adherents, such as Herbert Gans, Richard Alba, Victor Nee, Douglas S. Massey and Alejandro Portes, assimilation theory is not static but evolving.<sup>320</sup> The rapidly evolving demographic changes in the United States—the increase in racial and ethnic diversity, the increasing immigration of Asian, Hispanic, and African populations and the changes in religion, the influences of new religions, and the impact of globalization and transnationalism, all have led to re-examining the meanings of assimilation in the twenty-first century. Yet assimilation theory persists because, I believe, at the

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<sup>318</sup> After the publication of her memoir *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* in 2011, the author Amy Chua, a law professor at Yale, immediately became a focus of public attention in the United States. Her work generated a heated debate on her distinct Chinese-influenced parenting. Some major media such as *Time*, *New York Times* and *NPR* have also carried reports and interviews on Amy Chua's parenting and all these reports and interviews have correspondingly attracted the public attention. Details can be found in the interview "Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother," *NPR*, last modified on April 3, 2011, <http://www.npr.org/2011/01/13/132908322/Battle-Hymn-Of-The-Tiger-Mother>; Kate Zernike, "Retreat of the 'Tiger Mother'," *The New York Times*, January 14, 2011; and Annie Murphy Paul, "The Tiger Mom Manifesto," *Time*, January 31(2011), 34-40.

<sup>319</sup> See Paul's article, "The Tiger Mom Manifesto." This article gives the relevant data to prove that, in global testing, the students in China, for example, in Shanghai, and other parts of Asia, surpass American students'. In order to search for the secret to Chinese students' success in the global testing, it also discusses the successful but seemingly "politically incorrect" Chinese parenting represented by a Chinese-American "tiger mother," Amy Chua, 48.

<sup>320</sup> See Note 3.

current moment, it is the most efficacious tool in understanding the process of adaptation of most immigrants, especially the young Chinese-American women represented in the “Dear Diane” letters.

Finally, since the publication of the “Dear Diane” compilations in the early 1980s, I have not found similar advice columns or the “Dear Diane” format reproduced in the most widely read Chinese newspapers and magazines in the United States.<sup>321</sup> Instead, the major Chinese-language media published in the United States, such as the Chinese internet and newspapers in the United States, often carry a lot of immigration information to help the Chinese in the United States become legal immigrants. Thus as Chinese immigration continues to grow, the scant attention to the importance of the “Dear Diane” advice format in the Chinese-language media in the United States reveals that an even larger gap between Chinese and American cultures would appear, and that in the process of bridging that gap, young Chinese-American women might still face a difficult challenge in assimilating into life in the United States.

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<sup>321</sup> For this, I have consulted some major national and local Chinese newspapers circulated and read in the United States, such as *World Journal* and *Kansas City Chinese Journal*. I also visited Chinatowns in Chicago, Washington D.C., New York, and Los Angeles during my years at the University of Kansas and found no such advice column in any of the local newspapers or magazines.

## **Appendix 1 Letter Summaries of the English “Dear Diane” Book**

1. Discouraged Student— Parents only accept straight “A’s” from the daughter.
2. Caught Between Contradictions— Japanese parents accept no exogamy.
3. Double Standard Victim— Parents treat their sons and daughter differently, being fine with the sons for everything, but not for the daughter.
4. Good Korean Daughter— Korean parents do not accept their daughter’s dating with a Japanese American boy.
5. Parents At Work— Parents from Hong Kong always work and have no time to talk with their children.
6. Pressured— Korean parents’ expectation on the daughter to go to a good school frustrates the daughter.
7. Stuck for Words— A Chinese mother can only speak Chinglish and the daughter feels too embarrassed to ask her friends to come over to her house.
8. Home For Good— A daughter who runs away from home for three times tries to convince her parents of her change but it does not work.
9. Opinions Not Wanted— School and home requirements are different: encouraged to be talkative at school but asked to be quiet at home.
10. Disgusted— The Korean daughter feels very embarrassed because her parents and relatives talk loudly while eating out.
11. Out Of Fashion—Almost— Parents demand that the daughter major in computer science against her will of majoring in fashion art, which makes her feel lost.
12. Silent Daughter—The father rushed in and yelled at his daughter in front of all her friends when she was dancing at a local Korean church with a boy one night and the daughter has not talked with her father since then.
13. Mrs. Chew’s Daughter— Daughter feels discouraged because of mother’s constant comparison of her with mother’s friends’ daughters.
14. Left Behind— The parents won’t let their 16-year-old daughter have a boyfriend due to her age and this makes her feel as if she is falling behind her friends since they all have boyfriends.
15. Made In The U.S.A. — Non-Asians, especially whites, are Americans to parents, but not their daughter. This causes her to feel lost about her American identity.
16. Action Wanted—A sansei girl feels mad at her parents because they are too passive and do not dare to “make waves.”
17. Two Months Along— A pregnant daughter is unsure of telling her parents about her pregnancy.
18. 99% Sure— The Korean parents do not hug their daughter the way other parents do on TV and this makes the daughter unsure of their true love for her.
19. Too Limited— The immigrant parents won’t let their daughter try anything they have never tried before and this makes her angry.



20. Friendly— The parents approve of their daughter's bringing a white girl to their house, but not a black girl, making their daughter very confused.
21. 100% American— An American-born Korean student feels embarrassed by being surrounded by her relatives when some white students are near. This makes her feel as if she has lost her American identity.
22. Just Wants To Be Accepted— A Vietnamese girl is under pressure from her parents' requirement for her to make only Vietnamese friends, causing her to feel even harder to be accepted by Americans.
23. Ready To Go Out On My Own— A daughter decides to move on by moving out of her parents' home.
24. Going To Be Bilingual— A 25-year-old Chinese-American girl decided to learn Chinese to maintain her family's language after years of resistance to learn it. She encourages young people not to succumb to the pressure of trying to be 100% American.
25. Got A Roommate— A Japanese decided to cohabitate off-campus but is not allowed to do so by her parents.
26. Graduating Soon— A Girl feels indecisive in whether she should attend college after high school graduation or not.
27. Learned My Lesson— A 15-year-old girl tried to be good after bad actions, but is not accepted by fellow Asians.
28. Words Do Hurt— The girl was called "Chink" at school but afraid to rebel in case friends should disappear, and her mother wouldn't understand.
29. Limited— A Taiwanese student wonders what life would've been like if not coming to America.
30. Impure— A raped girl feels confused about what to do (parents, pregnancy, and VD).
31. Scared To Graduate— A 17-year-old girl feels scared of her life after high-school graduation.
32. Looking For Asian Friends— A Filipino girl wants to make friends with other Asians.
33. Average Student— A quiet Chinese girl is slow in math, but is afraid to ask her teacher for help.
34. Lost Between The Cracks— A half Filipino, half back girl finds no identity with either ethnicity.
35. Divided— A Korean is caught in a dilemma of staying with Korean friends but losing non-Korean friends, unable to mix them together.
36. Broken But Happy— A girl is happy about her mom's divorce but unsure whether she should expose her father's wife-beating truth to her community.
37. Eager To Learn— A girl yearns to smoke Quaaludes and marijuana but does not plan to be an addict. He is not sure if it's right.
38. Madame Butterfly— A girl thinks she has lost her Asian friends because of her dating a white guy.

39. Isolated— A “maybe lesbian” girl asks for help on which way should she go.
40. Out-Group— A girl gives advice about her change of attitude to the special “in-people at schools.”
41. Survivalist— Going to law school but afraid of discrimination at school and on the job.
42. Reached My Peak—Maybe—A woman is afraid of a new job promotion because of the possibility of failing.
43. Teacher’s Aide— A Filipino girl is worried about her English accent on the job and is confused if her boss wants her to quit.
44. All By Myself— A Chinese woman feels isolated at work. What is worse, she cannot stay with her fellow Chinese again.
45. First Class—A business woman is unhappy with the second-class treatment but afraid to mention it to her boss.
46. Screaming Silently— Working on 3 reports but when given more, the young woman feels angry with her supervisor-“what’s wrong with me?”
47. Daughter Of A Seamstress— A Chinese is shy to take garment-working mother to a party in case of embarrassment.
48. Looking For More— A woman complains that there is more to life than her current job.
49. Wondering—A woman is not sure whether she should go out with a non-Asian co-worker or not.
50. Not One Of The Guys— A young woman is not treated as a real attorney because of her age, race, or sex.
51. Not Interested In Him— A Japanese is harassed by her boss but is unsure about what to do. She is afraid of losing her job.
52. Tempted— A woman feels strange about promotion because crossing over to the “other side.”
53. Hurt— A young woman has good working relationships with white male colleagues but is catching jealousy.
54. Passed Over— Three white men were trained under an Asian woman’s supervision but they ended up as her supervisors; the woman feels unfair.
55. Just Wondering— A Chinese woman wonders if she has missed something in life by declining marriage and children.
56. Too Shy— A girl feels too shy to be comfortable with people, both Asian and non-Asian.
57. Unglamorous— A 24-year-old woman feels ugly as compared to her fellow exercise class women, and the magazine and TV women.
58. Jolly Yellow Giant— A tall girl wants to marry an Asian guy but height stands as a problem.
59. Feeling Bad— A girl feels bad for being criticized by her boss at work.
60. Pretty Face— A pretty “leaving-for-college” Hawaiian girl feels hard to get people to take her seriously.

61. Shocked Friend— A woman feels uneasy about her friend's confession of being a lesbian.
62. Superwoman— A woman wants everything this society offers (a career, a marriage, and a family), but is facing criticism.
63. Getting Impatient— A girl student feels Asian guys are shy and wants to spark their interest in her.
64. Loving Chemistry— Due to mom's opinions, a 19-year-old feels unsure about her love of a white man.
65. No Old Maid— A 24-year-old goes against parents' marriage arrangements and wants to go to gradate school.
66. At My Wit's End— Japanese wife is threatened by her husband for her career development.
67. Scared— A wife explains how husband continues his violence on her and their children and how she is ashamed and helpless.
68. Not Just His Servant— A Vietnamese wife disagrees with her husband when he wants her to be a servant and "supervising" mother.
69. Falling Asleep— A 46- year-old Japanese woman wants her "dutiful" husband to excite her.
70. Depressed— A Korean woman is mad at husband for his having a higher degree and good job but none for her.
71. Worried Wife— A Vietnamese wife is worried about her husband's being depressed since moving to America.
72. Panicked— A 20-year-old woman looks back at her past and is not sure whether she made the right decision to divorce.
73. Two's Company— A girl is confused about whether to live with her parents-in-law or not.
74. Lost In America— A Vietnamese feels lonely after her marriage with a black veteran in the United States.
75. Torn— White husband doesn't feel welcome at an Asian community's street fair, and is drifting away from his wife.
76. Soon-To-Be-Divorced— A Chinese woman's divorce makes her parents heartbroken and embarrassed.
77. Ready For Battle— A Chinese woman's in-laws try to teach her to be a good wife and mother.
78. Just A Failure— A housewife complains about not having done too much with her life.
79. Chinese American Mother— A Chinese mother wants her children to keep up their Chinese, but it is useless.
80. Upset With Immigrants— A Korean mother wants daughter to shun Asian immigrants in order to learn English.
81. Ashamed— A mother is afraid that her daughter may feel ashamed of her because of her low status and poor job.

82. Wants To Be A Mother— A 34-year-old Japanese woman wants marriage and children of her own, but is afraid of no reaction from the potential father.
83. Wants Her Home— Mother persuades daughter to stay at home while attending college, but not successful.
84. Believes A Girl Should Be A Lady— A Hawaiian mother explains the reason to her daughter why parents have two sets of rules for her and her brother.
85. Left Out— A Korean wants to supervise her children's study but couldn't do so for lack of English proficiency.
86. Doesn't Believe In Drugs— Mother is worried about her drug-taking daughter's friendship with her Asian friends.
87. No Actress Wanted— A sansei wants her daughter to major in something that can support her later on in her life, but is not gaining favor from daughter.
88. Angry & Embarrassed— A Korean mother embarrassed her daughter by giving a gift to her teacher.
89. Can't Understand— A mother is worried about her second daughter's "doing the wrong thing" and wants her to follow in her older sister's good nature.
90. Night Nurse— A working mom feels guilty for her not being around her 3 children.
91. Wants To Be Prepared— A Chinese is unsure what to do when her daughter called chink.
92. Nisei Mother— A Nisei mom is worried about daughter's dating with a Filipino boy.
93. Grown Up Already— A 34-year-old woman with children is sick of her parents' nagging about her life.
94. Mother Of Gay Girl— Mom is confused about what to do when told daughter is a lesbian.
95. Heartbroken And Lonely— The mother is sad when her daughter is with her "unreliable" boyfriend more often.
96. Tired Of It All— A nisei mother feels burdensome to take care of both her parents and kids.

## **Appendix 2 Letter Summaries of the Chinese “Dear Diane” Book**

1. Discouraged Student— Parents only accept straight “A’s” from the daughter.
2. Caught Between Contradictions— Japanese parents accept no exogamy.
3. Double Standard Victim— Parents treat their sons and daughter differently, being fine with the sons for everything, but not for the daughter.
4. Broken Bu Happy—A girl is happy about her mother’s divorce but unsure of what to do in the future.
5. Opinions Not Wanted— School and home requirements are different: encouraged to be talkative at school but asked to be quiet at home.
6. Stuck At Home—Daughter has problems with Dad because she is not allowed to stay with her friends overnight.
7. Parents At Work— Parents from Hong Kong always work and have no time to talk with their children.
8. Stuck for Words— A Chinese mother can only speak Chinglish and the daughter feels too embarrassed to ask her friends to come over to her house.
9. Home For Good— A daughter who runs away from home for three times tries to convince her parents of her change but it does not work.
10. Pressured— Korean parents’ expectation on the daughter to go to a good school frustrates the daughter.
11. Silent Daughter—The father rushed in and yelled at his daughter in front of all her friends when she was dancing at a local Korean church with a boy one night and the daughter has not talked with her father since then.
12. Isolated— A “maybe lesbian” girl asks for help on which way she should go.
13. Divided— A Korean is caught in a dilemma of staying with Korean friends but losing non-Korean friends, unable to mix them together.
14. Fed Up—A girl feels dependent on her parents because she is requested to come home regularly.
15. Impure— A raped girl feels confused about what to do (parents, pregnancy, and VD).
16. Angry & Embarrassed— A Korean mother embarrassed her daughter by giving a gift to her teacher.
17. Out Of Fashion—Almost— Parents demand that the daughter major in computer science against her will of majoring in fashion art, which makes her feel lost.
18. Tried Everything—A Korean mother embarrassed her daughter by giving a gift to her teacher in her presence.
19. Mrs. Chew’s Daughter— Daughter feels discouraged because of mother’s constant comparison of her with mother’s friends’ daughters.
20. Ready To Go Out On My Own— A daughter decides to move on by moving out of her parents’ home.

21. Lost Between The Cracks— A half Filipino, half back girl finds no identity with either ethnicity.
22. No Addict—A daughter is determined to ignore her mother's nagging about her life.
23. Going To Be Bilingual— A 25-year-old Chinese-American girl decided to learn Chinese to maintain her family's language after years of resistance to learn it. She encourages young people not to succumb to the pressure of trying to be 100% American.
24. No Old Maid— A 24-year-old goes against parents' marriage arrangements and wants to go to graduate school.
25. Average Student— A quiet Chinese girl is slow in math, but is afraid to ask her teacher for help.
26. Loving Chemistry— Due to mom's opinions, a 19-year-old feels unsure about her love of a white man.
27. Just Wants To Be Accepted— A Vietnamese girl is under pressure from her parents' requirement for her to make only Vietnamese friends, causing her to feel even harder to be accepted by Americans.
28. Chin & Chin—Mother doesn't allow her daughter to marry the boy with the same last name due to Chinese culture.
29. Too Limited— The immigrant parents won't let their daughter try anything they have never tried before and this makes her angry.
30. Action Wanted—A sansei girl feels mad at her parents because they are too passive and do not dare to "make waves."
31. Dress Right—A daughter wants to dress but she is not encouraged by her parents.
32. Looking For Asian Friends— A Filipino girl wants to make friends with other Asians.
33. Left Behind— The parents won't let their 16-year-old daughter have a boyfriend due to her young age. This makes her feel as if she is falling behind her friends since they all have boyfriends.
34. Learned My Lesson— A 15-year-old girl tried to be good after bad actions, but is not accepted by fellow Asians.
35. Disgusted— The Korean daughter feels very embarrassed because her parents and relatives talk loudly while eating out.
36. Good Korean Daughter— Korean parents do not accept their daughter's dating with a Japanese American boy.
37. Graduating Soon— A Girl feels indecisive in whether she should attend college after high school graduation or not.
38. Blue In The Face—The daughter is tired of her mother's nagging about her room, grades, etc.
39. Friendly— The parents approve of their daughter's bringing a white girl to their house, but not a black girl, making their daughter very confused.

40. Made In The U.S.A. — Non-Asians, especially whites, are Americans to the parents, but not their daughter. This causes her to feel lost about her American identity.
41. Two Months Along— A pregnant daughter is unsure whether she should tell her parents about her pregnancy.
42. Words Do Hurt— The girl was called “Chink” at school but afraid to rebel in case friends should leave her, but her mother wouldn’t understand her.
43. Trapped—The daughter complains about not being allowed to have an after-school life.
44. 99% Sure— The Korean parents do not hug their daughter the way other parents do on TV and this makes the daughter unsure of their true love for her.
45. Eager To Learn— A girl yearns to smoke Quaaludes and marijuana but does not plan to be an addict. He is not sure if it’s right.
46. 100% American— An American-born Korean student feels embarrassed by being surrounded by her relatives when some white students are near. This makes her feel as if she has lost her American identity.
47. So Far So Good—The daughter wants to be independent, going to parties, etc.
48. Grapevine Victim—A young woman is upset with Asian gossip, spreading fast and from friends.
49. At The Crossroads—A Filipino is caught between two cultures, hard to find a bypass.
50. Out-Group— A girl gives advice about her change of attitude to the special “in-people at schools.”

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