CARVING OUT A PLACE IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: AMERICAN AUTHORS OF CHINESE, JAPANESE, AND KOREAN DESCENT

by
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This dissertation is dedicated to
Hannah Haun Kong, my daughter, for bringing purpose to my life;
and Joseph Larry Mitchell, my husband, for encouraging me daily and blessing my life.

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ABSTRACT

Asian American authors have been producing works for children for more than a century, adding to the diversity and sophistication of the body of children's literature. Critics ascribe the development of Asian American works for children to the success of the civil rights movement and the subsequent ethnic awareness that brought about multiculturalism in the fields of education and children's books. The growth of Asian American children's literature, however, is rarely visible in marketplaces, and Asian American authors' works have received scant scholarly attention or criticism. The critical attention they *have* received is often couched as complaints concerning their literary value. Using critical multiculturalism as a framework, however, sheds new light on some Asian American authors and their narratives, illuminating their literary treatment of racial hierarchy and material inequalities. Such a critical framework reveals how these authors demonstrate Asian Americans' love for America. These authors salvage moments of Asian American historical experiences that might otherwise be buried or dismissed in traditional US history. They also reveal how the myth of the model minority has served to marginalize Americans with Asian faces, and recount how Asian American children develop culturally hybrid identities through ongoing negotiations of conflicts between the mainstream culture and their ethnic cultures. In their narratives, these authors make it clear that they are as American as they are Asian.

To demonstrate the way Asian American authors narrate Asian American experiences in children's books, this dissertation examines six representative texts: *Dragonwings* by Laurence Yep and *Weedflower* by Cynthia Kadohata for Asian

Americans' historicity in the US, *A Step from Heaven* by An Na and *Beacon Hill Boys* by Ken Mochizuki for dissolving the model minority ideal, and *Stanford Wong Flunks Big-Time* by Lisa Yee and *Project Mulberry* by Linda Sue Park for Asian American children as cultural hybrids. In addition to socio-political analyses of these texts, this dissertation also interrogates the literary aesthetics these authors employ. These authors maintain a striking balance between artistic mastery and their messages. Their literary techniques help these texts appeal to a broad readership, leading readers to empathize with Asian American children and disrupting readers ideological notions regarding American history, America as a land of equal opportunity, and Asian Americans themselves.

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INTRODUCTION

Multiculturalism in Children's Literature

There is a reason my daughter became so good at math. As one of the only two students of Asian descent in her American middle school, she needed something to help encourage her and reflect on her in a positive fashion. Her racial marker was a frequent catalyst for mistreatment from her schoolmates and teachers. With no coping strategy, no understanding friends capable of commiserating with her, and a limited English proficiency, she began to devote herself to studying. Mathematics was the most suitable subject for her. She worked hard, but her achievements were often dismissed by peers and teachers alike: "Of course she's good at math," they would say. "She's Asian." Her individuality was invisible whereas her race was highly visible. As an immigrant parent, I was at a loss.

This kind of vignette, in part or entire, is a common experience for Asian Americans. However, I did not fully realize how common until I began the research for this dissertation, reading novels by Asian American authors and associated scholarship. In most cases, these experiences remain as bitter personal rites of passage in growing up as Asian American and are intentionally or unintentionally suppressed into invisible and insignificant incidents by Asian Americans. These accounts of the Asian American experiences have, however, found an avenue of expression via children's literature because of the growing academic and socio-political interest in multiculturalism brought on by the continuing civil rights movement. In tandem with a new focus on multiculturalism that has led society to undergo institutional reforms since the1960s,

some Asian American authors have depicted their experiences genuinely, establishing their place in children's literature through individual narratives and elaborate literary techniques. Delving into these Asian American authors' works that have gained scholarly attention because of their literary excellence, I want to search for an alternative to the helplessness I felt when my daughter was going through the experiences relating to her race or ethnicity in her formative years. More specifically, my quest is to discover how Asian American authors in children's literature go beyond mere descriptions of racial and ethnic experiences and into aspirations for a fair multicultural society for all Americans.

Considering the close relationship between multiculturalism and Asian American contributions to the field of children's literature, it is important to remember the history of multiculturalism in this field. Multicultural children's literature began to gain more public attention with the rise of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, a trend which "had a significant influence on educational institutions" as ethnic or racial groups demanded drastic reform in school systems including curricula, the composition of staff, and textbooks (Banks and Banks 4). Barbara Kiefer and Charlotte Huck give credit to the national atmosphere in the mid-1960s for multicultural children's books: "The growing movement for social justice and civil rights . . . and the growing strength of the civil rights movement . . . would eventually open up the world of children's literature to people of all cultures" (81). In her three-part series of articles on multiculturalism in children's literature, Barbara Bader also thinks of multicultural children's literature as a result of the civil rights movement in the 1960s. She contends that the development of multicultural children's literature started in the area of black children's literature with white sponsors such as Lilian Moore and Stanley Faulkner, focusing on children's books

featuring black characters and produced by black authors and illustrators, and that nonblack authors and illustrators later followed their lead. She argues that "the transformation, in step with the civil rights/black power revolution, was fueled by government policy and economic interest, by black militance and white conscience. And, inescapably, by the presence, the centrality, of children" since non-white children take more significant roles in children's literature (658). Scanning the field of multicultural children's literature mainly through the achievement of African American authors, Bader argues that "[t]he first, revolutionary breakthrough, a black achievement" paved the way for nonblack people of color to produce multicultural books for children (673).

The tide for a multicultural society, however, would not have been flowing save for some organizational buttresses in 1965, one of which was the Council on Interracial Books for Children (hereafter CIBC). The CIBC began to develop avenues and guidelines for the publication of multicultural children's literature. Organized in 1965 by activists in the civil rights movement, the CIBC "[found] ways to encourage authors and illustrators from minority cultures to enter the field [of children's literature]" (Kiefer and Huck 83) and "encouraged all publishers to work with ethnic authors, producers, and professionals" (Gilton 51). Its periodic publication, *The Bulletin of Interracial Books for Children*, moreover, "[gave] information about and guidance in the selection and use of children's trade books and textbooks" (Banfield 18). Later, the CIBC came to make full use of its organizational power as a pressure group when it "[urged] librarians and later the ALA [American Library Association] to avoid or weed books deemed racist" (Gilton 51). Evaluation by the CIBC, therefore, was a mixed bag—promotion and development *vis-a-vis* censorship in children's literature. As complicated and contradictory as the

reviews by the CIBC are, it would be fair to say that the CIBC played an important role in increasing the productivity of multicultural children's literature and the awareness of racism because its members "took discrimination in the children's book field very seriously" (Gilton 51).

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965 also made way for practical, monetary support to bolster multicultural children's literature. The 1965 Act, "a component of Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty" (Kiefer and Huck 83), pursued equality and diversity (Bader 661) by "providing funds for educational services to low-income children" (Kiefer and Huck 83). As one of the practical results from the Act, Kiefer and Huck explain, "library media directors who were calling for more books about children of color also had the money to purchase them" (83). Publishers, of course, did not miss the opportunity presented by this multicultural tide. They sensed the high demand for multicultural books from librarians who were supported by federal funds. Nudging and pressure from the CIBC, on the other hand, drove the publishers to actively recruit authors of ethnic descent and to put more multicultural books in print and in markets. According to Bader's report, the year 1992 saw an unprecedented increase in book sales: "ninety-four black-authored or -illustrated books were published" whereas in 1985 only eighteen books had been published (271). As a more concrete result from the Act, these books were gradually incorporated into school curricula and therefore were utilized as effective tools for indoctrinating the ideology of multiculturalism into children. The 1965 Act, as Bader notes, was "the prime mover" for multicultural children's books (661). With the help of these institutional sponsors, educators began to seek multicultural books that could be utilized to reify equality and diversity in classrooms.

Another institutional change has drawn special attention to Asian American children's literature, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. This Act has been changing the face of America. In part, as an extension of the civil rights movement which focused on egalitarianism regardless of race or nationality, the Act annulled the previous immigrant policy. The old policy was based on "the national-origin quota system . . . under which each nationality was assigned a quota based on its representation in past US census figures" ("U.S. Immigration"). Through his website *Asian-Nation,* sociology professor C. N. Le states that this annulment was caused in part by the United States' political and economic status as a superpower after WWII, which led the US to abandon its discriminatory policy for immigration. Many Asian countries became the beneficiaries of this changed policy mainly because of economic and political relationships between these countries and the United States. Pyong Gap Min, a sociology professor, asserts that "the great disparities in economic development between the United States and major source countries [in Asia] support the economic nature of Asian immigration" (*Asian Americans* 14). The political, military, economic, and cultural connections between the United States and Asian countries drew many Asians toward the United States when they decided to immigrate for a better life. The amendment of the old immigration policy resulted from the US economic and political situations in the 1960s. The new policy has encouraged Asian people with desires for a higher standard of living to come to the United States.

In effect, the 1965 Immigration Act has resulted in more Asian faces in the United States. The editors of the website *History.com* report that "[w]hereas in the 1950s, more than half of all immigrants were Europeans and just 6 percent were Asians, by the

1990s only 16 percent were Europeans and 31 percent were of Asian descent" ("U.S. Immigration"). The immigrants from Asian countries continue to be on the rise in the twenty-first century. According to the Pew Research Center, between 2000 and 2015, the US Asian population grew 72% (from 11.9 million to 20.4 million as of the year of 2009) and represented "the fastest growth rate of any major racial or ethnic group" (López, et al.). Asians are "projected to become the largest immigrant group in the country, surpassing Hispanics in 2055. In 50 years, Asians will make up 38% of all U.S. immigrants" (Lopez, et al.). After half a century since the new immigration act was enacted, Asian Americans, who accounted for less than 1 percent of the US population in 1965, make up 5.8% of the entire US population according to 2018 United States Census Bureau. The 1965 Immigration Act, then, transformed the demographic composition of American society. More Asian faces in American classrooms began to spur demand for Asian American characters in children's books which describe their particular experiences.

All these 1960s social contexts nurtured the development of multicultural children's literature—initially African American children's books. The civil rights movement brought about a paradigm shift in the minds of all who desired an equal and fair US society, and the institutional establishments offered practical support for a multicultural society. With the help of this social climate, multicultural children's literature began to not only build its foundation but also to spread its influence. Pointing out the egalitarian spirit reflected in multicultural children's books, Bader argues,

> The ideal of books in which children of every background would see themselves—itself a revolutionary ideal—had taken root among teachers

> and librarians and was spreading into the larger community. What had started as a top-down transformation continued as something of a grass-roots movement, from patches of grass here and there. (155-56)

Bader's argument is adequate if "patches of grass" means mainly African American children's books. Yet, it has taken a patch of grass for Asian American children's literature quite a long time to find soil in which to root and spread.

Asian American Children's Literature

More than one hundred years ago, the seeds for the patch of Asian American children's literature were sown, but they were not well nourished even in the peak of the civil rights movement in the 1960s.[1] It would take one more generation for Asian American children's literature to spread its patch. Since the 1990s the number of Asian Americans in the US population has grown, sparking the production of more books relating to Asian Americans. The Cooperative Children's Book Center (hereafter CCBC) reports that since the center started to collect data on multicultural books for children, the number of books by and about Asian Pacifics or Asian Pacific Americans has steeply increased from 65 books in 1994 to 237 in 2016 (Horning et al. *CCBC Choices 1998* 14; *CCBC Choices 2017* 9; "Publishing Statistics"). Kathleen T. Horning, et al. in *CCBC Choices 2012* comments, "the number of books by people of color has plateaued for the

[1] It is generally agreed that Edith Maude Eaton, whose pseudonym is Sui Sin Far, is the first American writer of Asian ancestry that produced and published a creative text. While publishing essays and short stories in newspapers and magazines, she published the collection of short stories, *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (1912). The collection has two sections; one is for adults and the other for children, such as "The Story of a Little Chinese Seabird," or "A Chinese Boy-Girl." She, on the other hand, is an example of multiculturalism in her identity. Though she can be labelled as Asian American, she was born to an English father and a Chinese mother in 1865 in England, moved into America at the age of eighteen, and then into Canada. She moved back and forth between the US and Canada until she spent the last years of her life in Canada.

past decade or so with one exception" (11). The exception was books by and about Asian Pacific or Asian Pacific Americans. More surprisingly, the authors in *CCBC Choices 2017* note that 75 writers and/or illustrators of Asian Pacific heritage take a lion's share of the totality of book creators of color in the year of 2016. They outnumber the 71 black writers and/or illustrators, although books that deal with significant content about Africans or African Americans are more frequently published than those of Asians Pacifics or Asian Pacific Americans (Horning, *CCBC Choices 2017* 9). The patch for Asian American children's literature began to spread slowly and steadily and to gain more ground with the increasing population of Asian Americans.

While the publication of Asian American children's books has increased steadily, Asian American authors and their work have received little scholarly and critical attention—certainly less than deserved. For more than a century, the authors have been participating in forming children's literature in this society, but their works are still largely invisible both in the market and in literary criticism. Amid this dearth of criticism, it is noteworthy that the CIBC released a year-long study through a special double issue of its *Bulletin* in 1976 which exclusively examined the presentation of Asian Americans in 66 children's books where one or more central characters are Asian Americans.[2] That was the first large scale study of how Asians and Asian Americans were depicted in children's literature and textbooks. Since then, this special issue has served as a guideline

[2] For example see "Asian Americans in Children's Books" in *Interracial Books for Children Bulletin* (1976). Also, the CICB focuses on how elitism, sexism and racism abound in Asian American children's books by examining 66 books and by suggesting the criteria for analyzing books on Asian Americans: Frank Chin on the myth of white supremacy and yellow dependency; the staff in the CICB again, on common textbook distortion of Asian or Asian American history; Connie Young Yu, on the ways of judging textbooks and of publishing authentic Asian Americans; the final section, on the recommended reading.

for educators as well as for publishers who search for Asian-related books for multicultural education.

The ensuing years (roughly until the 1990s) can be characterized by the production of reviews and bibliographies of Asian American children's books. The reviewers faithfully stuck to the general guidelines the CIBC set up in 1976 , and thus Asian American books for children gradually started to gain visibility. The reviews also attempted to provide the teachers, publishers, and writers who were involved in multicultural education with some guidelines to help them become sensitized to the stereotypes of Asian Americans. Some typical reviews that show the characteristics in this period include Elaine Aoki's '"Turning the Page': The Appropriate Use of Asian American Children's Literature in the Classroom" (1981), Valerie Ooka Pang and Carolyn Colvin's "Beyond Chopsticks and Dragons: Selecting Asian-American Literature for Children" (1992), and Frances Smardo Dowd's "We're Not in Kansas Anymore: Evaluating Children's Books Portraying Native American and Asian Cultures" (1992), just to name a few. As these titles reveal, the journal articles focus on how to choose Asian American literary books for children rather than how to critically evaluate them. Additionally, some scholarly books supposedly focusing on multicultural children's literature allotted only a couple of chapters to overviews or bibliographies on Asian American literature for children, nothing more.[3] This period viewed Asian

[3] For some examples, in her book *Teaching Multicultural Literature in Grades K-8* (1993), Violet Harris assigned one chapter to Asian Pacific children's literature, which includes the new version of Aoki's 1981 article. Lyn Miller-Lachmann's *Our Family, Our Friends, Our World: An Annotated Guide to Significant Multicultural Books for Children and Teenagers* (1992) contains a couple of chapters to introduce Asian-related books.

American children's books mainly as cultural works expressing Asian cultural heritage in order to fulfill the requirements of multicultural curriculums in K-12 classrooms and as cultural products that dovetailed into a multicultural mosaic of America.

Not until the 2000s did Asian American children's literature gain more critical attention. The scholarly journal *MELUS (Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States)*, in its special issue in 2002, contained three articles on Asian American children's literature (more specifically, Chinese American children's literature) as a subcategory of ethnic children's literature.[4] These articles go beyond simple book reviews and into literary analysis, either through examination of Asian American identity for the characters or through aesthetic approaches to Asian American authors' texts. In the following year, two articles on Asian American children's literature appeared in the summer issue of the *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*: Rocío G. Davis's "Ethnic Autobiography as Children's Literature: Laurence Yep's *Lost Garden* and Yoshiko Uchida's *The Invisible Thread*," and Melinda L. de Jesús's "Mixed Blessings: Korean American Identity and Interracial Interactions in the Young Adult Novels of Marie G. Lee." While Davis highlights subversion of ethnic autobiographies that challenge some of the narrative structures in traditional American autobiography, de Jesús focuses on a teenager's complicated feelings and relationships in forming identity. In delving into Asian American children's books of a distinct area, both of the articles demonstrate Asian

[4] The three articles include Martha J. Cutter's "Empire and the Mind of the Child: Sui Sin Far's 'Tales of Chinese Children,'" Rocío G. Davis's "Metanarrative in Ethnic Autobiography for Children: Laurence Yep's *The Lost Garden* and Judith Ortiz Cofer's *Silent Dancing*," and Leona W. Fisher's "Focalizing the Unfamiliar: Laurence Yep's 'Child in a Strange Land.'"

American children's active negotiation of their identity and their elastic adaptability in a diverse American society.

The year 2006 saw meaningful progress in criticism in Asian American children's literature. The scholarly journal *The Lion and the Unicorn* allotted a special issue to some noted Asian American authors and their works, marking the first time that scholarly criticism paid exclusive attention to Asian American authors of children's literature and analyzed their work as literary production from a multilayered perspective. The editors of this special issue, Dolores de Manuel and Rocío G. Davis, introduce an overview of Asian American children's literature and garner fine articles that "attempt to provide a variety of approaches to the issues of literary production and a range of analyses of literary strategies" (x). Drawing on experiences of displaced childhood, the Asian American authors in this issue, the editors contend, "create a discourse that enables children to find their place in the picture of the American cultural landscape" (vii). The editorial focus is on how each article in the issue reveals the way authors from different Asian ethnic groups narrate their Asian American experiences. That is, the issue only treats the fictional works as representing separate subgroups—e.g., Chinese, Thai. As a result of this treatment, there is no overarching examination of how these texts all reflect narrative similarities engendered by shared experiences as Asian Americans.

That is my quest in this dissertation. I am searching for the ways in which shared experiences shape Asian American narratives as they write their place in American children's literature. Since multicultural education actively promoted and utilized multicultural children's books in the classroom, the body of Asian American literature for children has influenced and been influenced by this trend. Therefore, I conduct a close

examination of the experiences within the theoretical framework of multiculturalism (more correctly critical multiculturalism). At the same time, I interrogate the literary excellence in the authors' works. Although my project focuses more on ideological analysis of the Asian American authors' texts, I also examine the literary merits embedded in the text. Their aesthetic mastery, I argue, helps to broaden readership by leading readers to feel empathy for Asian American characters who go through ethnic or racial based experiences and by challenging readers' mindset about American society. The theoretical frame of multiculturalism combined with aesthetic analysis, therefore, can serve as an effective tool for critiquing the cultural products written by the Asian American authors.

My quest starts with the selection of the texts that meet my two main criteria—multicultural themes and literary merits. Included are Laurence Yep's *Dragonwings* (1975), Cynthia Kadohata's *Weedflower* (2006), An Na's *A Step from Heaven* (2001), Ken Mochizuki's *Beacon Hill Boys* (2002), Lisa Yee's *Stanford Wong Flunks Big-Time* (2007), and Linda Sue Park's *Project Mulberry* (2005). My selection is both practical and strategic. These texts are comparatively easy to access. Books with pre-teen and/or teen Asian American characters are rare in the American market or on the shelves in American bookstores and libraries. Among the books available in either place, I deliberately consider two writers from each ancestry—Chinese, Japanese, and Korean—who are representatives for general Asian American narratives in children's literature, and then

one text from each author.[5] On the other hand, I strategically include these six texts for multicultural themes and arrange them in a way to reveal a trajectory of Asian American narratives, which ranges from Asian Americans' efforts and contribution to the development of the United States, through the uncovering of America's fictitious realities, to an aspiration for a multicultural society.

Critical Multiculturalism

For a clear understanding of "multicultural" or "multiculturalism" in this current project, it is necessary to articulate my definition of multicultural literature, because the scope of this literature is hotly contested.[6] Hazel Rochman, for example, suggests that multicultural literature includes books "across cultures, against borders," beyond the limitation of books by and about "people of color" (9). Kiefer and Huck contend that the term "multicultural literature" might be replaced with "literature of diversity," which includes "people with disabilities or with same-sex attraction" (85). According to Ambika G. Gopalakrishnan, "multicultural children's literature validates all sociocultural experiences, including those occurring because of language, race, gender, class, ethnicity, and ability" (29). Meanwhile, other critics of multicultural children's literature take more exclusive perspectives. The CCBC gives the definition of multicultural as referring to

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[5] These East Asian ethnic groups, before the new immigration law was enacted in 1965, "were generally assumed to comprise the totality of Asian America" (Yamamoto 123). After the 1965 immigration law, the immigrants from Asia into the United States became more diverse, so the three ethnic groups from the Far East Asia are no longer seen as comprising the totality of the Asian American population. However, in the field of children's literature many Asian American books still are produced by authors from one of the three ethnic groups. Because, since these Asian ethnic groups came to America earlier than other Asian ethnic groups, they have had more time to accumulate their experiences and express them in print.

[6] For the debate on the scope of multicultural literature, Maria Jose Botelho and Masha Kabakow Rudman in *Critical Multicultural Analysis of Children's Literature: Mirrors, Windows, and Doors* (2009) explain highly heated arguments on three perspectives on multicultural literature: "People of Color," "Multiple + Culture," and "All Literature is Multicultural." Reference pages 82-86 of the book for more information.

people of color including Africans and African Americans, American Indians, Asians/Pacifics and Asian/Pacific Americans, and Latinos" (Horning *2004*). Ruth Kearney Carlson, substituting the term multiethnic for multicultural, defines it as "literature about a racial or minority ethnic group that is culturally and socially different from the white Anglo Saxon majority in the United States" (qtd. in Kiefer and Huck 84). Mingshui Cai argues that multicultural literature should be about ethnic minorities who have been underrepresented and quite often marginalized in children's literature ("Multiple" 317). I do not disagree that multicultural children's literature should broaden its scope so that it can reflect a rapidly changing landscape for a multicultural society. However, to make this project of Asian American authors researchable and manageable, I confine the literature to books by and about ethnic or racial groups who have been relegated to the fringes of society.

Still, no matter how broadly or narrowly it may be defined, multicultural literature has a couple of issues to be dealt with. Some critics charge multicultural books with unwittingly perpetuating the perception of a race or an ethnic group as cultural others. Introducing this perception as "essentializing," Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer point out the assumption behind it, that "there's something identifiable as, say, a black soul or a Jewish character shared by all members of those groups . . . " (171). Homogenizing members of an ethnic or a cultural group quite often erases their individuality. Such homogeneity, furthermore, assumes an ingrained feature in a group that serves to maintain distance from the dominant white group. This presumed homogeneity of a group makes its members *others* in the mainstream of society. Edward Said theorizes that essentialism was the underlying logic for the modern Western imperialism that spread out

all across the world from the late eighteenth century, and that one of its goals was to show non-white people as inferior, thus justifying European imperialists' occupation of African and Asian countries. Said explains,

> At its [imperialism's] core is the supremely stubborn thesis that everyone is principally and irreducibly a member of some race or category, and that race or category cannot ever be assimilated to or accepted by others—except as itself. Thus came into being such invented essences as the Oriental or Englishness, as Frenchness, Africanness, or American exceptionalism, as if each of those had a Platonic idea behind it that guaranteed it as pure and unchanging from the beginning to the end of time. (308)

As Said argues, the ideology of essentialism has encouraged people not only to categorize others but to perceive their identity as inborn and fixed. This results in white supremacy. The history of European imperialism is long enough to have constructed the stock images of non-white people as "inferior," or "uncultivated," and also is powerful enough to reify these images through the discourses of both mundane and academic worlds. From the historical and hegemonic relationship between dominant white people and non-dominant groups of color over centuries, arises a tendency to homogenize an ethnic or a racial group while glossing over individual differences.

To make matters worse, essentialism continues to be nourished through the current socio-cultural environments, including educational practice, mass media, and the publishing industry, which in turn allows for essentializing reading of multicultural children's books. Some routine practices in the educational field unintentionally lead

children to view a multicultural book as emblematic of an entire ethnic group or cultural group that the book describes. Nodelman and Reimer address this issue: “Trying to choose texts for children that represent a spectrum of ethnic or racial groups may foster the idea that members of an ethnic or cultural group are inherently alike simply because of their membership in the group” (171). Such a representative introduction of a multicultural book serves as a reification of essentialism to young readers.

Mass media also contributes to essentializing Asian Americans by continuously stereotyping them. On its website, the Media Action Network for Asian Americans lists typical stereotypes repeatedly projected by the mainstream media, especially Hollywood movies. According to the list, Asian Americans are presented as “foreigners who cannot be assimilated” or else as the “model minority,” Asian cultures as “inherently predatory,” Asian men as “emasculated,” and Asian women as “oversexualized,” just to name a few. These stereotypes, of course, cause problems because they simply misrepresent the reality of Asian Americans. More problematically, the stereotypes in media make it “harder for someone to see an Asian American as an individual than as a member of a group about which certain common generalizations exist and can be instantly applied” (Skorek 341). Stereotypes frequently reinforced through the media can serve to establish in the mind of a young audience Asian Americans as types instead of individuals.

In addition, publishing houses also perpetuate essentialism in multicultural books. Publishers and distributors of multicultural books are typically accustomed to Eurocentric or Anglo-American ways of perceiving others (Madigan 172). Chances are high that they carelessly produce ethnic or racial stereotypes or essentialize an ethnic or a racial group. After interviewing those who are involved in the production and distribution processes of

children's literature, Twyla J. Hill reports that the publishing industry "categorizes all books with non-white characters as multicultural," and that publishers have a tendency to produce conventional books "to fit in with the past tradition of the [publishing] house, current market conditions, and the mindset of that particular editor" (37, 40).[7] One also needs to be remember that publishing is a business. Publishers mainly intend "to satisfy mainstream readers' tastes as well as to fulfill their commercial interest," so they tend to take a safe way to produce books, which results in stereotypical ethnic books that cater to the expectations of general readers whose society still adheres to ideas founded in white supremacy (Chae 16). In other words, essentialism is sustained culturally and institutionally as well as historically. The reading public tends to see a cultural group or an ethnic group in a monolithic fashion. This tendency has been instilled into their (un)consciousness via Eurocentric ideology and constructed discursively over a long time period through some selection practices of introducing multicultural books, effects of mass media, and publishers seeking profit. Essentialism associated with multicultural literature, then, pertains more to readers' perception, not to multiculturalism *per se.*

That perception seldom goes away. Essentialism is a recurring issue in Asian American literature. Readers often tend to see an Asian American author as a representative of the ethnic or racial group to which the author belongs. In her 1982 essay "Cultural Misreadings by American Reviewers," the author of *The Woman Warrior*,

[7] Hill's report is based on the state of the publishing industry in 1992, but it is applicable to the current state of the industry as well, considering that multicultural books make up only a small portion of the total number of children's books published in America. On the CCBlogC webpage dated July 11, 2013, CCBC director Kathleen T. Horning noted that whereas non-whites comprise 37% of the population in the US, only 10% of the books published at that time could be considered multicultural in nature.

Maxine Hong Kingston, resists the reviewers of the novel who tend to see her work as representative of Chinese culture. She casts a rhetorical question to reviewers: “Why must I ‘represent’ anyone besides myself?” (101). The reviewers did not recognize her individuality as an American author of Chinese background. Instead, they, inadvertently or advertently, imposed the role of Chinese cultural-ambassador on her. In that same year Kingston’s resistance was echoed by another Asian American author. Elaine H. Kim, in her seminal work *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context*, addresses the same issue as Kingston does when mentioning that “many readers insist on viewing their [Asian American authors’] writing as sociological or anthropological statements about the group” (xv). E. Kim suggests that readers’ expectations toward Asian American authors are nothing but a result of essentialism. Even a quarter of a century after these two pioneering authors vocalized their resistance to essentialism, readers still tend to essentialize Asian American authors. In 2007 Jeffrey F. L. Partridge, in *Beyond Literary Chinatown,* identifies how readers still expect Asian American authors to act as cultural spokespersons and explains the reason behind such expectations: “Asian-ness is exoticized by readers in a way that many other minority writers, by virtue of their assimilability (of skin, of eyes, of name—that is, their racial markers) are not” (53). Due to physical characteristics, Asian Americans are set apart from the rest of American society, which in turn reinforces the essentializing of them. That continues to nourish readers’ misguided mindsets. As a result, they persistently deem Asian American work as communal projects no matter where the authors were born, have lived, and have produced their works. The fact that these authors are American is frequently forgotten.

Besides essentialism, multiculturalism is mistakenly criticized for maintaining the status quo. That misunderstanding stems from one specific perspective on multiculturalism, the liberal perspective. This perspective originates from a belief that awareness of cultural differences and respect for the cultures increase through mere exposure or traveling to other cultures. Stanley Fish calls this "boutique multiculturalism" and characterizes it by "its superficial or cosmetic relationships to the objects of its affection" (378). Fish pinpoints that this approach emphasizes visible diversity and obfuscates the existence of racial hierarchy in society. Cai labels it as the "tourist's conception" of multiculturalism. Tourist multiculturalism assumes that by sampling as many cultures as possible, people can gain understanding as well as tolerance and, thereby, settle the issues that may arise in a multicultural society. That is an erroneous assumption; merely traveling and sampling other cultures does not typically engender a genuine understanding of multicultural perspectives and concerns. This would remain true even if every culture could be on equal footing with each other. But multiple cultures, of course, do not share equal relationships within a society. "This tourist's view of multiculturalism," Cai argues, "is idealistic at best and deceptive at worst, glossing over the grim reality of conflicts between races, classes, genders, and other social groups" ("Multiple" 314). As tourists celebrate diverse boutiques, so does liberal multiculturalism celebrate the variety of displayed cultures. It does not face nor admit the reality of a racially stratified society.

The liberal, celebratory approach to multiculturalism distorts the reality of a layered society, and it serves as a controlling mechanism manipulated by the dominant group. Liberal multiculturalism presupposes that each ethnic or racial group lives in a fair

society without hierarchy and shares a common culture, and thus it celebrates an imagined universality founded in ethnic or racial groups. Sneja Gunew argues that the term *multiculturalism* can be frequently co-opted by the current dominant ethnic group in its role of building a common culture in a society. The problem here is that the norms of building a common culture "are identified most strongly with Anglo-American cultural-political communities" (McLaren 51). This perspective, on the surface level, puts people in the margins on an equal footing with those in the mainstream. On a deeper level, it is appropriated by the ruling power while protecting its already vested interests.

This liberal, celebratory concept regarding multiculturalism is pervasive in the production and classroom practice of multicultural literature, which serves to strengthen the existing social structure. David Palumbo-Liu argues that multicultural literature poses a risk of supporting the existing social order by pointing out the way the literature can be misused to control racial or cultural differences:

> [Multicultural literature] can be read to set a stage for the performance of difference—race relations are made *manageable* and students are able to "relate" to diverse and highly differentiated experiences by reducing difference to individual encounters via ethnic "texts" . . . [and to] "understand" the difference as a general phenomenon and subsume it under other categories that do not radically obstruct the smooth functioning of social apparatuses. (11)

Palumbo-Liu worries that multicultural books can be appreciated only as long as they do not disturb the existing social system. All too often, multicultural literature does not go beyond simple awareness of differences and into real acceptances of them. Many

children's books published in the name of multicultural literature depict various ethnic or racial groups superficially without reviewing the racially stratified society in which they exist.

It is not just Palumbo-Liu who worries over this. Other scholars lament the misuse of multiculturalism to uphold the status quo. Contrary to multicultural education's emphasis on "power in the forms of educational reform and resistance to racism and inequality," Stuart Ching bemoans, "selection criteria for multicultural literature typically promote cultural awareness and sensitivity, and often overlook the control, deployment, and management of power" (129). Ching critically pinpoints the appropriation of multicultural children's books in classrooms; the books become a tool for reinforcing the current ideology by embossing "racial harmony and assimilative pluralism" (130). What makes this worse is that the liberal conception of multiculturalism is instilled even into some ethnic authors who take a significant role in producing and developing multicultural books. In her "The Cultural Production of Asian American Young Adults in the Novels of Marie G. Lee, An Na, and Doris Jones Yang" (2006), Monica Chiu, a professor at the University of New Hampshire, investigates four young adult novels: Marie G. Lee's *Finding My Voice* (2001) and her *Necessary Roughness* (2011), An Na's *A Step from Heaven*, and Doris Jones Yang's *The Secret Voice of Gian Zhang* (2011). Chiu argues that the superficial concept of multiculturalism has been unknowingly ingrained in these authors: "although some Asian American authors employ a seeming literary dismantling of cultural typing (by challenging stereotypes or by creating unique ethnic or raced characters), these types are too often replaced by the cultural production and maintenance of similar ideologies" (168). Chiu sees these works as "'becoming American' novels

concluding in expected Asian American success" through stereotyping or stereotypical language and characterization (178). Only An Na's work, she states, "reference[s] the continued, often hidden, pain of immigrant struggles" through the use of unique and compelling language (174). From her readings of Lee's and Yang's novels, Chiu argues that "mere exposure without discussion over ethnic representation, ethnic accuracy, or the ideologies that texts promote can easily re-establish just the stereotypes the books intend to dismantle" (181). According to Chiu, then, some Asian American literary works are taking part in reproducing the dominant ideology. It is hard to deny that the word *multiculturalism* in education and children's literature, to some degree, is appropriated to affirm the current Eurocentric ideology's focus on harmony within ethnic or racial differences as well as celebration of the differences.

With these criticisms and issues in multicultural children's literature in mind, for my project I turn to the theory of critical multiculturalism as proposed by the educator and theorist Peter McLaren, in his 1994 essay "White Terror and Oppositional Agency: Towards a Critical Multiculturalism," and supplemented by other theorists and educators in the fields of multiculturalism. In the early 1990s, the term *multicultural(ism)* was discussed so heatedly that it became a "floating signifier," in Homi K. Bhabha's words, "whose enigma lies less in itself than in the discursive uses of it to mark social processes where differentiation and condensation seem to happen almost synchronically" ("Culture's in Between" 55). Professor Nelson C. Vincent, of the University of Cincinnati, also argues that "multicultural approaches suggest a continuum of theories and practice that are significantly modified by their application in unique historical and cultural contexts" (3). Thus, as opposed to the seemingly indeterminate use of the simple

term “multiculturalism,” “critical multiculturalism” emphasizes a focus on social justice rather than ethnic groupings, which risks essentializing an ethnic group while reinforcing the white status quo.

Prior to McLaren, there were some attempts to resist liberal multiculturalism and to sort out the meaning of the term “multiculturalism.” Rudine Sims Bishop, for example, highlights the term’s societal meaning by articulating that “[m]ulticultural literature is one of the most powerful components of a multicultural education curriculum, the underlying purpose of which is to help to make the society a more equitable one” (40). Bishop was echoed in Cai when he argues that “Multicultural literature is an important component of the multicultural education movement and a tool to achieve its goal: diversity and equality in education” (*Multicultural* 13). Both of the educators accentuate the instrumental use of children’s literature that is inclusive in reaching the goals of multiculturalism. Regarding what those goals should be, Cai expounds:

> Multiculturalism is about diversity and inclusion, but what is more important, it is also about power structures and struggle. Its goal is not just to understand, accept, and appreciate cultural differences, but also to ultimately transform the existing social order to ensure greater voice and authority to the marginalized cultures, and to achieve social equality and justice among all cultures so that people of different cultural backgrounds can live happily together in a truly democratic world. (“Multiple Definitions” 313)

Multiculturalism, as Cai explains, pursues a genuine democratic society where each culture is respected and enjoys equal status. A similar viewpoint is found in statements by

the founder of Children's Book Press, Harriet Rohmer. With an emphasis on the need for multicultural children's books that would ease racism and tensions between social classes, Rohmer acknowledges multicultural literature as an agenda for social change, which will expand and alter the base of children's literature as well as society itself (Madigan 171-5). Multicultural children's literature, in essence, aims to resist and subvert the current Eurocentric society.

The nature of resistance and subversion in multiculturalism is accentuated in the concept of critical multiculturalism advocated by McLaren. He explains that critical multiculturalism develops from "the perspective of a resistance, poststructuralist approach to meaning," that is, the idea that "the relationship between signifier and signified is *insecure* and *unstable*" (53, 55). All representatives come to be "the result of larger social struggles over signs and meanings" (53). Critical multiculturalism, McLaren continues, "interrogates the construction of difference and identity in relation to a radical politics" (53). Critical multiculturalism regards differences as historical and cultural constructions rather than cultural obviousness (57). On a practical level, McLaren explicates that

> A critical multiculturalist praxis does not simply reject the bourgeois decorum that has consigned the imperialized other to the realm of the grotesque, but effectively attempts to remap desire by fighting for a linguistically multivalanced culture and new structures of experience in which individuals refuse the role of the omniscient narrator but rather conceive of identity as a polyvalent assemblage of (contradictory and overdetermined) subject positions. Existing systems of difference which

> organize social life into patterns of domination and subordination must be reconstructed. (58)

In the process of its enactment, critical multiculturalism, as McLaren indicates, shows its difference from the aforementioned liberal, celebratory perspective on multiculturalism. Liberal multiculturalism tries to maintain the status quo with an emphasis on universality and harmony. In contrast, critical multiculturalism redirects the current Eurocentric discourses into new discourses with multicultural values, and it stresses attending to the transformation of the existing hegemony. "Central to critical multiculturalism," Ann Berlak and Sekani Moyenda aptly argue, "is naming and actively challenging racism and other forms of injustice, not simply recognizing and celebrating differences and reducing prejudice" (92). This type of multiculturalism does not hastily assume that everyone shares equal status. Instead, it focuses on material inequalities, that is, "the material structures that are responsible for the overdetermination of structures of difference" (McLaren 58). That viewpoint places critical multiculturalism in stark contrast to boutique multiculturalism, which merely celebrates cultural differences but remains silent about the causes of such differences. Whereas boutique multiculturalism emphasizes tolerance as a solution for racism, critical multiculturalism identifies the institutionalized racism as well as the current unequal power relationships and asks for communal action in reconstructing a fairer and more equal society.

In addition, critical multiculturalism effectively avoids essentializing by focusing on unequal power relationship rather than culture itself in representations of an ethnic or racial group. Instead of viewing culture primarily as "an artifact of the past," critical multiculturalism, Stephen May and Christine Sleeter assert, deems culture and identity as

"multilayered, fluid, complex, and encompassing multiple social categories, and at the same time as being continually reconstructed through participation in social situations" (10). Culture itself, along with identity, is not "an imprisoning cocoon or a determining force" of a group (Baumann 1). Culture and identity of a group should be neither identified nor defined according to the group's status in the hierarchical structure; one group's position in the pecking order tends to overdetermine the culture and identity of the group. Rather, within historical and social situations, the group should be identified, and its culture characterized. Thus, culture as well as identity become so fluid that their essence, if any, is difficult to catch and articulate.

Critical multiculturalism suggests that people be provided with opportunities to forge border identities, which leads them to search for a new social structure. They are expected to experience identity as 'a polyvalent assemblage of subject positions' that dares to become defiant of established norms. This identity, McLaren describes, constitutes "the *cultural imaginary*, a space of cultural articulation that results from the collision of multiple strands of referential codes and sign systems," and creates a hybrid consciousness (67). This consciousness, McLaren goes on to explain, is not "cultural bricolage or a form of bric-a-brac subjectivity but a critical practice of cultural negotiation and translation that attempts to transcend the contractions of Western dualistic thinking" (67). A similar notion for multiple identities is championed by Bhabha. He calls it "cultural hybridity" and explains that hybridity is new "structures of authority, new political initiatives," and in the process of cultural hybridity there emerges "a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation" ("The Third Space" 211). People with this new identity are neither the imperialized others nor subordinates.

People with culturally hybrid identity, then, are expected to construct a new society that requires the destruction of existing social and cultural structures. A new society does not mean replacement of the dominant group. If it does, then it becomes a mere duplicate of the current society. The new world will not be based on the current Western dualistic, vertical paradigm. According to Lisa Lowe, a professor at Tufts University, such binary schemas as white/black, man/woman "are not neutral" and result from "a logic that prioritizes the first term and subordinates the second" (684). Drawn from Lowe, the present binary framework does not provide ethnic groups other than black with any place nor equalitarian status. McLaren envisions this new society as a provisional utopia where people "anticipate the future through practices of solidarity and community" (66). When people continuously negotiate with their identity, he asserts, this society can be achieved (67). This new community leads non-white groups to cast off victim status in the majority/subordinate mode and to take responsibility to mold and maintain the new paradigm of community.

Critical multiculturalism, it follows from such propositions, takes a politicized and historicized approach to children's literature. Its focus is on the interrogation of the interplay between texts and the political, social, and cultural conditions that shape them. In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Children's Literature* (online), Clare Bradford succinctly explains how critical multiculturalism works in children's literature:

> [C]ritical multiculturalism analyzes the political agendas of children's texts, whether implicit or explicit; it considers how subject positions are effected; it valorizes multiple narrative traditions; and it is attentive to

> the textual instabilities and contractions that signal struggles over meaning.

When employed in Asian American children's literature, critical multiculturalism, as Maria José Botelho and Masha Kabakow Rudman argue, is based on "the historical silence of underrepresented [Asian American] groups, keeping this history of underrepresentation at the center, while bringing the integration of the complexities of power relations into the fold" (89). Critical multicultural analysis of Asian American children's literature also interrogates the hegemonic structure in society and resists it while exposing "how power is exercised, circulated, negotiated, and reconstructed" (Botelho and Rudman 117). Within the framework of critical multiculturalism, the texts included in this project reveal a certain trajectory of Asian American narratives; they narrate American history from the perspective of the marginalized, have readers interrogate the society they belong to, and invite them to construct a genuine multicultural society where they are experiencing themselves with multiple identities.

Artistic Excellence in Asian American Authors' Works

The lens of critical multiculturalism enables me to tackle ideological issues raised by Asian American authors' texts; however, these texts, without their literary excellence, might be relegated to propaganda literature with limited readership. Texts depicting Asian American experiences, according to Patrick Shannon, may allow readers in the mainstream "to stand apart from multiculturalism, as if [the experiences] were only about The Other and not about themselves" (2). In addition to the possibility of excluding some cultural outsiders, Asian American experiences depicted in the texts may prevent readers from appreciating the books, which may cause a loss in general readership. Laurence

Lester Sherrill conducted an experiment on the reading of multicultural texts and concluded that "cultural factors, both in the readers and the personal experience that they read, constitute a significant element in the process by which they evaluate . . . and interpret the literature they read" (qtd. in Oh 8). Since readers' cultural literacy plays a significant role in understanding a multicultural text, it is not easy for Asian American experiences to appeal to a broad readership unless the cultural distance that readers may feel is taken into consideration.

In that context, dexterous use of literary technique can lead readers to feel attracted to Asian American experiences that may be foreign to them. The literary excellence of the authors discussed in this dissertation helps to mitigate the otherness caused by depicting Asian American experiences. What these authors have in common is that they employ an Asian American child protagonist focalizer in tandem with the literary devices of "defamiliarization" or "familiarization," which are grounded in staple themes such as family, friendship, or identity formation. These literary devices help the Asian American authors to reach out to readers belonging to non-Asian groups as well as to Asian groups and to convey their themes in a sophisticated way. More importantly, these literary techniques are utilized to create an Asian American narrative counter to the traditional one of the dominant society. The aesthetic devices are adroitly adopted when the authors reinscribe history from Asian Americans' perspectives, when they challenge such notions as the land of opportunity and the model minority, and when they portray an aspiration for a transformed America where culturally hybrid Asian Americans play a crucial role in realizing a genuine multicultural society.

The Asian American authors' works included in this study develop their narratives mainly through Asian American child protagonists' eyes. That technique is named a character-bound focalizer by cultural theorist Mieke Bal. She explains that "If the focalizer coincides with the character, that character will have an advantage over the other characters. The reader watches with the character's eyes and will, in principle, be inclined to accept the vision presented by that character" (149-50). This literary device has been utilized in the Asian American authors' texts discussed here, which gradually helps general readers, especially readers from racial groups other than Asian Americans, to identify themselves with the child protagonist whose presence and experiences readers may initially feel are foreign and unfamiliar. John Stephens emphasizes the importance of focalization in multicultural books by explaining that these texts "are concerned to depict social groups, values and customs without focalizing them through the perspective of a 'majority culture'" (51). Stephens, on the other hand, states that "the present habit of stressing reader-focused approaches to text in combination with advocacy of identification with focalizers . . . is a dangerous ideological tool and pedagogically irresponsible," which has readers "highly susceptible to the ideologies of the text" (68). Arguing against Stephens, Leona W. Fisher, an English professor at Georgetown University, believes that multicultural texts with focalizers aid readers in "raising consciousness rather than imposing restrictive ideologies" (159). She also argues that "the only alternatives to acceptance of otherness, even in oneself, are permanent alienation and loss of subjectivity," through total identification with a focalizer (175). These arguments witness the significant function of a focalizer in leading readers to get involved in Asian American narratives.

No matter how dangerous or necessary losing subjectivity may be, I would like to qualify these two arguments: Stephens is worried that a child reader might totally lose subjectivity when identification is emphasized; however, readers never completely lose their subjectivity through identification with an Asian American child focalizer. According to Wolfgang Iser, "the reader's own disposition will never disappear totally" even if the text intensely invites readers to lose themselves while reading (37). They unconsciously pretend to become others during the act of reading. Nodelman and Reimer express a similar opinion that readers "are not in the process of losing themselves in the text. And equally, they are not in the process of losing the text in themselves" (18). Furthermore, there is a low chance that readers from outside Asian American culture would lose subjectivity in the act of reading Asian American texts, considering the cultural distance between Asia and America. Asian American writer Laurence Yep states how far apart the two cultures are: "I am not so sure that it is possible to blend two cultures together. Asian cultures are family-and cooperation-orientated. American culture, on the other hand, emphasizes the individual and competition. The two cultures pull in opposite directions" (qtd. in Marcus 101). Chances are that even readers from Asian American cultures can hardly lose subjectivity when following an Asian American child focalizer unless they are of the same Asian descent as the focalizer. Considering the various cultures within Asian American communities, it is rare for readers to readily identify themselves with a specific Asian American child focalizer. The cultural and experiential differences readers feel from Asian American experiences are too discrete to lead them to total identification.

For a similar reason, it is hard to fully agree with Fisher's argument: accepting

others does not necessarily require losing subjectivity. Readers can accept otherness without losing the self and *becoming* other. What is needed is not loss of subjectivity, but *connection* to otherness. Carole Carpenter argues that "Although one need not become the other, one must be able to access the 'otherness' in order to value and respect cultural diversity" (61). Roderick McGillis states a similar opinion based on his personal experience as a story-teller to children in school: "Through story a disparate group [such as teller and audience, adult and children] can come together without the intrusion of authority and power" (217-18). It is not necessary to lose subjectivity or to wipe out the otherness that readers may feel toward an Asian American protagonist. They still can have sympathy with Asian American experiences.

Along with the device of a child protagonist-focalizer, the authors included in this project employ another literary technique, that of defamiliarization, to shake readers' perceptions of themselves and of Asian Americans. According to Victor Shklovsky, who first coined *defamiliarization,* this literary technique aims "to remove [an object] from the automatism of perception" and "to create a special perception of the object—it creates a 'vision' of the object instead of serving as means for knowing it" (781). The Asian American authors analyzed in this dissertation make effective use of the defamiliarization device through the employment of an Asian American child protagonist. When readers follow a protagonist whose perspective comes not from the dominant culture but from one of the marginalized and oppressed cultures, they have vicarious experiences as if they too encounter the words, face the situations, and ponder the ideas for the first time in their lives, as Shklovsky explains in "Art as Technique" (779). To put it another way, it is expected that readers suspend their habitual automatism in their perception. They also

end up interrogating not only their preconceived perception of Asian Americans, including the model minority myth, but also the current social structure which they likely have unconsciously accepted. In her narratological reading of Yep's *Dragonwings*, Fisher points out that the device of defamiliarization produces a socio-political effect as well as an aesthetic one. She argues that "[t]he 'automatic' view of culture and history becomes decentered, its hegemonic perspective called into question and ultimately undermined and substantially altered" (164). What the texts intend to achieve with the use of the defamiliarization combined with a protagonist- focalizer is two-fold: to alienate readers from themselves as much as they feel estranged from Asian American experiences, and paradoxically, to shorten the distance between major and marginalized cultures by sharing the feeling of alienation. In the long run, the combined devices dismantle readers' ideologies, and therefore help the reader to recognize the artificial demarcation between "us" and "others." By effectively adopting these literary techniques, these Asian American texts deploy their multicultural themes while pricking the consciousness of a racially classified society.

In Asian American writing for children, the use of a child protagonist-focalizer also frequently works with another technique, which casts a wider net for readership. Borrowing from the name and idea of the literary device of defamiliarization, I label this technique "familiarization." Appealing to readers' schema, this familiarization technique helps readers to build up reading experiences from their comfort zone and at the same time to dilute the feeling of otherness that Asian American experiences may bring about. For the explanation of familiarization, I borrow Shklovsky's words about defamiliarzation and tweak them; readers are expected to meet an object as if they were

seeing it on a regular basis, and an event as if it were happening regularly. Furthermore, for readers of non-Asian descent, this device helps them sympathize with an Asian American character when they find the character shares similar ideas and feelings or is faced with similar situations. The Asian American authors resort to the technique of familiarization in various ways. In some cases, the authors foreground an event that could happen to children regardless of their ethnic or racial backgrounds. In other cases, the use of familiarization is through characterization of the Asian American protagonists; the authors describe those who possess strong willpower or who are alienated in one way or another. In still other cases, the authors adopt familiar writing modes that are common in children's books such as a journal format or conversational language. What this technique intends to achieve is not far from the goals of defamiliarization; to mitigate unintelligibility that Asian American texts can give to readers not of Asian descent, and thus to help them to identify with the protagonist. When the texts are presented with adequate familiarity, the reading public comes to perceive Asian Americans as human beings who deserve the same respect and treatment as they do. The familiarities are expected to draw readers to seek for more books that narrate Asian American children's experiences and to feel as if *their* experience is *ours*.

In order to trace the way that these Asian American authors employ the device of familiarization, it is worth noting how the texts for this current project are introduced by book reviewers. Regarding *Dragonwings*, Nancy Livingston and Catherine Kurkjian state that "The life of Moon Shadow illustrates that even though people may have differing backgrounds, humans experience common trials and hardships while following dreams" (101). In the review of *Weedflower, Publishers Weekly* argues that "Sumiko finds

hope and a form of salvation as a beautiful garden she creates and a friendship with a Native-American boy, Frank, both begin to blossom" (62). A review of *A Step from Heaven* states that "She[An Na] tells a familiar immigrant story, with Korean details but *universal* resonance" (Chira 22; Italics added). About *Beacon Hill Boys,* Gillian Engberg argues that "the author nicely balances universal experiences of male adolescence . . . and . . . asks tough questions about racial and cultural identity, prejudice, and family" (595); when reviewing *Stanford Wong Flunks Big-Time,* Engberg says that "[y]oung readers will find themselves chortling over comedic scenes, delivered in Stanford's genuine, age-appropriate voice, even as the well-drawn, authentic heartache about family, friends, and integrity reaches directly into their lives" (48); lastly, in the review of *Project Mulberry,* Rochman affirms that "the unforgettable family and friendship story, the quiet, almost unspoken racism, and the excitement of the science [raising silkworms] make this a great cross-curriculum title" (1079). The common thread in these reviews is the attention they pay to the way the authors develop stories in *familiar* ways through characterization, human practices, values, and themes. That makes the Asian American work approachable for a much wider readership whether or not readers are related to Asians or Asian Americans.

The emphasis on familiar themes or universal resonance evident in the chosen texts can be interpreted as an attempt to form a sense of community for readers and authors. By foregrounding familiarities in their foreign subject matter, the authors intend to build a feeling of community through which the binary system of "us" and "others" dissolves and through which readers are provided with an opportunity to examine their preconceived ideas of others, especially of Asian Americans. To develop the relationship

between self and other toward a community, Carole Carpenter emphasizes "the possibility of seeing ourselves not as a result of defining the other in terms of ourselves, but rather by realizing communion with the other through *recognition of selfness* in the other that acknowledges communal traditions" (62). Genuine acceptance of others and appreciation of cultural diversity are starting points to be affected by and to affect each other. Carpenter goes on to argue,

> Real acceptance of a cultural other involves recognition of that other as distinct, as esthetically positive, that is good or worthy and, in some ways, as being significant to oneself and ultimately as possessing an aspect of "selfness," which in one's own case is what it is that I think makes me whom [*sic*] I think I am. (61)

The mutual influence between us and others develops into a feeling of community. For the construction of the community, the authors lead readers to become more sensitive to racism and social injustice. Their confrontation of discrimination toward and mistreatment of Asian Americans, in Carpenter's words, can "reach out to the sympathies or consciences of the audience and ignite the fever for justice characteristic of children's culture" (68). The bond of community that these Asian American authors try to realize in their books for children ultimately awakens people to racism, causes readers to accept others, and leads them to self-examine the perception of *us* as well as *others*.

Utilizing the device of familiarization, the authors also demonstrate that Asian Americans' lived cultural experiences are not static but continuously fluid. The experiences do not remain within Asian American enclaves while Asian Americans communicate with other ethnic or racial groups in society at large. Characterized as

changeable and fluid, the lived cultural experiences are typically revealed through the characters' identities. Capshaw Smith asserts that "[f]lux characterizes ethnic identity in children's texts, for child characters face the junctures of cultural contact, generation tensions, and evolving senses of history" (7). Due to this characteristic, she argues, "writers are able to react against essentialization and the 'othering' of ethnic experience, for identity is relational and emerges in moments of cultural interaction" (7). As she suggests, Asian Americans' lived cultural experiences are forged not from their ethnicity or race so much as from the historical and social situation. Asian American experiences, then, can be understood and sympathized with by a broad range of readership. When the texts deal with such themes as family, friendship, alienation, and need for acceptance, Asian American experiences discursively become generalized across ethnic or racial boundaries. These generalized themes, Carpenter argues, "invite association with the other through recognition of the life experiences of an other as similar to one's own" (68). When the literary device of familiarization enacted by universal themes helps readers to feel empathy and offers them quality entertainment, Asian Americans' lived cultural experiences can be transmitted to general readers even if those readers do not have prior knowledge of Asians or Asian Americans. The Asian American authors ultimately make their texts intelligible to a broader readership by forging connections between Asian American experiences and those of other ethnic or racial groups.

I employ critical multiculturalism, then, as a crucial rhetorical and theoretical framework that recovers the socio-political impetus of the multicultural movement from the currently obfuscated use of the term. That framework also recognizes the persistent influence of ethnicity and race and employs the concept of cultural hybridity that

empowers Asian American protagonists to establish their place not only through challenge to the current American vertical social structure and rearrangement of it into a dynamic and egalitarian one, but also through analysis of the concept of others and stereotypes that Eurocentrism continues to construct about Asian Americans. Using the critical multicultural framework, I also delve into the strategies Asian American authors adopt to reveal the interminable relationships between signs and meanings and the strategies to draw general readers to Asian American children's books. In doing that, I deny the misconception that ethnic or racial based books are geared solely toward readers related to the specific ethnicity appearing in the books. The focus on the literary devices that Asian American authors utilize also challenges some criticism that the theoretical framework of critical multiculturalism relegates aesthetic literature to sociological manifesto.

For that purpose, in Chapter I, "Asian American Experiences in *Dragonwings* and *Weedflower,*" I contend that Asian American authors appropriately adopt the historical fiction genre to express Asian American experiences during the construction of the transcontinental railroads or in the internment camps during World War II. In doing so, Yep and Kadohata redress American history by revealing an untold narrative in mainstream society from Asian Americans' perspectives, and, thereby, they aim to prove their earned right of becoming Americans as well. Their accounts, moreover, do not emphasize a view of Asian Americans as victims; rather, the authors focus on Asian Americans' resilient spirits that have been cultivated by both American environments and their own ethnic or racial cultures.

In Chapter II, "Disenchantment with America in *A Step from Heaven* and *Beacon*

Hill Boys," I argue that Asian American authors dismantle the self-complacent idea of the land of opportunity and equality regarding America by unraveling poignant family stories. The authors first of all challenge the myth of the model minority imposed on Asian Americans and expose the way the myth is constructed under dominant white ideology. That ideology not only deems Asian Americans as a homogeneous group instead of individuals, but also defines them as *others.* Thus, the model minority stereotype has been utilized by the mainstream society to solidify the current hierarchical society where the dominant group enjoys the highest status and wields the power to judge which ethnic groups are good enough to fit into American society.

In Chapter III, "Anticipation for America in *Stanford Wong Flunks Big-Time* and *Project Mulberry,*" I explore Asian American authors' aspiration for a genuinely multiculturalized American society. When conceiving of the society, Yee and Park do not avoid addressing the reality of racism in a racially hierarchical society, but they shed more light on Asian Americans' double consciousness. When the Asian and American cultures collide, the Asian American protagonists in the texts initially try to reject their Asian background culture which has othered them in the mainstream society. The authors delineate the process of how the protagonists come to terms with their Asian background. Through confusion, contention, and negotiation, the protagonists come to realize the value of Asian cultures and to continuously craft their culturally hybrid identity. Their hybridity eventually leads them to a vantage point from which they take a step toward a genuine multicultural society.

In Chapter IV, "Asian American Authors Leavening Multicultural Children's Literature," I recount the main arguments through this dissertation. The authors discussed

herein narrate Asian American experiences through the eyes of child protagonists of Asian descent. Whether these authors highlight the discriminatory history and society that Asian Americans have experienced or their contribution to America and anticipation of a fair American society, they consistently claim that they are American as much as they are Asian. I also suggest a couple of themes for future research. For example, some Asian American authors try to broaden the scope of Asian American children's literature by diversifying themes or employing a post-racial discourse. Along with all these efforts, these authors add the strand of Asian American literature to the tapestry of children's literature, making the tapestry more colorful.

My daughter wanted to be accepted by US society. She stopped eating any ethnic related meals for breakfast, refused to carry her lunchbox, and eventually asked me not to make any ethnic food with a strong smell. "Schoolmates sniff around me suspecting me as the source of weird and revolting smells," she explained. It hurt her pride. It might have triggered her instinctive reaction to spend more time studying. Besides math, she studied her history subject hard enough to beat all her classmates in her middle school days. While helping her read the textbook, both of us were informed about how great the founding fathers in the United States were and how terribly the white Americans treated both native and African Americans. Stories related to Asians, however, did not exist in the textbook.

History textbooks' negation of Asian Americans' presence in the United States notwithstanding, they have lived in this land since the early eighteenth century. Asians who came to America two centuries ago contributed to constructing this country by working as contract workers or plantation workers. Recent immigrants from Asia also

continue to contribute to the development of US society even though discrimination and prejudice toward these people still persists. Thus, it is a natural process that American authors of Asian descent challenge discrimination in US society, imagining a multicultural American society where people from diverse groups form a coalition to dissolve a racial hierarchy. The following chapters deal with the way some authors of Asian descent build Asian American narratives by retelling Asian American experiences via historical fiction and contemporary fiction.

CHAPTER I

ASIAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCES IN *DRAGONWINGS* and *WEEDFLOWER*

The Usefulness of Historical Fiction in Asian American Children's Literature

In expressing Asian American experiences in the field of children's literature, a number of Asian American authors resort to historical fiction to shed light on their history, which has been so often ignored or distorted in mainstream American society. Through historical fiction they put much effort into recovering their collective story, making it visible to general readers, and challenging the frame of the so-called traditional American history narrative. In particular, their effort in children's literature lays the foundation for building up who and what Asian Americans are and how they have taken root in the soil of America's history. Through history, racism has run rampant in Asian American experiences, but the authors underscore Asian Americans' perseverance and their contribution to the construction of America as it is today. Their stories are subversive in that they provide a counternarrative in displaying American history from the viewpoint of Asian Americans as ethnic minority groups, not from the established perspective of the mainstream society. The authors publicize how Americans of Asian descent have been involved with historical moments and have engaged in life and death with the rest of Americans. In the historical texts written by these authors, Asian Americans are, on the other hand, frequent drifters, but they all the while muster effort and power in defying a discriminatory society, and in the process divulge a glimpse of a genuine multicultural society. Ultimately, all these stories demonstrate these Americans' love for this country and simultaneously highlight their legitimate right to stake a claim in America. This chapter explores Laurence Yep's *Dragonwings* (1975) and Cynthia

Kadohata's *Weedflower* (2006) as emblematic texts to examine how some Asian American authors are beginning to ravel out Asian American experiences by utilizing historical fiction within children's literature. Their texts come to illustrate the history of Asian Americans' spirit and tenacity that have nourished the American soil, and they embed these histories into the field of children's literature.

Historical fiction in children's literature provides an effective literary medium for these Asian American authors to reestablish and demonstrate who Asian Americans are, Americans who have been struggling with racism, and to transmit their spiritual heritage to the next generation. "[Most] historical novelists for the young," Suzanne Rahn argues, "want to bring the culture of some former age to life for a generation with little or no knowledge of it" (3). In conveying historical knowledge, historical fiction of Asian Americans inevitably confronts racism or discrimination, as is often the case in most of ethnic or racial based historical fiction in America. Writer of Japanese descent Kadohata explains its reason in an interview inserted in a CD edition of *Weedflower*: "[F]or many Americans racism and poverty are not political issues; they are part of daily life. I found that this concept is difficult for some people to understand. You cannot really write a historical novel dealing with daily lives of people of color without at least touching on racism." The writer expounds what potential impact an ethnic or a racial based historical novel can have on people as well as why it cannot escape dealing with racism. Racism is so prevalent in the lives of people of color that Asian American experiences cannot be described without accounting for it. These accounts are expected to lead readers to realize injustice and discrimination toward people outside of the mainstream society and to appreciate Asian Americans' struggles against unfavorable American settings.

Composition and publication of historical fiction regarding Asian American experiences increases their visibility by highlighting their contributions to the construction of America and, thus, their earned presence. Asian Americans' share in US history is rarely heard, and when it is, it is on special occasions. During a presidential proclamation for Asian American and Pacific Islander heritage month in 2016, for example, Barack Obama aptly summarized how Asian Americans have led their constructive life throughout American history:

> Confronted with grueling and perilous working conditions, thousands of Chinese laborers on the transcontinental railroad pushed the wheels of progress forward in the West. Japanese American troops fought for freedom from tyranny abroad in World War II while their families here at home were interned simply on the basis of their origin.

It is encouraging that the former president expressed his awareness and appreciation of Asian American roles in history even though it is a late acknowledgement. The history of Asian Americans deserves considerably more recognition. Not a few Asian American authors try to present Asian American experiences with a renewed way of looking at and understanding them (Rahn 4). In doing so, the authors provide historical bases for people of Asian descent who claim their right and place on American soil.

Historical fiction also provides some Asian American authors in the field of children's literature with an avenue to gain and exercise power. From an Asian American perspective, the authors start to unravel the thread of often twisted or tangled, or altogether hidden Asian American stories. Telling their own version of history means that they begin to have a meaningful influence on society because, as Marla Harris points out,

"[w]hich stories ultimately get told and whose point of view they are told from depends upon who wields power" (111). The authors have Asian American stories heard and read while "consciously attempt[ing] to correct what [has] been distorted or omitted in the classroom . . . showing [history] from [their] point of view" (Rahn 18). In the afterword of *Dragonwings*, Laurence Yep, for instance, explains his intention "to counter various stereotypes as presented in the media" (317). He aims to correct "an image of Chinese not as they really are but as they exist in the mind of White America" (*Dragonwings* 317). Kim Wilson in *Re-visioning Historical Fiction for Young Readers* argues that "historical fiction is in many ways an expression of social recall, [and] it provides a site for public memory to exist" (7). The authors examined in this chapter are well-aware that their historical works can serve as "a site of power" to intervene in the public memory of Asian Americans (Wilson 8).

It is not the goal of the Asian American authors of children's books to wield that power to acquire a dominant status in the extant hierarchical society. Using the medium of historical fiction, the authors try to express their present expectation of a desirable multicultural society. Wilson argues that historical fiction for children "discloses more about the present and the present's conceptualization of the past, than the past in and of itself" (192). Focusing on the importance of children's texts in educational, intellectual, and social senses, Rocío G. Davis contends that "[p]erhaps more than other forms of literature, they[children's texts] reflect society as it wishes to be, as it wishes to be seen, and as it unconsciously reveals itself to be" ("Reinscribing Asian" 390). Accordingly, in historical fiction featuring Asian American protagonists, the authors not only stress Asian American influence on society in the face of racial discrimination, but they also depict

their anticipation of a multicultural society. What does this society look like? As I mentioned in my Introduction, through McLaren's provisional utopia, in such a society each ethnic or racial group shares a dynamic racial relationship within an egalitarian society where whiteness is not considered as a norm for other ethnic or racial groups to follow. That society is reminiscent of the "multiplicity paradigm" addressed by Shirley Hune, a scholar in Asian American Studies. Hune pinpoints that the predominant black and white paradigm is "not adequate in a multiracial context" and that the binary paradigm "reinforces the exclusion of Asian Americans and others from public and private agendas because they are viewed as being neither Black nor White" (669). Since Asian Americans interact with and have impact on more diverse ethnic or racial groups, the authors of Asian background are expected to explore methods of integrating a multiplicity of racial dynamics into their work.

In making their story visible, Asian American authors face one crucial task to solve—to make Asian American experiences approachable to a general audience. Historical fiction serves as one of their solutions. It allows the authors to sprinkle the historical, cultural uniqueness of Asian Americans into the commonalities of human life. John Stephens recognizes this property of universalism in historical fiction:

> The historical novel in children's literature is not a genre which, in some abstracting preoccupation with the past, constitutes a closed system of signification, representing a pre-existing and essential reality, but rather is the discoursal product of firm ideological intentions, written and read in a specific, complex cultural situation. It has always performed a moral, and even didactic, function, especially through its capacity to transform events

> that appear to be historical particularities into universals of human experience. (205)

As Stephens argues, Asian American authors transform individual ethnic or racial related experiences into what can be shared by general people. Yep and Kadohata visit their ethnic groups' particular historical periods. Yep recounts Chinese immigrant experiences in the early twentieth century when they were institutionally excluded. In 1882 Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act that barred Chinese laborers from coming into the United Sates and people with Chinese nationality in America from being naturalized. Kadohata, on the other hand, narrates Japanese American experience during World War II when the ethnic Japanese in the US were incarcerated in camps. Interweaving these experiences into those of ordinary people helps the authors' works to appeal to more general readers and to secure Asian Americans' place in a society that is not well-informed of their sacrifice and contribution to the construction of the United States. Yep and Kadohata employ historical fiction to express the way people of Asian descent are finding who they have been and to "(re)negotiate the varied and complex social and cultural history of their group's presence in the United States and the manner in which these groups have struggled to carve a place for themselves in American society and, importantly, in its representation of itself" (Davis, "Reinscribing Asian" 392). Historical fiction, then, works for these authors to publicize and transmit Asian Americans' spirits nurtured by both their ethnic heritage and American experiences.

Laurence Yep's *Dragonwings* (1975)

In *Dragonwings* Laurence Yep depicts the experiences of Chinese immigrants to the United States in the early twentieth century through the eyes of a boy who grows

from an eight-year-old stranger to a fifteen-year-old immigrant in the land of the United States. The protagonist and focalizer, Moon Shadow, leaves the Middle Kingdom (China) and comes to the Gold Mountains (America), the land of the demons, in order to live with his father, Windrider, whom he has never met before. On his first night in America, the protagonist witnesses white people attacking the Company, a laundromat run together by Chinese immigrants in Chinatown, San Francisco. He comes to know that his father dreams of building and flying an airplane, too. Chinatown provides him and Father with protection from white American bigots. It also contains vile facets such as an opium den and underground gangs, which ultimately makes them leave the Company and live in Miss Whitlaw's stable. In the white neighborhood, Moon Shadow faces persistent racism, but he develops friendships with white people, who help him go through hardship and assist his father's dream of flying. When the earthquake hits San Francisco, the survivors, regardless of skin color, help each other. Subsequently, the Chinese survivors are rounded up and barred from returning to the remains of their town, but they ultimately manage to rebuild Chinatown on the site they used to live. With the help of Moon Shadow, his father builds the flying machine, and they name it Dragonwings. Father flies successfully for a short time and crash-lands. Bruised and wounded, his father decides to take care of his son's dream—living with Mother. Moon Shadow appreciates his luck in America while waiting for Father who is bringing Mother to America.

Dragonwings captures one of the hardest periods in Chinses American history, through which Yep highlights the nineteenth century Chinese immigrants' significance to the building of the United States. In the mid-nineteenth century, significant numbers of Chinese came to the United States (M. Wong 110; Zhou *Contemporary* 44). Most

Chinese immigrants as contract labor, professor at the University of California Min Zhou explains, worked "in the plantation economy Hawaii and in the mining industry on the west coast" (44). After the gold rush, they worked as agricultural laborers, and in the 1870s California farmers depended heavily on Chinese cheap labor. At that time, Chinese laborers also provided "the majority of the labor force" for the construction of the transcontinental railroad in the west (M. Wong 124-25). The opening of job opportunities in the United States lured more Chinese people, whose workforce played a vital part in the development of the United States. The Chinese immigrants continued to increase to over 105,00 by 1880 from 41,397 in the 1850s (M. Wong 111-12).

It did not take long before the increasing numbers of Chinese laborers were met with dislike and racial hatred. With the economic depression of 1876, the Chinese workers were perceived as a threat to the white working class, which naturally incited racial violence toward the workers (Chae 23). "The Chinese," M. Wong states, "were accused of being 'dangerous,' 'deceitful and vicious,' 'criminal,' 'coward,' and 'inferior from the mental and moral point of view'" (111). The anti-Chinese sentiment subsequently grew into the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 (M. Wong 113; Zhou *Contemporary* 44). The Act, M. Wong continues to explain, "excluded all Chinese laborers … from entering the United States for 10 years . . . [and] also explicitly denied naturalization rights to Chinese in the United States—making them 'aliens ineligible for citizenship'" (113). The history of the early Chinese immigrants displays their vulnerable status as pawns in American economic situations. They, nonetheless, worked hard and survived in spite of an unfavorable social atmosphere.

These early Chinese immigrants' experiences are likely foreign and distant to general readers of the age group that this book is targeted at. In incorporating unfamiliar material into his narrative, Yep adroitly employs the interplay between *defamiliarization* and protagonist-focalizer. Ellen Donovan implies that authors in multicultural children's literature should introduce the unfamiliar in a careful way, so that "readers may [neither] feel overwhelmed by the amount of information required to accurately represent the unfamiliar experience," nor " be confused because the writer did not provide enough information" (30). Yep's strategy balances these concerns and engages in desensitizing otherness by leading readers to connect with the protagonist-focalizer Moon Shadow who has newly arrived in San Francisco from China. Through the eyes of this eight-year-old newcomer, America is reflected as strange and unfamiliar. He is, as expected, beginning to learn about America while readers are simultaneously adjusting to the unfamiliar that results from historical and cultural distances. In other words, readers watch and sympathize with the Chinese boy's sufferings and endeavors to adjust to the new and foreign environment, the process of which helps them grow out of the unfamiliar. Yep utilizes the child protagonist-focalizer to help readers cope with the unfamiliar that the text contains.

Unfamiliar experiences and distanced history in *Dragonwings* are not only due to the multicultural characteristics of the text, but also due to Yep's resorting to the literary strategy of defamiliarization. This strategy eventually has the effect of de-establishing the racial hierarchy. From the opening page, China is referred to as the Middle Kingdom,

America as the Gold Mountain, and white people as white demons (Yep 1).[1] This initial description disturbs readers by challenging their conventional concepts and thoughts. Yep's strategy of defamiliarization is applied to everyday items for which readers already hold preconceived meanings. As Leona W. Fisher illustrates in "Focalizing the Unfamiliar: Laurence Yep's 'Child in a Strange Land,'" such simple signifiers as "milk and cookies" that culturally represent cozy domesticity or traditional motherhood in America are differently perceived (164); Moon Shadow describes gingerbread as "brown-colored and shaped like men" (102) and as dung-like in appearance (103) while he experiences milk as "the awful, greasy taste" (103). Yep furthermore makes a publishing convention unfamiliar. He, as Barbara Bader aptly indicates, "casts the Chinese-language conversation in Roman type, the English-language dialogue in italics, making Chinese the norm" (276). These techniques take readers by surprise by making them feel alienated from their own language and culture. It is worth noticing that just as the Chinese boy feels alienated from the foreign situation, so too are readers alienated from their conventional concepts and thoughts. The Chinese protagonist and the American readers are evened out in terms of becoming *others* in the same American setting. Yep's use of defamiliarization thus subtly works for de-establishing the hierarchy of both racial groups (Chinese and American) by making readers' own culture perceived as *other*.

Along with the strategy of defamiliarization, Yep employs an increasingly empowered protagonist—a common device in children's literature. This strategy also makes this text approachable to a broader readership by framing unfamiliar contents in a

[1] Yep, Laurence. *Dragonwings*; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

familiar theme. Children with empowerment, as critics Christopher Kelen and Björn Sundmark argue, "have provided a pervasive thematic framing for" children's literature (1). Moon Shadow is empowered to choose his life, to raise his voice *vis-a-vis* adults, and to be resistant to their authority. Against his mother's and grandmother's protest and his own fear about the Gold Mountain where the demons lynched his grandfather, the protagonist makes up his mind to leave the Middle Kingdom for the Gold Mountain. On his first day in America, he tries to secure his status by demonstrating who he is in a situation surrounded by adults. When his uncle grunts, "Don't you know it's impolite to stare, boy?," Moon Shadow boldly replies, "Why are you doing it, sir?" (20). The newcomer is neither overwhelmed with the strangeness around him nor deterred by the age hierarchy between him and Uncle, who is in his eighties. That very night, at the conversation with his father, the protagonist again shows his resistant character. He does not cringe when Father attempts to suppress him by reminding him of his position as "boy" and "son":

> "Won't you take my word for it, boy?"
>
> "It's hard to order someone to believe." I added, "Sir." We both felt stiff and awkward.
>
> Father spread his hands. "Oh, hell, boy. I don't know much about being a father."
>
> "I guess I don't know much about being your son," I said slowly. (43)

Moon Shadow is vocal even at the moment that Father tries to step back from this conversation. Nervous from the first day in the totally strange and new land, the boy tries to defend himself from adult power. The boy also has the same rhetorical competence as

adults. His replies are composed similarly to the way adults speak—staring and a question form in the case of Uncle, and the same sentence structure except for '*your* son' in the case of Father. Through word and deed, Moon Shadow insists on his adult-like status. In fact, he shoulders the same workload as adults do. In a retrospective tone, the adult narrator in the text intervenes, "I was treated as a man and not a boy" (63). Clearly, Yep creates an empowered child protagonist, and readers follow as he sees and speaks. Moon Shadow is not a mere Chinese boy whom readers might perceive as *other*; instead, he becomes a boy with empowerment whom readers would like to emulate and through whom they may vicariously wield power over adults.

In tandem with empowerment goes the Chinese traditional virtue in Moon Shadow. That virtue enables readers to see Chinese people and culture from a fresh perspective. Although Moon Shadow has the boldness to talk back to adults, he rarely does without a need to prove himself in an adult domineering society. Yep depicts the protagonist as a boy who has his own character but who honors filial piety. This virtue, instilled since his birth, encourages the son to be a helper of his father. Regarding the traditional Chinese family, Sociologist Morrison Wong explains,

> Filial piety, another Confucian value that was highly cherished, involved a set of moral principles taught at a very young age and reinforced throughout one's life. It consisted of mutual respect to those of equal status and of reverence and obedience toward one's elders. Duty, obligation, importance of the family name, service, and self-sacrifice to the elders are all elements of filial piety. (117)

These Chinese doctrines are inculcated into Moon Shadow. That is one of the reasons he decides to leave the Middle Kingdom. The boy acknowledges that "I owed it to Father to obey him in everything—even if it meant going to such a fearful place as the Golden Mountain (12). The son, furthermore, supports his father's desire to fly even though that means he should defer his wish for bringing Mother from China to America. Setting aside his wish, he involves himself in the process of Father's flying project, from designing a flying machine to flying it. Moon Shadow narrates that "I had Father's dream taking visible form—first in the picture and the articles . . . then in the models and diagrams . . . and finally in the skeleton of the flying machine . . ." (269). With reverence for Father, the protagonist carries out his duties as son helping his father to fly even for four minutes (305). Chinese critics such as Ying Zhang, Xianhua Meng, and Yumei Mo contend that the eight-year-old boy demonstrates Confucian doctrine and filial duty (75). Moon Shadow cherishes Chinese tradition, which prompts him to delay his own wish and work with his father. Yep, through the boy protagonist, helps child readers not only fulfill their wish of being a collaborator with adults beyond a marginalized status in society but also appreciate Chinese culture in which children are taught to show reverence toward their elders.

With literary strategies such as defamiliarization and empowered child protagonist interwoven in the text, Yep sprinkles the stories of the early Chinese immigrant workers who had to deal with prejudice, racism, xenophobia, and exclusion. Early in *Dragonwings*, Moon Shadow observes that "His [Uncle's] hands were calloused by mining the California streams for gold, and his left index finger was twisted slightly from an accident when he had been helping to dig tunnels through the mountains for the

railroad" (19). This description of Uncle offers a condensed version of the history of the early Chinese immigrants since the mid-nineteenth century. Before the Chinese Exclusion Act, the early Chinese immigrants were supposed to cope with a series of measures. According to the *Office of the Historian* (online), special licenses were required for Chinese businesses or workers, only fifteen Chinese people were allowed for arrival per ship or vessel, and they were prevented from naturalization. Despite these discriminatory regulations, Chinese labor served to develop the US economy, especially in California. The synopsis of "Chinese in the Frontier West" released by PBS states that "Chinese labor became an essential underpinning in the developing economy. In taxes from gold mining alone, the Chinese contributed up to 50% of the [*sic*] California's total revenue by 1860." The webpage of a research project at Stanford University, *Chinese Railroad Workers*, states that about 12,000 Chinese laborers are estimated to have worked for the transcontinental railroad helping to "shape the physical and social landscape of the American West." The Chinese laborers, as historian Ryan Dearinger states, "sacrifice[d] their life and limb in the name of western development and American progress" in the 19th century (186). These early Chinese laborers helped to shape the American west in spite of an unfavorable social atmosphere.

In the contemporary period set in *Dragonwings* Chinese immigrants continued to participate in the development of the United States while overcoming institutional discrimination. The process of rebuilding Chinatown just after the 1906 quake provides a telling example. The ethnic Chinese people were nearly banned from returning to their home in San Francisco. Moon Shadow narrates that "the demon officials were going to

make us rebuild the Tang people's[2] town not in our original location but down at Hunter's Point; and yet every other ethnic group in the city was going to be allowed to return to its old home site" (243). The plan for displacing Chinatown after the quake in Yep's novel is historically evidenced. National Park Service's webpage titled "1906 Earthquake: Chinese Displacement" reports that some city officials had an intention to use the quake as an opportunity "to move Chinese people to Hunters Point and to obtain Chinatown's valuable land." The people were ignored to the point that where they were to live was designated against their wish, and they were treated differently even from other ethnic groups. At this moment, Yep, through Uncle's mouth, illuminates the Chinese's influence on American economics: "We run a lot of businesses and services that they [white people] need. If we were to leave this city completely, their whole economy would be wrecked" (245). Uncle aptly articulates the Chinese right for claiming the original site of Chinatown. Chinese immigrants, as M. Wong argues, "involved themselves in occupations that . . . were rejected by or noncompetitive with whites. . . in urban service occupations such as laundries, restaurants, and grocery stores" (125). The same National Park Service webpage mentioned above also states that some politically astute officials were worried that San Francisco would lose its large Oriental trade as well as city revenues without Chinatown. Yep underscores the Chinese people's significant role in US history even though the country has treated them differently ever since they

[2] The narrator of *Dragonwings* explains that "We did not call ourselves *Chinese*, but the people of the Tang, after that famous dynasty that had helped settle our area some eleven hundred years ago. It would be the same as if an *English* demon called himself a man of the *Tudors*, the dynasty of *Henry VIII* and of *Elizabeth I* . . . " (3).

began immigrating to the United States. Emphasis on the work of the ethnic Chinese during their time here lays the foundation for their rightful place on American soil.

While throwing light on the Chinese immigrants' vital role in the formation of American West, Yep begins to shorten the distance between Chinese and American peoples, chipping away at the racial hierarchy. He demonstrates ways in which the two races are not different from each other by juxtaposing a Chinese community with a white community. Both communities have good and ugly faces. Moon Shadow learns that "the Company [where he lives and works together with other Chinese people] was more than a group of men wanting money. We were brothers: strangers in a strange land who had banded together for mutual help and protection" (63). The brotherhood in Chinatown, however, is often threatened by its own members; Black Dog, delinquent son of the leader of the Company, severely beats up Moon Shadow and nearly ruins Father's flying plan. Furthermore, opium addicts and gangsters reside in Chinatown, which leads Father to have to kill a Chinese man to save his son (105-22). In Chinatown the protagonist feels the threat of death as well as the security of family.

This communal duality, Yep indicates, is present in the white community, too. From the first day Moon Shadow with his father moves into Miss Whitlaw's stable, he feels a family bond. Although she is a demoness to the mind of young Moon Shadow, he feels calm and unafraid as he stands before her (131) and close to her, as if "in some former life—a mother and child, even" (144). Miss Whitlaw also treats this Chinese family without prejudice as if they were her family members. She and her niece Robin help Moon Shadow learn English (145-70); Robin slips the hint of how he can fight back against the leader of the white boy's gang (185). This quasi-family atmosphere rarely

goes beyond the boundary of Miss Whitlaw's house, though. Most white people discriminate against Chinese people due to their race. Moon Shadow experiences bullying by white boys; a Chinese man is attacked in the street, only to become blind in one eye (119); moreover, Moon Shadow's grandfather is lynched by a mob of white people (1). White people's attacks on Chinese people are frequently described in *Dragonwings*. Yep, through the eyes of Moon Shadow, demonstrates that both communities, regardless of their race, can hardly reflect communal difference between them; every society contains both good and bad people. By putting American and Chinese societies side by side, Yep suggests that it is hard to justify a superiority between Chinese and white communities.

Once proving that the white community and, thus, white people are not very different from the Chinese community and people, Yep draws a glimpse of an egalitarian society. To do so, the author zooms in on the 1906 earthquake and fire in San Francisco. The natural disaster struck people with no consideration of their difference. The *San Francisco Newsletter* describes the quake as an equalizer of social differences of the city's neighborhoods: "It did not discriminate between tavern and tabernacle, bank and brothel" (qtd. in Davies 2). Chinatown, a consequence of racial discrimination,[3] is also demolished. The calamity shatters the invisible wall between white and Chinese peoples. Both groups are equally victims, and the survivors from both groups equally fall into the status of refugees. Sheer need for survival unites them and compels them to work together as if to prove Miss Whitlaw's statement: "we were put on this earth to help one another" (201). With no time and no room to consider the racial demarcation, the discrete

[3] The Exclusion Act of 1882 and subsequent anti-Chinese sentiments compelled the Chinese to insulate themselves in Chinatowns for self-protection (Zhou, *Contemporary* 46)

groups start to save victims stuck in the rubble despite personal risks. Moreover, the natural disaster leads people to cross social fissures by sharing their meager meals. In this situation, food works as a conduit for personal and direct communication between two groups. Miss Whitlaw, lacking food, is invited to dinner and takes a bottle of whisky to the Company's tent, and Uncle makes a return visit to her tent with some apples (230-39). In response to the instinctual need for survival, people, white or Chinese, show little, if any, reluctance to dismiss a racially created social stratification. The 1906 disaster story, utilized by Yep, offers a glimpse of a multicultural society, an anticipation of a cooperative America across race.

It is, however, no more than a glimpse. The ethnic Chinese in *Dragonwings* are frequently on the move. Their movements in Yep's narrative serve to epitomize all the rootless ethnic Chinese people who live in the Gold Mountain, those who left homes to immigrate to the United States but have yet to find new homes in this new country. Moon Shadow moves into the Gold Mountain from the Middle Kingdom, and then he must leave Chinatown and stay in Miss Whitlaw's stable. The 1906 quake had the boy, again, along with other Chinese people, "[leave] for points east, south, and north" from the refugee camp to the point that he cannot remember so many places (242) until they were allowed to rebuild Chinatown on the old homesite. The moving motif imparts the precarious position of the early Chinese immigrants and their migrant existence. Unable to gain any legal status and due protection, they kept moving, searching for jobs and self-protection.

Their frequent movements can also be seen as a symbolic expression of Chinese Americans' psychological wandering between the two worlds, China and America. The

Chinese immigrants in *Dragonwings* lead an expatriate life, which makes it hard for them to settle in one specific place. Windrider is familiar with the two cultures, China and America. Unlike most Chinese immigrants in Chinatown, he is able to speak in English, and he is well versed in machines. After he happens to fix a white man's automobile, he tells his son that ". . . in machines there's a language common to us all. You don't have to worry about your accent when you're talking about numbers and diagrams" (75). Windrider covers wide places ranging from leaving for the Gold Mountain from the Middle Kingdom, through traveling between Chinese and white communities, to flying in the areophane made by himself. He has the ability to transcend the limits of China or Chinatown, and simultaneously no place confines him whether it is Chinatown or a white community, the Middle Kingdom or the Gold Mountain, or land or sky.

It is natural that people who are experiencing another culture tend to become expatriates psychologically. Hand Cap, another character in *Dragonwings*, also wanders between two cultures. When he makes up his mind to return to America, the narrator reveals Hand Cap's experience of an expatriate life even in China:

> Things had not remained the same in his village as he [Hand Clap] remembered them. You would say something about a family or a village in the district, and he would say that was nothing and compared it to something bigger or better that he had seen in his youth . . . Though he had been married since he was sixteen, he had spent nearly thirty years of this marriage apart from his wife. On the other hand, his face lit up whenever he spoke of the good things about living on the Golden Mountain—for the Tang people had learned to have their own good times there. (9-10)

He does not quite belong to his own village anymore and misses American life. This passage is indicative of the fact that most of the Chinese people in the Gold Mountain will not be able to go back to China. They become too Americanized to return to China although, in America, they are frequently treated as *others*. They are on the cultural borderline.

Expatriate experience of the Chinese immigrants, on the other hand, makes them richly cultured from both China and America. Yep again describes the cultural richness mainly through Moon Shadow. While waiting for Father, who will bring out Mother to America, the protagonist utters, "how lucky I am" (313). This utterance sounds like gratitude for his life; he survived, his father survived from the crash when he tried to fly in his Dragonwings, and the family will be reunited very soon. Moon Shadow however feels lucky for his vantage point to glean courage from the two cultures. Subsequently he articulates that from both Father in the Gold Mountain and Mother in the Middle Kingdom, he learns the courage to deal with problems and responsibilities to come (313-14). Similarly, Yep, with multicultural background, confesses that:

> I was Chinese American raised in a black neighborhood, a child who had been too American to fit into Chinatown and too Chinese to fit in elsewhere. I was the clumsy son of the athletic family, the grandson of a Chinese grandmother who spoke more of West Virginia than of China. When I wrote, I went from being a puzzle to a puzzle solver. (*Lost* 91)

The author's liminal position helps him to drop a normal mental filter as Chinese or American, which "enlivens and reanimates the world" (Yep, "Outsider" 54). These travelers between two cultures, real and fictional, continue to find a home as Americans

of Chinese ancestry while trying to solve the puzzle of who they are as Chinese Americans.

Cynthia Kadohata's *Weedflower* (2006)

Yep is not alone in depicting the Asian American determination to survive on American soil. Other Asian American writers utilize the same theme. Cynthia Kadohata, for example, demonstrates it through Japanese Americans. This American author of Japanese ancestry draws, like Yep, on a traumatic ethnic experience to illustrate a struggle for validation and place in society. In *Weedflower*, the author recounts Japanese American experiences before and after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 from the perspective of the protagonist, Sumiko, a twelve-year-old Japanese American girl. Prior to the attack, she lives with extended family in California after losing her parents. She looks like a typical American girl wishing to be accepted by her classmates. After the attack, however, the family is separated from the mainstream society and forced to move to an internment camp on an Indian reservation in Poston, Arizona. Sumiko is stripped of her freedom and dignity as a human and, more importantly, her identity as American. It is this moment when the protagonist starts to reappreciate her Japanese heritage and do gardening in the desert area. She also forms a friendship with Frank, a Mohave boy. The friendship between minority groups shows their care toward each other. Sumiko helps the tribe through Frank to gain some knowledge of irrigation, and Frank encourages her to find a way out of the camps.

Kadohata utilizes historical fiction to support the Japanese American claim for their place in the United States. The history of Japanese Americans demonstrates their precarious status manipulated by the mainstream society. According to the Japanese

American Citizens League (JACL hereafter), in the 1880s when the Chinese Exclusion Law resulted in an acute labor shortage in the western United States and Hawaii, Japanese people were recruited and started to immigrate to the United States as substitutes for Chinese workers in the agricultural industry (4). Unlike Chinese immigrants at that time, the Japanese immigrants were supported by the Japanese government and allowed to invite their wives to join them in America (E. Kim 73). Soon, they successfully "formed independent farm unions" and "achieved wages parity with white workers" (JACL 5). The favorable conditions made it easy for them to settle and prosper in the US, but the favorable wind did not blow long.

The growth of the ethnic Japanese population and economics was perceived as a threat to white people. They reacted to the Japanese immigrants just as they did to the Chinese. The JACL argues that "[t]he removal of Japanese Americans from the West Coast and their incarceration was the culmination of the movement to eliminate Asians from the West Coast that began nearly 100 years earlier" (6). During World War II, American state power eventually dispersed more than 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry into ten concentration camps, "in godforsaken places where no one has lived before or since" (Daniels 298-302). "The wartime exile of the west coast Japanese," as historian Roger Daniels harshly insists, "was surely an American attempt at ethnic cleansing" although the camps were not death camps (303). It took four decades after President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 for the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC hereafter), directed by the

Congress, to review the facts and circumstances surrounding the Order. [4] The CWRIC concluded that the Order resulted from "race prejudice, war hysteria and a failure of political leadership," not from military necessity (1-18). The Order and its subsequent decisions, without due process of law, removed the ethnic Japanese from the west coast, from their homes and workplaces, and detained them in the camps on desolate and unfriendly places during World War II.

When unwinding the thread of Japanese American experience of incarceration in *Weedflower,* Kadohata, like Yep, employs the protagonist–focalizer device through the fictional character Sumiko. While the text focuses on the girl, the author utilizes the literary device *familiarization*, which starkly contrasts with Yep's employment of defamiliarization. The opening scene eliminates feelings of distance and foreignness which are arguably common in multicultural, historical fiction. It can be read like a contemporary realistic story rather than historical one. The description of the protagonist highlights her as a typical American girl except for the ethnic-based name and address.

> Sumiko jumped off the school bus and ran behind her house. Her family was working; she saw their small farm surrounded by bursts of color in the flower fields. "Jiichan!" she shouted to her grandfather. She waved an envelope at him. "I'm invited to a party!"
>
> "Can't hear!"

[4] Executive Order 9066 was signed on February 19, 1942. The Order, the CWRIC describes, "gave to the Secretary of War and the military commanders to whom he [President] delegated authority, the power to exclude any and all persons, citizens and aliens, from designated areas in order to provide security against sabotage, espionage and fifth column activity" (2).

"I'm invited to a party!" (Kadohata 1-2)[5]

This scene feels familiar since it could be common in the daily life of any American regardless of race or ethnicity. The preteen girl Sumiko grows so excited for a party invitation that she cannot remain silent right after getting off the bus. Such familiarity is also founded in the use of language. Kadohata relies on ordinary words and sentence structures. As seen in the above excerpt, language is simple and colloquial, and that engenders empathy rather than distance. Librarian Marilyn Taniguchi states that "[t]he concise yet lyrical prose conveys her [Sumiko] story in a compelling narrative that will resonate with a wide audience" (106). Sumiko's words and deeds demonstrate that she is a typical American preteen whose life includes a school bus, a party invitation, and friends. Kadohata's familiarization strategy of Sumiko as an ordinary American girl implies that what happens to her could happen to any individual regardless of race. Nonetheless, Japanese American incarceration during the Second World War stands out in the frame of familiar and recognizable ambience.

Even with the structure of the story, Kadohata adopts the device of familiarization. This novel is composed of a two-layered structure. The initial four chapters serve as "a cognitive map, a pattern to be changed and enriched by what follows" as Nodelman demonstrates in "Text as Teacher: The Beginning of *Charlotte's Web*" (125). With the help of the structure, he continues to argue, "even readers with the most primitive of narrative competences have the opportunity to make a transition and cope with the complexities for the rest of the novel" (125-26). *Weedflower* has this

[5] Kadohata, Cynthia. *Weedflower*; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

familiar structure in that Japanese American experience is told twice, once from the personal scope of a mundane episode, and then from the national scope of a historical event. For example, prior to the main tale about the Japanese concentration camps, Kadohata foregrounds a small, yet significant episode about Sumiko in the initial four chapters. At a classmate's birthday party, Sumiko is kicked out by a white hostess with an explanation that she allowed her daughter to invite the entire class without knowing that there was a Japanese girl (35-36). Professor at the University of St. Thomas Paul Lai describes this incident as "a framing device for the novel," which is situated "at the intimate level of communities, classmates, and potential friends" (72). In the following chapters Sumiko experiences rejection in a more sophisticated form at the institutional level of the federal government. From Chapter 5 onward, the author uncoils the main thread of this text, the Japanese Americans as unwanted guests in both white society and Native American community. They were forced to move into an incarceration camp which occupied a part of the Mohave Native American reservation. Through the narrative structure of twice-told racism regarding people of Japanese ancestry, Kadohata shepherds readers through the historical distance as well as through the foreignness and otherness of the Japanese concentration camp.

Kadohata continues to make full use of the device of familiarization through her empowered protagonist. Pat Zettner, a writer for children, argues that child characters with power are an essential key in successful children's fiction, and they are an important recurring literary device in this field. As Yep does with Moon Shadow, Kadohata creates a strong protagonist, Sumiko. The author displays the Japanese American experience through the eyes of Sumiko with strong-mindedness. She earns her status rather than

depending wholly on adults. Since moving to Uncle's just after losing her parents, she works hard while fending off some fears. Although "from the beginning, Uncle and Auntie had never asked her to work . . . she'd gotten up and scrubbed all the floors . . . she had not stopped working since then" (10). Through hard work, she makes her presence essential to the farm and secures her and her brother's place in this new home.

Sumiko is also empowered to raise her voice from her vulnerable situation. At the same birthday party scene mentioned before, she courageously demands: "I need my present back" (37). Dealing with the negation moment on her own, she tries to save the money that Uncle paid for the gift, too (37). The girl does not surrender easily. Overwhelming and humiliating as circumstances are, she will courageously hold her head up. Later in the text, Sumiko's agency is exerted even in the concentration camp. She saves Frank, a Native American boy. In the middle of visiting the camp, he is pummeled by Japanese boys because of racial antagonism. At this time, the girl of Japanese descent helps the boy escape the camp by smashing one boy of her own racial group on the nose (199-201). The girl stands up for the Native American boy against the Japanese hatred toward Native Americans. A series of difficult circumstances such as losing parents, rejection, and racial hatred does not defeat her. By describing the ethnic Japanese experience through the eyes of the empowered protagonist, Kadohata has this text appealing to general readers and invites them "imaginatively to inhabit positions in history [or] ethnicity . . . that may at first seem alien" (Fisher 159).

It is worth tracing how this "typical" American girl begins to open her eyes to her Japanese side. Before the attack on Pearl Harbor happens, Sumiko is no more and no less than an ordinary American girl; she recognizes herself as American. Prior to the

bombing, she absorbs herself in America to the point that she never questions her identity. The incident of the birthday party, thus, does not shake her identity as American. Although the party negates her as American, it is situated in a small community level. It might result from a single person's whim, so it is not sufficient to threaten her sense of national identity—American. Still, she is proudly aware that "one of the things that made her different from the rest of her family, one of the things that made her more American than her cousins, was that she didn't feel *haji*, or shame, quite as much as other Japanese did" (58-59). The other family members internalize Japanese sensibility. Unlike them, Sumiko does not feel the same way as the rest of the family members do and takes pride in not having Japanese sensibility.

The attack on Hawaii and its subsequent incidents, ironically enough, act as a catalyst for the awareness of Sumiko's potential Japanese side. She becomes more sensitive to her own Japanese sensibilities. Living on the West Coast, she is ordered by the government to be relocated ultimately in Poston, Arizona, the desert that "lay entirely on Colorado River Indian Reservation lands" (Lillquist 412). The JACL summarizes the ramification of the order on some 120,000 ethnic Japanese during 1942-46:

> [They] were . . . deprived of liberty and property without criminal charges and without trial of any kind. Several persons were also violently deprived of life. All persons of Japanese ancestry on the West Coast were expelled from their homes and confined in desolate, inland camps, often referred to euphemistically as "internment camps." (3)

Her American citizenship is entirely negated at the national level: she is treated like a traitor, unprotected by her government. Objectified by white people's cold stare, Sumiko

begins to feel *haji* or shame (the dearth of which she used to feel proud of), "as if she'd done something wrong," and at the same time she feels anger because she knows that "she hadn't done anything wrong" (100). The text goes on to narrate that "she knew . . . that the *haji* she felt was from her Japanese side and the anger she felt was from her American side" (100). She also comes to understand another Japanese sentiment—*Shikata ga nai,* meaning that "This cannot be helped" (130). While corralled into a camp that intends to cut off Japanese-ness, she grows to enrich her identity by developing her Japanese sensibility. This protagonist embodies Kadohata's wish for Japanese Americans. In the same interview mentioned earlier, the author laments that the internment had a serious effect on the Japanese American community, and the ethnic Japanese lost a significant portion of their culture while trying to become more and more American. As if to compensate for the ethnic Japanese losing their culture, the author has the fictional character Sumiko come to terms with the two cultures. By this, Kadohata implicitly encourages minority Americans to cultivate their dormant racial heritage, which has usually been exoticized or oppressed throughout US history.

It is with her Japanese sensibility cultured in the United States that Sumiko overcomes the hardships and moves on. Through this protagonist, Kadohata recounts the Japanese detainees who have survived the concentration camps. People of Japanese ancestry, citizen and alien alike, were the only group singled out for mass incarceration, whereas citizens of German and Italian ancestry were not ordered for mass evacuation although the US was at war with Germany and Italy (JACL 3). The concentration camps, the JACL documents, were built in desolate areas, where people led a crowded life without privacy, so "[l]arge extended families or groups of unrelated individuals were

squeezed into tiny unpartitioned 20×25 foot units" (11). This physical condition was just the initial level of hardship. Many Japanese detainees in the camps, as the JACL witnesses, "were frightened because of the unpredictable future and the hopelessness of the situation. Many did not expect to come out alive" (12). After being relocated to the camp, Sumiko nearly succumbs to "the ultimate boredom," which Jiichan defines as "close to lose mind [*sic*]" (92). She lives a death-in-life. Deprived of her hope of "go[ing] to college and get[ting] a business degree so she [can] run her flower shop," this 12-year-old girl does not find much to do in the camp except for idling (115). At the nadir of her mental wasteland, gardening helps her to recover her mind. Most ethnic Japanese had an affinity for gardening considering that they immigrated to the United States in the late nineteenth century as the result of the American agricultural industry's recruitment effort for farm laborers (JACL 4). The CWRIC also comments that agriculture was the principal occupation of the [Japanese] immigrants prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor (4). Gardening, in fact, was popular among the detainees. It was an activity that made interment tolerable and gave the detainees "a sense of purpose" (JACL 11, Beckwith 283). With the help of Mr. Moto, who becomes friends with her in the camp, Sumiko starts her own garden and feels happiness (147). The used-to-be farm girl at last has a hope for the future.

Gardening works as more than a survival mechanism. It testifies to Japanese Americans' spirit and contribution to the Poston relocation center on the Colorado River Indian Reservation. The internees' gardening work, as Paul Lai aptly pinpoints, "echoes the larger work of the Poston camps to transform the desert landscape into arable land with the construction of irrigation canals" (80). In *Imprisoned in the Desert: The*

Geography of World War II-Era, Japanese American Relocation Centers in the Western United States, Karl Lillquist, a geographer in Central Washington University reports: "The area [Poston] that was viewed as bleak and desolate by the Japanese Americans upon their arrival in 1942 has been transformed into a very desirable place for agriculture as well as recreation, tourism, light industry, and 'snowbirds' escaping the long winters of the north" (449). Kadohata also provides her firsthand witness on the transformation of the used-to-be campsites. In the same interview mentioned earlier, she mentions that the scene of Poston is transformed from barren land into a place "bloom[ing] with trees, gardens, ponds and waterfalls." The author draws attention to the spirit of the Japanese internees. They did not give in to the incarceration environment and worked a miracle of planting flowers in the desert area. Kadohata's narration of Japanese internment, then, is turned into an avenue to light up the history of Japanese perseverance and productivity *vis-à-vis* the harshness of an American government and, at times, even the American land.

Being healed by gardening, Sumiko strikes up a friendship with Frank, a Native American boy, and through their burgeoning friendship, Kadohata offers a glimpse into a visionary multicultural society. The society shows the potential to fashion a dynamic racial relationship between minority groups through care rather than confrontation. The developing of their friendship follows a routine trajectory: prejudice and antagonism toward each other precedes their understanding and friendship. The first encounter between Sumiko and Frank demonstrates each one's prejudice toward the other. In Chapter 15, while loitering around the concentration camp, Sumiko is nearly hurt by a rattlesnake. At the close call, she comes to save her life thanks to the Native American

boy. Still, she "[feels] more scared of them [Indians] more than any white people she'd ever been around" (123). Prior to the snake accident, Sumiko happens to overhear the boy commenting that "They [Japanese detainees] are wasteful . . . They throw food out all the time!" (122). The comment implies the resentment by the Native Americans whose life condition is much poorer than that of the Japanese detainees. Antagonism again manifests itself when Frank tells Sumiko, "Why don't you people go back where you came from and leave our reservation alone?" (124) In the first encounter, they have antagonistic attitudes to each other. The Japanese detainees are perceived as invaders on the Mohave reservation, while the Japanese detainees see the Native Americans as scary beings.

A series of encounters, however, helps Sumiko and Frank educate each other. Lai argues that their encounters "form a pedagogical relationship" (82). By juxtaposing the two minority racial groups, Japanese girl and Mohave boy, Kadohata unfolds the exploitative history of the US toward ethnic groups outside of the main power structure. Poston relocation center strategically hosted Japanese detainees in order to gain free, forced labor. Lillquist documents that "[t]he site [of Poston] was chosen by the US Army and the [federal] Office of Indian Affairs in March 1942" (412). The Office was willing to host a relocation center as a way to develop an irrigation system, cultivate farmland, create the necessary living infrastructure for Native Americans, and enhance economic development (Lillquist 412; Fujita-Rony). The ethnic Japanese workforce fitted into the scheme of the state. *Los Angeles Times* staff writer Teresa Watanabe, borrowing the words from Ruth Okimoto who is an artist and researcher, reports that "the US government had deliberately selected Japanese Americans with farming experience . . . to

help develop the reservation's agricultural potential." *Weedflower* faithfully witnesses these historical situations. Frank helps Sumiko comprehend Japanese detainees as unwanted guests to the indigenous Native Americans: "They take our land and put you on it" (143). With his help, the girl also finds out the state scheme about the campsites: "We [Mohave] were here first. Then came the Chemehuevi. Now the government wants to bring Hopi and Navajo onto the reservation. In fact, they're going to take over your barracks when the war ends" (160). Sumiko's disclosure of government mistreatment of ethnic Japanese people follows. She informs that "A lot of people lost everything they had during the evacuation," and the boy responds that "You're not the first people to lose things" (160). Their conversation divulges that both Japanese and Native American groups experience forced removal and confiscation by the state. By putting two minorities by side, as Paul Lai argues, "Kadohata shifts attention away from the uniqueness of war internment for Japanese Americans to the longstanding histories of incarceration that have characterized the US government's treatment of nonwhite peoples" (67). *Weedflower* witnesses that the state wielded its power toward nonwhite peoples by forcibly removing them or by taking advantage of their labor force. The power has been abused while depriving nonwhite peoples of a stable life.

As Sumiko and Frank have a better understanding of their mutual situation, they are willing to help each other. Kadohata portrays a dynamic and cooperative relationship between the marginalized groups. The girl helps the Mohave via Frank to gain knowledge about irrigation for their reservation while the boy helps her realize the state's exploitation of nonwhite peoples. He comes to put her well-being before Native Americans' possible benefit from the Japanese detainees. The Native Americans on the

Colorado River Indian Reservation had complicated opinions on the incarceration camps; some Native Americans "wanted no part in inflicting injustices on the Japanese Americans similar to what they had suffered," some knew that the camps would be helpful for the development of the reservation (Lillquist 412), and still others thought of the ethnic Japanese as land grabbers (Daniels 303). In *Weedflower*, Frank is well-aware of these conflicting opinions, but he ultimately declares that "The more people who are free in the world, the better it is for Indians. It's better for everyone. You should leave. You shouldn't live here" (246). He, as Lai argues, cares for "the general welfare of others outside one's own community" (85). Despite the advantages of the Japanese people's presence, he persuades her to leave the camp for her freedom and future. Such friendship is essential for a genuine multicultural society "that honors the full sovereignty of all peoples" (Lai 85). Intriguingly enough, in the formation of this friendship, Kadohata pushes the white group to the background as if the minority groups were out of reach of the dominant white power structure. It is true that the white group looms throughout the text. It is also true that Sumiko and Frank traverse ethnic or racial division to develop friendship in whatever circumstances they are situated. The author puts the minority groups in the foreground with focus on their collaborative spirit as well as their mutual care.

At the moment that their friendship begins to emerge, Sumiko is displaced once again when the government allows the detainees to leave the camp and find a job. This displacement is caused from the US government attempt to use the detainees for wartime labor shortage (Lai 86). Kadohata, as Yep does, captures the nomadic life, psychologically and physically, of the ethnic Japanese by chronicling their frequent and

forced removals during World War II. Professor at National Taiwan Normal University Hsiu-chuan Lee argues in the interview with Kadohata that the sense of being uprooted is one of Kadohata's main subjects in her works for children as well as for adults (165). The movements of Sumiko echo those of most ethnic Japanese. The bombing of Pearl Harbor makes Sumiko and her extended family move to unknown places. Furthermore, these institutionally forced movements split the extended family; Jiichan and Uncle are arrested and locked up in prisons while Sumiko and the rest of the family are corralled into a makeshift camp at the San Carlos racetrack, only to be shipped into an internment camp in Poston, "one of the hottest areas in the country" according to Mr. Moto, a fictional character in *Weedflower* (130). The order of relocation pushes the people of Japanese descent into a life adrift.[6]

Life in camp also sets the detainees adrift. It is not possible to lead a normal family life. The text tells that the tiny barracks housed four families, and three meals a day were supplied in a big dining barracks (107-12). This mass living, as the CWRIC accounts, "prevented normal family communication and activities. Heads of families, no longer providing food and shelter, found their authority to lead and to discipline diminished" (11). Family members can hardly spend time together, and thus they float. Sumiko's cousins Ichiro and Bull also leave to serve in the military.[7] The dismantling of

[6] The ethnic Japanese's drifting does not cease with the end of the Second World War. It was difficult, if not impossible, for them to return to their original places and homes after closing the camps. The JACL reports that "[h]omes, farms and businesses left behind were occupied by people unwilling to return property to their rightful owners. Some homes were razed and decimated, and Japanese Americans were targets of terrorist shootings" (16). So, they continued to drift for settlement. Kadohata's second work for children, *Kira-kira*, describes the Japanese's diaspora after the camps.

[7] In the endnote of *Weedflower*, Kadohata mentions the ethnic Japanese service in the army during WWII, stating that "The 442nd Regimental Combat Team, composed mostly of Japanese Americans, went on to

a family proliferates throughout the entire Japanese community in camp. Additionally, the entire camp community comes to see the rupture between "loyal" and "disloyal," when the state administers a loyalty review program.[8] "The avowedly loyal," the CWRIC reports, "were eligible for release" whereas the assumed disloyal "were segregated from the main body of evacuees into the Tule Lake camp" (15). The program, as the JACL concludes, was "an audacious act for the government" in that it assumed that the ethnic Japanese detainees were disloyal (13). The program was "one of the most divisive and wrenching episodes of the camp detention" because it was insensitive and lacked understanding of the detainees' circumstances (CWRIC 13). The detainees freed from camp worked in war production facilities, served in the army, or filled labor shortages during the war (JACL 13). Likewise, Sumiko with other family members leaves the camp for similar labor projects. During the war, people of Japanese heritage were frequently ordered to change their locales. The experience in camp leaves a huge impact on Japanese descendants making them feel rootless and insecure in US society. In the interview with Lee, Kadohata confesses, "the internment happened once, and I somehow believe that it could happen again . . . In a sense, I don't feel a hundred percent secure" (180). Through a close examination of Japanese Americans' experience during World

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become one of the most decorated combat units in American history . . . While many of their families remained imprisoned, the members of the 442nd suffered what many experts agree was a 300 percent casualty rate" (259).

[8] All evacuees 17 years of age or older were required to fill out a questionnaire including two questions: One was "Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?" The other was "Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces and forswear any form of allegiance to the Japanese emperor or to any other foreign government, power, or organization?" (Kadohata 224, Lillquist 441, JACL 13)

War II, Kadohata exhibits their fragile place and forced nomadic life in America and on the other hand their contribution in the composition of US history.

These two Asian American writers—Yep and Kadohata—cleverly solve many tasks faced by Asian American writers of children's literature. They develop sophisticated narrative strategies that are appropriate to their historical fiction as well as their foreign subject matter. Through a strategy of "defamiliarization," Yep wakes the readers up from their routine perspective and offers a fresh view of the dominant white society, Chinese Americans, and the established social hierarchy. Similarly, Kadohata, through literary devices of "familiarization" and a traditional third-person focalizer, demonstrates how deeply Japanese Americans are acculturated to the mainstream of America prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor and challenges the readers to realize the impact of that historical event on Japanese American identity. These strategies are effective when both writers deal with heavy issues such as racism and with unfamiliar issues such as Asian American experience.

In dealing with these issues both Yep and Kadohata document the oppressing and pathetic conditions of each ethnic group, as is often the case in ethnic or racial-based fiction. The focal point of their tales, however, is not so much the oppressed experiences *per se* as the perseverance and hard work of these ethnic people who are becoming American. These Americans of Asian heritage or descent have gone through hard times with other Americans, and they have contributed to the construction of America as well. As Chinese Americans contributed in construction of the transcontinental railroads, so Japanese Americans served in the army during World War II and transformed the desert area in Poston into rich farmland (Kadohata, *Weedflower* 260). Drawing from their

experience as Asian Americans in the historical milieu, Yep and Kadohata underscore the efforts and perseverance of each group, which helps ethnic groups claim a more equitable power structure. Both writers also capture an ethnic spirit that helps children of each group become empowered not to give in to American situations unfavorable to people of Asian descent. Their shared focal point validates these marginalized Americans' efforts to create a public place for Asian Americans. It also, of course, helps their work to gain a wider readership and helps them find their niche in society—as multicultural children's literature should.

CHAPTER II

DISENCHANTMENT WITH AMERICA IN *A STEP FROM HEAVEN* AND *BEACON HILL BOYS*

The Myth of the Model Minority

From around the world the United States is hailed as a land of equal opportunity. Since its inception, Asian people have been coming to this country with the belief that their hard work would make them successful. They labored long to forge their claim to, and carve their niche in, American society. In response, American society eventually seemed to give them credit for their blood, sweat, and tears by labelling them as the model minority.[1] The image of the model minority buttresses the logic of the United States as the land of equal opportunity, where people, regardless of their race and ethnicity, can achieve their American Dream. The label of the model minority, however, singles out Asian Americans, and thus sets them apart from the rest of the American people. This stereotype in turn perpetuates an ideology that Asian Americans are expected to live up to while simultaneously reinforcing their status as *other*. As long as they are recognized as *other*, their endeavors to adjust to the society (*i.e.*, claim their place as Americans) are most likely to end up with no substantial results. It is, then, no wonder that Asian American writers have dismantled the concept of the model minority and at the same time cast doubt on the notion of the land of equal opportunity.

[1] There is a plethora of studies on Asian Americans as a model minority group. Respected scholars in social psychology Sapna Cheryan and Galen Bodenhausen, for example, assert in *The Routledge Companion to Race and Ethnicity* that "the term [model minority] has been used most often to describe Asian Americans, a group seen as having attained educational and financial success relative to other immigrant groups" (173).

Clearly, I am concerned with Asian American writers' challenge to and/or skepticism toward the land of equal opportunity and toward the model minority ideal. For that purpose, this chapter analyzes the Korean American writer An Na's *A Step from Heaven* (2001) and the Japanese American writer Ken Mochizuki's *Beacon Hill Boys* (2002). Through these texts, both writers challenge the image of great America as they unfold the idea of the model minority as a myth. Drawing on firsthand experiences, An Na narrates the story of a Korean family who has recently immigrated to America, and Mochizuki recounts the story of a Japanese family who has lived in this land through three generations. Both texts work to disturb Americans' self-complacent perspective toward Asian Americans, more specifically, the perception that Asian Americans are ethnic minorities that enjoy full advantages of this land of equal opportunity and achieve a comparatively high socioeconomic status. Moreover, these authors illustrate sufferings and discrimination that American children of Asian heritage inevitably experience in the United States regardless of their tenure here.

To provide a context for the discussion of the model minority, a brief explanation of the history of this term is in order. Prior to the establishment of the model minority narrative, the periods of World War II and the Cold War produced the precursors to the narrative.[2] Throughout these wars, the image of Asian Americans began to change into 'aliens eligible to citizenship' from 'perpetual foreigner.' The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which banned Chinese laborers from immigrating into the US and denied

[2] For more information, see Chapter 11 in Min Zhou (2009); K. Scott Wong, "From Pariah to Paragon: Shifting Images of Chinese Americans during World War II." Also see Robert G. Lee, *Orientals: Asian Americans in Popular Culture.* Temple UP, 1999.

naturalization rights to the extant immigrants (as I discussed in Chapter I), and the following Acts on Asian immigrants, as Yvonne Walter demonstrates in "Asian Americans and American Immigration and Naturalization Policy," legally categorized the immigrants as aliens ineligible for citizenship. Along with the institutional discrimination against people of Asian descent, their visible physical characteristics mark them as perpetual foreigners (Takaki 124). When entering World War II, the United States found itself allied with China and dependent on support from the countries in Asia that were fighting against the imperialist ambition of Japan. The Second World War, argues Robert G. Lee, "was a watershed event for Asian Americans" beginning to unravel the yellow peril myth (146). On December 22, 1941, *Time* and *Life* magazines released articles titled "How to Tell Your Friends [people of Chinese descent] from the Japs," and "How to Tell Japs from the Chinese" respectively. People of Asian descent, at least the Chinese people, were projected as friends whereas people of Japanese descent, as the derogative term *Japs* indicates, were perceived as foes. The year of 1943 saw the repeal of the Chinese exclusion statutes and the permission for Chinese immigrants' application for citizenship (S. Wong 165). Scott Wong pinpoints that one of the most striking aspects of the repeal movement was pushed by a group of pro-Chinese white Americans with "the absence of a strong Chinese immigrant or Chinese American presence in the public campaign" (165-67). As S. Wong's aptly titled "From Pariah to Paragon: Shifting Images of Chinese Americans during World War II" explains, Chinese participation in the war served to greatly improve the image of Asian Americans in general.

The image of Asian Americans seemed to continuously improve in a positive way as the US government kept finding itself in need of global assistance from major Asian

nations (*e.g.*, China during WW II, and Japan when China later turned to communism). During the period of the Cold War the status of Chinese Americans was replaced by that of Japanese Americans as Japan became an ally with America and China turned to Communism. R. Lee, in his book chapter "The Cold War Origins of the Model Minority Myth," demonstrates that ethnic liberalism and the racial logic of the Cold War, through legal processes and mass media, helped to elevate the image of Asian Americans to promising ethnic groups for assimilation into the mainstream society. Furthermore, the social milieu of the civil rights movement paved the way for the concrete image of Asian Americans as a model minority. In 1966, two success stories regarding Asian Americans were released from the *New York Times Magazine* and the *U.S. News and World Report* (respectively), eleven months apart.[3] One article lauded Japanese Americans for their remarkable achievements, and the other did the same for Chinese Americans. Both stories underscore the two ethnic groups' successes without federal support and ascribe their success to their ethnic culture that emphasizes hard work and morality (Osajima 449-50). This image, as Min Zhou mentions, "marked a significant departure from the traditional depiction of Asian immigrants and their descendants in the media" (*Contemporary* 231) that used to stereotype Chinese immigrants, the metonym of Asian Americans, as "alien," "dangerous," "docile," and "dirty" by whites since the 1850s onward (Chou and Feagin 6). The two articles embody and indoctrinate in the minds of mainstream Americans the image of a model minority for assimilation into the United States.

[3] For the whole articles, see Petersen, William. "Success Story, Japanese American Style." *New York Times Magazine* New York Times, 9 Jan. 1966: 20-21, 36, 38, 40-41, 43. Also see "Success Story of One Minority in the U.S." *U.S. News and World Report* 26 Dec. 1966: 73-78.

The mainstream's high praise of Asian Americans, however, has little to do with the actual achievement of the minority groups. The model minority concept fit the requirements of the socio-historical context. Keith Osajima, an ethnic studies professor, articulates that the success stories in the magazines "constituted a direct critique of Blacks who sought relief through federally supported social programs" (450). The *New York Times Magazine* emphasized the Japanese Americans' success without federal support: "By any criteria of good citizenship that we choose, the Japanese Americans are better than any other group in our society, including native-born white. They have established this remarkable record, moreover, by their own almost totally unaided effort." A similar narrative was repeated eleven months later when it acclaimed Chinese Americans instead of Japanese Americans. The *U.S. News and World Report* purposely adds that "At a time when it is being proposed that hundreds of billions be spent to uplift Negroes and other minorities, the nation's 300,000 Chinese Americans are moving ahead on their own, with no help from anyone else." It is easy to discern how the image of a model minority was pitted against African Americans in order to silence their claim for federal support.

Besides making African Americans' claim for federal aid appear baseless, the success stories contribute to conveying the dominant ideology of this society—that is, America as a land of fairness and opportunity. The model minority concept, Youngsuk Chae aptly pinpoints, "has concealed the racist reality and unequal power structure that have prevented minorities from improving themselves and also help the US to justify its myth as a 'land of promise'" (26). Similar reproaches are echoed in sociologists Lucie

Cheng and Philip Q. Yang who summarize several criticisms surrounding the portrayal of Asian Americans as a model minority:

> [T]he model minority label is . . . objectionable for its political implications, which cast America as a fair, open society and a real land of opportunity, where minorities can make it as long as they work hard. The concept that some minorities could be a "model" thus counters the black militant claim that America is fundamentally a racist society, structured to keep minorities in a subordinate position. By extolling Asian Americans as a model minority . . . the established world hopes to set a standard of behavior for other minorities. (464)

The established world, of course, goes beyond hoping and into wielding its power through the model minority image. Rosalind S. Chou and Joe R. Feagin situate the image within the frame of America's systemic racism and contend that "the dominant white group and its elite stand in a position of such power that they can rate groups of color socially and assign them 'grades' on a type of 'minority report card.' Whites thus give certain Asian American groups a 'model minority' rating while other groups of color receive lower marks as 'problem minorities'" (19). The model minority concept, then, contributes to reinforcing the dominant white power structure by giving it a right to regulate what is desirable or undesirable. This concept did not represent the voice of Asian Americans at all. In the 1960s when the previously mentioned articles were published, Asian Americans were so victimized by racial discrimination that they could not raise their voice. People of Japanese descent dared not speak out due to their recent release from the concentration camps, and people of Chinese descent also remained silent

since China became communist in 1949. Ironically enough, during the time of the Cold War, the silence of Asian Americans put them in a situation where they inadvertently became a testament for the dominant ideology of white Americans and were used against African Americans' claim for federal support.

The political abuse of the model minority narrative was not limited to dealing with racial problems in the United States. The US government also utilized the narrative to propagandize its image toward the world in the era of the Cold War. The elevation of Asian Americans, R. Lee argues, "sent a message to the Third World, especially to Asia where the United States was engaged in increasingly fierce struggles with nationalist and communist insurgencies, that the United States was a liberal democratic state where people of color could enjoy equal rights and upward mobility" (146). The representation of Asian Americans as an exemplary minority group did not originate from mainstream society's genuine appreciation for the success of Asian Americans against the racial hierarchy. Conversely, the model minority concept was manipulated to contain the red menace of communism in the world as well as to maintain the status quo by silencing the other minorities' claim for federal support.

In addition to its political and ideological implications, the model minority image has also continually assisted in demarcating Asian Americans as *other*. The image connects Asian Americans' successful lives to their *assumed* intrinsic ethnic values. As Claire Jean Kim, a professor in Asian American Studies, aptly articulates,

> By lumping all Asian descent groups together and attributing certain distinctively 'Asian' cultural values to them (including, importantly, political passivity or docility), the model minority myth sets Asian

> Americans apart as a distinct racial-cultural 'other.' Asian Americans are making it, the myth tells us, but they remain exotically different from Whites. Beneath the veneer of praise, the model minority myth subtly ostracizes Asian Americans. (45)

When Asian Americans lead their lives without resorting to federal support or disturbing the established society, they are welcomed as *them*, not as *us*. The model minority image, to some degree, renders Asian Americans positive to the mind of the public; however, the perspective of the image was basically conceived by Eurocentric Americans for their strategic discourse. The image spreads the myth that Asian Americans enjoy an equal status in the mainstream society, and it shrouds the fact that they are used to control other minority groups and to reinforce white supremacy structures.

It is not surprising, then, that Asian American writers delve into the image of a model minority to search for their genuine identity and their status in the States. For those purposes, An Na and Mochizuki recount Asian American family stories with focus on the teen protagonists' struggles. While developing the families' struggles to assimilate into the mainstream society, the authors disclose the deception contained in the concepts of the land of equal opportunity by interrogating the model minority label. Both writers, thereby, lead readers to realize not only that the image of a model minority hinders Asian American children from forming their integrated identities, but also that the land of equal opportunity is not equally open to Asian Americans.

***A Step from Heaven* (2001)**

In *A Step from Heaven,* An Na narrates the struggle and half-success immigration story of a contemporary Korean American family through the eyes of the protagonist

Young Ju. Her story starts with a four-year-old girl and follows her until she becomes a teenager who sets off to college. Her family emigrates from South Korea into the United States dreaming of a better life, especially a better education for children. The protagonist thinks America is heaven but gradually senses that it is a step from heaven; moreover, she finds that the step is extremely steep. The family, as other immigrant families often do, faces multilayered, challenging situations in adjusting to the new country, including a language barrier, conflicts between the two distinctive cultures as well as between generations, and social demotion. The protagonist cannot help observing her father becoming abusive to the family and resorting to alcoholism, but she eventually musters her courage to report Father to the police. The family falls apart when Father returns to Korea. The rest of the family moves on to their unfulfilled future in the United States.

In order to convey the struggles and hardships the Korean immigrants face in the process of adjusting to their foreign situation, as is often the case with ethnic or racial works, An Na effectively adopts the literary device of defamiliarization. From the outset of this tale, An Na throws in Korean words with no explanation nor italics, such as *Apa, Uhmma*, *Halmoni*, *Harabugi, Gomo,* "Dad, Mom, Grandma, Grandpa, and Aunt," respectively, in order to intentionally puzzle and challenge readers. Only after they put forth determined efforts to read several pages do they come to figure out the meanings of these words. An Na utilizes defamiliarization in a playful and intriguing way. The author, as critic Monica Chiu points out, transcribes the English language phonetically as Young Ju hears it (173). During the first day in school the protagonist, who is not familiar with the English language, hears the teacher announce, "Ah ri cas, ca mo ve he" and "Tees es

Yung"; the class responds "Weh ko um" (31).[4] This phonetic translation requires some efforts from readers; they are compelled to read aloud and come to figure out the meanings of "All right class, come over here," "This is Young," and "Welcome," respectively.[5] An Na, in an interview, mentions that "Just as immigrants struggle to make sense of English, I wanted English readers to struggle with Korean . . . It was also a way to demonstrate Young Ju's transition from thinking predominantly in her native tongue to adopting English" (qtd. in Angel 53). The author's strategy works as intended; the readers not only experience Young Ju's strangeness to the English language vicariously yet empathetically, but also measure with a more genuine interest how much the immigrant family has to struggle with the language barrier.

In addition to linguistic defamiliarization, An Na utilizes a first-person child focalizer in describing Young Ju's hardship *vis-à-vis* immigrant life and in projecting the distance and fear she feels about the US culture. Her first sip of Coke, which is encouraged by the adults, hurts: "This drink bites the inside on my mouth and throat like swallowing tiny fish bones" (28). The protagonist tastes it just after being informed by her uncle that Mi Gook (Korean counterpart for *The United States*) is not a heaven but a step from heaven. This drink embodies her first bitter experience of this new host

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[4] An Na. *A Step from Heaven*; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

[5] In the 2006 article "The Cultural Production of Asian American Young Adults in the Novels of Marie G. Lee, An Na, and Doris Jones Yang," Professor at the University of New Hampshire Monica Chiu also pays attention to An Na's technique of the protagonist's acquiring the English language. Through further analysis of the text, she argues that An Na illustrates the protagonist's frustration and confusion with language acquisition "by adeptly and intelligently uncovering English language idiosyncrasies that can be as nonsensical to native speakers as to nonnative ones" (173-74). Chiu's argument reveals how An Na makes her text more authentic than the other authors who usually follow a stereotypical approach on immigrants' English such as Asian immigrants' pronunciation interjected with the pronunciation of their native language. Similar to Chiu's argument, I contend An Na changes the frame of the description on the immigrants' English from how strange immigrant pronunciation sounds to the ear of people in the host country to how strange and illogical the English language sounds to Asian immigrants.

country, which also foreshadows hardships in immigrant life. When she first meets the American teacher, the girl even experiences fear: "A tall ahjimma [a Korean address frequently applied to a mature woman], even taller than Apa, comes over. She has a big white cloud sitting on top of her head like it is hair . . . My teacher looks like the old witch who ate bad children for dinner" (30-31). By adopting the strategy of the first-person child focalizer who expresses the US culture from a newly arrived immigrant's perspective, An Na leads readers to have more awareness and empathy with the challenging adjustment process immigrants typically go through. In some cases, they successfully adjust, and in other cases, they do not.

With the help of defamiliarization, An Na also sheds light on a marginalized Korean immigrant family that is a little distanced from the image of the model minority. Historically, Korean immigration can be traced back to early in the twentieth century, but most Korean Americans came to the States after the 1965 Immigration Act. "The majority of post-1965 Korean immigrants," as Belinda Y. Louie, a professor at University of Washington, mentions, "were middle-class professionals or white-collar office workers" (179). Instead of telling a story typical of the majority of Korean Americans, however, An Na narrates the story of an immigrant family with a low socio-economic status and focuses on Young Ju, a girl who is in a more vulnerable situation but who ultimately gains at least half-success. This story of the immigrant family challenges the public perception of Asian immigrants, especially their successful immigrant life. Although many Korean immigrants lead successful lives in the United States, it is doubtful that their success comes directly from reaping the benefits of the land of equal opportunity.

A strong correlation between Korean immigrants' success and their pre-immigrant socioeconomic status is frequently addressed. Jennifer Lee explains that a large portion of Korean immigrants age 25 and over "held white-collar and professional positions in Korea" (280). These Korean immigrants with middle class backgrounds held much higher educational attainment as well. Jie Zong and Jeanne Batalova, on the webpage of the Migration Policy Institute, report that "In 2013, 52 percent of Korean immigrants (ages 25 and over) had a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 28 percent of the total US immigrant population and 30 percent of the native-born population." These socioeconomic backgrounds lay the foundation of Korean immigrants' successful assimilation in the host country. In his article "A Cohort Analysis of Korean Immigrants Class Backgrounds and Socioeconomic Status in the United States," Professor In-Jin Yoon at Korea University in South Korea demonstrates that the immigrants' socioeconomic status in their homeland plays a crucial role in assimilation in the mainstream society. He compared two cohorts of Korean immigrants, the pre-1976 immigrants and the post-1976 immigrants. The two cohort groups were separated by the year 1976, when the US immigrant policy changed to discourage occupational and professional immigration. Yoon concludes that the pre-1976 immigrants came from the middle class in South Korea and successfully became assimilated to the US mainstream society while maintaining their pre-immigrant socioeconomic status whereas the post-1976 immigrants with diverse backgrounds, including immigrants with lower socio-economic status, have tended to maintain similar socioeconomic status in the host country (74-79). The model minority, thus, illuminates only the successful Asian

Americans while ignoring the less fortunate people of Asian descent. An Na holds a lamp over the hidden sufferings and failures of these Korean immigrants.

An Na describes how vulnerable the family is in immigrant life, especially through Young Ju's father. Under the strong Confucian moral codes, Korean men are identified as the head of the family. Young Ju's parents as new immigrants, as Ann Angel indicates, "found themselves laboring at menial jobs for long hours at low wages, conquering overwhelming language barriers, and beleaguered with religious and cultural disparity" (52). Amid these challenges, the family begins to fall apart due to Apa's maladjustment. Apa's suffering starts with his social demotion with immigration. He has no choice but to acquiesce to his wife's working outside of the home, which is against his patriarchal mindset. He also works so hard that he has "yellow callused palms from gardening all day and then cleaning up the lawyers' offices at night" (78). Their work, however, does not lift the family out of poverty. As he becomes more frustrated when he is not able to provide his family with a comfortable life, he begins to chastise his wife and yell, "Look at us now . . . I had to take a second job picking up those lawyers' trash like some beggar. In Korea at least I had my own boat. What was so bad about that life?" (36). According to Sociologist Helen Kim, immigrant families undergo "dramatic changes in gender arrangements as Korean men have witnessed losses in their economic power upon arrival and have increasingly depended on their wives' earnings" (249-30). With migration to the United States, Apa's moral base is uprooted and so is his power over his family.

Most Korean immigrants after the 1965 Act came to the United States hoping that they would lead a better life. Throughout the history of Korean immigration, education is

counted as one of the main causes for South Koreans to immigrate to the U.S (Yoon 1997; Min 2011). [6] In his third research report on Korean immigration, Pyong Gap Min analyzes data and statistics and concludes that "Better opportunity for their children's college education and their own graduate education is now the most important motivation for Koreans' decisions to immigrate to the United States" ("Immigration" 203). It should not be surprising that in comparison to the decency of their pre-immigrant life, these immigrants feel exceedingly miserable when their hard work around the clock does not bring about improvement of their life condition in the host country. This psychological misery is more intense to a Korean man who identifies himself as the head of a family and feels compelled to provide a better life for the family. This is the case with Apa.

The immigrant life in America not only makes Apa incapable of being the sole breadwinner, but also erodes his authority and power over his children. An Na symbolically describes the episode through Apa's visit to the immigration office where he attempts to upgrade Young Ju's green card. Before they enter the immigration office, "Apa leads. I [Young Ju] stay a step behind"; but once they enter the office where English empowers Young Ju more than Apa, "he starts to follow [Young Ju]" (84). His status as man and Apa, which was so ingrained in Korean patriarchal society, plunges. In a survey of Korean American juvenile literature, Belinda Y. Louie focuses on Korean men's lack of adjustment mechanisms; relishing the traditional values and customs of his

[6] Koreans, South or North, have a strong desire for higher education. This desire, Yoon explains, "resulted from the fact that education has been the single viable avenue of upward social and economic mobility in Korean society" (67). If one graduates from a prestigious university, s/he will easily find a meaningful occupation in Korean society. Accordingly, there is fierce competition for admission to prestigious universities. As a result, middle-class Korean families often opt to immigrate to the US in order to secure a second chance for their children or to provide a less stressful education environment.

homeland, a Korean man who immigrated to the United States collapses "the foundation of his identity" by "losing control of his business, losing control of his family, and losing control of his authority of being husband and father" (184-5). Such collapse happens to Apa, and he becomes disillusioned with the immigrant life. In the United States, where he can hardly find any connection, Apa resorts to alcoholism and violence, which accelerates his virtual ruin as an immigrant; the more despondent he becomes over his loss of status, and thereby his identity, the more violent he becomes toward his family. He ultimately has to return to Korea by himself with his American dream utterly shattered.

Along with Apa's failure to cope with a new situation, it is worth considering Young Ju's constant lies, which to some degree are rooted in her immigrant life. Her insecurity in a precarious immigrant life compels her to wear a mask whenever she wishes to be somebody else, and her social isolation ensures that her lies are not perceived. One day, for example, she announces in front of the class that her brother is dead. She apparently resents Apa's favoritism for his son; she wishes to be an only child in the family so that she can gain all the attention and love from both parents. By telling her childish wish as if it were a matter of fact, she expects her teacher and classmates to pay attention to her, through which she clearly wants to compensate for the lack of parental love. She cleverly lies to the class that is less likely to discover the lie. This instance shows how she instinctively exploits her social isolation. Her lie works perfectly because the class does not know about her family situation at all.

The poverty the family suffers also makes the protagonist shameful of her situation and more self-conscious of her ethnicity. She narrates that

> More than once Uhmma's pennies have saved the weekly groceries. I am embarrassed when Uhmma puts down a million pennies and the clerk snarls as she counts out the change. I inch away from Uhmma, pretend I am not that woman's daughter. Not a poor Oriental who saves pennies like gold. (77)

Although Young Ju appreciates her mother's frugality, she, as a teenager, does not feel free from the ordinary Americans' treatment of poor Orientals as evidenced by the clerk's attitude. Even to her best and only friend Amanda, the protagonist does not feel free to confide her poverty. When Amanda's parents give her a ride home, she gets out of the car in front of her pretend house in a rich area where she notices that "the air seems fresher up here . . . The lawns, mowed smooth and flat as a new-made bed, gleam a strange, poisonous green" (109). Young Ju's insecurity motivates her to camouflage her poor, immigrant status with lies; moreover, the family's isolation within the host society keeps her lies concealed.

Even though the immigrant situation drives Young Ju to lie, An Na manages to endow the protagonist with agency and determination for her dream, and consequently, she fits the stereotype of the model minority. Amid such a dire situation as abusive Apa and persistent poverty, the protagonist triumphantly becomes an award winner for having the highest-grade point average in her ninth-grade. It is still due to Young Ju's endeavors that the family stays afloat when Uhmma unfairly blames her for the collapse of the family since Apa returns to Korea; she takes care of the remaining family members while pursuing her higher education. Her efforts finally pay off; Uhmma decides to start her new life without her husband, and Young Ju obtains a college scholarship. The

protagonist's struggles and work ethic reveal her as an epitome of the model minority: her academic success is remarkable considering her situation; her behaviors are an example to follow; despite the family's poverty and her father's abuse, she works hard for both school and family rather than hanging around with friends or gangs; moreover, she works part-time and eventually chips in to buy a little house. This Korean girl, without any governmental support, makes her immigrant life successful. She looks like an admirable immigrant who proves that anyone with indefatigable willpower can realize one's dream in the land of equal opportunity.

Her achievement in America, however, is poignant and qualified. The family gains a house, but they lose Apa. Their adjustment to the US society is not as successful as it seems to be. Chiu does not read *A Step from Heaven* as an Asian American success story; instead, the critic comments that this text "reference[s] the continued, often hidden, pain of immigrant struggles" (178). The protagonist and her family are rarely rewarded for their hardships in the new country, and the hardships they face seem endless. They lose one family member for good: Apa's presence is removed from the family picture; even worse, Apa remains in a state of half-life given that he is separated from his family and must return to Korea where no financial capital remains. As a result, the family's prosperity with Apa's permanent absence is no more than partial success.

This sort of qualified success is also the case with Young Ju's academic triumphs. Her admirable scholarly performance is a result of her prudent choice to compensate for her isolation. This girl seldom socializes with friends in school or through other social organizations excepting her only school friend Amanda. The protagonist feels shrunken and overwhelmed by the mainstream society wherein her family lives as a poor minority.

Straddled with the two cultures (traditional Korean at home and not-fully-familiar American in public), and trapped in between her penny-pinching family and the surrounding, materially affluent community, the Korean teenager feels compelled to find ways to shield her self-esteem and bolster her reputation. This need manifests in her academic success; this choice is circumstantially convenient given her parents' high expectation for academic achievement, her willpower, her family's meager monetary capital, and the abundance of time afforded by her social isolation.

Academic success, Lawrence Yep confesses in his memoir *The Lost Garden*, "[is] a means of earning respect" for many Americans with Asian ethnic markers (84). In that light, Asian Americans' academic performance serves as a survival mechanism for negotiating a place within an indifferent mainstream society. Their excellence in school is not fully a ramification of Asian immigrants taking advantage of American opportunity. Young Ju has a desperate *need* to exert herself—to secure her place in this new country. It is, then, sadly ironic that survival struggles such as those An Na's protagonist suffer can serve as fodder for the model minority myth that is used to beautify America's reputation as the land of equal opportunity.

At risk in these desperate struggles is her ethnic identity. The more acculturated to America Young Ju becomes, the more evident this is. Her attraction to American culture starts earlier in the family's immigration life. One of the earliest evidences is when she tries to comfort her young brother Joon who is crying after his balloon pops. Contrary to Uhmma, who is tired of his tantrum and raises her knuckles to thump him, the protagonist "walk[s] over to Joon. Use[s] [her] best English teacher voice. The way Mrs. Russo talks to crybaby kids who fall down on the playground. 'Joon, please do not cry. You are a big

boy now'" (53). Interestingly enough, she imitates not what she has observed from her parents, but instead what she has observed from her American English teacher. Obviously, she emulates and internalizes an American style.

Young Ju's Americanization speeds up as she acquires English. When Apa tells her to speak in Korean, the girl muses, "I do not understand why I have to speak Korean at home so I will not forget where I come from. Why did we move to America if I am to speak English only at school? But I do not argue with Apa" (55). As her family begins to fall apart, the Korean immigrant girl is at high risk of losing her ethnic identity. Meena Khorana, defining a family as nurturer in ethnic fiction, argues that "the family preserves and propagates cultural pride and values" (52), and that adolescents suffer "the cultural deprivation . . . when the family fails to give ethnic roots to its members" (54). Young Ju's parents are unable to pursue their original purpose of immigration to the United States: better education for their children with a less stressful family environment. They can hardly have quality family time. Their tight work schedule makes it impossible for them to have physical time as well as psychological room for their children. Instead, the family, especially Apa, causes his daughter's conflict and leads her to feel much more attracted to an American family (*i.e.*, a representative of the US culture).

> After the chatter of the Doyles, the quiet at the dinner table sounds strange to my ears. I eat my rice and wonder why my parents can't speak or joke with the ease of Mr. and Mrs. Doyle. Why can't Apa barbecue and ask Uhmma if she needs any help? Or Uhmma tease Apa and then lightly kiss him on the cheek to make sure he knows she was only kidding? (110)

Contrary to her wish, this girl usually endures high tension and repression when she has dinner with her parents. Her desires, when contrasted with her reality, subtly undermine her Korean identity.

At the end of this text, the protagonist reveals that she loses her Korean identity considerably through her confession that "A few of the characters look familiar, but I never learned to read and write Korean" (148). Symbolically, in proportion with her proficiency in the English language, she loses the Korean language, a tool to nourish her with ethnic culture. Immigrant life compels her to elide ethnic identity when her family affects her negatively—*e.g.*, poverty, and violence, as well as physically sticking-out. As time rolls on, Young Ju's Korean origin ceases to play a part in forging her identity. That loss of ethnic identity can be interpreted as an inevitable survival tactic in mainstream American society. Without agile assimilation, she might well end up as a failure—like her father. Eventually, the immigrant girl moves toward a promising future; however, the protagonist's academic achievement contains some bitterness and poignancy in that her success is a desperate choice arising from the socially dire straits of obtaining a place in the host society. Through the immigration story of the Korean girl's family, An Na reveals the oft hidden painful choices and losses that are obfuscated by the myth of the model minority. In doing so, she also leads readers to become skeptical toward the image of America as the land of equal opportunity.

***Beacon Hill Boys* (2002)**

Similar to An Na, Japanese American writer Ken Mochizuki demystifies America as a land of equal opportunity. In *Beacon Hill Boys*, Mochizuki focuses on the experience of Japanese Americans in 1972 when they were highly praised as the model minority.

The author interrogates the concept of the model minority through the perspective of the protagonist Dan Inagaki, a Japanese American high school junior in Seattle. Dan plays a role of an insider informer about the Japanese community in terms of the model minority narrative while searching for his identity. During his journey for identity, he becomes doubly discontented with both family and school. At home, Dan's parents remain silent about their incarceration in camps during World War II and compel him to silently follow in the footsteps of his brother Brad, who is a Stanford-bound star athlete and straight-A student. At school, when Dan raises his voice to reform the curriculum and form a student union for Asian American students, he faces deep-rooted discrimination toward Japanese Americans. He eventually makes up with his family, and his aspirations for obtaining Asian American students' public place in school remain partially fulfilled.

In securing their place as Japanese Americans in society, Mochizuki focuses on the experiences of sansei, "the third generation Japanese Americans," represented by Dan and his clique in the text. Mochizuki, as with many other Asian American authors, utilizes the literary device *familiarization*. The protagonist and his friends are depicted as typical American teenagers constantly searching for who they are. *Beacon Hill Boys*, as Gillian Engberg comments, deals with "universal experience of male adolescences" (595). As other ordinary American teenagers in the early 1970s would, the sansei teenagers enjoy pop-music and Bergman movies but are worried about their possible draft for the Vietnam War. Another element that makes them universal boys in the mainstream society is that they are distant from the public's assumption on Asian Americans, from the image of a model minority that makes them in some way exotic. These American boys of Japanese descent show more interest in hanging out together

than in academic achievement. Like other American teenagers, Dan and his gang are looking for a place they can feel comfortable, where they are accepted as they are:

> I'd known Frank, Eddie, and Jerry almost all my life, and come to think of it, I couldn't remember a time when we weren't searching for someplace where we would be somebodies, where our families weren't constantly on our cases, where we would be given credit for what we *could do*, rather than endlessly criticized for what we couldn't. (27)[7]

Their sense of insecurity is quite commonly witnessed in other teenagers in the US society. Such teen insecurity comes intrinsically from their liminal status between childhood and adulthood. These teenagers of Japanese descent are in search of their identity. Were it not for their ethnicity, the sansei teenagers would seem to be ordinary American teenagers.

It is the society's attitude toward their ethnicity that makes the sansei teenagers more insecure. The teenagers can hardly have a solid sense of belonging to society. No matter how successfully they are acculturated to the mainstream society, and no matter how long they have lived in this land, Asian Americans are frequently deprived of the sense of belonging to this society. Their noticeable ethnic marker automatically relegates them to a marginalized minority position. At an interview with Gillian Engberg, Mochizuki, whose family has been living in the US through three generations, narrates he has been quite often treated as Japanese: "I've never been to Japan . . . I don't speak Japanese, but to this day people will say to me, 'You speak English really well,' or they'll

[7] Mochizuki, Ken. *Beacon Hill Boys*; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

ask, ‘Where are you from? And I’ll say, ‘Seattle,’ and they’ll say, ‘No, where are you really from?’” (8). People with Asian ethnic markers in the US are familiar with such questions or comments. “These remarks,” as anthropologist Yasuko I. Takezawa aptly pinpoints, “indicate, at least to Japanese Americans, many Americans’ ignorance of the difference between Americans of Japanese descent and Japanese nationals and their ‘alien’ status in America even after more than three generations” (310). The young sansei in *Beacon Hill Boys*, through their conversations, illuminate how pop-culture, even after three generations, reinforces such cultural alienation. Eddie complains, “The Chicanos got Santana and Malo, Americans got Redbone, the blacks have everybody, white folks have everybody else . . . who do we got?” (101). The pop-culture area does not provide these teenagers of Asian descent with songs or singers to which or whom they can easily connect themselves. Mochizuki conveys the double insecurity the sansei teenagers feel due to their visible ethnicity as well as their life stage that is neither child nor adult.

By presenting the sansei teenagers in *Beacon Hill Boys* as familiar and yet isolated, Mochizuki demonstrates how Japanese Americans in the 1970s were being acculturated to mainstream society value and culture. The Japanese American experience of the concentration camps drives these people to conform more to the so-called norm of Americanization than any other ethnic group. Cynthia Kadohata, who herself is a sansei writer, remarks that the incarceration experience had Japanese Americans lose their ethnic culture and history while trying to assimilate into the mainstream society (as discussed in Chapter I). Since being released from the camps, the internees remained silent regarding their unspeakable experiences during World War II. This is exemplified by the parents of the protagonist Dan. Curious about this silenced history, Dan, when in

eighth-grade, asks about the camp for the first time. Each of the parents tries to avoid a direct answer, only to say "*Shikataganai*," meaning "it cannot be helped." He vaguely senses the topic is taboo to ask his parents' generation and that he should figure it out on his own (41-42). Why did the former internee Americans remain silent? They want to bury their helpless and traumatic past—the past experiences that humiliated them and crushed their human dignity. R. Lee borrows the social psychologists' view and explains the situation thusly: the response of Japanese Americans who experienced the concentration camps works in parallel with that of rape or other physical violation. They showed post-traumatic stress syndrome including anger, resentment, self-doubt, and guilt (152). With all these mixed feelings, they desire to be seamlessly interwoven into America while letting bygones be bygones. The released internees try to prove themselves Americans through hard work and silence.

Their hard work with no complaints helps some people of Japanese descent to become a successfully assimilable ethnic group and thus exemplary Americans. Success stories of Japanese Americans are especially related to the third generation like Dan and his brother Brad in the text. The majority of the sansei, according to Takezawa, were born between the late 1940s and the early 1960s, and they, due to the lack of ethnic enclaves, "had more open social association than their parents' generation with other ethnic groups . . . encountered very largely by racially mixed schools and neighborhood environments" (301). The sansei, Takezawa continues to argue, "came to adopt American values and mores to a much greater extent than the Nisei [second generation Japanese Americans]" (301). One facet of the sansei teenagers is epitomized by Brad. He represents the image of the model minority: as a straight-A student he is a baseball star

and football star with clean-cut looks and heading to Stanford medical school (4). Mochizuki, however, reveals his disapproval of this model minority character. By filtering Brad through Dan's lens, the author critically portrays Brad's Americanization: "Brad told teachers there was nothing wrong with being called "Oriental" when a lot of Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino students I knew at Hoover were fighting for "Asian." He did not mind being called a "Jap" in the North End if that meant he could hang out with his girlfriend's friends" (19). The model teenager aspires to belong to the dominant white society so desperately that he is not bothered by such derogatory addresses as "Oriental" or "Jap." As long as he is accepted as one of them, he has a lenient attitude toward racial remarks by the mainstream society. One criterion for his being accepted is to socialize with his white girlfriend and her friends. Dan and his gang compare him to a banana: "Yellow on the outside, white on the inside" (19). It means that Brad is a white American in Asian clothing. Brad consciously puts himself in line with other white Americans while carelessly ignoring the other Asian students' efforts and values. It is through this presentation of Brad that Mochizuki casts the concept of the model minority into doubt.

Through Brad's assimilation into mainstream white society, Mochizuki implies that becoming a model minority can include an erasure of Japanese identity. Brad goes beyond his permissive attitude and into erasing whatever Japanese heritage is handed down to him. He suggests that "What's our Japanese middle names? I'm Toshiro. Dan's what? Kenji? And Steve's what? Ichiro? Maybe it would've been best if we didn't have anything to do with Japan anymore. Maybe we should've changed—or at least shortened—our last name" (109). It is common for Asian American parents to give their children ethnic-based middle names as a way of paying homage to their ethnic ancestry

and encouraging their children to remember their ethnic roots. Cleveland Evans, the Nebraska-based onomastician, states that immigrants from East Asian countries show a tendency to give an anglicized first name for children to help them fit into the mainstream society, "with any names from their original culture being put in the middle name position" (39). Brad, however, tries to take off these names; moreover, he wants to erase the ethnic tint from their family name that clearly indicates their Japanese origin. To Brad, who desires to assimilate himself into the mainstream American society, whatever is related to Japan is counted as a stumbling block for completing his total Americanization.

Besides ignoring his ethnic heritage, this so-called model minority teenager acquiesces to the injustice conducted by the US government. Brad puts so much effort into being accepted by the mainstream society that he pays little attention to the past of his parents. To Dan's question on the concentration camps, he replies that "the U.S. government did what it had to do, and we're good Americans and did what we were told. You think our government doesn't know what it's doing, stupid?" (42). Brad blindly accepts the belief and values of the dominant culture and adjusts himself to them. This image of the model minority, as R. Lee argues, is "a result of stoic patience, political obedience, and self-improvement" (145). It is the combination of his parents' silence, his compliance with the white-led ideology, and his endeavors in school that make Brad a model minority student. Mochizuki's representation of Brad implies that conforming to the ideal of the model minority can suppress one's ethnicity and at the same time demand acquiescence to the mainstream society.

The concept of the model minority also does not portray the whole community of Japanese Americans as it actually is. Mochizuki reveals the concept is not entirely true by shedding light on individuals and families shadowed by the image. None of Dan's clique fit the image of the model minority. Jerry Ito is so disobedient and mischievous that he "[is] jettisoned as a loss" (21). Although he lives with his parents, "his folks [deal] with him as they [do] with anything unpleasant: Ignore it, and hope it goes away" (21). The Japanese community deems that he "mar[s] the image of the nice, quiet, studious Oriental" (21). In this community, which is deeply concerned about how its image is perceived by the mainstream society, Jerry is dealt with as no more than a thing. Frank and Kathy, the Ishimoto's children, are not agreeable with the community either; they live not only in poverty, an unimaginable condition for the model minority, but also in disgrace due to their parents' divorce. The protagonist narrates that "[their] parents had committed the Japanese American unthinkable: They got divorced. What kind of image was that to project to the rest of America? And to my parents' generation, kids of divorced parents were damaged goods" (17). The community tries to stick to the model minority ideal and seldom considers people who do not live within it. Nonetheless, the model minority ideal, as Zhou and Gatewood pinpoint, represents a one-sided picture of the Japanese American community, "obscuring the plight of those who are not doing well and thus further absolving the broader society of any responsibility for redress" (29). The community in the text does not count as its members those who do not live up to the model minority image and thus abdicates its responsibility for them. The presentation of a darker side of the Japanese community undermines the image of the model minority and demonstrates the image as a stereotype of Japanese Americans.

At the opposite extreme from Brad, the epitome of the model minority, is Dan. By presenting Dan as the protagonist, Mochizuki endows him with agency. That frequently causes a conflict with the family members, especially with his father, who habitually compares him with his brother Brad. Disappointed with his father's favoritism for Brad, the protagonist feels like an unwanted son and reacts: "why don't you trade me in for another kid who has *character*?" (4). The relationship between them deteriorates. Beleaguered with his father's consistent words of advice, Dan cries, "Don't lecture *me* about guts! . . . I know where I learned to be a wimp. Like father, like son. And you guys goin' into those camps—a bunch of scared sheep" (150). Father in anger responds "We always had to work twice as hard as the next guy; our buddies died in the war to get *hakujin* [Japanese word for white people] to accept us. And here you go with your messing around, making us look bad" (151). Considering Japanese Americans' vulnerability living as minorities in American society, especially their experience of the incarceration caused from their ethnicity, Father pushes Dan to suit the model minority. Donna Nagata, through the online *Densho Encyclopedia*, regarding the internees' psychological side, explains that many sansei, who "carried feelings of sadness and anger about their parents' unspoken pain [regarding the camp experiences] . . . were also affected by the Niseis' efforts to blend into mainstream America and protect their children . . . [and therefore] experienced pressure to excel in academics and careers, and avoided doing anything that might draw negative attention." When Dan, along with his friends, fails to meet parental expectations to pursue the model minority image, he is alienated from family and community. By presenting the rebellious protagonist who chooses resistance rather than silence, Mochizuki refuses to acquiesce to the image.

Mochizuki does not end up with rejection of the model minority ideal. Instead, the author delineates mainstream society's duplicity. The tendency is to praise Japanese Americans as a model minority but to show racial discrimination toward them when they break their silence. Away from the family that drives him to put on the straightjacket of a model minority, Dan attempts to find a way to figure out his cultural identity in school. The school seems to be an ideal place that has actualized equality among ethnic groups: "a third black, a third white, a third Asian—the way it had always been at every school on Beacon Hill . . . No need for forced busing at Hoover—equality had been achieved. We were all oppressed equally just by being students at that school" (13). Drawing on the experiences of his own high school, Seattle's Cleveland High School in the early 1970s, Mochizuki mentions in the *Seattle Times* "it was the perfect place and time for a teenager figuring out who he was in the midst of a country figuring itself out" (Large). The school's demographically equal balance among ethnic groups encourages the protagonist to publicly initiate his desire to include Japanese American history as well as empower, through unionization, Asian American students. While putting his desire for cultural identity into action, however, he experiences overt racism. When asking his history teacher about the Japanese internment camps, Dan is responded to with racially discriminative remarks:

> He peered at me over the tops of his bifocals and grunted, "I don't care about any Japanese history. We only teach American history around here."
>
> But these "camps" happened in the U.S. And people in the camps were American citizens. Didn't that make it American history?

> "Look, son, I have a few months to cover over two hundred years. I only cover what's important." (43)

The response of the teacher divulges that the racially-balanced composition in this school is a mere veneer of the racially stratified society. The thin layer easily breaks when Dan takes action as an Asian American student. The evenly balanced racial composition of the school does not necessarily engender genuine transformation of the white Americans' attitudes toward ethnic minorities—especially Japanese Americans. The reply also indicates that racial discrimination is deep and wide. The teacher shows his carelessness for that issue although he is expected to be more aware of American history, including Japanese Americans, than ordinary people. He reveals himself as a mere member of American intelligentsias who enjoy white privilege. Dismissed as trivial are Japanese Americans' contributions to the US history such as their military service during WWII and their acquiescent life in the camps during and after that war. Such dismissive attitudes toward Asian Americans, including Japanese Americans, has them still struggling for acceptance and their public place in the US society.

The teacher's attitude is echoed by Dan's classmate, which also provides clear evidences of American society's deeply-rooted discrimination toward Asian Americans. During comparative American cultures class, in response to the explanation that there is no evidence to suspect Americans of Japanese ancestry of espionage or of being participants in sabotage against the United States during World War II, one of Dan's classmates, Greg Moore, bluntly chimes in: "I think we were right in movin' 'em all out. They could've been a bunch of spies. How were we supposed to know? They bombed Pearl Harbor; what'd they expect?" (46). Greg's response is more serious in that he

represents a generation to come that still perceives Asian Americans completely as *other*. He differentiates them from the rest of the Americans using the pronouns of "us" and "them." To the mainstream society, Japanese Americans are still perceived as *other*; moreover, overt racial discrimination arises when they try not to remain silent about injustices of the government toward people of Japanese descent.

Silence is not the option for Dan. Amid prejudice and discrimination, the protagonist consistently takes action to search for his ethnic identity. Dan refuses to remain a quiet student with all A's; instead, he finds room for improvement in his school and asks for more inclusion through changes in the curriculum and library books. His activism comes to disturb the school that is "stagnated in a still pond" (14). When he initiates adding the comparative American cultures course to the curriculum, he is accused of being an "agitator" by the history teacher although the course is added to the school curriculum when "the black student union [gets] in the act" (43). What matters to Dan is for Asian American students to take a public position at least in school where the demographic composition already reflects equality of whites, blacks, and Asians. That is why he refuses to become a quiet model minority student and begins to take vociferous actions. His high-profile actions cause him to meet racism, false accusations, and familial disapproval (Brad would never do such things). Mochizuki presents Dan as the anti-image of the model minority by portraying him as a lone fighter against dominant American culture as well as self-complacent Japanese Americans in his community—an agitator indeed.

The protagonist's effort to find his cultural heritage, which causes the strong disapproval of his father, at last serves as a catalyst to hear the former internees'

viewpoint on their silence. The internees wish that their next generation will mingle with the mainstream society rather than being singled out due to their ethnicity. By conforming to the Eurocentric social structure and internalizing the idea of the model minority, they suggest that children should become exemplary Japanese Americans even if it might cost their ethnic heritage. They do not want their offspring to become agitators. Mochizuki, through the mouth of Dan's father, the former internee, conveys Japanese Americans' undercurrent of fear living in America:

> [W]hen you [Dan] were doing all that rabble-rousing—uh, activism stuff – in your school, me and Mom were telling you to put a lid on it out of concern of what might happen to you in the future. Because, *we know* what happens to folks that stick out, who are looked at as different. Like I tell you, 'The nail that sticks up the highest gets hit the hardest.' Well, I do know this: I never would've had the guts to be one of those nails. (177-78)

This confession reveals a more profound reason for their assimilation wishes—heart-wrenching parental love. Japanese Americans, to some degree, have no choice but to assimilate to Eurocentric society in order to prevent a second relocation considering that "what has happened in the past," as Historian Roger Daniels argues, "could happen again" (308). Through their lives, the Japanese detainees were forced to pay the price of their difference in various forms of discrimination ranging from being treated as invisible to being sent to the camps. What they learned through the camp life is to equip themselves with a defense mechanism—acquiescence. They rarely mention their past, especially their experiences of the incarceration camps; instead, they put their efforts into becoming American. It behooves them to hope their children will not take actions that

make them stand out, which might lead them to the same fate of discrimination and tribulation. At this moment, Mochizuki clearly indicates that the parents' efforts for assimilation and desire for the model minority are their mechanism to cope with discrimination occurring in this land of equal opportunity. As a result, Mochizuki conveys that equal opportunity in the United States is not always true for all individuals, at least not ethnic minorities, and that the model minority ideal is a subversive myth.

Father's confession, on the other hand, serves to dissolve the tension between father and Dan. Although Dan takes actions in order to know who he is, especially as a Japanese American, he does not have solid confidence about himself until he is approved by his father. Not until that approval does Dan enunciate his full name: Daniel Kenji Inagaki. Prior to that, Dan's name is introduced fragmentarily. This moment has a symbolic meaning in that Dan recognizes himself as synthesized Japanese American. As the full name indicates, Dan is an American of Japanese ancestry who does not need to assimilate entirely into American society via negation; instead, he lives in this society with pride in his Japanese heritage.

Dan's private conflict with his father is resolved, but Asian Americans still have a glass ceiling. In the 2002 article "Incarceration of the Japanese Americans: A Sixty–Year Perspective," Daniels demonstrates that in times of crisis the US government has taken toward minorities the same strategies as it did to people of Japanese descent and concludes that "there are still huge inequities between whites and persons of color, and potentially explosive emotions exist in both the oppressing and the oppressed populations" (308). In the same year when *Beacon Hill* was published, 2002, Mochizuki also noticed that racial relationships, despite persistent efforts to improve them, were not

so different from the 1970s when his protagonist started to become aware of his Japanese heritage. As historical fiction does, Mochizuki's text describes the present inequality toward Asian Americans in a historical setting.

These two Asian American writers, then, An Na and Mochizuki, cast doubt over the widely accepted notion of America as a land of equal opportunity. Their doubts manifest in their literary criticisms of the image of the model minority which serves to support that notion by covering up the inequities and lack of opportunity for Asian Americans. In order to reveal the model minority as a myth, the two authors deploy similar strategies in that they shed light on how Asian Americans have been hidden by the image of the model minority. An Na challenges the myth through the description of the half-success immigration story of a Korean family who is pulled into the US by the image of great America but ends up falling apart. Mochizuki, on the other hand, portrays the side shadowed by the ideal of the model minority through the third-generation Japanese American teenagers who do not suit the model minority stereotypes. The sansei teenagers outside the model are isolated by both family and community. While describing these sansei teenagers searching for their identity, Mochizuki also reveals that Japanese Americans' efforts to live up to the myth of the model minority are their mechanism for survival in US society where difference is assumed as deficit. In that regard, An Na and Mochizuki do not glorify America as a land of equal opportunity. On the contrary, by discovering a family whose immigration is a partial success and by focusing on ordinary Asian American teenagers, An Na and Mochizuki give a wake-up call to Americans who are still self-complacent believers in America's generosity and openness. They lead

readers to feel uncomfortable when they discover unpleasant realties through their texts, realities that continue to lurk in contemporary American society.

CHAPTER III: ANTICIPATION FOR AMERICA IN *STANFORD WONG FLUNKS BIG-TIME* AND *PROJECT MULBERRY*

Asian Americans as Cultural Hybrids

It is inevitable that children of Asian descent, at some point in their life, find themselves on the fringe of American society. Along with the visible racial markers, their traditional cultures bring them into conflict with mainstream America. When their marginalized culture meets the dominant culture, these children find themselves in-between cultures. This liminal space faced by Asian American children, as sociologist Helen Kim argues, makes it a part of everyday life for them to produce a hybrid culture and identity by incorporating the two cultures (245). It is due to this situation that some Asian American authors start to focus on Asian Americans' dual identity as well as on their marginal status in America's racially hierarchical society. Naturally, these writers address racism, a prevalent theme in race-based literature. In dealing with it, however, they do not leave Asian American children fixed within the frame of racial stratification. Instead, they lead the children to a liminal space where they feel uncomfortable and unsettled, confused, contested, and different. Situated in this third space, to use critic Homi Bhabha's term, the children must continually negotiate their culturally hybrid identity as Asian Americans. It is through cultural hybridization that the authors anticipate a genuine multicultural society. Asian Americans, as cultural hybrids, possess the potential to change society; their dual identities and bi-cultural richness serve to reorient the tide of the mainstream and to disturb the existing racial pyramid. Asian American authors ultimately aspire to depict a realization, even if provisional, of a

society where hybrid cultural identity is perceived as strength, not as deficit or as not fully American.

This chapter explores Asian American protagonists' hybrid identity, the driving force to conceive a racially dynamic and democratic society. For that purpose, I analyze the Chinese American writer Lisa Yee's *Stanford Wong Flunks Big-Time* and the Korean American writer Linda Sue Park's *Project Mulberry* with a focus on culturally hybrid identity. In these texts, both writers anticipate a community in which Asian American children make an effort to have a sanguine relationship with other racial groups. While dealing with race tangentially, these authors tend to subsume the issue of racism just enough to ensure that the process of Asian American protagonists' negotiations regarding culturally hybrid identity and their active engagements in society is very much in the foreground. The children of Asian descent are thus depicted not as mere helpless, wretched racial objects, but as hybrid 'individuals with differential power and agency.'[1] In the process of coming to terms with their ethnic or racial traditional culture, the children come to look at themselves or society from a reflexive perspective of a marginalized group, a perspective hankering for social justice. Through their Asian American protagonists, the authors provide a brief glimpse of a community where the protagonists can create a niche while taking full advantage of their hybrid identities to

[1] The phrase comes from the subtitle "From Asian Pacific American Communities as Victim Paradigm to Differential Power and Agency" in Shirley Hune's 1995 article "Rethinking Race: Paradigm and Policy Formation." The well-known educator in Asian American Studies argues for new racial relations and addresses the phrase when redirecting the Asian Pacific community's relations in US society. I see Hune's redirection of racial relations eighteen years ago reflected in the texts I discuss.

challenge the existing racial structure and to invite dynamic relations among ethnic or racial groups.

The concept of hybridity is not new. Historically it emerged and developed along with other theoretical concepts such as syncretism, creolization, *mestizaje*, transculturation, and others, but the term *hybridity* is widely used owing to its inclusiveness. Sociologist Marwan M. Kraidy argues that the term "often encompasses the objects and processes" intended by similar terms (1). The terms *hybrid* or *hybridity*, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, appeared first in the field of biology in the early seventeenth century and spread to other fields. In the following centuries when interracial contacts became prevalent and common phenomena as a consequence of western imperialism, the term had a negative connotation inferring biological miscegenation. "These early speculations on the hybrid," Kraidy argues, "were chiefly concerned with the contamination of white Europeans by the races they colonized" (48). As a result, the word *hybridity* started to be used with derogatory connotations in biological discourses. Not until the twentieth century did the postcolonial theory refashion the term in a positive and complex way relating to culture and identity.

Prior to postcolonial theorists, W.E.B. Du Bois expressed the concept of hybridity more than eleven decades ago by articulating a black person's double consciousness. He emphasized his dual identities as black and as American in the white society. His oft-quoted passage conceptualizes "double consciousness":

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One

> ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (9)

Living as a Negro in the dominant white society, he senses his own double consciousness, which situates him in an ambivalent site of contention. He is black and simultaneously unequal to white people. This double consciousness can lead a black person to a vantage point because he can see himself from a different perspective, one free from racial discrimination. According to Judith R. Blau and Eric S. Brown, Du Bois's notion of double consciousness denotes that "between the white world and the black world, U.S. blacks must not internalize whites' attitudes but instead cultivate a reflexive perspective on *Twoness*" (44). It is in the feeling of "two-ness" in one dark body that black people, through forging hybridity, strive to gain a critical perspective by putting one foot in the black culture and the other in the mainstream culture. This double consciousness from African American experiences can be expanded to include other minority groups striving in the predominantly white US society.

Du Bois also used the term *double consciousness* to indicate African Americans' agency for transforming the racially stratified society. People with double consciousness are expected to be more than a mere mélange of the two cultures. DuBois introduces the term *veil* "as the color line that divides and separates and as an essential aspect of perceptions and communications between those divided" (Blau and Brown 44). African Americans, according to Du Bois, have agency to raise the veil that white people do not have: "Leaving . . . the white world, I have stepped within the Veil, raising it that you [white people] may view faintly its deeper recesses,—the meaning of its religion, the

passion of its human sorrow, and the struggle of its greater souls" (vi). He, as Blau and Brown pinpoint, implies that the privileged position of white people "constricts perceptions and social conscience" regarding racial discrimination (45). Du Bois further intones that in striving "to merge his double self into a better and truer self, . . . [h]e would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world" (3-4). African Americans with double consciousness come to see white society critically, which in turn serves to challenge and subvert the existing power structures. In other words, marginalized groups who experience double consciousness take subjectivity to understand themselves and the dominant white society and to anticipate a society that continuously takes forward steps toward social justice.

Nine decades and one year later, postcolonial critic Homi K. Bhabha theorized the concept *double consciousness* in socio-political contexts and contributed to its gaining popularity in academic discourses. Focusing on the contact zone of the colonizer and the colonized, Bhabha attempts to conceptualize hybrid identity in terms of cultural differences. He argues that:

> The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation. (2)

Cultural difference also leads the colonizer to construct his identity. The oppressor, as English professor in India Pramod K. Nayar explains, "establish[es] his identity by

positioning himself against and in opposition to the native" (26). Identities are neither fixed nor static; instead, they are in line with an ongoing negotiation as the result of a mutual relation of the two parties. Bhabha notes that the colonial encounter produces a culturally hybrid identity that has protean manifestations through continuous negotiation.

Fundamental to cultural hybrid identity is the third space. This space, Bhabha explains, "constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity for fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (37). It is also a cultural place, the critic goes on to note, "where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences" (218). That is McLaren's cultural imaginary (as discussed in the Introduction), "a space of cultural articulation that results from the collision of multiple strands of referential codes and sign systems" (67). This third space is not cohesive and is full of tension. From this space are produced culturally hybrid identities that are not in a stable form, but constantly in a state of becoming. He attempts to explain this notion by introducing different metaphors such as the beyond, interstices, in-between, stairwell, and bridge. Considering it in the context of globalization, Alex Frame and Paul Meredith state that "a third place . . . assumes . . . an organic and continuing interaction and adaptation . . . [and] is a productive and ambivalent space that engenders new possibilities that are not constrained by existing boundaries" (313-14). Put another way, the third space is a liminal place where two cultures have interplay with each other, negotiate relative meanings based on their cultural differences, and craft cultural hybridity while its ambivalence challenges the existing hierarchical system.

It is this ambivalence, then, that allows cultural hybridity to be subversive. Initially from the oppressed who strive to "negotiate stability for a fragile dual identity" (Iyall Smith 5), hybridization can serve to negate the colonizer's authority. Bhabha defines hybridity as "the construction of cultural authority within conditions of political antagonism or inequality" (58). Those oppressed conform to the authority to ensure their status and simultaneously transform it in order to maintain their traditional identity. Marwan Kraidy contends that Bhabha celebrates it as "a system of resistance by the colonized, as the contamination of imperial ideology, aesthetics, and identity by natives striking back at colonial domination" (58). In the process of keeping a distance from the oppressor's authority and power and of objectifying colonial discourse, "strategies of hybridization," Bhabha continues, "open up a space of negotiation" (58). Such negotiation as "neither assimilation nor collaboration," Bhabha argues, enables hybrid agency to emerge:

> Hybrid agencies find their voice in a dialectic that does not seek cultural supremacy or sovereignty. They deploy the partial culture from which they emerge to construct vision of community, and versions of historic memory, that give narrative form to the minority positions they occupy; the outside of the inside; the part in the whole. (58)

Bhabha accentuates hybridity as the outcome of negotiation, which is continuously intervened "without the redemptive rationality of sublation or transcendence" (26) by "the third space of enunciation" (37). Through the concept of hybridity, Bhabha not only reveals the power structure of society, but also pinpoints the mutual influence and development between the colonized and colonizer. Bhabha's concept of "the structure of

iteration" (26) through negotiation is expected to produce culturally hybridized people who make efforts toward a genuine multicultural society.

The contact zone where Asian culture meets the mainstream American culture contributes to creating just such a space for Asian American authors. Their in-between-ness, as Bhabha argues, "provide[s] the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood–singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (1-2). This "terrain" has been a typical trope in Asian American literature. The history of the United States, Qun Wang argues, displays that the double consciousness "phenomenon" is persistently relevant to millions of Americans' lives, especially to "those who struggle to identify their ontological and cultural relationship with both the mainstream culture as well as with their ethnic heritage" (89). He further demonstrates that double consciousness is prevalently experienced by Asian American characters in a large group of Asian American works. This experience raises the question of the characters' identities. On a close examination of three representative Chinese American authors' fiction,[2] Pilar Cuder-Domínguez and Sonia V. López argue that the recent fiction has a focus on Chinese American subjects who "have to position and define themselves as regards either the mainstream or their distinctive tradition" (24). The concept of double consciousness in Asian American works highlights the extent to which Asian Americans

[2] The critics examined three adult novels published in the mid-1990s: Aimée E. Liu's *Face* (1994), Amy Tan's *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995), and Shawn Wong's *American Knees* (1995). According to these authors' websites, Liu is mixed-race with an American grandmother and Chinese grandfather (Pine), Tan gained success through a series of her best-seller books including *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) (Tan), and Wong participated as one of editors in publishing *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* (1974), the first anthology in the field of Asian American Literature (Wong).

are continuously in the process of forming their culturally hybrid identities while mingling their traditional heritage, their American-ness, and their individuality.

Hybridity adds aesthetic quality to Asian American literature as well. Stuart H. D. Ching and Jann Pataray-Ching argue that Asian American authors conform to mainstream conventions in order to "gain access to publishing houses and become intelligible across cultural boundaries," whereas they revise a distinctive cultural and creative space in order to "maintain cultural integrity and achieve cultural empowerment" (123). Hybridity becomes intrinsic in Asian American literature. In relation to identity, hybridity is commonly expressed as Asian Americans' dual status. The fictional characters try to disown traditional heritage that causes conflict with the dominant culture, and they come to negotiate with the conflicting two cultures. Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong adopts a motif–*the double*–and argues that "the double [that] is symptomatic of a crisis in self-acceptance and self-knowledge . . . emerges as an external figure" (82). Labeling the double as racial shadow, she argues that the double can be considered in sociohistorical peculiarities relating to race in reading Asian American literature rather than in the universal human psyche conventionally applied to western literature. Wong's motif is founded in the Asian American child protagonists in the texts discussed here. The children meet their double, who leads them into a third space. Filled with confusion, conflict, tension, dissonance, and negotiation, the children of Asian descent, through "the structure of iteration," are being culturally hybridized with the potential to change a society. By producing culturally hybridized Asian American characters, the authors make their peculiar experiences audible to the mainstream society and simultaneously picture a society where cultural hybrids are recognized as savvy, not as lacking in American-ness.

***Stanford Wong Flunks Big-Time* (2005)**

In *Stanford Wong Flunks Big-Time*, Lisa Yee captures the struggles of a sixth-grade boy who experiences double consciousness as an American of Chinese ancestry. Through the eyes of the protagonist Stanford Wong, who inhabits the liminal space between mainstream and minority ethnic cultures, the author depicts the forging of cultural hybridity as process, as well as her anticipation toward a multicultural society. Stanford has developed his hybrid identity while going through a chaotic summer—failing English, lying to his friends, and worrying about his parents' marriage bond. What is worse, his grandmother Yin-Yin leaves for an assisted-living facility. He has no choice but to retake English in the summer, being tutored by Millicent Min, a socially awkward child prodigy who is also of Chinese ancestry. In addition, he desperately desires to hide this summer tutelage from his friends. Failure in English threatens his place on the A-team basketball squad. Along with his teachers, Stanford's father expects his son to be a stereotypical Chinese American student, a high academic achiever, while ignoring Stanford's athletic talent. Stanford, on the other hand, crushes on Emily Ember, the only friend of Millicent. Stanford and Millicent agree to tell Emily that he is tutoring Millicent because he does not want Emily to know he is flunking English, and Millicent does not want to reveal her academic acumen. Despite his pretentions and disguises, Stanford manages to pass the summer course, to regain friendship, and to receive his father's approval for basketball. More importantly, Stanford is forging his hybrid identity throughout conflicts within himself, between friends and father, and through reconciliation with his Chinese heritage.

Yee cleverly depicts the protagonist's experience as Chinese American while appealing to a broad readership through description of his typical experience as a preteen American boy. Yee, like the other authors discussed in this dissertation, adopts the strategy of *familiarization,* using a journal format and a focus on Stanford's American-ness. That makes not only this text approachable to the readers, whether they belong to a minority group or a majority group, but also its themes persuasive to them. The familiar journal format narrows the distance between the protagonist of Chinese descent and general readers. The confessional tone of a journal makes it much easier for readers to have empathy with the protagonist as if they were his only bona fide friend and privileged to listen to his confession much earlier than Stanford's friends in the text. In one of the initial journal entries, Stanford confides how much basketball means to him, especially to his identity. "Basketball's big in Rancho Rosetta. Even before I started middle school last year, people knew who I was. I was the leading scorer for my school's B-Team, breaking the league record. I got my picture in the newspaper. I as unstoppable. Everyone's forgotten that I used to be a nobody. Everyone but me and Marley" (10).[3] This entry appears just after he fails English, which entails a high risk of taking away his position as a stellar basketball player. His confession conveys his worst fear of becoming a nobody again. That fear instantly grips the readers because the same sort of punitive failure could happen to them. The journal format with the confessional tone engages readers to listen to the protagonist while eliminating the distance of the racial divide. In

[3] Yee, Lisa. *Stanford Wong Flunks Big-Time*; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

other words, readers from any racial group can go beyond the demarcation among racial groups and connect themselves to this text.

Besides the journal format, Yee's accentuating Stanford's American-ness makes this text familiar by seemingly obfuscating his two-ness, *i.e.*, an American who has distinctive Chinese heritage. The author, intentionally or unintentionally, challenges the existing racial hierarchy when she positions the protagonist from a minority group into the dominant society; Stanford's race is pushed into the background whereas his American-ness is foregrounded. This boy is raised in a fully Americanized family and becomes fully Americanized himself. He grows up with American pop culture such as *Star Trek*. He and Grandmother Yin-Yin together enjoy watching an American quiz show and an American drama like *Top Cop*. His mother enjoys dancing in an American style. Without the family name, Father's high expectation for academic achievement, and *dim sum* (a Chinese food), it would be hard to find any Chinese tint in this family. The Wongs are depicted as successfully acculturated into mainstream American society where their racial differences seem to no longer be a major issue. Yee presents a society wherein a racial minority group appears to be accepted without being recognized as *others*. This presentation of society makes it possible for readers, especially those of European descent, to read this Chinese American experience without pang of consciousness as dominant groups who have colonized minority groups.

Against the familiar background of the journal format and the protagonist's American-ness, Yee, however, depicts the peculiar experiences of the Chinese American boy, the process of his cultural hybridization. He is forging a culturally hybrid identity through the reconciliation with his Chinese heritage which he wishes to disown and keep

a distance from. Not until failing English does Stanford particularly need to clash with his heritage. That incident initiates him into a liminal space. He feels different and disconnected from friends who appear to enjoy summer without worries. Out of embarrassment and worries about what people think of him, the protagonist fabricates an A grade in that subject to his friends. From the perspective of others, he starts to look at himself. The protagonist, as American of Chinese lineage, is not expected to fail. The discrepancy between real and fabricated selves leads him to a third space where his reality as a failure stands against people's high expectation of him. That confuses and embarrasses him, and on the other hand makes him aware of his double consciousness as a Chinese descendant living in dominant white society.

The protagonist becomes more aware of his difference through his teachers' attitude toward him. The teachers play a part in reminding him of who he is. They have the same expectation of him as they do of his older sister Sarah who moves on to Stanford University. One journal entry tells how uncomfortable he feels toward the teachers' expectation in a humorous tone:

> "Stanford Wong? Are you Sarah Wong's little brother?" my teachers always ask. Eventually, when they find out that I am nothing like my sister, I can sense their disappointment. Sarah skipped a grade. So it only seems right that I flunk a grade to balance things out. Hey, maybe I'll be in *Ripley's Believe It or Not!* The headline will read: STANFORD WONG, THE ONLY STUPID CHINESE KID IN AMERICA! (52)

The teachers commit inadvertent racism. They are disappointed with the protagonist's inability to live up to their expectation because he is, like his sister, a student of Chinese

descent. In other words, they blindly follow the stereotype of Chinese American students constructed by the mainstream society. Sarah and Stanford are treated as types, not as individuals. The teachers inadvertently spill their internalized racism toward people of Chinese heritage by essentializing the racial group. That reminds Stanford of what he is expected to be. Yee, as Loretta Gaffney aptly indicates, "directly challenges stereotypes of [Chinese] Americans" and highlights Stanford as a common boy (207). The experiences of the American boy of Chinese descent lead him to muse on his genuine identity amid vagueness, ambivalence, and confusion from his dual status.

In developing his identity, Stanford exposes an ambivalent attitude, a mixture of repulsion and attraction toward Chinese culture. That is realized typically in Stanford's relation to Millicent Min. She has Chinese features that the protagonist abhors and wants to avoid but cannot get rid of. Stanford perceives her as "a freaky geek-a-zoid genius, totally useless" (40). When finding out Millicent is going to tutor him in English, he utters in despair, "Maybe I should just slit my wrists now and get it over with" and offers his perspective on her: No one likes the "poster girl for Chinese geekdom" or cares about her, and she is "[his] mortal enemy" (49-50). She is the last person with whom Stanford wants to be seen publicly: "Just being seen with a kid who carries a briefcase [Millicent] is enough to catapult me right back into the nobody category" (51). The protagonist even mentions that she is one of the two "most disgusting things in the world" (76) and hopes that "she catches on fire" (83). Being a child prodigy of Chinese descent, she serves as the double of Stanford. Critic Sau-ling Wong asserts that Asian Americans go through a bitter necessity, *i.e*., "having to contend with total devaluation of their Asian ethnicity." The ultimate continuation of this bitter necessity is that "to become accessible to a racist

society, one must first reject an integral part of oneself" (77). Stanford projects undesirable 'Asian-ness' outward onto the double (Millicent Min), and he comes to disown and distance his ethnic heritage. Chinese heritage signified in Millicent is perceived as awkward and shameful in the mainstream society. He thus rejects it by maintaining distance from her.

Despite Stanford's attempt to avoid Millicent, their life is closely intertwined. She, as part of Stanford's consciousness, exerts a hold over him (S. C. Wong 82). The cultural continuity through their mingled life, as Rachel Endo asserts, "connote[s] the protagonist's unconscious longing for a sense of belonging and place that is rooted in an abstract notion of Chinese identity" (245). Their grandmothers' friendship has kept Stanford and Millicent together since they were little (49). He frequently needs to work with her, and without her acquiescence, he could not keep telling crucial lies to his friends, such as convincing them that he received an A in English. Moreover, their schemes are sometimes beneficial to Millicent too. For instance, Stanford has a crush on Emily, and she is Millicent's only friend. Because they both desire to maintain their friendships with Emily, they agree upon a charade: Stanford pretends to tutor Millicent. This collaboration makes him feel that "Sometimes she's [Millicent] okay" (99). His attitude toward her becomes ambiguous. This is apparent when he reminisces about a past episode: Millicent took revenge publicly on Digger, who continuously harassed her in their grade school. He remarks, "I have never told Millicent this, but I sort of admire her for what she did to him when we were little. It takes an awful lot of courage to stand up to Digger" (100). This episode foreshadows Stanford's standing up to Digger later in the text. Furthermore, Millicent ultimately saves Stanford from the risk of returning to a

nobody by helping him pass English. It is due to Millicent, who projects the Chinese part of Stanford, that he remains on the A-team of basketball. Stanford and Millicent, then, are building a symbiotic relationship in dealing with their two-ness. His ambiguous attitude and relation to her indicates that the protagonist is situated in a third space where contrast, confusion and ambiguity are contending with each other.

While ambivalent in his attitude toward his double, Millicent, he is also compelled to negotiate his identity under rather direct pressures from home—more directly from his father. He finds himself in conflict with his father over grades. The son wants to become fully American whereas the father tries to maintain Chinese tradition. Stanford does strive for recognition from his father. His efforts, however, are not the traditional way of being a straight-A student, but rather an unexpected way of becoming a basketball player. Endo argues that basketball "is a way for Stanford to put aside personal insecurities about his body image and popularity" (243). Basketball signifies American culture given that it originated from and is enjoyed most in the United States. Being a basketball player is another way for the protagonist to be acculturated into the mainstream society.

To be a basketball player, Stanford musters courage as he tacitly confronts his father's expectation. When their different wishes collide, the protagonist negotiates their differences. Stanford's flunking English makes his father, who devalues basketball, assume that basketball hinders his son's academic achievement. Stanford manages to pass English through summer class. Still, Father chides, "If you put half the effort into your schoolwork that you put into basketball, you'd be at the head of your class" (253). On this point, Stanford squarely confronts father:

"Well, grades aren't that important," I tell him.

"Really now?"

"Yeah, not for what I'm going to be when I grow up."

"And what's that, Stanford?"

"I'm going to be myself, only older."

"Ha-ha, very funny," my father snorts. "You need to get good grades. This is not some sort of a joke. In this family we don't flunk."

"Then maybe I don't belong in this family." (253)

His father reflects a typical Chinese parental sentiment. Chinese parents, Min Zhou explains, "tend to think (also tend to make their children believe) that their children can all get A's in their tests in school if they are disciplined and hardworking" ("Social" 325). Against Father's Chinese sentiment, the protagonist announces who he is and who he wants to be. Rather than trying to blindly fulfill his father's expectations, Stanford is forging his identity on his own through conflict and interrogations. He constructs his subjectivity: he dares to say that he will be himself against his father; yet, he works hard and passes English to prove to himself that he can, not to mention remaining on the A-team basketball squad (254). Yee shows Father's Chinese sentiment in contrast to his son's subjectivity. Stanford is forging his culturally hybrid identity by finding the interface between Chinese and American cultures.

Stanford's hybrid identity makes it possible for him to reconcile with his Chinese heritage and to take the reins of his life. He is able to look at Chinese Americans, especially those who are victims in the power structure, through the lens of empathy. The protagonist comes to terms with his double by rescuing Millicent who is known as a nerd

with incredible social naiveté. On a fiesta day, she is in danger of falling prey to Digger. He owes revenge to her and intends to humiliate her by demonstrating publicly that she cannot even dance. At this moment, Stanford heads to the dance floor and rescues her. The journal entry on that day recounts this incident:

> Millicent looks at me. I can tell she's scared. To both our surprise, I hold out my hand to her. She hesitates and I am afraid she is going to start crying.
>
> "It's okay, Millicent," I assure her. "It's okay."
>
> Her body slumps. She takes my hand and I give it a small squeeze to let her know I am on her side. I turn to Digger. "Get lost, loser. Millie knows how to dance, she just doesn't want to dance with you." (257)

This is a striking contrast with the second-grade Stanford. At that time, despite Digger's misbehaviors that made Millicent almost cry, the younger Stanford would abandon her even though he felt bad for her (99). Additionally, Stanford hated to be connected to Millicent. Merely being present with such a socially awkward genius publicly, he assumes, could be detrimental to his social life. At this moment, however, he is changed: the protagonist rescues and dances with her in public. Experiencing alienation and the fear of being ridiculed helps him empathize with her when she is being ridiculed for her nerdy smartness for academics and her equally absurd clumsiness in socializing. Despite the potential risk of standing up to Digger, who knows Stanford lied to his friends all summer, the protagonist defends Millicent, whom he now recognizes as a fellow Chinese American kid struggling to fit into American mainstream society. In that sense,

Stanford's hybrid identity goes beyond being a mere suture for his split consciousness and becomes empowered with transformative agency.

Once Stanford, with his emerging hybrid identity, accepts Millicent, Chinese heritage becomes signified differently to him. He used to hide his Chinese heritage from the public mainly because of the exoticism that most non-Chinese Americans perceive. When Yin-Yin encourages and gives him a jade pendant with a Chinese story to comfort him over his failure in English, Stanford reluctantly receives it and hangs it *inside* his shirt. His initial protest that boys do not wear necklaces (9) does not sound valid considering necklaces are not exclusively for girls. The protest is nothing but an excuse against the jade pendant that he perceives as too tainted by its association with Chinese culture. The pendant, however, miraculously seems to work for him: he starts to gain his place as somebody in school the moment he begins wearing it. Still, the protagonist doesn't acknowledge the presence of the necklace until he develops his hybridized identity. Once that identity develops, the Chinese pendant is neither weird nor shameful any more. It is transformed into a miraculous amulet. Stanford thus hands the pendant to Emily when she desperately needs encouragement: "'It brought me good luck for many years,' I tell her as I unclasp it. 'Now I want you to have it'" (282). His shamefulness over his Chinese heritage is transformed into pride and power that the protagonist shares with those who need it.

Similarly, the typical Chinese food *dim sum* embodies the protagonist's maturity through the experience of his double consciousness, which in turn provides what the author thinks is a better society. Out of fear from being ostracized over the food, Stanford cuts the connection to it in public places: "Every day during the school year Yin-Yin

would make dim sum for my lunch. Every day I'd throw it away. It's not that I don't like Yin-Yin's dim sum—I love it. But it would be suicide to be seen at school with weird-looking food" (51). Outside the Chinese enclave, the Chinese dish looks as weird to him as it would to the mainstream society. Since, early in the text, the protagonist wants to erase his Chinese heritage in public places, *dim sum* is excluded from public association. Even at home, the other family members do not value or care about preserving this culinary manifestation of ethnicity. Stanford's grandmother Yin-Yin wishes to pass on the recipe of her *dim sum* to the family, but Stanford's auntie "has shown no interest in dim sum," and his mother also shows reluctance, responding, "Thank you, but not today" (89). To the family members as well, the food is too Chinese to fully fit into American society.

The dish *dim sum*, however, serves as a catalyst to connect people across the boundary of race.[4] In a situation wherein Yin-Yin's recipe for *dim sum* is in danger of being forgotten, Yee narratively concocts a way to salvage it. In her assisted-living facility, Grandmother finds Ramon, the cook, to transmit her recipe through. He has no Chinese background, but he loves *dim sum*. Yin-Yin evaluates him as "the perfect person to carry on [her] legacy," and adds that "He's a fine cook on his own, but with my coaching he's been flourishing" (250). On International Food Festival Day, the Wong's

[4] It is worth noting that nowhere in the text does the author specify the race of the fictional characters except for the protagonist's and Millicent Min's families. The society in the text, however, is not composed of solely Americans of Chinese descent, but of diverse people as evidenced by such an occasion as International Food Festival Day. In one interview posted online, Yee explains that the Chinese American protagonist just happens because of the author's affinity with that ethnicity, "not because of any ethnic agenda." On the surface level, Yee seems to depict a race free community. I do not think that the author assumes that racism no longer exists in American society, but rather that she is more interested in conceiving of a genuine multicultural society than focalizing a racially stratified society.

family mistakes *dim sum* made by Ramon for one by Yin-Yin. The cook learns the recipe so perfectly that the family cannot tell the one from the other. Thus, Yin-Yin's dim sum comes to represent a cross-cultural product. While originating from Yin-Yin's traditional Chinese recipe, it is prepared by Ramon, who has no Chinese ancestry. This cultural exchange inspires Stanford to appreciate his Chinese heritage and his identity as hybrid. Yee, through Stanford's evolving perspective on dim sum, indicates that people's racial heritage is to be celebrated and preserved, instead of being perceived as exotic and shameful. All the while, the author unfolds her anticipation of a society where Chinese Americans interact with other people across races or ethnicities and without racial discrimination. Endo aptly points out that Yee's text reflects "a growing desire among many Americans to move toward a post-racial discourse where race supposedly no longer 'matters' in identities and relationship" (243). Yee visualizes a society where cultural encounter among races or ethnicities is enjoyable and productive, as Ramon is flourishing with Yin-Yin's coaching, and as Stanford's hybrid identity enables him to see his traditional culture from a reflexive and empathic perspectives.

Project Mulberry (2005)

Linda Sue Park's *Project Mulberry* figures hybrid identity through a Korean American girl named Julia Song. This seventh-grade protagonist thinks that Korean heritage does not fit into American society, but she is bound up in that heritage. Julia's Korean background makes her face several conflicting situations. *Kimchee*, a fermented, and rather pungent, vegetable staple in Korea, causes embarrassing reactions from her friends, yet also serves as a catalyst for her and Patrick becoming best friends. When Julia and Patrick are thinking up subject for the state fair, Julia's mother suggests raising

silkworms. Patrick loves the idea whereas Julia reluctantly accepts it with the assumption that the idea is too Korean. The process of raising silkworms leads them to several problems such as finding mulberry leaves, the sole food silkworms eat. The problem is solved thanks to Dr. Dixon, an older African American neighbor, with a mulberry tree. Julia comes to consider racism while watching her mother's and Mr. Dixon's attitude toward each ethnic group. As she comes to appreciate her Korean background, and as she grows aware of racism from the perspectives of both victimizer and victim, Julia grows into her culturally hybrid identity in the space between cultures.

Park throws a net for a broad readership through the employment of an Asian American child protagonist focalizer in tandem with the literary device *familiarization*. The text starts with the sentence: "Patrick and I became friends because of a vegetable" (1). Friendship between them runs mainly through the text. Almost all reviewers mention this theme: Barbara Scotto states that as the story develops, the two characters "negotiate the ups and downs of their friendship" (135); while Bonnie L. Raasch also comments that the fluctuation of their friendship "will hit home for any middle school student" (66). Into this major theme are woven big issues, as Hazel Rochman indicates, such as "conservation, prejudice, patriotism, biology, and more," without swamping the story (1079). These diverse issues, shown through the eyes of the protagonist, dissolve Julia's otherness as American of Korean ancestry. The author depicts Julia and her family as typical Americans. It is worth noting that without Julia's self-consciousness of her Korean heritage, readers could hardly focus on her otherness. The parents are also acculturated into American society although they are first generation immigrants. They have no language barrier, nor do they stick to Korean culture except for food. Unlike the

father in *Stanford Wong Flunks in Big-Time*, Julia's father does not force their children to become what Asian American students are expected to be, such as academic high-achievers. The family name Song is also rarely mentioned, which helps readers recognize Julia and her family as American.

From the foundation of familiarization, Park employs a combination of strategies in the narrative form of the text, which parallels the cultural hybrid identity of Julia. The author makes herself a character in the text. Aside from the main storyline about raising silkworms, she intersperses a recurring dialogue after every chapter between herself and the protagonist Julia. The story inside the story includes the author's writing process of this text and her actual story. This combination form drew attention from many book reviewers. Beth Kephart evaluates it as "engaging plots," and Bonnie L. Raasch as "a unique writing strategy" for providing readers with information behind the main narrative (66). What is more important in these vignettes, however, is to reveal the mutual influence between the author and her fictional prodigy. David Richardson aptly pinpoints that "Park skillfully chronicles the relationship authors have with their main characters while maintaining the flow of the narration" (28). Julia steps outside of the main narrative and expresses her wishes and complaints, and the author listens to her. While attractive to readers, this unusual narrative strategy demonstrates what hybridity is like: the negotiation continues between author and protagonist, resulting in a mutual dependency in the composition of this text. Thus, Park inserts another layer of hybridization into her text, one that allows her an alternative means of displaying the way that Julia develops her hybrid identity and takes action for the realization of a multicultural community.

While inviting and preparing readers for hybridity, Park depicts the protagonist's double consciousness as American of Korean descent. Julia has an ambivalent attitude toward Korean culture. She tries to maintain distance from her Korean heritage because of some embarrassing experiences she had as a result of it, such as with the Korean dish *kimchee*. Korean people have *kimchee* with every meal. It is such a staple that those who do not like the dish would be teased as not being real Koreans, just as Julia's father teases her at the beginning of the book. As she grows up, Julia comes to dislike this dish. On the surface, she attributes it to *kimchee*'s spiciness. Under the surface, however, her wish to avoid the dish is ascribed to her friends' response to it. Recalling a friend's response to the smell of kimchee as "Eww? What's that smell?", Julia confesses, "I'd never noticed it. Smells are funny that way—they can sort of disappear if you live with them all the time. But Sarah was so grossed out that I was really embarrassed" (2).[5] On another occasion, her friends "stop dead in their tracks and grab their noses" and insist upon playing outside because *kimchee* makes Julia's house unbearably stinky (2-3). It is in these moments when Julia senses how her Korean heritage creates difference, and such experiences with *kimchee* reinforce her sensitivity to this difference. Moreover, the difference drives her to humiliation and alienation *vis-à-vis* her friends.

The pungent smell of *kimchee* alone does not initiate the protagonist's wish to disown her Korean heritage. Park captures Julia's struggle with living as a Korean descendent in a dominant white society. On the first school day after moving to Plainfield, where Julia's family are the only Koreans, a group of students yelled "Chinka-

[5] Park, Linda Sue. *Project Mulberry*; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

chinka-Chinaman" at her at the playground (29). This is a racial slur that levels all Asians as Chinese without considering their differences. This experience haunts Julia as a nightmare she struggles to forget, and she writes that "It made me feel really bad inside—so bad that I hated thinking about it. And, of course, the more I tried not to think about it, the more I thought about it. I was glad when that memory started to fade, and it hardly came up anymore" (29). A series of experiences relating to her Korean heritage upset her to such an extent that she tries to avoid the heritage that others view as weird and abnormal. She "want[s to be] a nice, normal, All-American" person (30). Korean heritage, Julia assumes, is too exotic or weird for her to fit into the mainstream society. Park's protagonist, whose Korean background makes her stand out negatively in her American upbringing, is positioned, then, in the liminal space between Korean and American cultures.

Nonetheless, while trying to deny her Korean heritage, Julia cannot help but to also be favorable toward it. Park describes Julia's unconscious favor for her Korean heritage through the protagonist's friendship with Patrick, who triggers her revaluation of that heritage. In this sense, he serves as a physical representation of her double figure in that he, as Ralph Tymms asserts, represents "a figment of the mind, to which one attributes the promptings of the unconscious self, now dissociated from the conscious personality" (qtd. in S. C. Wong 82). Julia and Patrick become friends because his initial response to *kimchee* starts with "Whoa . . . It smells great!" and he falls in love with *kimchee*. Julia observes that "Whenever he eats dinner with us, my mom puts one bowl of kimchee on the table for the family and gives Patrick a whole private bowl for himself. He eats it in huge mouthfuls, sometimes without even adding any rice. I can hardly stand

to watch him" (5). Patrick's love for this Korean dish surprises Julia, who is so embarrassed by the smell of *kimchee* that she stops eating it. The dish not only connects them as best friends but reconnects Julia to her ethnic culture as well. Patrick serves to mirror her oppressed ethnic self. By presenting the double figure Patrick, Park releases Julia's repressed desire for Korean culture and rescues her from the humiliation of her Korean background.

As her double, Patrick puts Julia in constant conflict between Korean and American cultures, which in turn leads her to delve into Korean culture. The conflict becomes apparent when her mother suggests raising silkworms for their project for the state fair. Patrick loves the idea whereas Julia reluctantly accepts it. However, because the project strikes her as too Korean, she decides to secretly sabotage the project. Thus, she faces a sudden conundrum: she wants to avoid the project due to its Korean-ness, but on the other hand she feels obligated to complete it due to her friendship with Patrick. Since she cannot be separated from her double, the protagonist oppresses her covert wish and continues to raise the worms. Patrick, then, brings her into inner conflict; however, it is also Patrick who protects her from an embarrassing situation. When Mr. Dixon, who becomes friends with them via the project, calls the American girl of Korean descent Chinese, Patrick rescues her by explaining, "Julia is not Chinese, Mr. Dixon. Her family is Korean" (139). The protagonist muses on this incident "Once in a while somebody thinks I'm Japanese. But that's it—either Chinese or Japanese. It seems like those are the only kinds of Asians anyone has ever heard of. I didn't know exactly why it bugged me. Maybe because it made me feel like being Korean was so nothing—so not important that no one ever thought of it" (140). It is not rare for Julia to explain that "I [am] Korean and

not Chinese and Japanese" to those who make the same mistake as Mr. Dixon does (140). As S. C. Wong describes in the analysis of *The Woman Warrior,* however scrupulously the protagonist "insists on her difference, the larger society will not bother to distinguish between [Asians]" (89). The girl wants to be recognized as Korean, all the while disowning it. These conflicts guide Julia into the third place wherein she is expected to forge her cultural hybrid identity by harmonizing her split wish (hiding her ethnicity and revealing it). Through the introduction of Patrick as Julia's second self who values Korean culture, the author offers Julia a dynamic space where she revalues her ethnic heritage, goes through conflicts, and redefines her cultural hybrid identity.

Along with the presentation of Julia grappling with Korean heritage, Park touches on the protagonist's double consciousness through her experiences of racism. Park positions the girl of Korean ancestry *vis-a-vis* both the dominant white community and the African American community. Looking at racism through a dual lens—victim and victimizer—Julia feels confused and conflicted. She falls victim to her friends' inadvertent racism, racism that the dominant white group levels toward minorities. She on the other hand has vicarious experiences as a victimizer while observing her mother's attitude toward African Americans. The girl, as early as fifth-grade, notices her mother's prejudice against black people. Julia narrates that "My mom thought Mrs. Roberts might not be a good teacher, because she was black . . . my mom was a very nice person. I hated thinking of her as someone who might be prejudiced against black people" (68). Later in the story, Julia is chastised by her mother who thinks Julia and Patrick overstay in Mr. Dixon's house. She ponders "*Would she be this mad at me if Mr. Dixon was white?*" (119). Being concerned that her mother, whom she believes to be a nice person,

might be racist, the protagonist is in a muddle over her mother's ambiguous utterance about Mr. Dixon. Grudgingly compromising with Julia about visiting hours for the African American neighbor, her mother states: "He's an old man—what could you and Patrick possibly have in common with someone like him?" (154). With lingering memories of her mother's comments about Mrs. Roberts, the girl wonders at the ambiguity in the phrase "someone like him": "Someone like him—was that sort of a coded way of saying something? Underneath what she said, did she really mean someone black?" (154). Although Julia hesitates to say her mother is racist, Park alludes that she really is. The mother reveals unnecessarily sensitive responses to African American people whom Julia associates with, but offers no reason for her responses.

Cognizant of her mother's unfavorable attitude toward black people, Julia grapples with one question—what causes her prejudice against black people? Park adroitly avoids a clear explanation; however, her fictional characters reflect the racial hierarchy determined by white people. "Since blackness is reviled in the United States," historian Vijay Prashad casts as a rhetorical question, why would an immigrant, of whatever skin color, want to associate with those who are racially oppressed, particularly when the transit into the United States promises the dream of gold and glory?" (x). Unlike African Americans who were forcefully transported into the US land as slaves, most Asians voluntarily come to America, the promised land. The immigrants, as Prashad argues, search for "vertical assimilation . . . from the lowest, darkest echelon on the stepladder of tyranny into the bright whiteness" (x). To offer some context, Prashad's comments speak to the insidiousness of white privilege, and the struggles non-white immigrants must go through to obtain a similar status. Prashad presents two paths

historically taken by immigrants vis-à-vis the terms of white privilege: "barter their varied cultural worlds for the privileges of whiteness" or "disregard them [the terms of white privilege], finding them impossible to meet." Those who disregard them seek "solidarity, and safety in embracing others also oppressed by white supremacy in something of a horizontal assimilation" (x). Following this argument, Julia's mother has clearly taken the first path. As a first-generation immigrant, she has internalized the image of reviled black people. Desiring to be associated with the privileged white culture, she seeks to distance herself, and her family, from African Americans. Park indicates that Korean Americans, and more broadly, Asian Americans are positioned somewhere between the lowest and highest rungs in US racial hierarchy and that they, in spite of themselves, frequently become victimizers through their desire to be accepted by the dominant culture.

It is not limited to Asian Americans to practice racism toward other minority groups however. Park indicates through Mr. Dixon that African Americans also can discriminate unfairly against people from other minority groups. He reveals his internalized attitudes in relation to Americans of Asian descent. Handing some homegrown peppers to Julia, the man asks her a casual question: "Don't Chinese people use a lot of peppers in cooking?" (139). Patrick instantly informs him of the ethnicity of Julia's family, but Mr. Dixon does not apologize for his mistake. He possibly does not realize the inappropriateness connoted in the question. According to Elain Kim, "Since their information sources are primarily from the dominant culture, people of color are almost as susceptible to racist stereotyping as anyone else" ("At least" 4). Mr. Dixon's labelling of Julia as "Chinese" results from the dominant discourse around race. Julia,

thus, is aware that Mr. Dixon has no mean intention; however, his passivity *vis-à-vis* Patrick's response remains problematic. With an unpleasant surprise, the protagonist confesses that she thought that "Mr. Dixon—somebody black, somebody who probably had a lot of experience with racism—would never make a mistake like that" (141). Racism is racism. Julia realizes that what matters in racism does not lie in its deliberation but in people's complacency with their ignorance:

> Not knowing.
>
> And not knowing—or not caring—that you didn't know.
>
> And not bothering to find out because you didn't know you didn't know.
>
> *That* was the problem. (141)

Mr. Dixon's warm-heartedness fades out when his carelessness generates racism toward Julia. He is not even interested enough to inquire about her ethnic background. He recognizes her as a mere member of an Asian group, not as an individual subject. He is unaware that he does not know about other people and his racist behavior. This African American uncritically follows the stereotypical discourse mainly constructed by the dominant white group. Julia's mother also falls victim to this white led discourse of power and status. Julia's mother and Mr. Dixon, who represent current Korean and black communities, play roles of unwitting pawns under the dominant white society, and Julia observes the seemingly irreconcilable distance between them. Through these two characters, Park demonstrates how minority groups, Koreans or Africans, may themselves carelessly slip into racist discourses. Through Julia, Park demonstrates the observational power of the third space. It is from that vantage point that Julia is

empowered to not only see, but also to reflect on racist behaviors, their manifestations, and their roots.

These experiences with racism and heritage guide Julia to the third space, where she tries to find an intersection of Korean and American cultures. Her first success, however, is *somewhat* inadvertent. She participates in an embroidery competition in the state fair, which ends up reconnecting her to Korean culture. Since she likes sewing and has a specific purpose, this time Julia does not feel ashamed by Korean-ness as she does in the silkworm project. She makes an effort to design something truly American that "would balance out the Korean-ness of the silkworm part," not to speak of winning a blue ribbon in sewing (94). Instead of the American flag, however, which was her initial plan for the sewing design, Julia chooses the theme 'the Life Cycle of the Silkworms,' because "it [isn']t American, like the flag—but it [isn']t Korean, either" (170). Immediately Julia realizes that her embroidery work can be both American and Korean (170) because she sees herself as an American, and she is, but she draws upon traditional Korean style embroidery. As such, the work signifies the symbol of her hybrid identity. The protagonist does not have to choose Korean or American. She is both. Julia would perceive herself through the lens of those who, as the author argues, make "her somehow less American, her background alien, her loyalties, perhaps, divided" ("Staying" 833). The protagonist's identity, in fact, is more than a mere combination of the two—like her sewing project. Her embroidery is awarded a Special Citation for Originality. Julia ironically contrives the Korean style embroidery to offset the Korean-ness of their silkworm project. What Julia perceives as ironic is that the embroidery is appreciated as original even though it has been practiced by Julia's great-grandmother (214). Thus, the

embroidery project helps Julia to understand what Patrick means by saying that "[her] family's being Korean American [makes] things more interesting" (214). Through the embroidery project, as well as the silkworm project, Park stresses the development of the protagonist's culturally hybrid identity, which entails the revaluing of her Korean heritage.

The protagonist, through her emergent culturally hybrid identity, develops her own subjectivity. Experiencing diverse perspectives regarding Korean heritage and racism makes her confused and conflicted, but all the while Julia attempts to connect her Korean group to other groups. While coming terms with her Korean heritage, Julia also muses over racism, which bothers her frequently, and anticipates a more desirable society: "I needed to figure out the big picture, and I wasn't quite sure what it would look like. But I knew what I *wanted* it to look like—at least partly. And there were things I could do that might help it turn out that way, even if they were only little things" (217). This contemplation follows Julia's little, yet transformative, efforts. In an attempt to connect Korean culture to Mr. Dixon, the protagonist offers him some recipes for Korean food with a hope that he can know that "Korean food [isn']t the same as Chinese food" (216). That is her way to lead the African American man to know about Korea and to care about her and her ethnicity. Julia senses even her mother possibly start to change: the mother appreciates the mulberries Mr. Dixon sends to the family. As Park defines her Korean American identity as a connector between discrete cultures ("Staying" 833), she depicts how Julia's hybrid identity serves as a connector between Korean and African American people.

For the big picture Julia imagines, the protagonist also puts whatever little she can into practice. That includes beginning to treat her little brother Kenny, whom she had always considered a nuisance, with empathy. Hoping for better relations between Korean and black communities, Julia provides Kenny with an opportunity to be familiar with African Americans. She starts to take him along when she and Patrick go to visit Mr. Dixon. Elain Kim argues that Asian Americans, "from an interstitial location, with one foot in the margins and the other in the mainstream," can "build bridges to one another for the democratic race relations in the United States ("At Least" 5-6). Julia plays such a bridging role for her mother, Mr. Dixon, and her brother. Park adumbrates the big picture in which minority groups equalize themselves and initiate a mutual, empowering conversation rather than blindly accepting the dominant white discourse. Park reveals anticipation of a racially equal society wherein each group contributes to a multicultural democracy rather than falling as helpless objects into a racial hierarchy.

Lisa Yee and Linda Sue Park each aspire to an American society where each racial group shares a dynamic and equal relationship with one another. The Asian American protagonists they create in the texts play a pivotal part in engendering such a society. Living as racial minorities in US dominant white society, the protagonists commonly experience the double consciousness, their cultural hybridity. Avoidance of their racial background, conflict and confusion from the collision of the two cultures, and revaluation of their cultural richness are included in the process of developing their hybrid identity as strength. In dealing with their racial heritage, the authors adopt the literary strategy of *the double*, which functions as racial shadow in *Stanford Wong Flunks Big-Time* and as alter-ego in *Project Mulberry*. The double characters lead the

protagonists not only to Bhabha's third space full of confusion, conflict, and negotiation, but to recognition of Asian Americans' cultural richness. In that sense, the presentation of racism in the texts demonstrates the authors artistic creativity. They have their Asian American protagonists transcend victimization. The protagonists grow their subjectivity, fertilized by their experiences of racism. Awakened to the power inherent to their cultural hybridity, Yee's and Park's protagonists take initiative in communicating with other racial groups and anticipate that their action will contribute to guiding this society to a multicultural democracy. Thus, Yee and Park demonstrate that Asian Americans are both Asian and American.

IV: CONCLUSION: ASIAN AMERICAN AUTHORS LEAVENING MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Today, my daughter rarely has problems with her identity. She enjoys social benefits from her bicultural hybrid identity as Korean and American. As she discovered opportunities to tell her Korean American experiences to other Asian Americans in college, and to listen to their experiences, her Korean background became less troublesome for her. As one of the two Korean students at a white dominated high school, she would look forward to being invited to a birthday party. Eager to be accepted by her white peers, she seldom declined an invitation. One trip to South Korea made her prideful of Korean cultures, yet most of her schoolmates in the small town were uninformed about her native country and culture. College life was different. Its multicultural atmosphere provided her with opportunities to meet people with diverse backgrounds and to ponder a multicultural society. Her bilingual ability and cultural duality were encouraged. Now, often visiting, virtually or physically, South Korea enables her to realize the strength of her culturally hybrid identity. Since she is both Korean and American, she is doubly rich in words and perspective in whichever country she stays.

While my daughter has been carving out her place in this land by forging her cultural identity, I also have been interested in what other Asian Americans have gone through and how their experiences have been captured in children's literature. My focus has been on the way American authors of Asian descent depict Asian American experiences in children's books. Through this dissertation, I have argued that Asian American authors, speaking for Asian Americans, present a case for their American-ness while securing their place in children's literature. These authors, as Dolores de Manuel

and Rocío G. Davis aptly point out, “continually show us how the story of Asian American writers has been marked by various forms of marginalization and erasure, and reshaped by their attempts to make themselves visible” (v), although these authors’ continual efforts have received far less scholarship and criticism than they have merited.

I have shown these authors’ incremental production of children’s books since the 1960s. The success of the civil rights movement and the following ethnic awareness brought about a social atmosphere receptive to multicultural children’s books, helping publishers promote these books and providing educational funds for disadvantaged children. Encouraged to produce children’s books, Asian American writers have written about Asian American experiences through the lens of the protagonists or characters of Asian descent, inviting more critics to pay attention to Asian American authors and their works. I have examined these authors’ works and related criticism, and I have discovered a certain trajectory of Asian American authors’ narratives for children’s books. In most cases, critics ended up analyzing individual works of an Asian American author or works of a specific ethnic group, not placing the works in a broader scope of Asian American authors, and, therefore, failing to trace certain narrative patterns shared by Asian American authors in children’s literature. I have attempted to connect individual works and to establish that these authors embody Asian Americans’ assertions that they are American, not Asian outsiders, and that they have participated in composition of US history and society.

In tracing Asian American authors’ narratives, I have focused especially on the works written by some American authors of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean backgrounds. These three ethnic groups, of course, are not the totality of Asian Americans, but the

authors from these groups have more opportunities to narrate their experiences in print since these groups have accumulated their American experiences longer than other ethnic Asian groups. From the three ethnic group authors, I managed to gain a substantial number of fiction books on Asian American experiences for children. That, on the other hand, indicates the limitation of my study. The term *Asian American* I have used in this dissertation needs to be accepted with caution because it encompasses a wide range of Asian cultures. These peoples of Asian descent, unlike African Americans or Latino Americans, rarely have common features like language and ethnicity to share among themselves except for their seemingly similar appearances. Mainly because some multicultural children's books show questionable literary values in their contents and subtexts (Chiu, Palumbo-Liu), and because the pickings of multicultural young adult novels are slim, I had no choice but to cover only a portion of Asian Americans whose origins are related to Far East Asia. For a more correct use of the term *Asian American*, it is necessary to conduct an extensive study of authors with other Asian ethnic backgrounds once they produce significant numbers of children's books.

I have examined the Asian American authors' works I have chosen within the theoretical frame of multiculturalism, but with caution. To make the concept of multiculturalism clear, I have refuted essentialism, the charge that multiculturalism runs the risk of homogenizing an ethnic or cultural group, because essentialism is ascribed to the prevalent discourses constructed by Eurocentric imperialism, not to multiculturalism itself. I have also argued against boutique multiculturalism. This version of multiculturalism views cultural differences as celebratory, and, therefore, it dismisses the racial stratification in society. Amid the broad range of concepts and approaches

surrounding the term *multiculturalism*, I have utilized critical multiculturalism because the visibility of Asian American children's books was greatly indebted to the tide of multiculturalism, yet these books may inadvertently contain ideologies to reinforce the status quo. The focus of critical multiculturalism is not on the celebration of cultural differences, but on the causes, such as a racial hierarchy and material inequalities, which result in cultural differences among ethnic or racial groups. Culture and identity are manifestations of the differences, and they, therefore, keep changing. Through the lens of critical multiculturalism, I have examined the social and political agendas in the texts produced by Asian American writers, trying to find overarching themes from them.

To achieve these goals, I have attempted to show the common denominators shared by the Asian American authors' narratives for children. They turn to historical fiction to demonstrate the legitimacy of their claim for being American with deep roots in this land. From the perspective of Asian Americans, the authors shed light on Asian American experiences over history that have been dismissed or un/underrepresented in US main history, through which they make an attempt to ferret out who they are in the land of the United States. Current ideologies that help to regulate Asian Americans also draw the authors' attention. They call into question the notion of America as the land of opportunity, one of the main ideologies that has pulled people from all over the world. The ideal of the model minority is criticized because it serves to champion that ideology. The authors also describe Asian Americans with a cultural hybrid identity that results from the ongoing negotiations with conflicts between mainstream and their ethnic or racial cultures. In their narratives, the American authors of Asian descent make it evident that they are as American as they are Asian.

Along with the socio-political agenda discussed in these authors' works, I have also highlighted how the literary excellence of these Asian American authors has helped to broaden their readership by making their texts pleasurable and intelligible to Asian and non-Asian readers alike. The authors hit a striking balance between artistic mastery and their messages. The skillful employment of artistic techniques enables the authors to make their narratives of Asian American experiences intelligible to the general reader who may feel distant from or foreign to the experiences. The authors adopt a child protagonist-focalizer and entice readers to have empathy for the protagonists with an Asian face. These authors also successfully manage an adequate balance between defamiliarization and familiarization. The literary device of defamiliarization not only provides novelty for the text, making it pleasurable to read, but also reinforces the authors' social and political agenda by disrupting readers' preconceived thoughts on American history, America as a land of equal opportunity, and Asian Americans. The authors, on the other hand, employ the literary technique of familiarization through themes such as family, or friends, or characterization such as a protagonist with agency, or literary form such as journal format, by which they lead readers to the comfort zone so that they are not overly confused nor overwhelmed by the Asian American experiences being depicted. The interplay between defamiliarization and familiarization allows the authors to control the potential unintelligibility of their texts and to challenge general readers' perception of Asian Americans.

In order to demonstrate these Asian American authors' literary techniques and their claim for Asian Americans' historicity for American, I have discussed Laurence Yep's *Dragonwings* and Cynthia Kadohata's *Weedflower*. These texts serve to show the

way some Asian American authors utilize historical fiction and substantiate Asian American's claim for being American. Through the eyes of a protagonist-focalizer, Moon Shadow, Yep narrates the experiences of the Chinese immigrants when the Chinese Exclusion Act was still in effect. Delineating the history of Chinese immigrants and their response to challenging discrimination, Yep claims that they are no longer strangers in this land. These Americans of Chinese descent grow their love for this land through their hard work and perseverance all the while contributing to constructing the transcontinental railroad and to expanding the west in America, overcoming natural disasters like the 1906 quake in San Francisco with other Americans, and putting up with racism. Yep, as he states in the foreword of *Dragonwings*, "chronicles their [Chinese Americans] ongoing love affair with the Land of the Gold Mountain . . . over one hundred fifty years."

In *Weedflower*, Cynthia Kadohata recounts the Japanese American experience during World War II, the traumatic history of ethnic Japanese, from the perspective of the protagonist-focalizer Sumiko. After the Pearl Harbor attack, Sumiko and other Asians of Japanese descent are incarcerated in the desert areas of Poston, Arizona. The author describes the painful history with a prideful tone. The internees do not succumb to bleak reality; instead, they muster up the courage and perseverance to do gardening, which ultimately contributed to transforming barren campsites into rich farmland. The author also reports the internees' sacrifice for the United States when some of them joined the army and fought in World War II. In doing so, Kadohata ultimately sends a message that Japanese Americans have earned their status as American at the price of their sweat and blood. Asian American authors like Yep and Kadohata "need to revision history to include Asian Americans in the history of America,"(Takaki 121) so that Asian

Americans have their place in US society rather than being relegated to invisible entities on the margins, and that their voice is heard rather than being buried in the white dominant society.

While casting light on the under or unrepresented history of Asian Americans, some Asian American authors narrate Asian American experiences focusing on dysfunctional family stories in contemporary realism fiction. This focus opens an avenue to challenging the image of America as the land of opportunity and equality through disclosure of the model minority thesis imposed on Americans of Asian descent. "By lumping all Asian descent groups together and attributing certain distinctively 'Asian' cultural values to them (including, importantly, political passivity or docility), the model minority myth sets Asian Americans apart as a distinct racial-cultural 'other'" (C. Kim 45). An Na, the Korean-born American author, in her debut work *A Step from Heaven,* narrates a Korean immigrant family through the eyes of the protagonist Young Ju. After immigrating to the United States, the family experiences demotion in economic and social status, and splits up. The family's hard work does not pay off, except in the protagonist's case. Young Ju appears to serve as the epitome of the model minority; however, her success, to some degree, results from her coping mechanism for her lonely, isolated immigrant life. Through the family's collapse and partial success in immigrant life, the author indicates a deep-seated falsity in the idealized America.

Mochizuki also attempts to de-frame the model minority thesis in *Beacon Hill Boys*. He narrates Japanese Americans' being othered through the protagonist-focalizer Don, whose family has lived in the United States over three generations. Don tries to find his place at home or in school. He is frequently compared with his brother, Brad, the

epitome of the model minority, who is a Stanford-bond star athlete and straight-A student. The protagonist becomes an agitator in school when asking for curriculum reform that will include Asian American history. Feeling insecure, at home or school, Don spends time with friends who, with their families, are distant from the model minority ideal. No matter how long Japanese Americans have lived in US society with American nationals, they are boxed in by the stereotype of the model minority. Resistant to the stereotype, Don struggles for a sense of belonging. The model minority ideal serves to push Americans of Asian descent to the fringe of American society, keeping them foreign. In some occasions, they seem to lead successful lives fitting well into the image of the model minority. Their success, however, is not completely given by the land of opportunity and equality. It may come from their desperate desire for moving into the mainstream from the margins, from their psychological mechanism to compensate for the discrimination and isolation they have face.

Asian American authors also delineate the experiences of Asian American children between their marginalized ethnic cultures and the dominant white culture. The children come to terms with their ethnic heritage through the process of distancing themselves from their ethnic culture, then appreciating its value, and ultimately embracing it. Their cultural hybridity serves as a step toward a racially dynamic and democratic society. The protagonist Stanford in Lisa Yee's *Stanford Wong Flunks Big-Time* comes to reconcile with his ethnicity when he publicly helps Millicent, who is also of Chinese descent. Through a series of negotiations with his racial shadow, Millicent, who is a socially awkward nerd and who projects Stanford's Chinese heritage, the protagonist realizes strength through his cultural hybridity and participates in making his

community more open to race. This community encourages individuals to preserve their ethnic culture and to form a coalition across their cultural differences and skin color.

Similar efforts to visualize a racially horizontal community are also seen in Linda Sue Park's *Project Mulberry*. The author introduces the Korean American protagonist Julia, who sees her ethnicity as foreign to the dominant white society and later recognizes it as an integral part of her identity. It is due to her ethnicity that she experiences racism directly as a victim, and vicariously as a victimizer. Awakening the strength of her cultural hybrid identity from American and Korean cultures, she wants to develop a friendship with an African American neighbor, initiating a bridging process between Korean and black peoples. In these authors' works, Asian American protagonists come to forge culturally hybridized identities that serve as impetus for transforming America into "a provisional utopia . . . where we anticipate the future through practices of solidarity and community" (McLaren 66).

I have demonstrated that some Asian American authors delineate Asian Americans' efforts to find their place in the land of the United States through their books for children. This dissertation, on the other hand, may provide a potential theme for further studies of Asian American children's literature—the way Asian American authors broaden their readership. I have dealt with this topic in this dissertation, but much room for this theme remains. Multicultural children's books have a multilayered audience. Katherine Capshaw Smith argues that multicultural children's literature "becomes a particularly intense site of ideological and political contest, for various groups of adults struggle over which versions of ethnic identity will become institutionalized in school, home, and library settings" (3). It is already acknowledged that children's books have a

dual audience: children, and adults who play a mediating role through publishing, distributing, choosing and buying. As Capshaw Smith points out, "In addition to adult mediators and young readers, ethnic children's literature is often targeted both to insider and outsider groups" (4). The Asian American authors discussed in this dissertation deal with the multilayered audiences by maintaining a striking balance between social-political themes and aesthetics in literature. That theme may be explored through a much wider range of Asian American authors in children's literature.

Related to broadening a readership, it may be fascinating to study the way Asian American authors in the field of children's literature continue to expand the scope of their narratives. These authors, whether for adults or children, want to go beyond the ethnic or racial boundary of Asian American authors and into becoming just authors for Americans. The authors still struggle to rid themselves of the cultural-ambassador label that is imposed on them, as I discussed in the Introduction. Linda Sue Park expresses her frustration when labelled an author of Korean descent: "Our ethnicity is assumed to be our only valid subject, when, like all writers, we have countless interests" ("Staying" 833). I have caught glimpses of some authors' attempts to expand their narrative scopes. For example, Lisa Yee, as Rachel Endo pinpoints, seems to engage in a post-racial discourse in her work. Yee does not mention the ethnicity or race of her fictional characters other than for Stanford, Millicent, and their families. The author may want to make her work appealing to a multilayered audience by dismissing the ethnicities or races of most characters in her work. Linda Sue Park may be another example. Her repeated successes seem to help her to shed the label of Korean American author. Ever since her ethnic based fiction *A Single Shard* made her name and work visible in children's

literature, Park continuously expands her narratives by dealing with humanitarian themes such as *A Long Walk to Water* or by resorting to a series of fantasy adventure stories. Asian American authors in the field of children's literature continue to make their works diversified, ranging from narrating their peculiar ethnic experiences to depicting various themes and characters with various ethnic backgrounds, pushing their territory further.

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