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# “Transnational Writing” by Chinese American Writers from the Perspective of Intergenerational Conflict

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**Abstract:** Against the complex backdrop of multiculturalism in the US, 1990s Chinese American literature depicts the conflict between the Chinese community and white American culture, and expresses the emotional connection to the homeland and the Chinese people’s subjective understanding and evaluation of their US social status in the new era. This article selects five representative Chinese American literature works covering home culture and the search for immigrant culture. Through “transnational writing”, these works expand the national and ethnic narrative, complementing the comparative perspective. The aim is to more effectively construct the image of overseas Chinese and better disseminate Chinese culture in the context of globalization.

**Keywords:** Intergenerational Conflict; Chinese American Writers; Cultural Identity; Transnational Writing

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## 1. Classic chinese-american writers and their homeland of emotional roots

The Joy Luck Club (1987) by Chinese - American author Amy Tan and A Thousand Years of Good Prayers (2005) by Chinese - American writer Yiyun Li explore family relationships in a cross - cultural context. The former, set at mahjong parties of immigrant mothers in the US, tells stories of four mother - daughter pairs and delves into generational conflicts, tolerance and reconciliation between those from different cultural backgrounds. The latter focuses on a father - daughter story. Mr. Shi, a lone Beijing resident, travels to America after learning of his daughter’s divorce. But upon arrival, he finds he has no common language with her. Due to time and cultural differences, they’ve become familiar strangers.

### 1.1. The typical chinese family stories

The Joy Luck Club (The Joy) and A Thousand Years of Good Prayers (A Thousand) focus on the generation gap and conflict between two generations. Through emotional integration between different generations, they reveal Chinese stories and emotions in the western context. In the novels, the authors’ depiction of the parent - child ambivalence transcends cultural differences, showing the real situation of Chinese Americans in the USA. As a country shaped by white patriarchy, America poses challenges for Chinese immigrants and those born there. Despite being seen as “the model minority” for their diligence, they still face many survival challenges. The fate of the unpredictable like The Joy at the opening of the

feather: “Then the woman and the swan sailed across an ocean many thousands of li wide, stretching their necks toward America. On her journey she cooed to the swan: ‘In America I will have a daughter just like me. ... She will know my meanings, because I will give her this swan - a creature that became more than what was hoped for.’ But when she arrived in the new country, the immigration officials pulled her swan away from her, leaving the woman fluttering her arms and with only one swan feather for a memory<sup>[1]</sup>.” At the end of the novel, June follows her father back to China, where she meets her two half-sisters,

who embrace each other. “My sisters look at me with joy... At this moment, I can clearly see the Chinese brand on my body, it is so bright and deep. I understand that home is more than just a place. It is in our blood. After years of baptism, we can finally release and return at this moment<sup>[1]</sup>.”

The novel concludes in a warm and harmonious atmosphere, with June fulfilling her mother's will through feelings of guilt and confession. In *The Joy*, four mothers, all of them having endured their own hardships in old China, emigrate to the United States, remarry and have children. Raised and educated in America, their daughters develop a sense of superiority. The novel depicts the conflict and reconciliation of two generations and two cultures within the family bond, and the entire work reflects an Eastern aesthetic characterized by gentleness and quietude.

In the novel, the daughters have been fully integrated into American society in their careers, lives and emotions, yet they feel overwhelmed by the traditional Chinese culture and emotions their parents cling to. Take the father and daughter from *A Thousand* as an example: Mr. Shi traveled to America to assist his daughter in finding a suitable partner, thereby providing her with new emotional support. However, in the daughter's eyes, her father's love is perceived as “interference” in her emotional life, leading to a fierce face-to-face conflict between them:

“Baba, if you grew up in a language that you never used to express your feelings, it would be easier to take up another language and talk more in the new language. It makes you a new person.”

“Are you blaming your mother and me for your adultery?”

“That’s not what I’m saying, Baba!”

“But isn’t it what you meant? We didn’t do a good job bringing you up in Chinese so you decide to find a new language and a new lover when you couldn’t talk to your husband honestly about your marriage.”

“You never talked, and Mama never talked, when you both knew there was a problem in your marriage. I learned not to talk<sup>[2]</sup>.”

In the dispute between father and daughter, the daughter finally confided to her father about the long-standing confusion in her heart: her father, originally a rocket scientist, had been misunderstood for being too close to his female assistant. Rather than arguing, he chose to be transparent, but this only led to endless gossip and harm to his wife and daughter. Ultimately, he was removed from his position, demoted from an engineer to the lowest position, far from the work he loved. This false scandal was etched into her daughter’s heart, becoming a root cause for her emotional development issues.

In *A Thousand*, Yiyun Li narrates the conflicts between a father and his daughter through a simple family tale. In the novel, the father and daughter reside in separate countries, each embodying distinct cultural concepts and divergent life values. For the daughter, the mother in *The Joy* is not merely a familial connection but also a repository of a rich historical and cultural heritage. When the Western cultural dominance in her clashes with the Eastern cultural depth ingrained in her mother’s very essence, the stark contrasts between the two cultures become immediately apparent.

The plot, characters, and emotional states of the two works have a strong “Chinese essence”, representing the “innate affection” the writer wants to convey, which is the deep - rooted attachment of the Chinese people. Despite racial opposition, gender discrimination, and cultural prejudice, the Chinese community doesn’t just seek acceptance or recognition. Instead, they firmly uphold Chinese traditional culture. In today’s Western countries, especially the US, there is multicultural coexistence, yet people don’t forget their racial identities. Racial prejudice and discrimination still exist. The Chinese diaspora realizes that although their hard work, achievements, and magnificent culture can draw attention, they won’t change their actual status in a foreign land.

## 1.2. Simple and warm “chinese sentiment ”

Overseas Chinese people are aware that they are “sandwiched between two cultures and two worlds, in a sense, experiencing two realities and ways of thinking. However, it is challenging for them to fully assimilate into either of them or to achieve a profound harmony with both<sup>[3]</sup>.” It is evident that overseas Chinese people exist within two cultural spheres, and the liminal space leads them to genuinely feel the dissonance between these cultures. This dissonance can only be articulated through literary creation.

Although *The Joy* and *A Thousand* focus on the intergenerational conflicts and the emotional discord between parents and children, we are more drawn to the emotional choices of the writers behind these conflicts. In the novel, the parents hold onto traditional Chinese cultural values, while the younger generation champions American cultural ideals: the former appear to be steadfast on the surface, yet their hearts have been shaped by the trials of life; the latter seem to be unburdened on the surface, but their hearts have been wearied by the chaos of life.

The daughters in *The Joy* face emotional crises in real life. June, single, can't satisfy her mother; Waverly, divorced and living with her daughter, has her mother disapprove of her new American boyfriend; Lena, in a marriage where she splits the bill evenly with her husband, struggles with his coldness; Rose, who loves humbly, sees her marriage collapse. These US - born daughters' inner worlds crumble after life's blows. Eventually, their mothers help them out of emotional lows and regain confidence. For example, An - Mei Hsu helps Rose. Seeing Rose in divorce pain, An - Mei tells the story of Rose's grandmother. Deceived by a friend, the grandmother got involved with Wu Qing, was disowned by her parents, and became his concubine after pregnancy. An - Mei lived a dignity - less life in that feudal family until her mother committed suicide for the children. An - Mei hopes Rose will recognize her value in marriage as self - worth earns respect. Rose is awakened by the story.

In the conclusion of the two novels, the relationship between parents and children evolves from initial misunderstanding and opposition to eventual tolerance and understanding. This emotional journey is rooted in the power of “love”, which compels both parties to bridge the gap of the heart and rediscover the warmth they seek together. This “Chinese emotion”, relatively uncommon in the Western world, is also the pivotal element that has made these two works revered as classics in Overseas Chinese literature.

Surviving within existing living conditions is challenging, which is the fundamental reason for the intricate “family and friendship” relationships. In *The Joy*, four mothers - Suyuan Woo, Lindo Jong, Ying - ying St. Clair, and An - Mei Hsu - have endured family disintegration and emotional loss. Suyuan had to abandon her infant twin daughters due to dysentery during the war. Lindo was given as a child bride and later abandoned by her family; she escaped the marriage and emigrated to the US. Ying - ying married a playboy who mistreated her, and she ended her unborn child's life out of shame, living painfully. An - Mei's mother sacrificed her life for her children in a feudal family. These past adversities gave the four mothers a deeper understanding of “family” and a stronger pursuit of “emotion”. Even after moving to America, their commitment to “family” remained. This pure and steadfast emotion helps their daughters achieve happiness. In the cultural psychology of the Chinese nation, “home” is a spiritual symbol and the destination of emotion, which may explain why the daughters in the novel ultimately return to their mothers despite rebelling against tradition.

## 1.3. “Affection Elements” in the two novels

The mother-daughter narrative is the iconic narrative style of Amy Tan's works. As these daughters listen to their mothers, the distance between them narrows, and the latter's experiences also serve to compensate for and correct the former's American life. This represents a tender form of reason, capable of inducing calmness and goodness, while also enabling one to confront the real world of loss and regret. For instance, in *A Thousand*, father's confession to his daughter: upon learning of his daughter's affair and her subsequent divorce, the father was deeply puzzled. When he heard his daughter attribute these events to his past actions, he fell silent. The next morning, the father finally explained the situation to his daughter: he had grown close to his assistant through conversations, which led to a misunderstanding by the leadership and colleagues. However, he assured her that his actions and words had never strayed, that he remained loyal to his wife and

family, and that he had a clear conscience. Despite the malicious misinterpretations by those around him, he was ultimately forced to transfer out of love for his job.

The story of *A Thousand* is simpler than *The Joy*, unfolding in our daily lives. The “gaps” between father and daughter are familiar to the audience. Twelve years have diluted the father and daughter’s relatives, and misunderstandings have formed an unbreakable barrier over time. In the end of *A Thousand*, “Mr Shi shakes his head hard. A foreign country gives one foreign thoughts, he thinks. For an old man like him, it is not healthy to ponder too much over memory. A good man should live in the present moment, with Madam, a dear friend sitting next to him, holding up a perfect golden ginkgo leaf to the sunshine for him to see<sup>[2]</sup>.”

This novel depicts the emotional estrangement and communication barriers between the father and daughter. The plot may not be straightforward enough to resonate deeply with readers, but it represents the author’s inner - emotion expression. Clearly, *The Joy* and *A Thousand* have strong “affection elements”. In an American social environment emphasizing multiculturalism, racial differences, and gender discrimination, these novels create a rich mix of affection, friendship, and love. Though lacking realism, they forge a unique identity for Chinese - American works.

This novel depicts characters’ emotions naturally and fluidly, shedding their historical mission and ideological weight and adding vitality to the narrative. Its moderate “warm lyricism” enables readers to have a spiritual resonance cultivated in peaceful minds. The work’s tender, introspective and emotive self - expression shows a profound cultural sentiment of Chinese American writers. Maybe people shy away from intense self - awareness after past passions, or the real social environment and life pressures in America make it hard for overseas Chinese to maintain passionate emotions.

It’s important to note that some characters in these novels were raised in traditional Chinese culture before immigrating to the USA, while others were born in America. Their different developmental backgrounds and emotional experiences lead to distinct perceptions of Chinese and American cultures. Take the four mothers in *The Joy*, who contrast sharply with their American - born and - raised daughters. As products of the feudal system, these mothers were deeply influenced by old - fashioned ideologies and cultural norms. For example, An - Mei’s mother suffered in feudal society and lost her life. The feudal system not only corrupted people’s minds but also controlled their thoughts, causing superstitions about ghosts and gods. Lindo Jong used the “ancestor dream” superstition to free herself from an oppressive marriage.

If *The Joy* explores family conflicts and the mother-daughter relationship in the context of Chinese and Western cultures, *A Thousand* focuses on the clash between traditional Chinese values of fathers and American ideals of daughters. The daughters in *The Joy* are American-Born Chinese, while the daughter in *A Thousand* is a Chinese person who immigrated to the USA. Despite living in America and being influenced by foreign cultures, the essence of Chinese culture persists in these female characters. The different views on life, values, and ethics of the two cultures often confuse them, especially in their daughters’ emotional lives.

It’s undeniable that Amy Tan and Yiyun Li’s distinctive writing style differentiates them from other Chinese - American writers. Their novels incorporate positive elements of Chinese culture, but there are instances of orientalist writings in some works. Whether due to survival pressure or catering to Western aesthetic preferences, these writings don’t reflect China’s true image, are harmful to Chinese image construction, and not conducive to Chinese culture dissemination. In the 21st century, the inner world of overseas Chinese is no longer just a simple emotional bond with their homeland; it’s increasingly focused on exploring and shaping their own spiritual world.

## **2. Cultural identity of the inner world of chinese american writers in the new era**

### **2.1. The correct usage of the double “Other”**

“The Other” is a common term in postcolonial theory, relative to “the Self”. Westerners view non-Western worlds as “the other” and oppose them completely. So, the concept of “the other” contains a Western self - centered mindset. When applied to Chinese American literature, “the other” has new meanings. English - written Chinese American literature is “the other” compared to mainstream American literature and also to Chinese - written Chinese literature. The dual “other”

attribute reflects the living state of Chinese American literature and determines its survival nature to some extent.

The portrayal of Chinese women's emotional experiences in American Chinese literature reveals a common issue: the harshness of American society and gender inequality relegate Chinese women to a passive "the other" status in the emotional realm. As Chinese in America experience generational shifts, especially with the lifestyle changes of the third and fourth generations, the social status of Chinese men and women has fundamentally changed. In this new context, men's emotional experiences are often "othered" by women. The novels *Monkey King* and *Hunger*, in their creative themes and narrative perspectives, have the clear connotation of "the other". The lives of Chinese men and women depicted in these novels are marginal, weak and excluded.

Many writers in Chinese American literature are American-Born Chinese. While they identify themselves as American, but they are not entirely assimilated into American society. In comparison to the mainstream of American culture, they represent a heterogeneous element. This dual marginalization places them in a culturally status of "the other". The depiction of this phenomenon has emerged as the central theme in the works of Chinese-American writers during the new period. In *Monkey King*, Sally and Marty stole something from the store. Their father took Sally to the store to apologize to Mr Kramer (the store owner), My father makes a speech: "I have no explanation for my daughters' behavior. We are not a wealthy family, but there are no thieves." When we are outside, Daddy says, "If we were in China, maybe your mother and I would not talk to you for a year." ... "We're not in China," I say. "But you are a Chinese daughter." ... "You are a Chinese daughter," Daddy repeats, "You have shamed me and all my ancestors." "I wish you would have a stroke and die," I say<sup>[4]</sup>. This dialogue shows us the significant differences in the emotional identity of their ancestral country between China men who immigrated to America and those born in America. The former regards the emotion as the foundation of their survival, while the latter's emotional identity is relatively weak, and even in some cases will deliberately highlight their "American identity". Although they are both of "Chinese descent", they show sharp opposites in emotional attitudes, which actually reflects the continuous influence of racial discrimination in American society on the young generation of Chinese in self-cultural identity.

"Since the world's pluralistic culture, some perceptive individuals in the international cultural sphere have dedicated themselves to collaboratively constructing a new global cultural landscape characterized by pluralistic coexistence and 'harmony without uniformity'"<sup>[5]</sup>. It is evident that within the context of a diversified global culture, sensitive issues such as gender, race and class have ceased to be the primary focus of people's attention. To facilitate a better understanding of China by the world, many Chinese-American writers have opted to write in English. This choice is not only related to their personal growth experiences but, more importantly, English-language creation can bridge the gap in Chinese literature. At the same time, it allows the readers to more intuitively perceive the emotional complexities of Overseas Chinese: "On the one hand, due to their own survival status in the country of residence, they seek to reconcile the conflict between their two national and cultural identities, to find a place in a foreign land, and to secure spiritual sustenance; on the other hand, because the cultural foundation of their nation remains unshaken, it is challenging to assimilate with the ethnic, cultural and social customs of the host country. Through literary expression of this conflict, they evoke the various cultural memories embedded deep within their hearts, as a testament to their will to survive. It is an endeavor to dispel feelings of alienation and insecurity, thereby building a spiritual home within a heterogeneous environment<sup>[5]</sup>." In fact, the American aversion to other nationalities has always persisted and remains quite resilient today. Regarding the reasons behind "the other" phenomenon in the life of Chinese Americans as implied in these works, the author posits that it may stem from the self-identity of Chinese Americans and the pressing need to attain cultural identity in a foreign land.

## 2.2. The cultural identity about the inner world of "the self"

From a psychological point of view, "identity" (Identification) refers to the identity of individuals to people higher than their status or achievement, so as to eliminate the anxiety generated when individuals are unable to achieve success or satisfaction in real life. On "identity", Charles Taylor explains in *The Source of the Self*: "The question of identity is often expressed in the same sentence: Who am I? This question must not be just given a name and a pedigree... Knowing who

I am is to know where I stand. My identity is defined by commitment and self-confirmation, which provide a framework and horizon in which I am able to try to decide in various situations what is good, or valuable, or should be done, or what I stand for or against. In other words, it is such a horizon, in which I am able to take a position<sup>[6]</sup>.”

In other words, the “cultural identity” pursued by Chinese Americans is a search for “who I am” and “where I stand” in the US. As the model minority, they’ve been troubled by this unsolved problem, leading many to end their lives to escape the predicament. In *Hunger*, Lan Samantha Chang depicts the lives of Tian, Min, Anna and Ruth in the US. The hero Tian, a young - idealistic man, left home with high hopes for the future. But the real academic environment shattered his dreams. He buried his ambition and placed his hopes for his country, family and career on his daughter Ruth, hoping to pass on his unrecognized talent. So, he strictly educated Ruth and was relatively indifferent to Anna, which caused emotional alienation between the two daughters and finally a complete breakdown of their relationship.

As a minority in the United States, the identity of Chinese will undoubtedly be influenced by many social and cultural factors such as race, class, gender and nationality, and various complex reasons determine that the living space of Chinese Americans will be very narrow. “For immigrants, they generally want to integrate into the mainstream society of the country of residence, and for the country of residence, they also want to assimilate immigrants and become part of their own body. However, integration and assimilation are often reduced to a theoretical myth. Once implemented in specific personnel or time and space-time, the gap between hope and reality is revealed, sometimes even a fatalistic and insurmountable gap<sup>[5]</sup>.” This makes the protagonist in Chinese-American works neither “American” nor “Chinese”, but more like “marginal people” separated from two identities. This emotional world of “marginal people” is extremely complex, just like the family conflict between Raymond and his father Wood in *American Knees*:

After the divorce, Raymond moved to a new community, and successfully found an ideal career, thus opening a new chapter in his life. In the process, his father stressed to him the important responsibility as a male member of the family to ensure the continuation of the family blood line and the inheritance of his surname<sup>[7]</sup>. And told him that as the only male heir, he must think more about the family’s overall interests. In traditional Chinese culture, the eldest son must assume family responsibilities and support parents, which is an important filial - piety standard. Obviously, Raymond’s family concept differs from his father’s. After his mother’s death, he thought he could escape family shackles and pursue freedom. Yet, whether he can truly ignore his father’s life remains to be considered.

My father, a Chinese, emigrated to the USA. My parents’ hard work led the US Congress to allow the Chinese to naturalize in the country, enabling Chinese here to become legal US residents. As a Chinese born in the USA, Raymond is deeply influenced by American culture. Compared with his father, he only has a blood - relation with China, and his understanding and feelings about traditional culture are less profound. This is the core reason for the frequent differences between the father and son on many traditional Chinese issues and explains why Raymond unconsciously caters to the mainstream of American culture. Even so, he can’t get rid of the “Chinese blood” imprint. “The third and fourth generation of Chinese born in America, although they basically belong to the ‘westernized’ generation, the ‘yellow skin’ prevents them to ‘integrate’ into American society... in the eyes of Americans, they are Chinese, after all<sup>[8]</sup>.” This “neither foreigner nor Chinese” survival experience leads to the psychological distortion and abnormality of some Chinese individuals. Taking *Monkey King* as an example, the novel depicts a father sexually assaulting two minor daughters. The mother has the traditional “Don’t wash one’s dirty linen in public” concept and covers up the father’s misdeeds. As a result, the eldest daughter Sally has to be treated in a mental hospital after divorce. When the mother visits Sally and faces the psychotherapist’s doubts, she blames Sally’s failed marriage to cover up the real cause of her mental disorder. Evidently, the mother’s misrepresentation fails to help Sally’s psychological recovery. At the end of the visit, facing the daughter’s anger and confusion, the mother still defended her father: “Your daddy was never peaceful. He talked this all the time, maybe he’s better off back in China, shouldn’t have come to the United States at all. Never have children<sup>[4]</sup>.” Until the end of the novel, Sally did not forgive her parents. She tried to commit suicide, but finally gave up, because the people in the hospital told her that the pain is something a person must experience, and she would forget it after the experience. She didn’t know how to start her life ahead, but it was only from the moment she prepared to commit suicide that she realized

that life was wonderful.

It should be noted that both immigrant Chinese parents and Chinese - Americans are seen as “different” in American society. Young Chinese - Americans inevitably follow American mainstream culture to some extent and are alienated from traditional Chinese culture. In *American Knees*, after Raymond’s mother died, his father Wood wanted to remarry in China and live in America. Raymond and his ex - girlfriend Aurora differed on Wood’s remarriage. Raymond thought he could care for his father; Aurora believed Wood wanted a new life through remarriage, and the new wife would be grateful and take good care of him. Raymond was skeptical, fearing the new wife might bring her family to America and abandon his father. Aurora thought his view was selfish and discriminatory<sup>[7]</sup>. They disagreed on this issue. In the end, the father accepted Raymond’s relationship with Aurora, no longer insisting on a “pure Chinese” family for his son.

Through the analysis of *American Knees*, *Monkey King* and *Hunger*, we can find that even though their parents immigrated to the USA, they still have “traditional Chinese characteristics” and “Chinese elements”. The contradictions and conflicts between them and their children in work, life and emotional communication are difficult to be resolved in a short period of time. This may be an emotional issue that Chinese community must face up to and deal with.

Before the 1950s, most Chinese Americans lived at the bottom of society. Facing a difficult environment and cultural exclusion, they lost the power to build their identity. Objectively, Chinese people contributed to American society, but these contributions were ignored and forgotten, leading to their disappearance in American history. 20th - century Chinese - American literature opposed distortion and misunderstanding from mainstream American society and reminded people that Chinese - Americans are an important part of American history and culture. This identity construction helps Chinese - Americans re - examine their ethnic history and can be seen as a re - positioning of their survival path in the US multicultural background. Although this exploration has positive value, the “cultural identity” crisis still exists and will accompany overseas Chinese under historical and real - world pressures for a long time.

### **2.3. Transnational writing of chinese american novels**

Since the 1990s, with the in-depth discussion of the crisis of “cultural identity”, Chinese American literature has inevitably fallen into the binary opposition between Chinese tradition and American reality. The characters in these works must not only adhere to the cultural standpoint of “China men”, but also face the challenge of the Western realistic context. Those Chinese who immigrated to the USA still cling to the cultural identity of “China men” in their subjective value orientation, but in a strict sense, they are no longer purely “China men”, and their identity of “China men” is more or less integrated with elements of American culture. Therefore, the subjective “identity return” and the “cultural difference” in the objective context have become the main sources of inner pain and contradictions experienced by many characters in Chinese-American literature.

Using the 1990s as a historical node, earlier Chinese literature often viewed “cultural identity” as a static and unchanging entity. However, after the 1990s, “cultural identity” has been perceived as a dynamic variable, with its evolution and changes influenced by various factors such as historical progression, the contemporary context and cultural disparities. Consequently, it is challenging to define it precisely. In light of this, many characters portrayed by Chinese-American writers do not exhibit the understanding of “cultural identity” crisis found in previous Chinese literature. Instead, writers have shifted their focus away from the pursuit of “essence or purity” of identity, moving closer to an “acknowledgment of necessary diversity and heterogeneity”<sup>[9]</sup>. In other words, readers can’t interpret characters via a single “Chinese identity” or “American identity” as the works transcend the simple dichotomy between Chinese and Western cultures. Against the backdrop of global economic integration and China’s rapid economic growth, the multicultural US offers a broader platform for Chinese American literature to explore human nature. Characters in these works have a blended “cosmopolitan” identity. As new global cultural concepts emerge, this identity is increasingly recognized globally, making Chinese American literature distinct in World Chinese literature.

In Western context, Chinese-American writers with an Oriental cultural background use “storytelling” and “emotional expression” in literary creations. This approach suits Western society’s “enthusiasm” and “curiosity” towards the Eastern

world. However, in the complex backdrop of American multiculturalism, these works show conflicts between Chinese ethnic groups and American white culture, and depict subjective cognition, reflection and evaluation of their US social status. This creative tendency allows Chinese-American writers to express inner feelings from their cultural perspective when recounting experiences despite being restricted by mainstream American culture. Such writing has clear ethnic symbolism.

“In comparing Chinese and foreign cultures, Chinese people or Chinese Americans often deeply perceive the distinctions between them. While recognizing these differences, they also engage in introspection, reflecting on their own identities and, through this process, rediscovering themselves. On one hand, this introspection serves to further appreciate some delightful aspects of traditional Chinese culture and its allure of a hidden life; on the other hand, as time progresses, they embrace the influence of other cultures, which sparks new spiritual energies. This leads to a reinvention of themselves, which they then express through their creations<sup>[5]</sup>.” This “introspection” on traditional culture and “reflection” on foreign culture is a search on the motherland’s culture and a questioning on immigrant culture. Its transnational nature determines that Chinese ethnicity is a subject that is constantly constructed and defined. “The fundamental significance of the study of ‘transnationality’ is to cross national boundaries and open a comparative perspective for its own national and ethnic narratives<sup>[10]</sup>.” The ultimate goal of “transnational research” is to construct a new Chinese-American image through texts, after deconstructing the existing rigid image of Chinese-American. Thus, the Chinese-American characters portrayed in *American Knees*, *Monkey King* and *Hunger* have made certain breakthroughs in the distorted and vilified images of Chinese-American. These novelists born in America, have different growth experiences, learning environments and life experiences. However, they depict the Chinese-American images and express Chinese-American culture in a fundamentally similar way: by expanding Chinese images within American social and cultural writing space through the “otherness” of Chinese life. They particularly use intergenerational conflict to illustrate the strangeness and insecurity of Chinese-Americans in a heterogeneous environment, seeking comfort. Such a “Chinese image” inevitably bears traces of American culture. Investigating the reasons behind this, one cannot rule out that the novelists are catering to American public psyche and employing a writing strategy. This description may not conform to the facts, but it also exposes, on another level, Chinese-Americans question within the mainstream of American social values and challenges.

The most representative study of Chinese American literature is the “mother-daughter narrative” from the perspective of feminist criticism. Representative works, such as Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club*, *The Kitchen God’s Wife* and *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*, have brought this narrative mode to its peak. This method of criticism primarily focuses on “Chinese mother” and “American daughter”, forming a confrontational narrative structure between them. Within Western multicultural context, constructed from three dimensions of sex, race and class, this kind of research discourse with gender characteristics can undoubtedly make the narration of Chinese-American move towards a more distinctive national narrative. As the 1990s cultural globalization further developed in the context of increased eastern and western cultural exchanges, and the rapid rise of Chinese economy, the research on Chinese American literature has gradually shifted from American ethnic literature to the field of transnational comparative literature. The significance of this shift is no longer limited to the “mother-daughter’s narrative” literary phenomenon but encompasses the dimensions of “family” and “growth”, particularly for stories involving the relationship between parents and children.

Considering this research trend, Chinese-American writers of the new century should adopt an emotional perspective rooted in “Chinese culture” to craft Chinese narratives, thereby constructing a new Chinese-American image and challenging the traditional mainstream of American cultural in storytelling. The portrayal of Chinese culture within American context reveals the dual pressures of cultural differences between China and the West that Chinese-American writers encounter when writing. It also highlights the potential for cross-cultural communication and exchange, as well as the opportunity for self-expression within the framework of global Chinese culture.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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