Diasporic Narrativity: “Imbroglios of Cultural Fictions.”

Diasporic works are said to narrate the trauma of dislocation. In reading a literary work, an analysis of its narrative structure becomes imperative as it deals with the content as well as the form used to tell the story. A reader’s perception of a literary work will depend on the choice of the narrator by the author. The veracity of the narrative voice, the extent of the narrator’s knowledge of the events or the lack thereof and its effect on the story cannot be avoided in making a cultural reading of literary texts that deal with diasporic experience.

The fictional reality presented in The Woman Warrior is that of the life as a diasporan in America. The story-time spans from Brave Orchid’s (the character representing Kingston’s mother) life back in China while she had shared her room with No – Name aunt, her husband’s sister, to life in America of the characters in the twentieth century. The temporal organisation of the text involves non-linear narration, with frequent use of analepses and prolepses, forms of anachronies, which Gerard Genette defines as “various types of discordance between the two orderings of story and narrative” (36). At the “apparent” or the “linguistic level” of narration, Kingston consciously uses an appropriated form of language (Rimmon-Kenan 7). She, in her interview with Paula Rabinowitz admits of a political agenda behind her writing and speaks about her language thus: “I am trying to write an American language that has Chinese accents; I will write the American language as I speak it” (317). Thus in the narration, there is the interspersing of Chinese writing, with the words
sometimes glossed in the context itself and sometimes left unglossed. At the
immanent level, the text can be said to be divided into five sections, with the
individual sections titled ‘No Name Woman,’ ‘White Tigers,’ ‘Shaman,’ ‘At the
Western Palace’ and ‘A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe.’ The first section
mentions the trip made by Kingston’s male relatives to China and harps upon
the No Name aunt who commits the extravagance of adultery and is punished in
turn by the villagers and presents Kingston’s mother Brave Orchid as the
powerful agent of patriarchy warning her daughter against transgression. It also
presents some facets of being a ‘Chinese American.’ The whole section ‘White
Tigers’ is an imaginative recreation of China that takes place in Kingston’s mind
and contradicts the reality of ‘American’ life and the fantasies of redeeming
China by evoking the myth of Fa Mu Lan. There is a fine intermingling of fact
and fiction in this section. The third section ‘Shaman’ offers a recreation by
Kingston of Brave Orchid’s experiences at the Canton School of Medicine. The
section presents the picture of China as conceived by the homogenised ABC and
the American multicultural reality. ‘At the Western Palace’ is largely about
Kingston’s maternal aunt Moon Orchid and her inability to establish roots in the
American soil, but also gives an overview of Brave Orchid, Moon Orchid’s
daughter and the America born generation in general. The final section reiterates
the questions of identity, gender and silence, focusses on the generational
conflicts and ends up in celebrating matrilineage. The “complex” narrative
movements (Juhasz 313) take the readers back and forth between cultures and
physical spaces and establish a new terrain in Chinese American writing in the
relation between mothers and daughters. Regarding this relation that the text establishes through narration, Susanne Juhasz opines:

The first three stories move toward defining the mother; the final two stories go on to define the daughter, distinguishing her from the mother. But within each of the stories other movements occur in alternating patterns, maintaining the necessary tension between separation and connection (313).

Further, the relation between the teller and the tale also throws light upon the genre, or rather the inability of classification: “The text as a whole, for example, can be seen as an alternation between the stories the daughter tells. Each teller’s stories, in turn, alternate between true stories and stories that are not true” (Juhasz 313).

The story involves so many story-lines which intersect to provide the reality of Chinese American existence. Thus one of the story lines involves No–Name aunt, her absent husband, her paramour, baby, relatives and the enraged villagers while another involves Kingston and her family living in America. Fa Mu Lan, her parents, teachers, the villagers, the baron and the others who are executed, figure in another narrative. Brave Orchid, her friends, teachers and the rapist at the Canton school of medicine are involved in another storyline. Yet another narrative deals with the lives of Moon Orchid, her husband, his other wife, Brave Orchid and her son. The storylines involving Crazy Mary, Brave Orchid and the villagers and the one in which Kingston and her racist bosses are present, all interweave to provide the fictional reality.
Kingston is the main narrator of the story. The fictional character of Fa Mu Lan at times acquires a kind of independence from the events in which it lives and becomes one with Kingston herself. The voice of Kingston, striving to find an identity for herself by uniting China and North America, a task similar to the one performed by Fa Mu Lan, can be heard through the legendary swordswoman.

Focalisation is done at different levels-- at times Kingston as a child is the speaker, at times it is an adult Kingston and sometimes Brave Orchid, referred to in the third person becomes the focaliser. Focalisation also is external as well as internal. Kingston’s language in certain parts is coloured by her perceptions at the time of narration and in certain other contexts, those of her younger self and at times remains ambiguous between the two.

Kingston, who has made use of the possibilities of ‘talk-story’ in her narration, however, combines “fictional and autobiographical techniques” to make the book quite an experience for the reader, “who is invited to participate emotionally in the dramatic scenes” only to find “the author sitting alongside, talking and crying” (Homsher 247). Maxine Hong Kingston, through this self professed non-fiction has “found a way to break out of the silence” and has found firm ground in the realm of American literature (Hunt 255).

The work’s subtitle classifies it as a memoir. Since this work like The Concubine’s Children is autobiographical, the writer is successful in making it appear that she has been able to maintain a distance from the narrative, for the narrator is indulging in a retrospection of the events. Two voices--that of the narrator and that of the protagonist are prominent, and the narrator has now
come out of the events described and is projected as narrating with a
detachment. However, this mode ascribes some amount of omniscience to the
narrator in that the narrator knows more than the protagonist.

A picture of coexistence of different cultural groups can be found in the
works taken up for study, but whether this is peaceful coexistence is something
to be interrogated. On first reading, what one may feel about the works by
diaspora writers as these can be summarised thus: The position of these writers
is intensely political in that they are arguing against racism, exploitation and the
marginalisation of migrants. Theirs is a plea for the establishment of truly
multicultural societies --not in theory alone but in praxis. In writing histories
from below, these writers are using their pens as cudgels to whip the existing
system with, to bring greater justice in a world of imbalance.

However, a reading that is at loggerheads with this established view--
whether the works under consideration evince certain interests on the part of the
writers which make one suspect whether they are actually speaking for the
marginalised or simply ascribing marginality to their migrant characters -- may
evolve when one makes a rereading of the works. The pertinent question that
one faces on reading the works is whether the writers’ apparent attempts to
diagnose the problematics of a world of injustice are with the intention of
draping the world in the radiance of egalitarian multicultural vision or if they are
just hollow. The only aesthetics that such a skeptical reader experiences on
reading the works, is the one of the tensions between a professed justice and a
hidden undercurrent of swollen injustice.
The society that is of concern in *The Woman Warrior* is the multiculturalism in America evolving during the movement of the Chinese and their descendants along the two countries -- China and America. Though the basic cultures subjected to analysis are the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture, the Chinese culture and their hybrid forms, there is a mention of various other cultures that constitute the warp and woof of the multicultural space. They constitute the varying ethnic groups in the memoir.

From the very beginning, one doubts if the writers, under the veneer of speaking for “global equity,” are not establishing certain binary oppositions. The “plea for social justice” is effected in the works by pitting ethnic groups against each other. One is made to wonder whether an acceptance of other ethnic groups can be seen in their works. The readers are made to doubt if it is just pragmatism that is at work in favouring certain ethnic groups and not an attempt to understand the intrinsic merit of other cultures. Whether the difference of the Chinese from the other ethnic groups is foregrounded with the intention of disparaging the latter is also yet another doubt that arises. Though one cannot arrive at a definitive answer, some of the works evince this tendency.

The depiction of coexistence of different cultures in the works throws light on certain racist and exclusionist patterns. Whether the coexistence of different cultures as shown by the writers may foster the egalitarian idea of multiculturalism or whether the works fall short in providing such a broader outlook is an area fit for study.

“Much of Asian-American literary history is a history of a small minority being cast into the role of the good guy in order to make another
American minority look bad,” vouch the editors of *Aiiieee! An Anthology of Asian American Literature* (xxii). In Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*, the depiction of the Negro students and Japanese kids by Kingston is a case in point. In the words of Kingston:

> I liked the Negro students (Black Ghosts) best because they laughed the loudest and talked to me . . . Two Negro kids enrolled in Chinese school, and the teachers gave them Chinese names. Some Negro kids walked me to school and home, protecting me from the Japanese kids, who hit me and chased me and stuck gum in my ears. The Japanese kids were noisy and tough (WW 166).

The writer here makes Kingston, the persona, privilege the Negroes over the Japanese. The Japanese all through the memoir, are portrayed as rough or bad against whom the goodness of the other ethnic groups can be measured. The Japanese bombing of China finds mention in the course of the memoir where it is said, “. . . watch for planes in threes. When they spread apart, you know they’re going to drop bombs. Sometimes airplanes covered the sky and we could not see and we could not hear” (WW 93). The presentation of Kingston’s grandfather as “crazy ever since the little Jap bayoneted him in the head” (WW 10) and Kingston’s father’s defending of himself to the police saying “No read Japanese. Japanese words – Me Chinese” (WW 52) exhibit the Chinese antagonism for the Japanese. When an Asian man next door is stabbed, with words on cloth pinned to his corpse, the example also becomes an indicator of the “good” Chinese and “evil” Japanese. The pragmatism of the writer is
evidenced when Kingston says that this does not prevent her from wanting the Caucasian, Negro and Japanese boys in her class from falling in love with her (WW 12). The goodness of the Chinese as opposed to the Japanese is underlined when Kingston mentions that when the Japanese became samurais and geishas and avenged the wrongdoers, the Chinese simply averted faces and glowered eyes sideways and “fed the offenders with leftovers” (WW7). Nonetheless, when Kingston says that the Japanese were “the only foreigners considered not ghosts by the Chinese,” (WW 93) the Chinese’s view of the other ethnic groups is revealed. Further Kingston sees the Japanese as descendants of the Chinese thereby suggesting the antiquity of Chinese culture and dehumanises the Japanese to the extent that “another ancestor of the Japanese is said to be an ape that raped a Chinese princess, who then fled to the eastern islands to have the first Japanese child” (WW 93). Kingston also notes that “Chinese without sons stole the boy babies of Japanese settlers who left them bundled up at the ends of potato rows” (WW 93).

There are references in the work not only to the Chinese, Japanese, Whites and Negroes, but to other ethnic groups as well. The Mexicans and the Filipinos are also alluded to. Moon Orchid, Maxine Hong Kingston’s aunt fears that Mexican ghosts are plotting on her life (155) and Brave Orchid assures her that there are no Mexicans, but only Filipinos (156). Brave Orchid, while working in the tomato fields “would walk to skid Row and stand in line with the hobos, the winos, the junkies, and the Mexicans” (WW 103). Maxine Hong Kingston, in an encounter with a Chinese girl who was taciturn, says that she “Looked her up and down the way the Mexican and the Negro girls did when
they fought” (WW 176). Kingston also speaks of the “Mexican and Filipino girls at school who went to ‘confession’” (WW 198). There is also a mention of Maxine Hong Kingston’s exploring a Mexican house (WW 203). Thus the presentation of Mexicans and Filipinos as bad also proclaims the essentialisation effected by the writer.

There is a mention of the white culture’s specific relationship with the Chinese. The “Urban Renewal Ghosts” have given Kingston’s parents “moving money” and “White Ghosts can’t tell Chinese age” (WW 104). Even the voice texture of ‘the Chinese’ and ‘the Americans’ are different. Kingston says: “Normal Chinese women’s voices are strong and bossy. We American-Chinese girls had to whisper to make ourselves American-feminine” (WW 172). Further, the Japanese, the Chinese and the Italians are treated differently by Americans, for, the text says: “You can see the disgust on American faces looking at women like that. It isn’t just the loudness. It is the way Chinese sounds, ching chong ugly, to American ears, not beautiful like Japanese sayonara words with the consonants and vowels as regular as Italian” (WW 171). Thus the Chinese are defined by their lack when compared to Japanese culture. The Chinese are also not found to show much tolerance towards the whites, for, the book states, “And the Chinese can’t hear Americans at all; the language is too soft and western music unhearable. I’ve watched a Chinese audience laugh, visit, talk-story and holler during a piano recital, as if the musician could not hear them” (WW 172). Thus evidently, there is an inscription of the Chinese as the Other of the white culture.
The multicultural stance professed by the writers also becomes suspect, when, instead of showing tolerance, the characters are found to blame their host topoi. The WASP (White Anglosaxon Protestant) culture is projected by the writers themselves as standing for the host topos even as many ethnic cultures coexist in the land. Despite their own intolerance towards other cultures, the characters are found to cite instances of prejudice offered by the whites and lament that the host land is against them. Thus specific instances of racism towards the Chinese perpetrated by the whites find mention in the works. Kingston in *The Woman Warrior* feels that each boss “business-suited in their modern American executive guise” is her enemy (WW 48). Kingston, who herself is a character in *The Woman Warrior*, is shown as discriminated against in America. However a careful reading of the work shows certain of the migrants offering resistance to the unjust treatment meted out to them. Like the legendary warrior woman who coaches herself to be the female avenger, Kingston fights to combat racism. At the art supply house that traded paints to artists, the boss orders Kingston, “Order more of that nigger yellow, willya,” (WW 48) but finds Kingston retorting “I don’t like that word” (WW 48). This positioning of the characters makes one reread the whole paradigm of marginality. The significant question here is this: Are these characters that are able to articulate their ‘distress’ really marginals? Or are they, who have become powerful, wielding cudgels against other ethnic groups, which will only topple the idea of multiculturalism? Answering these questions becomes difficult.

In the memoir, the writer tries to provide instances of attempts made on the part of the people in the host land at the synthesis of the immigrant groups
“into a new group” (Dreidger 24). This tendency, to the writers, is exhibited mainly by the Christian missionaries who try to impose their religion on other ethnic groups. Kingston says she’d wanted to speak to her mother about “the nuns who kept stopping them “in the park” to tell them that if they didn’t get baptised, they would go to hell (WW 197).

The idea of the writer engaging in two kinds of depiction, professing to speak about the dominant culture and the ethnic subculture, is found in The Woman Warrior and has been elaborated by Sidonie Smith, who observes:

. . . as a work coming from an ethnic sub-culture, The Woman Warrior offers the occasion to consider the complex imbroglios of cultural fictions that surround the autobiographer who is engaging two sets of stories: those of the dominant culture and those of an ethnic subculture with its own traditions, its own unique stories (1059).

The pictures obtained through the lens of the people who actually travelled over from China to the host land and the ABCs (America Born Chinese) are different in The Woman Warrior. To the first generation migrants, the American people are restless as opposed to the Chinese people who wait patiently. To Brave Orchid, “Her American children could not sit very long. They did not understand sitting; they had wandering feet” (WW 114). The depiction of America by the ABC is also interesting. Not only are the dead people referred to as ghosts, but all the people from other ethnic groups come under this category. In short, whatever is “unreal and insubstantial to each other” (Goldman 318) are ghosts. Thus, to Kingston, there are different kinds of ghosts
in America: “. . . America has been full of machines and ghosts – Taxi Ghosts, Bus Ghosts, Police Ghosts, Fire Ghosts, Meter Reader Ghosts, Tree Trimming Ghosts, Five-and-Dime Ghosts . . .” (WW 97). Kingston even experiences a choking sensation because of the proliferation of ghosts and has to limp her way “around the White Ghosts and their cars” (WW 97). However, she likes the black Ghosts, who are open eyed and full of laughter. Brave Orchid, the migrant, is shown to take pride in China and provides a description of the Chinese bridges:

In China the bridges are nothing like the ones in Brooklyn and San Francisco. This one was made from rope, laced and knotted as if they were magpies. . .it had been built by men who had returned after harvesting sea swallow nests in Malaya. They had to swing over the faces of the Malayan cliffs in baskets they had woven themselves. Though this bridge pitched and swayed . . . no one had ever fallen into the river . . . (WW 87).

The differences between the Chinese and Americans as represented by the migrant and host land born generations get reflected even in their habits. Kingston brings out clearly the differences between the Chinese and the Chinese Americans. Unlike the Chinese Americans, the Chinese do not smile for photographs (WW 58). So Brave Orchid does not smile for the photograph, nor do her eyes focus on the camera unlike her husband who always smiles for photographs. Kingston’s looking at the photograph to see whether Brave Orchid is afraid, for “Year after year my father did not come or send for her” (WW 60)
contrasts the carefree attitude of the American towards the family and the Chinese’s attachment to it.

The first generation migrants are shown to be treated as the ‘other’ by even their succeeding generations indicating a clash among generations. Hence the narration goes: “They must try to confuse their offspring as well, who, I suppose, threaten them in similar ways – always trying to get things straight, always trying to name the unspeakable” (WW 5). Also conveyed is the notion that the children resist the way in which tradition imposes its rules upon them.

The community-oriented values fostered by the Chinese are shown to baffle the succeeding generations of migrants who are born in the host land. Kingston tells us in The Woman Warrior how even intercourse for a woman with a man outside her own household will have amounted to incest, for the Chinese consider all the villagers as kinsmen. Kingston writes: “Parents researched birth charts probably not so much to assure good fortune as to circumvent incest in a population that has but one hundred surnames” (WW 12). The children of first generation migrants, who are born in the individual oriented host land are projected to find these kinship rules vexing.

The loudness of Chinese voices as per the narration, is a cause of shame for the ABC who very often experience a cultural divide. Kingston talks on behalf of the host land born generation, “The immigrants I know have loud voices, unmodulated to American tones even after years away from the village where they called their friendships out across the fields. I have not been able to stop my mother’s screams in public libraries or over telephones” (WW 11). To add to this sense of resentment, the host land born generation is also expected to
call out in public as is evidenced in the episode at the airport where Brave Orchid expects her children also to call out to Moon Orchid.

Besides, when the America born children in *The Woman Warrior* find the paper dolls attractive and play with these, this also runs contrary to Chinese manners, “How greedy to play with presents in front of the giver” (WW 121). The children, shown as being used to the individualistic values of America cannot tolerate when they feel that Moon Orchid is prying into their affairs and tell each other in English, “She’s driving me nuts!” (WW 141). In general, the ABC consider Chinese people as weird (WW 158). Due to the differing values, Brave Orchid is said to put up on the wall her husband’s and her own photograph for fear that later her children wouldn’t have the sagacity to do that (WW 122).

Generational conflicts figure forth in *The Woman Warrior*, when the children’s preference of Western food over Chinese causes Brave Orchid to become angry. Brave Orchid’s anger, as she cooks Chinese delicacies finds expression thus:

> On the floor she had two shopping bags full of canned peaches, real peaches, beans wrapped in taro leaves, cookies, Thermos bottles, enough food for everybody, though only her niece would eat with her. Her bad boy and bad girl were probably sneaking hamburgers, wasting their money. She would scold them (WW 113-114).

Mother daughter conflicts figure again with Brave Orchid asking her daughter to go to the drugstore to get some candy free of cost, which would be
the same as the rectification of the crime of the delivery boy of having come to
the wrong house to cause illness. But the daughter, who is better adjusted to
American culture comprehends that the druggist cannot understand the magic of
warding away the curse with sweetness. Kingston being the ‘biggest’ daughter
has to put up with both her mother and the shopkeeper. Kingston tells us the
hardships that she had to undergo as an ABC:

“My mother seztagimmesomecandy”, I said to the druggist . . .

“What? Speak up. Speak English,” he said . . .

“Tatagimme some candy.”

The druggist leaned away over the counter and frowned.

“Some free candy,” I said, “Sample candy.”

“We don’t give sample candy, young lady,” he said.

“My mother said you have to give us candy. She said that is the
way the Chinese do it.”

. . .

“Do what?”

“Do things,” I felt the weight and immensity of things impossible
to explain to the druggist (WW 170 – 171)

In Kingston’s case, the narration shows the cultural differences between
generations and Kingston’s belief that her parents would sell her off giving rise
to generational conflicts. She shouts at her mother saying that she would never
be a slave or a wife. She gives vent to her pent up frustrations as an ABC forced
to keep up Chinese values when she says that she would go to college and not to
Chinese school anymore. The words that follow convey her frustration evidently:

I’m going to run an office at American school, and I’m going to join clubs. I’m going to get enough offices and clubs on my record to get into college. And I can’t stand Chinese school anyway, the kids are rowdy and mean, fighting all night. And I don’t want to listen to any more of your stories, they have no logic. They scramble me up. You lie with stories (WW 202).

The structure of the novel *The Joy Luck Club* is in the form of four pairs of mothers and daughters coming up with a series of personal narratives. The voices heard in the narrative include the voice of aging but still tough, independent and spirited mothers in America remembering their youth in China; the voice of ‘immigrants’ who had to make significant changes in their lives; and the voice of the resentfulness experienced by America born daughters who fear maternal disapproval. Voices of seven women are prominent --that of three mothers and four daughters. Coherence is brought about by the narration of Jing-mei Woo. The voice of some members of America born generation who long to have lives independent of their mothers, the voice of daughters who have become strangers to their mothers and the voice of the woman who speaks of “the shaping events of her life to her daughter” and to “acknowledge her pain and disappointment at her lack of rapport with her daughter” are also heard (Huntley 43). Other voices heard include the voice of a woman who travels to America, promising herself that life will be beautiful and dreams to have a daughter who would resemble her physically but never face discrimination or
prejudice like her mother because of her ‘Americanisation,’ but whose dream
gets only partially fulfilled, the voice of women who brave the unknown and	ravel across oceans in a quest for good life and the voice of daughters who try
to fathom the place of Chinese culture in their ‘American’ lives.

The novel is divided into four sections. Each section consists of four
narratives. Each section begins with a short story or vignette that conveys the
essential ideas expressed in the book. Jing mei June Woo is the only person
given more space to express her ideas -- she is made to speak for herself and her
mother. It is June Woo’s narration that is expository --conveying the idea of Joy
Luck Club, introducing characters and acting as a provider of the link among
narrators.

The novel figures first person narrators. Each narrator is a character as
well as observer. The narrators are not omniscient and are at times unreliable.
Mothers try to address their stories to their daughters except for Ying-ying
whereas daughters mostly speak in interior monologues. The fictionality that
exists in fact is highlighted with the daughters claiming that the mother’s story
keeps changing slightly with every retelling making the work typically post-
modern.

The coexistence of the whites and the Chinese finds mention in The Joy
Luck Club also. The American attitude of encouraging assimilation is critiqued
when Jing-Mei says about her mother:

She wore the same brown-checked Chinese dress until the
Refugee Welcome Society gave her two hand me-down dresses,
all too large in sizes for American women. The Society was
composed of a group of white-haired American missionary ladies from the First Chinese Baptist Church. And because of their gifts, my parents could not refuse their invitation to join the church. Nor could they ignore the ladies’ practical advice to improve their English through Bible study class on Wednesday nights and, later, through choir practice on Saturday mornings (JLC 20).

Here it is evident that the writer, who argues against the ‘melting pot’ stance, however is blind towards the character’s disinclination to forego the comforts offered by the host society. This makes one doubt if the writers are also not indulging in selective essentialism. The intolerance of the characters towards the other ethnic groups is evidenced when Suyuan in *The Joy Luck Club* is found to heap abuses on Caucasians: “‘Last week,’ she said, growing angrier at each step, “the waigoren accuse me”. She referred to all Caucasians as *Waigoren*, foreigners” (JLC 199).

*The Joy Luck Club* projects instances of racial prejudice, for, Mrs. Jordan, Ted’s mother is found trying to persuade Rose against marrying her son. Though she pretends that she has nothing against the minorities, one is not persuaded of this positioning. She can’t even tell a Chinese from a Vietnamese. In the words of Rose Hsu Jordan:

She assured me that she had nothing whatsoever against minorities; she and her husband, who owned a chain of office – supply stores, personally knew many fine people who were Oriental, Spanish, and even black. But Ted was going to be in one of those professions where he would be judged by a different
standard, by patients and other doctors who might not be as understanding as the Jordans were. She said it was so unfortunate the way the rest of the world was, how unpopular the Vietnam War was (JLC 118).

What the diaspora writers would call segregation by the dominant culture is also projected when An-mei’s mother mentions how Chinese people are made to live apart from Westerners:

My mother had told me we would live in the household of Wu Tsing, who was a very rich merchant. She said this man owned many carpet factories and lived in a mansion located in the British Concession of Tientsin, the best section of the city where Chinese people could live. We lived not too far from Paima Di, Racehorse Street, where only Westerners could live (JLC 223).

That America approves of only WASP culture and that multiculturalism has not attained firm roots is projected when a girl who coaches Lindo before her arrival in America tells Lindo:

“In America,” she said, “you cannot say you want to live there forever. If you are Chinese, you must say you admire their schools, their way of thinking. You must say you want to be a scholar and come back to teach Chinese people what you have learned” (JLC 258).

That America would like to spread its culture and religion everywhere, so that theirs would become the global culture is made evident when the girl wants Lindo to tell the authorities that she wants to study religion in America. As the
girl puts it: “Americans all have different ideas about religion, so there are no right and wrong answers. Say to them, I’m going for God’s sake, and they will respect you” (JLC 258). The alternate reading that this may offer is a query as to whether the writers, who have imbued this idea fully, are playing up to America by exoticising the Chinese in order to ensure the receptivity of their books.

The differences between the ‘Chinese’ culture and ‘American’ habits are brought out in the narrativity making one feel that an unbridgeable cultural divide exists between the nations. When in ‘Chinese’ culture, the work of a person is accepted for the only reason that he is kin or Chinese, ‘the individualistic American society’ does not do so. The freelance work done by Jing-mei is rejected. One wonders if the writer’s harangue against individualism found in the narrative is not setting into currency another of the manichean dualisms namely collectivism/individualism.

What E.D Huntley remarks in Amy Tan: A Critical Companion, about the structure of the novel The Joy Luck Club regarding its portrayal of different generations is applicable in the case of the other works also. This evidences a tendency on the part of the writers at generalisation and essentialisation of the situation of people belonging to the same generation which helps in projecting that a great generational divide exists among characters belonging to different generations:

. . . the clearest division is a simple bifurcation that separates one generation from another, mothers from daughters. Each generation is connected with the other by family ties and a shared racial identity; and . . . estranged from the other through age and
culture. Between the generations looms . . . insurmountable barriers – time, experience, values, language – and the effect of the division is an image of antagonists poised for battle (Huntley 44-45).

The migrant generation, generalised at times in the novel, is shown as offering a critique of America, thus indirectly offering a critique of multiculturalism. Through the words of Lindo Jong, the readers are offered a critique of the American rules and the ignorant émigrés being forced back to China. To put it in Lindo’s words:

This American rules . . . Every time people come out from a foreign country, must know rules. You not know, judge say, Too bad, go back. They not telling you why you find out yourself. But they knowing all the time. Better you take it, find out why yourself (sic) (JLC 94).

The essentialised portrayal of those of the migrant generation as trying to drill Chinese wisdom into the heads of their children and the ABCs being shown as reluctant receivers of this helps in projecting the cultural divide. Migrant mothers are shown as acting as the transmitters of culture to reluctant ABC as Suyuan Woo tells her daughter repeatedly her Kweilin story about her first marriage, “which grew darker, casting long shadows into her life, and eventually into mine” (JLC 21) and also the role of the elements in determining a person’s character. The attachment the mother has for the babies, the Japanese bombing and the suffering that leads to the formation of the Joy Luck Club – an attempt at the recreation of China -- are all conveyed to the daughter, which would later be
decisive in determining territorial crossings. Jing-Mei explains how the multiple endings of her mother’s story had made her consider it just as a Chinese fairy tale.

The narrative also tells us of the second generation’s urge to try to get away from everything connected with China showing them as culturally separated from the migrants to America. They resent Chineseness being imposed on them. Rose Hsu Jordan is shown as lured by Ted because of the things that make him different from her brothers and the Chinese boys she dates. Jing-mei June Woo, ignorant of her mother’s Kweilin story at first, thinks of Joy Luck itself as a shameful custom.

The daughters are portrayed in a common mould -- being resentful of their role as translators between the two cultures which help in underlining the presence of a cultural divide. This is so in the case of Waverly Jong, who has to act as the bridge between Rich’s world and her mother’s.

The ‘Chinese’ way of life with the elder children held responsible for what the younger ones do is mentioned with the mother An-mei assigning to her daughter the charge of looking after her younger brothers, while at the beach.

The difference between the ‘collectivistic’ Chinese and the ‘individualistic’ Americans is brought out in the narration. When Waverly advises Rose to break off her marriage with Ted, the mother wants her to hold on. The hostland born generation’s view of America as the better place, though tainted by indecision is mentioned when Rose says:
Chinese people had Chinese opinions. American people had American opinions. And in almost every case, the American opinion was better.

It was only later that I discovered there was a serious flaw with the American version. There were too many choices, so it was easy to get around and pick the wrong thing. That’s how I felt about my situation with Ted (JLC 191).

The narration figures forth conflicts occurring among generations. Mother-daughter conflicts, a common theme in Amy Tan’s fictional works, find expression in *The Joy Luck Club* when Jing-Mei is found to remark, “My mother and I never really understood one another. We translated each other’s meanings and I seemed to hear less than what was said, while my mother heard more” (JLC 37).

‘American’ and ‘Chinese’ beliefs as represented by the ABC and the migrants come into conflict when Jing Mei tells her mother that instead of criticising the children, the parents should encourage them and Suyuan replies “That’s the trouble . . . You never rise. Lazy to get up. Lazy to rise to expectations” (JLC 31).

The generational divide between the mothers and the daughters are hinted at when Jing-Mei tells the aunties that she does not know what to convey to her sisters about her mother because Suyuan was just her mother and “I don’t know anything” (JLC 40). As Jing-Mei observes, in her:

They see their own daughters, just as ignorant, just an unmindful of the truths and hopes they have brought to America. They see
daughters who grow impatient when their mothers talk in Chinese, who think they are stupid when they explain things in fractured English. They see that joy and luck do not mean the same to their daughters, that to these closed American born minds “joy luck” is not a word, it does not exist (JLC 41).

The conflicting views held by mother and daughter causing further trouble is indicated when Lindo Jong says, “A daughter can promise to come to dinner, but if she has a headache, if she has a traffic jam, if she wants to watch a favourite movie on TV, she no longer has a promise” (JLC 49). In the narration by Waverly Jong also, Chinese and Western lifestyles followed by mother and daughter respectively are found to cause generational conflicts, for Waverly thinks her hairstyle with an asymmetrical blunt-line fringe that was shorter on the left side to be fashionable but her mother disapproves of it. The Chinese and the American habits coming into conflict are elaborated further with Waverly telling how her mother had not been to her apartment for months as during the early days after Waverly’s marriage “she used to drop by unannounced, until one day I suggested she should call ahead of time” (JLC 168). However, after having divorced her first husband, with her daughter Shoshana to take care of, Waverly is reluctant to tell her mother about her decision to marry Rich Schields. Even her attempts to introduce Rich into her conversation with her mother fail.

Waverly is so unsure of Lindo’s reactions about Rich so that she has to arrange for the meeting between Lindo and Rich, founded on the friendly jealousy that Lindo and Suyuan feel, making Suyuan offer a treat to her friend
and Rich complement her, so that Lindo would also throw a treat to get complemented. The odds that would bother her mother about Rich are elaborated by Waverly: “Rich was not only not Chinese, he was a few years younger than I was. And unfortunately, he looked much younger with his curly red hair, smooth pale skin, and the splash of orange freckles across his nose” (JLC 177). A fall out occurs between Waverly and her mother after Waverly’s harsh words with her mother about the chess tournament. Rose Hsu Jordan’s narration also speaks of generational conflicts arising out of cultural conflicts. The Chinese mother does not consider it improper to discuss intimate family matters even while attending a funeral in the church, but the Americanised daughter has a different view of things.

The narrator in the novel *Bone* by Fae Myenne Ng is Leila, the daughter of Mah and Lyman Fu. She is an actor as well, for she is a character that is part of the fabula and is also a character bound narrator, for, the ‘I’ in the narration is to be identified with a character, hence, also an actor in the fabula. Further, Lei almost proclaims indirectly that she is recounting “true facts about herself” (Bal 31). For the most part of the novel, she is the character bound focaliser – narrator, for, the prism through which the readers get to know the family of Leon Leong is Leila.

However, in revealing gender expectations, at the beginning of the novel, focalisation shifts to Leon Leong who is iconoclastic in toppling gender norms. Here Leon turns out to be a speaker of the second level, for he is a character quoted by the narrator of the first level.
The narration in *Bone* makes use of the first person personal pronoun ‘I’ while referring to Leila and the third person impersonal pronouns ‘he/she’ while referring to characters such as Mah and Leon. In the places where the conversation among characters figures, the second person personal pronoun ‘you’ is used. However in *Bone*, one does not find the hierarchical terms of address that the other writers claim to be part of the Chinese culture -- terms specifically used to denote relationships like father, mother, daughter, etc. Instead, following the American lifestyle, the characters are found to address each other by their names.

Speaking of the narration in *Bone*, Juliana Chang comments:

Leila’s narration follows a movement back into the past, instead of forward into the future. Rather than unfolding into the future—locating the story in a present that replaces and is caused by the past—*Bone* disturbs this historical temporality of modernity. Instead of an inevitably arriving future, it is the past that we are propelled into, a past that remains unknown and radically open (115).

Chang is also able to connect the way time is presented in the novel with the Freudian concepts of mourning and melancholia. Thus she observes:

These contrasting concepts of time correspond to Freud’s distinction between mourning and melancholia. Mourning is a process that exemplifies progress; it acknowledges loss so that the attachment to the lost object may be removed, and the subject may thus achieve closure and move on. Melancholia, in contrast,
signifies an improper attachment to the past, palimpsestically keeping alive what should be left behind. Bone’s lack of closure indicates this melancholic temporality of deferral, a temporality that Leila articulates as “forward and forward and then back, back” (115).

Hence, it ensues that an analysis of Bone has to take into account this melancholic nature of the characters and hence the narration cannot be considered an impartial account.

Fae Myenne Ng offers a portrayal of different cultures in America in Bone. The Leon household is presented as containing a vast array of things, which in themselves are a hodgepodge of various countries. In the words of Lei, they include “A scarf with a coloured map of Italy. Spanish pesetas in an envelope. Old Chinese money. Dinner menus from the American President Lines. The Far East itinerary for Mason Lines” (Bone 59). The well used bilingual cook book containing recipes of “Yorkshire pudding, corned beef with cabbage, kidney pie” (Bone 59) also broadcast Leon’s association with multiple lands.

Various ethnic groups are mentioned in the novel. There is a mention of the Chinese coexisting with the whites when it is said that “In high school, Chinese guys who liked Nina, but were afraid to ask her out spread a rumour that she only went out with the white guys” (Bone 28). A diaspora reading would brand this as a predilection for assimilation on the part of Nina.

As in The Woman Warrior, in Fae Myenne Ng’s Bone also, there is a delineation of the Japanese as spiteful beings, thus extending the paradigm of
the good Chinese versus the bad Japanese. The cruelty of the Japanese is underscored in the picture that Leon Leong has, which shows “a Japanese soldier with his bayonet aimed at a Chinese woman” (Bone 59).

The Italians also find a mention in the novel when at the Benevolent Association, Leila comes across some “Italian guys carrying white carnation wreaths” (Bone 75). The Ongs, the business partners of Leon Leong are mentioned to have come from Peru and Rosa Ong, half Spanish, has “pretty eyes and lilting accent” (Bone 164). Thus, even while the authors claim to argue against stereotyping, it is evident that they want the readers to view the various ethnic groups in a particular light. The various ethnic groups are expected to be seen only through the coloured lenses offered by the writers.

To the daughters, the life of the migrant generation is something which they cannot imagine happening in their lives. Thus Lei muses, “Mah’s and Leon’s lives were always on high fire. They both worked too hard; it was as if their marriage was a marriage of toil -- of toiling together. The idea was that the next generation would marry for love” (Bone 33). This is highlighted when Lei also speaks of the marriage between Mah and Lyman Fu:

The old way. Matches were made, strangers were wedded, and that was fate. Marriage was for survival. Men were scarce: dead from the wars, or working abroad as sojourners. As such, my father, Lyman Fu, was considered a prince. Mah married my father to escape the war-torn villages, and when he ran off on her, she married Leon to be saved from disgrace (Bone 34).
Bigotry, practised against certain of the ethnic groups is highlighted in the novel *Bone*, when the sewing ladies do not trust Rosa as she is half Spanish. This does not present the Chinese in a favourable light, for, what one feels is that the Chinese themselves are devoid of sympathy when they want others to treat them sympathetically. One wonders if the writer is not consciously ascribing liminality to the people of Chinese ancestry when it is elaborated on how the whites view the speech of Chinese people as funny so that when the Chinese say “three or five,” it sounded like “fee-fie-fo-fum” (*Bone* 45). As a Chinese, Leon is shown as being ill treated by the Americans, jobs are denied to him and he is being verbally abused. However, the craving to attain visibility in America by the writers is made evident when the American government is depicted at times as holding a lenient attitude towards its illegal migrants. In Lei’s words, “the government offered a deal: the confession program . . . The exchange: a confession of illegal entry bought you naturalization papers” (*Bone* 57). Even when Leon Leong is at fault as he hasn’t brought the right papers, compared to him, the attitude of the white official is shown as commendable. Even Lei notes that “he was polite and patient” (*Bone* 56). One doubts if the writer is not simultaneously playing up to America and China.

A picture of the host land as being harsh on the migrant is presented, offering a picture of the kind of multiculturalism in America. Thus in the case of Leon:

Leon worked hard, too. Out at sea, on the ships, Leon worked every room: Engine, Deck and Navigation. He ran the L.L. Grocery while holding down a night job as a welder at Bethlehem
Steel yard. He talked about a Chinese takeout, a noodle factory, many ideas. Going into the partnership with Luciano, Ong was the first real thing that looked promising, but then it was dangerously the other way (Bone 34).

The writers give the impression that the America born generation’s individualism as opposed to the collectivism of the migrant generation is the reason for generational conflicts. Nina is said to be remote from the Chinese lifestyle and presents herself to be too individualistic. Thus in the text, she tells Lei, “It’s funny, but you know I hardly ever use chopsticks anymore. At home I eat my rice on a plate, with a fork. I only used chopsticks to hold my hair up” (Bone 27).

Lei is shown as trying to resist the Chinese belief that the elder sibling is responsible for all that the younger ones do. Lei is found to say:

I knew Ona was doing ludes, but I had gone through a downer stage myself so I didn’t worry. I was trying to break away from always being the Big Sister. And I really couldn’t blame her for doing all that stuff and keeping quiet (Bone 15).

Through such lines, the writer actually establishes an interpersonal function. The writer makes the text indulge in a dialogue with the reader wherein the text establishes a kind of “Chinese reality” where the elder sibling is held responsible for all that the younger ones do. Thus the text embodies in itself some set patterns which are seen as part of the Chinese reality. Whether this is the ‘actual reality’ and the reasons as to why the author feels the compulsion to establish such patterns is unknown to a reader who does not know Chinese language or
culture at first hand. Hence a reader who doesn’t know Chinese culture will be made to believe that this view which doesn’t allow for individualistic thoughts in people is part of China’s beliefs. The readers are given a feeling that the elder children in the Chinese household are always haunted by guilt when any of their younger siblings fail. Thus in the words of Lei, “I wanted a new life, as if to say that person then, that person that wasn’t able to save Ona, that person was not me” (Bone 15).

The novel also echoes the constant complaint indulged in by the ABC about their parents being insensitive and their having to adjust with this. This tendency recurs in Bone as well. Thus Nina tells Lei:

Look, you’ve always been on standby for them. Waiting and doing things their way … they have no idea what our lives are about. They don’t want to come into our worlds. We keep on having to live in their world. They don’t move one bit (Bone 33).

The speech act indulged in by Nina, when analysed, would appeal to the Americans or Chinese Americans as performing the ideational function of establishing the American reality and the difficult lives led by the ABCs on account of their being expected to be bound to Chinese values. It would also appeal to the Chinese in its presentation of practices that are to be shunned by ABC. Thus one feels that it is the writer who cashes in on, writing from this position, blaming both the Americans and the Chinese, but able to satisfy the sensibility of both.

Further the portrayal by the ABC of the migrant generation is as quarrelsome people. Though this is rationalised with such reasons like “Their
lives weren’t easy. So is their discontent without reason?” (*Bone* 34) the narration uses strong words like ugly to refer to the quarrels. Thus Lei says:

How many times have Nina, Ona and I held them apart? The flat *ting!* sound as the blade slapped onto the linoleum floor, the wooden handle of the knife slamming into the corner. Which one of us screamed, repeating all their ugliest words? Who shook them? Who made them stop? What makes their ugliness so alive, so thick and impossible to let go of? (*Bone* 35)

By such a presentation, the narrative projects a generational divide and manages to present the host land born generation as much more ‘refined’ than those of the migrant generation. At the same time, those of the migrant generation are given the feeling that they are unpretentious. Thus the narration, at the stake of many values, helps in pandering popular taste.

China, when talked about by the generalised ABC (represented by the writer by the plural WE) is shown as the land of the exotic, and the host land born generation children are found to show an aversion to identify themselves with such a picture which they think is the lot of the migrant generation. The statements by Leila would illustrate this:

WE’RE lucky, not like the bondmaids growing up in service, or the newborn daughters whose mouths were stuffed with ashes. The beardless, soft-shouldered eunuchs the courtesans with the three - inch feet and the frightened child brides – they’re all stories to us. Nina, Ona, and I, we’re the lucky generation. Mah
and Leon forced themselves to live through the humiliation of this country so that we could have it better (Bone 36).

The host land born generations are even shown to take pride in the fact that they do not know much about China and also in that family does not mean much for them, thus highlighting the cultural divide. Thus in the words of Leila:

> We know so little of the old country. We repeat the names of grandfathers and uncles, but they have always been strangers to us. Family exists only because somebody has a story, and knowing the story connects us to a history. To us, the deformed man is oddly compelling, the forgotten man is a good story, and a beautiful woman suffers (Bone 36).

Leon, a representative of the migrant generation is also presented as having only partial knowledge of the monuments that are part of America. Thus he is presented as calling the statue of Liberty, Freedom Goddess and as concerned about the Chinatown in New York. The conversation between Leon and Lei is given thus:

> “What about the Freedom Goddess?”

I had no idea what he was talking about.

> “You know.” He raised his arm over his head.

> “Green lady in Ocean.”

I laughed. “Statue of Liberty, Leon.”

> “What about Chinatown, you go there?” (Bone 11).

The idea of the loudness of the Chinese voices, embarrassing the ABC, recurs in Bone also. Thus Lei is found to say about herself and Leon:
We were … walking … when someone shouted down at us,


Jimmy Lowe waved from the emerald – painted balcony,

“Wait, I come down. Tell you some news.”

Leon bellowed back, “Your news is dragged in from the bottom of the sea!”

Yelling in the street! I was embarrassed (Bone 13).

Further, there is a tendency to project the generalised first generation migrants as paper sons -- illegal migrants. This is very much the case in Bone as well. The migrants are shown as bashful and cunning and fooling the immigration officials in order to ensure their entry into America as evidenced by the histories of Leon and You Thin.

The works under consideration also give an impression that the writers may be deriving benefit by exoticising mother-daughter relationships. In the depiction of mothers, one can always discern the existence of an exotic story. This is very much so in Bone. The daughters are shown as wanting to protect their mothers from the bitterness of their lives but mostly failing in the attempt and hence suffering from guilt. Thus in Bone, at one point, Lei says:

What wasn’t simple was my guilt about having a better life than Mah. She married my father for a thrill and Leon for convenience . . . She’d have to face the bitterness about her own marriages and
that’s what I want to protect her from. Remembering the bad.

Refeeling the mistakes (Bone 12).

Nina tells Mah and Leon about her abortion. The depiction is as if the migrant and host land born generations are separated by a huge cultural barrier and that the twain will never meet. The narration runs thus:

Mah and Leon joined forces and ganged up on her, said awful things, made her feel like she was a disgrace. Nina was rotten, doomed, no-good. Good as dead. She’d die in a gutter without rice in her belly, and her spirit – if she had one – wouldn’t be fed. They forecast bad days in this life and the next. They used a word that sounded like dyeen. I still can’t find an exact translation, but in my mind it’s come to mean something lowly, despised (Bone 25).

The pattern of different generations cherishing different views is found in Bone when Leila and Nina are made to critique the gender assumptions and certain practices that are there in China. The daughters are found to set certain expectations in the reader’s mind as to what China and America are from their point of view and what they are from the migrant generation’s point of view.

In Disappearing Moon Café, the “pseudo-temporal order” of the arrangement of events in the narrative has been indicated by the provision of the year in which the event has taken place and the character, from the point of view of which, the events are looked at (Genette 35). The choice of first person narrative in Disappearing Moon Café to describe the events headed under Kae Ying Woo makes explicit that Kae Ying Woo is the present day narrator of the
story. The narrations by other characters are in the third person. By making Kae Ying Woo, a woman and a Chinese Canadian narrate the story, Sky Lee has been able to give an impression of conveying the intimate personal experiences of the women characters who find themselves silenced by the codes of patriarchy that sees woman only as a race sustaining machine, their sustained efforts to attain voice and also the anguish involved in the creation of this new identity.

In Sky Lee’s *Disappearing Moon Café* also, various cultures find mention. Wong Gwei Chang who works in Canada has a Chinese ancestry and is rescued from death by Kelora Chen, a Native Canadian. However, he is shown as leaving this woman who gets pregnant to marry a woman of his mother’s choice. Here, the author’s attempt should be considered praiseworthy if she is moved enough to redress the concerns of Native Canadians as well. However, the intention of the writer becomes suspect when one thinks of the possibility of the writer presenting the man of Chinese ancestry as a cheat in order to cater to the mainstream image of the Chinese. There is a mention in the novel also of the whites in Canada.

Sky Lee also speaks of the discrimination practised against the Chinese with the Janet Smith murder episode. According to Sky Lee, it wasn’t the murder of the white woman that mattered, but the rumour that it was a Chinaman (Wong Foon Sing) who committed the murder which troubled the white Canadians. Thus Sky Lee projects chinamen as victims. However, the victory of the Chinese over the ‘mainstream’ white society makes one ask whether the position of the Chinese is really marginal. With Gwei Chang
supporting the younger generation Chinese, the Janet Smith Bill gets flopped and this becomes Chinatown’s first real success story. Further, as per the observation of Morgan, a character in the novel:

. . . there was once a law prohibiting Chinese men from working too closely with white women, and vice versa . . . But it backfired in the end because, given a choice, employers tended to hire the cheaper, more-for-their-money chinamen; and as a result, white women got protected right out of a job. By and large, this masterful bit of law-making was successfully ignored until some of the more upstanding white citizens tried to pursue it again, over Janet Smith’s corpse . . . Chinatown fought back the rising tide of virulent hatred headed their way, and for a change, they won! (DMC 68).

Sky Lee provides other instances of injustice practised against the Chinese. White children are found to block Choy Fuk’s way and sing out: “Chinkee, chinkee chinaman, eats dead rats. /Eats them up like gingersnaps” (DMC 97). The children throw a wet paper bag at Choy Fuk and its contents splatter a fowl stench over the legs of his pants and shiny shoes. Choy Fuk reflects that if the harassment was committed in daylight, “a chinese wouldn’t even dare lay a finger on their butts for fear of repercussions from other whites, especially the constables” (DMC 98). But in the novel, the Chinese in Choy Fuk is found to retaliate the injury caused him by the white society for once, thus evidencing that he cannot be treated as just a marginal person unable to resist harm:
He managed to secure a small one who was too inept to run away on cue. Clutching a handful of tangled, furlike hair, Choy Fuk shook and rattled him . . . He also gave the howling little shrimp two sound kicks on his scrawny butt, one with each foot, taking care to wipe off his besmeared shoes at the same time (DMC 98).

Sky Lee gives the Chinese Exclusion Act as one of the reasons why incest became popular in the Chinese Canadian community. She portrays Mrs. Woo pleading to her son not to marry Beatrice and to find someone else. But Sky Lee, through the narrator puts forth the question “And how could he find somebody else anyway?” and explains her question with

There was such a meagre number of young people – no new immigrant blood. What few there were, were native – born. Since 1923, the Chinese Exclusion Act had taken its heavy toll. The rapidly diminishing Chinese-Canadian community had withdrawn into itself, ripe for incest (DMC 147).

However, in spite of the Chinese Exclusion Act, the reader is forced to see Canada as a state which is somewhat lenient towards the ethnic Chinese, for there is a reference to the CBC radio broadcasts with Beatrice and Keeman listening to Chi’s brother’s upright Vitrola, evidencing the presence of ‘mediascapes.’ That special programs meant for the Canada born Chinese are broadcasted in the radio is an indication of the tolerance that the Canadians show towards the ethnic Chinese. Thus even while projecting the discrimination against the Chinese by the whites, Sky Lee does not hesitate to mention the benefits that the Chinese enjoy in their adopted land, that is, Canada.
The book also reveals the problems faced by Chinese migrant women in Canada. When it is the solitude in the Gold Mountain that poses problems for Mui Lan, it is the problems of expatriation coupled with the role which society assigns to women as producer of children that causes problems for her daughter-in-law, Fong Mei.

The equation of the different ethnic groups is foregrounded when the Chinese migrant women are presented as standing up for each other against the white officials who are presented as sex-hungry. Fong Mei tells her sister how the elderly women saved her from the claws of the immigration officials:

They hid me at night. After the ghosts put out the lights, different aunties would switch bunks with me, so that any evildoer would find that he’d dragged off a wrinkled, toothless granny for his lecherous troubles. I thought they were so brave to risk themselves for me – a stranger not even from the same village, after all. Yet, here in this hostile environment, we are all like family” (DMC 43).

In *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, Kae Ying Woo is made to speak on behalf of the generalised CBC which is in contrast with the first generation and she tells us of the problems that the later generation Chinese Canadians face in coming to terms with their Chinese roots. She talks about the disappointment that she feels when she finds that she cannot digest the Chinese roots of her family:

I’m so very disappointed. I’ve been brought up to believe in kinship, or those with whom we share. I thought that by applying
attention to all the important events such as the births and the
deaths, the intricate complexities of a family with Chinese roots
could be massaged into a suant, digestible unit (DMC 19).

Kae Ying mentions the “legacy of silence” that has been transmitted to
her by her mother and which she would end with her narration of the Wong
family history. Kae’s mother is found to whisper to her: “You don’t know, A
Kae, . . . but there has been much trouble. It’s best that what I tell you does not
go beyond these four walls” (DMC 23). It is to put an end to this silence that
Kae Ying tells the story, beginning with Lee Mui Lan, her great grandmother.
Thus those of the migrant generation are shown to pass a legacy of silence to
their host land born children. They are also shown to have skeletons in the
closet. A similar legacy of silence regarding No Name aunt is said to be
transmitted on to Maxine Hong Kingston by Brave Orchid.

The pattern where the members of the hostland born generation are not
much appreciative of China is followed in Disappearing Moon Café also. Kae
Ying speaks of the expectations that the later generation Chinese Canadians
have for China and she also voices her disappointment with “There, the
traditional values had been turned inside-out in search of radical truths” (DMC
40).

Mother-daughter conflicts figure in Sky Lee’s Disappearing Moon Café
also. After confessing to her mother about her love for Keeman, Beatrice goes
back to Chi’s home with the left side of her face terribly swollen and bruised
with red-hot finger-shaped welts from her mother’s right hand. It is the fear of
loss of family reputation and the hostile feelings that Fong Mei has for the
waitress that forces her to prevent her daughter from marrying Keeman, for Fong Mei knows that at least some people believe that Keeman is Choy Fuk’s bastard son.

The memoir *The Concubine’s Children* is narrated by Denise Chong, the second born of Winnie and John. Chong positions herself as the contemporary point of view and third person omniscient narration is employed. However, the narrator’s first person voice is also heard. Lien Chao has posited her view on the narrative strategy in *The Concubine’s Children*, “by foregrounding the role of the writer in her narrative, Chong emphasises research as a process to recover and to reconstruct historical data. From her narrative, ‘the collective self’ emerges as an underlining paradigm and an identity construction model, as it does in Lee’s fictional family saga” (105).

Though the narration is assisted by family photographs included in the book, according to Denise Chong, “there are as many versions of events as there are members of the family” (XI) and hence the veracity of the narration is put under interrogation. Orature is celebrated by the writer rather than realistic history. As Lien Chao puts it, Chong “challenges the traditional way that photographs are presented as a reliable, final testimony” and shows that they are “as elusive as words can be in signifying the absolute truth” (106). Regarding narration, it is also observed that “Chong’s narration follows a chronology, but she switches the settings from Chinatown in Vancouver and Nanaimo to Chang Gar Bin in southern China” (121). The narrative techniques used, project the characters as flesh and blood beings of contemporary society rather than as historical figures. Rather, the narrative perspective is used “as a political
strategy to challenge history” (108). Hence even this memoir embodies postmodern elements.

The text of *The Concubine’s Children* presents the situations in three different nations -- China, America and Canada. The Self/ Other dichotomy is implicit in the work of Denise Chong as well. Different ethnic groups are mentioned in course of the narration. The treatment of different ethnic groups by Canada conceals a discourse of the alterity of Chinese, which is manifest in the following lines:

> At Chan Sam’s mill, the Chinese were third on the pay scale behind whites and Hindus, earning a fraction of their pay. They paid room and board; others did not. Their bunkhouses were segregated from whites and they were expected to survive on salted fish, soup and rice (CC 19).

The situation in China is also alluded to in the memoir when it speaks of the presence of the Japanese in mainland China. The attack of the Japanese instils fear in the Chinese that the Chinese ports may be closed and that Canada’s government may suddenly change the rules of the certificates for the returning Chinese. Here one finds a delineation of China as a gruesome place and a careful reader will be able to read the overtones of a veiled plea to the Canadian government to be munificent to the overseas Chinese.

The treatment of the migrants by Canada is elaborated in great detail in *The Concubine’s Children* and this at times shows how the Chinese are attributed liminal positions by the writers themselves. Denise Chong speaks of “the claustrophobic existence of being excluded from the larger white society”
(X). She “documents the anti-Chinese sociohistorical milieu in North America” (Chao 111). Denise Chong in strong terms rebukes the treatment of migrant Chinese by Canada, “still shunned by the larger society, they had no choice but to stay within their own circles” (CC 80).

Denise Chong speaks of the flocking of Chinese to Vancouver’s Chinatown despite anti-Chinese feelings. However, “Because Chinese labourers were not allowed to make Canada their chosen home until the Chinese Exclusion Act was revoked in 1947, they could only sojourn in this country [Canada] while dreaming about returning to China, if not alive, then perhaps after death” (Chao 112). No self-respecting white, to Chong, would be seen near the Chinese. It is also said that the Chinese were being accused of stealing jobs from the Canadian fathers.

Even Hing, a Canada born Chinese is shown as having to meet with racial segregation. Hing applies herself to her studies, though without the knowledge that “the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, then among the top schools in the country, had yet to admit a Chinese student, male or female, into its faculty of medicine” (CC 153). The principals of colleges are aware of this malaise, but even they are shown to be helpless. In the case of Hing, Mr. Webster, the principal is supportive but the discrimination practised against the Chinese is very much evident from his words: “He brought up the word ‘prejudice’ . . . He confessed that he had failed to place his top Chinese graduates, that every one he’d sent to a job interview had been turned away with ‘The job is taken’” or “We don’t hire Chinese”” (CC 164).
The writer projects that even members of Denise Chong’s generation are not free from prejudices and preferential treatments. Even children are not free from racial prejudices and some from Denise Chong’s generation encounter racism even as they go to school. Chong writes: “Taunts chased us to school … At recess, children threw stone-laden snowballs in our direction; after school they waited in ambush to knock us off our bicycles” (CC 218). However, the Canadian born Chinese do not simply stomach this. They also offer resistance in their own way. Chinese Canadians use “the resources of the other” to establish a ‘space’ for themselves in the host land (Giles and Middleton 111). In the words of Denise Chong, “Mother’s advice to feign deafness worked, and she and Father made it clear to other parents that they wouldn’t put up with abuse. Acceptance and friendship soon followed” (CC 218). This again sets on the doubt whether the characters are really marginal.

The writer’s stance of playing up to the host nations in order to incur privileges is revealed when *The Concubine’s Children* also tell us about wrongs righted:

Both the Canadian Parliament and the U.S. Congress wrestled with their past “mistakes” against the Chinese. Congress had already taken the step of repealing its Exclusion Act in 1943 . . . The United States put an annual quota system in place for Chinese immigration . . ., but eventually, wives and children were permitted to enter without restriction (CC 154).

The hardships of the migrant generation in Canada have brought profits to some at least who belong to the generation of Denise Chong. Lien Chao observes that
“Thirty years after her grandparents passed away, Chong sees both the myth and the cliché of the Gold Mountain dream in the house built by her grandfather” (110).

Some of the writers, in their works, effect a comparison of the treatment meted out to the migrants by the two host nations: America and Canada. They try to bring to limelight the relative merits and defects of the two nations as host topoi.

Denise Chong effects a comparison between America and Canada in their attitude towards Chinese migrants. Usually Canada is lauded for its liberal multicultural policy, but Denise Chong still finds fault with the system, thus offering a diatribe against her host land. She too, in her works, follows the pattern of presenting the first generation migrants Chan Sam and MayYing as suffering in the home as well as the host lands. Chong notes that the attitude of the Americans towards the Chinese migrants is one of hostility. She observes that the distaste for the Chinese presence did not deter the white contractors who were looking for cheap labour to carve out the great transcontinental railways across the United States and Canada.

However, in comparing the attitude of the Canadian government towards the migrants, Denise Chong observes that though the Canadian government is at first liberal in its attitude towards the Chinese, soon they are found to follow the footsteps of the Americans. She even tends to state that America is more lenient when compared to Canada. She hints that the lifting of the exclusion was only tentative in the case of Canada. In the words of Denise Chong:
Canada lifted the barrier more tentatively than did the United States regarding wives and children: only family of those Chinese holding Canadian citizenship were to be allowed in (in contrast, whites wanting to sponsor family only had to be residents in Canada) (CC 154).

Denise Chong also effects a comparison between the homeland (China) and host land (Canada). Denise Chong observes that the Chinese way of “outing” the concubine and her invoking one of the “notouts” does not have any validity in Canada, the new land. The effect of exclusion on the Chinese in Canada has made them to dilute all the customs and practices that were prevalent in China. Denise Chong observes regarding May-ying’s illegitimate relationship with Chow Guen and the possibility of Chan Sam’s ‘outing’ her:

... while these were the customs of marriage in China, in the new world they had lost all meaning. Almost two decades of exclusion had warped the male-female ratio. As a consequence, the older Chinese community had become less censorious about unmarried relationships. Those like May-ying and Chow Guen’s where a woman took up with a man whose wife was in China, were accepted and even condoned (CC 124).

Denise Chong also covertly proposes that with the changes that were taking place in China, Canada has become a better nation to live in than China. China has become so worse according to Denise Chong that she remarks, “In earlier times, ninety-nine of one hundred overseas Chinese here (in Canada)
wanted to go home. Now, because of all the fast changes in China, not one in ten thousand wants to go back” (CC 189).

What China means to the migrants is not the same as what it means to the CBC as shown by the narration in The Concubine’s Children. As Radhakrishnan opines in “Is the Ethnic ‘Authentic’ in the Diaspora?” tensions which arise out of differing cultural beliefs can be located from the way narration has been effected. The migrants are shown to nurture a feeling of respect for their home land but this feeling very often is portrayed as getting diluted in the case of Canada born Chinese which accounts for the differing attitudes of Chan Sam, who belongs to the migrant generation and Winnie, “As a young child growing up in Canada, all that she knew she had shared with the family in China were letters of formal greeting to her two elder sisters, Ping and Nan, and to the other mother there” (CC 2). But for Chan Sam, values are different. To Chan Sam, “at whose insistence she (Winnie) had copied out the Chinese characters, these letters were a show of respect” (CC 2). But the same letters were to Winnie “little more than an exercise in Chinese brush-writing” (CC 2).

The way in which the migrant generation and the host land born generation react to the news of achievements made by the primary space also may differ. The attitudes of even the older and younger generation of migrants to the news of Canada’s victory over Japan are different as enunciated by Denise Chong:

In Chinatown, there was no … revelry for the older generation, … preoccupied by fears of the next conflict that was sure to
come in China. But for young people … , a generation of Canadian-born children, the images of war were gone as abruptly as were the newsreels that came on before the feature films at the movie theatres. This fear of war was replaced by youthful hopes and dreams of a future full of possibilities, one that ignored the reality of lingering discrimination (CC 152).

The loyalty in the case of CBC to the country of their parent’s origin is not as rigid as that of the migrants and this very often gets reflected in their conversation with each other. Chan Sam is presented as loyal to China and makes the following request to Hing, “Ah Hing, if things get better for you and I am gone from the world, all I ask is that you keep up sending money to China – twenty or so dollars every couple of months” (CC 195). However, Hing (Winnie), characteristic of CBC, does not bear a condescending attitude and the author comments, “Even though Winnie said she’d have to ask John, she knew she couldn’t ask her husband to carry that obligation” (CC 195).

China does not mean much to the host land born generation and their descendants as per the portrayal. This is very much a concern for the Chinese Canadians as the Chinese Americans, for, the children of the host land born generation are astounded when May-ying leaves the thermos of tea, the bottle of whisky, porcelain bowls of hot steamed rice, a whole steamed chicken and barbecued pork and the cups in the shadow of Chan Sam’s tombstone. They are unaware of the rituals practiced by the Chinese when deaths or marriages occur.

Though the CBC abandon the use of Chinese in the Canadian soil and take up English, they are reluctant to part with Chinese terms used in addressing
family members. But this happens ultimately. Thus Denise Chong says about the
term used in addressing her brother, “My sister and I called him ‘Dai-dai’, not
Greg and he called us ‘Jeh-jeh’, not Louise and Denise” (CC 206). In a similar
manner, Denise observes that her sister Louise and herself used the appropriate
Chinese titles of respect for each other of “Elder Sister” and “Younger Sister”.
Nevertheless as the host society’s influence over them begins to exceed the
family’s influence, this habit is also found to wane. Thus Denise Chong
observes that the sisters’ habit of addressing each other by the Chinese titles of
respect lasted only until they started school. In her words, “We would address
each other so only until we started school, when English overtook the use of
Chinese at home” (CC 206).

Ignorance about China very often causes problems to the host land born
generations. Very often the migrant parents are also not sympathetic to the
plight of these children. May-ying’s decision to take Hing out of school during
winter season as Hing did not own winter coat or boots and her asking Hing to
tell the teacher that she is going to China lands Hing in trouble. Denise Chong
tells us of the anguish that Hing has to suffer on account of her ignorance about
China:

When the snow melted and Hing returned to class, the teacher
asked her to tell the class about China. Hing, who knew nothing
of her parents’ birthplace except that there was another mother
and two sisters there and that her father had gone there to build a
house, made up a story as best as she could (CC 92).
The CBC is not shown as reprehensible through the narration in their ignorance for China as a great deal of withholding and secrecy is shown to manifest in the parent-child relationship that exists between the Chinese parents and their children born in the host land. Part of this may be due to the fear that the expatriates and immigrants still have about their country of adoption. The fear that the children may reveal that they are illegal migrants may be one of the reasons that prompt the Chinese to adopt this attitude of secrecy. Denise Chong observes in *The Concubine’s Children*:

May-ying did not tell, and Hing did not ask, about the other half of the family in China. The relationship between May-ying and her daughter was typical of Chinese families: parents were a source of discipline and instruction; children were silent unless spoken to. Even asking questions was rude (CC 93).

Denise Chong tells the reader how her mother had helped her in considering herself a Canadian and not a Chinese. Thus a picture of the expatriate generation preventing the CBC from attaining certain Chinese values also evolves, which is unique to this work.

Subscription to different cultural beliefs, according to the narration, may spark off generational conflicts in migrants and succeeding generations. “*The Concubine’s Children* explores the relationship between mother and daughter” (Chao 114). Hing who, as a child is made to act as a translator between her mother and the shopkeeper, resents this. Bickerings arise as Hing, who is just a child, fails to translate the word ‘interest’ which she does not understand. The quarrel has been amply verbalised by Denise Chong:
“What is he saying?” her mother demanded to know. “When I ask you a question, you answer!”

“Speak up, girl!” the man said, in sympathy.

By now Hing was too agitated to even think. “I don’t know what he is saying,” she said.

“What do you go to school for?” her mother snapped.

I’m only a child, Hing thought to herself, and the tears started to roll down her cheeks (CC 129).

One of the reasons for these mother-daughter conflicts has been enumerated by Lien Chao, “Living in a male-oriented culture as a concubine, May-ying is disappointed by the birth of her third daughter Hing, whom she was expecting to be a son” (115). The thwarting of her expectations might have triggered off mother-daughter conflicts in the case of May-ying.

The quarrels assume a serious tone as Hing reaches her adolescence. May-ying probably wants her daughter to be brought up obeying the Confucian values. However, Hing who grows up in a much liberal Canadian society believes in socialising. Despite her history, May-ying objects Hing’s association with boys and bursts out when Margaret takes Hing to meet some of her friends at a nightclub. The quarrel comes to its pinnacle when May-ying chastises Winnie (Hing) in front of everybody. May-ying questions Winnie as to where she had been the previous night and answers for her: “Why bother to come back! Why don’t you just go and die right now? Go and die!” (CC 159).

The generational conflicts later have dire consequences. Chan Sam becomes irritable as he ages and is discomfited with his stay outside Chinatown.
He is offended when Hing just asks, “Baba, why don’t you use the cold water to rinse off the garden tools?” (CC 196). Chan Sam, who finds it difficult to adapt in a world outside Chinatown retorts with “I’m going to write to the family in China to tell them this is how you treat your father” (CC 196) to Hing’s bafflement.

The novel *The Excluded Wife* employs third person narration. Focalisation at first is done through Sau-Ping, the girl who inhabits the maiden house and is almost ignorant of, but curious about Chinese customs and at times through the adult Sau-Ping. The narration uses impersonal third person pronouns while referring to characters. The narration is done by an external narrator --“the narrator” that “never refers explicitly to itself as a character” (Bal 21) but “presents a story about others as true” (Bal 24). Non-narrative comments are avoided. The tense used in the narration is past tense. Second person and first person pronouns are employed at places where the characters are made to speak for themselves. The time represented in the narrative spans from 1929 to 1987, with three time slots being allotted to incidents that take place in three geographic terrains -- events taking place in Toi-shaan county, South China are situated from 1929-1952, those at Hong Kong from 1952 to 1955 and those at Vancouver’s Chinatown from 1955-1987. The narration is linear. The writer incorporates a preface, a family tree and a character list before the actual novel and a map of Kowloon, Hong Kong, with a view to provide authenticity to the narration. A glossary of those terms which the non-Chinese may find difficult is provided at the end implying that the novel is meant to be read by a wider audience than those with explicit knowledge of Chinese alone. The book
professes to be authentic in its claims as a long bibliography is provided at the end of the book which has helped the writer in the working out of the different sections.

The ascension of Pierre Trudeau to power and his new multicultural policy finds mention in *The Excluded Wife*. The narration goes on thus:

He (Yik-Man) told Sau-Ping that a good prime minister had been voted into office. His name was Pierre Trudeau, and he favoured a policy that allowed many cultures to exist alongside one another in Canada. He would respect Chinese culture and put a stop to the demolition of Chinese community in Strathcona (233). The apparent endorsing of multiculturalism would have been undisputable had it not been for the last sentence where the writer appeals to Pierre Trudeau specifically for a preferential treatment of the Chinese.

In *The Excluded Wife*, the writer lashes out at the injustices that Canada showers on the migrant Chinese. At the immigration counter, Ping is troubled by the denial of entry to the person in front of her, but she does not face much trouble to enter Canada. Canada of the 1950s does not appear from the work to be a migrant friendly nation, as is evidenced by the conversation between Uncle Fong and Ping. Uncle Fong thinks of the time when he had set foot in Canada: “When I came, they put me in a dark cell for almost four months” (EW 191).

Chinese in Canada are portrayed as victims of racism. As Yik-Man observes, “Many youngsters had entered the country as ‘paper sons,’ just like Kin-Tsoi, but since they couldn’t speak English and were not welcomed by the mainstream Vancouver society, many were stuck in Chinatown and willing to do
any job at all” (EW 209). Racism in Canada finds its mention again, when after the death of one of the Uncle Maks, when the city of Vancouver decides to demolish the houses in the Strathcona area, the rest of the uncles suffer from the pang of separation, beside their fear that

The white people may not let us move into their neighbourhood. They might send their children to throw stones at us or beat us up or vandalize our place. We can’t speak the foreign devil’s language. How could we live there with any peace of mind? (EW 225).

Vancouver is shown as hostile to Chinese migrants. Many houses in Strathcona area are destroyed by bulldozers. Even the Peach garden restaurant is in trouble.

The family of Ping, even after a long stay in Canada, is presented as having to face setbacks. Canadians steal food from the restaurant and threaten Catherine, for, “the Chinese had taken jobs from the white folks in the city” and they have “got secret organizations” (EW 238). Even the police are of no help and Joe is attacked by white children from Josie’s class. The children also have to suffer atrocities at school, for, as Pauline observes: “Sometimes they call me ‘Chinese Pig’ and pull my braids in class” to the extent that “I sure wish I wasn’t Chinese” (EW 239). Thus the Canadian born children, who had to encounter racism even in the 1960s want to be freed from their Chinese ancestry which causes the turmoil. Thus ethnicity is shown not as something which one can use to reap benefits alone, but which one can also deny when it gives trouble.
However, the victim status of the CBC is stressed when they are delineated as helpless about these atrocities. As Yik-Man observes:

> It’s useless. The children were beaten up outside school. The principal won’t have anything to do with it. What you have seen is part of Canada. Even Pierre Trudeau can’t stop it. They want Chinese votes and taxes but they think we are rats off the ship (EW 240).

The writers, through their works effect a comparison of China and the host nations to which their characters migrate. Ping in *The Excluded Wife* likes Vancouver at first sight though everything is unfamiliar to her. She tends to compare Hong Kong and Vancouver:

> She quickly recognized that the streets of Vancouver were black and grey, not golden; but the city itself seemed pretty . . . The streets looked deserted compared to urban Kowloon. There were no refugees lying around under staircases, no crowded avenues lined with pedlars belting out their calling songs (EW 91).

Yuen-fong Woon offers a critique of life in China and life in Vancouver. In Pauline’s estimation, life in China has become better. However, she argues against border crossings and asks her mother:

> I’m trying to be fair, I’m trying not to judge people whose lives have been so hard. But tell me this: why do people in Sai-Fok and Fund-Yeung still want to leave? From what I gathered, the government’s policies have given the Toi-Shaan economy a big boost. People can worship their ancestors. They can choose their
own occupations; even farming seems easier. Toi Shaan City and Toi-Shaan Market looked prosperous to me. The peasants in Sai-Fok and Fund-Yeung are getting rich—look at some of those houses! Judging from what you’ve told me about your past, their standard of living is probably much higher than it’s ever been (EW 283).

The author again tries to give the impression that China has progressed into a country of political stability with “no more bandit attacks or lineage feuds or warlords and soldiers roaming around, or cruel Japanese invaders or Red Guards” (283). Pauline even goes to the extent of saying that China is now even better than Canada, for, to her, racism continues in Canada even in 1987. Pauline opines:

So why do the Toi-Shaanese want to give it all up and leave their native communities to wash greasy dishes in Canada or the United States? The girls would have no outside contact because they can’t speak English, and if they’re married to strangers who are only looking for submissive women to serve them, they’ll probably be abused. Cold climate. Second-class citizenship, even now. Language difficulties. Do they really think that North America is covered with gold? Can’t someone tell them it’s not! (EW 283)

Ping points out the other side of the picture with her words: “There is more money in Canada” (EW 283). However, Pauline observes that it helps only in victimising girls, for the members of the senior generation openly arrange blind
marriages for women in China at the tender age of fifteen and women are “being used as a means to obtain remittances or high-quality foreign goods for their parents and their brothers” and are “used as a bridge to get the male members of their household to Gold Mountain?” (EW 283)

Generational conflicts arising out of cultural differences also figure in the novel *The Excluded Wife*, though not to a great extent. The rituals of the Chinese and the western people come into conflict, during the Western part of Kin-Pong’s wedding. Sau-Ping is uneasy at the white colour of Katherine’s dress, for white, according to the Chinese, was an unlucky colour (EW 222). Sau-Ping is all the more angry as Kin-Pong does not allow her to help his bride select her wedding dress. The Chinese values imbibed by Sau-Ping come into conflict with the values of the new generation. She observes about Kin-Pong’s wedding:

Instead of coming from her home village to Kin Pong’s village, Katherine and Kin-Pong climbed into one of the decorated cars together. Honking loudly all the way, it wound towards the Peach Garden Restaurant for the Chinese part of the ceremony. No rowdy boys attacked its cool metal surface the way they had attacked Sau-Ping’s sedan chair so many years ago. Nor did Kin-Pong, who was already inside the vehicle pressed close to his bride, try to kick its door in, giving the bride a chance to get at his character (EW 222).

However, on Sau-Ping’s insistence, certain Chinese rituals are also observed, for, “Firecrackers blasted away like gunshot as soon as Katherine and Kin-Pong
arrived at the restaurant” (EW 223). This was followed by kowtows, handing over of tea to Ping and decorating the bed with popcorn and cypress leaves.

Ping also faces problems with Joe, who supports his westernised wife in not practising Chinese customs. This pattern recurs in Ping’s relation with Kin-Pong as well. Ping expresses to Kin-Pong, her filial son, her resentment in having to carry Josie, her grandchild, to school and back, for, as per the Chinese customs she has internalised, it is her daughter-in-law who should be taking care of her, rather than her catering to the needs of her children and grand children. Kin-Pong, however defends his wife, agreeing that had it been in China, the daughter-in-law would have taken care of the mother-in-law in addition to her own children. But he reminds Ping that they are now in Gold Mountain and that Katherine is being filial in her own way and the fact that her work in the restaurant benefits the whole family should not be forgotten. Ping reflects sadly on her son’s change:

How her son had changed since their days as squatters … First he’d had a Western-style wedding, allowing his bride to dress as an unlucky ghost and then kissing her in public. Now he was telling his mother that she had no right to be served by her daughter-in-law! How long, she wondered, before he began to look like a foreign devil? (EW 229)

The Chinese and the Canadian ways come into conflict when Pauline tries to become Westernised:

... this hybrid girl had no patience with Chinese customs that commanded women to obey and serve their fathers, husbands,
brothers and sons. She scolded her sister-in-law, Katherine, for being subservient to Kin-Pong and once even accused Sau-Ping of abandoning Big Sister Fei-Yin--her own first-born daughter in Hong Kong without a fight! Pauline thought it horrible that a woman like Katherine would allow herself to be married to a man who had chosen her from a batch of photographs and she declared herself to be uninterested in Chinese boys (EW 254).

Joe’s decision to marry Jennifer also sparks generational conflicts, for in Ping’s case, the marriage has been arranged and she has seen ‘Yik-Man only on the night of their marriage’ whereas Joe does not even ask the consent of his mother, but just announces that he is getting married. Ping resents that her daughter-in-law who is a third generation Chinese Canadian cannot speak Chinese, but Joe abruptly ends the argument, saying “Mom, what are you complaining about? You always wanted me to marry a Chinese. Come on, give me a break! She’s Chinese” (EW 258). Generational conflicts reach their pinnacle when Ping laboriously prepares Chinese dishes for Jennifer to have after childbirth, but the latter rejects them and bathes and washes her hair repeatedly. “Worse still, she refused to let Sau-Ping hold the baby for more than a minute a day. And Joe allied himself with her” to the extent that “Sau-Ping felt slighted, like a TB ghost” (EW 259). Ping is sad at the fact that baby Gordon Leung would not bother to tend the family’s ancestral tablets or sweep the graves of his forbears in the Chinese cemetery when he grew to be a man (EW 259).
The writers thus find fault both with what they would call an ‘assimilationist’ and a ‘segregationist’ stance on the part of the ‘hegemonic’ culture. The feeling that America and Canada have not become egalitarian in the real sense of the term and that racial prejudice still prevails is drilled into the readers. Multiculturalism, in the ideal sense of good life for all is to be lauded. But the excessive emphasis on the defining of essences is problematic as this sets on the us/them divide which may result in the conscious or unconscious denigration of other ethnic groups. Thus, in marginal writings, in a way, there is an attempt to counter racism in the host topoi, but in the process there is also an attempt by the writers to depict other ethnic cultures in an unfavourable light thereby advocating exclusionism. At times, the writings also depict a tendency to define essences that restrict border crossings. Hence essentialisation is to be viewed as a dangerous tendency.

Thus in the narration, one usually finds some detachment on the part of the host land born generations while talking about China and greater identification while talking about America which gets reversed in the case of the first generation. However, this is a tendency that becomes suspect and warrants interrogation, for, such homogenising is absent in actual cases of migration where people cannot be typecast as immigrant generation or hostland born generation having a common view of the two lands, for, different individuals, irrespective of their being migrants or hostland born generations react differently to migration. However this will help the writers in ensuring their space, which is not simply Chinese or American, but Chinese American, a third time space (Lavie and Swedenburg 18), which would allow them to reap greater benefits as
writers offering a critique of both China and America. This selective identification with their ethnic group enables them to reap greater benefits in the secondary space. Thus a reader can read the ideology also underlying the narrative which reveals that rather than occupying the space of the hyphen which the writers very often claim themselves and their characters to be part of, they can be found to have transcended the boundary of limited readership and now occupy the third time space, the position of privilege when compared to the one occupied by the people who are just Chinese or American. This is underlined by the fact that as evidenced by chapter five, it is only selective essentialism that the writers practice.