CHAPTER - I
INTRODUCTION

The term “Asian American” was coined in the late 1960s to promote political solidarity and cultural nationalism. This movement was a broad-based one, appealing to immigrants and American-born Asians alike. By contrast, early Asian American cultural criticism – which emerged during this period as part of the larger movement – placed a much greater emphasis on American Nativity. In the influential introduction to *Aiiiiieee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* (1974), edited by Frank Chin, Jeffery Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Wong, the editors regarded American Nativity as crucial to what they considered to be Asian American “sensibility” – one “that was neither Asian nor white American” (1974/1983 xxi). They also decried the nation of a “dual personality, of going from one culture to another” (vii, xi). Only writers of Chinese, Filipino, and Japanese descent were included in their anthology.

More recently, however, critics such as Lisa Lowe (1991), Oscar Campomanes (1992) and Shirley Lim (1993), have challenged the idea of a unifying Asian American sensibility and underlined the need to take into account “heterogeneity,” “exile,” and “diaspora” when reading Asian American literature.
Eline H. Kim, author of the ground-breaking work of criticism in the field, *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context* (1982), explains in her forward to *Reading the Literatures of Asian America* (Lim and Ling 1992) as to why cultural nationalism is more important to her than the earlier conception of Asian American literature. She argues for revisiting the conception:

In the late 1970s...I sought delimitations, boundaries, and parameters because I felt they were needed to establish the fact that there was such a thing as Asian American literature...That is why cultural nationalism has been so crucial...Insisting on a unitary identity seemed the only effective means of opposing and defending oneself against marginalization.

Naheed Islam protests against the homogenization of diverse groups and the domination of Indian Americans within the “South Asian” category: “But why would I be South Asian when I could be Bangladeshi? And the Tripuras, Shantals and Chakmas living within the borders of Bangladesh, brutally suppressed by the military, may choose to distinguish their identity from that nation-state”. (242)

In the contemporary world of past paced cultural transition, history and place are not simply two separate elements of a worldview in
Hawai’s. Stephen H. Sumida in an article *Sense of Place, History, and the Concept of the ‘Local’ in Hawaii’s Asian/Pacific American Literatures* opines, “in Hawaii’s island culture *place* is conceived as *history* – that is, as the story enacted on any given site” (Suminda 1992: 216). The most important reason to maintain the designation of “Asian American” literature is not the presence of any cultural, thematic, or poetic unity but the continuing need to amplify marginalization voices, however dissimilar.

“Asian American,” on the other hand, accentuates the American status of immigrants from Asian and their descendants. The term grows out of the frustration felt by many American-born citizens of Asian extraction at being treated as perpetual foreigners in the United States despite the fact that their roots in this country go back as many as seven generations. Such racist treatment, along with Orientalist tendencies that fetishize Asian objects, customs, and persons, has also engendered in many Asian Americans as internal ambivalence about their Asian heritage. Because of the dominant perception that what constitutes “American” is white, mainstream, and Western, the desire to reclaim a distinctive ethnic tradition seems forever at odds with the desire to be recognized as fully “American”.
It is therefore not surprising that writing by Asian American has coalesced around the theme of “claiming an American, as opposed to Asian, identity” (E. Kim 88). This desire to be recognized as American has sometimes been achieved at the expense of Asian affiliation.

In Kingston’s *China Men* – a book admittedly designed to “claim America” – the narrator puzzles over her father’s reluctance to divulge his past: “Do you mean to give us a chance at being real Americans by forgetting the Chinese past?” (14). Her question, which implies that jettisoning Asian cultural baggage augments a Chinaman’s chance of being acknowledged as a “real” American, explodes the myth of a pluralist country.

Children of immigrants are perhaps made even more acutely aware of their ethnic differences. The pain of maintaining traditional Asian customs is evoked in Chitra Divakaruni’s poem “Yuba City School” (*Leaving Yuba City: Poems*, 2009). Many people of Asian descent feel, to this day, the need to prove their Americanness by shedding their originary culture and by setting themselves apart from new Asian immigrants. Though different sensibilities admittedly characterize the American-born and the foreign-born, insistence on American nativity can result in the double exclusion of current Asian immigrants – by non-Asian and by American-born Asians alike.
The competing impulses of claiming America and maintaining ties with Asia are especially pronounced among some of these immigrants. Bharat Mukherjee believes that such authors should draw on their American experience instead of writing as expatriates and indulging in nostalgia: “I am not interested in just writing ‘an American novel’… Though I’ve been living in America for 30 years now, my roots remain elsewhere… back there” (Hagedorn 181).

Nguyen, who lived two decades in America, identifies himself as a Vietnamese man, because “A psychological sense of home is the most important sense of home” (Vinh 1994, 1). Meena Alexander describes herself in *Fault Lines* as “a woman cracked by multiple migrations,” who is impelled to revisit figuratively “all the cities and small towns and villages” in which she has lived to come to terms with her fragmented life history. (1993, 2-3)

Shirley Lim, who argues from the opposite viewpoint that the effort to “claim America” only spurs assimilation into the majority culture and feeds American national pride and prejudice, I believe that we can both “claim America” – assert and manifest the historical and cultural presence of Asians in North America – and use our transnational consciousness to critique the polity, whether of an Asian country, Canada, the United States, or Asian America. Individuals may feel
empowered by an ethnic American identity, by a diasporic identity, or by both, but the field of Asian American literary studies can certainly afford to incorporate these divergent perspectives. An exile or diasporic identity can enable others to contest the exclusiveness of state or cultural nationalism.

Similarly, diasporic experience may be enabling for metropolitan intellectuals who can afford to travel back and forth across the Pacific but debilitating for migrant workers and those who suffer drastic occupational “demotion” in the transition from Asia to America. At the same time, a transnational class analysis can unveil analogous or interrelated structures of class and gender oppression in Asian and America, as exemplified in the works of Bulosan and Kalsey, as well as those of Meena Alexander and Le Ly Hayslip (see also Grewal 1993; Mohanty 1993; San Juan 1995). With the rise of global corporatism in which Asian plays a significant role (see Miyoshi 1993), Asians and Asian Americans are seen as occupying not just exploited but exploiting positions.

Ironically, while Asian American writing that emerged after the civil-rights movement was bent on claiming America, educators and publishers who are currently seeking to integrate works by Asian Americans into their offerings tend to fasten on texts with a strong
“Asian” (exotic) flavor. In the popular consumption of East Asian and South Asian American literature, the focus has been on putative Asian lore, picturesque details, and outlandish practices. Such a predilection has the effect of distracting from what Asian American writers have to say about America at large.

Because American minority writers are often judged primarily by the ethnic content in their work, those interested in taking up other subjects are seldom given critical attention. Asian American writers thus may find little incentive to explore different channels of creativity.

The South Asian American indicates the need for such ethnic demarcations within the climate of a peculiarly North American (United States and Canada) multiculturalism replete with state policies, immigration quotas, and academic curricular battlefields. Amid this clamor, one must remember to listen to the struggling to make a “home” within mainstream hegemonies, institutional or on the streets. Even within the same ethnic group there is multiplicity rather than homogeneity and this is often the hardest fact for any mainstream to recognize.

The “internal conflicts” among peoples of South Asian origins have much longer historical and geographical origins than our more recent location in the United States or Canada. As Saloni Mathur points
out with regard to Canada, ethnic groups are not “internally consistent” as required by the state. There is no monolithic South Asian ethnicity as “required by the needs of multiculturalism.” Within multiculturalism, there is room for usually only one variety of one ethnicity, not a complex plurality. Such a need for homogeneity is “closely connected,” notes Mathur:

to state power and regulation… The problem, in part, with the doctrine of pluralism as it has been politically employed by the Canadian government is its paternalistic insistence on the notion of diversity, when its underlying agenda has always been unity. (Mathur “Broadcasting Difference.” 2-5)

The multiplicity of differences among South Asians is linked by common histories of British colonization that they share with writers from other ex-colonies in Africa and the Caribbean. I include in the concept of colonization both physical and metaphoric parameters. The imposition and institutionalization of the English language as crucial components of cultural imperialism have left a legacy of writers using the English language even as they grapple with what Trinidadian-Canadian Marlene Nourbese Philip in *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* (1989) calls “this anguish that is English” (Philip 11). In a now
commonplace phrase, the empire writes back, and often in a distinctive English that Philip describes as “Kinglish and Queenglish”. (Philip 11)

Facilitated by immigration policies, South Asian immigrants since the 1960s belong predominantly to a professional class, the educated elite who benefited from an English colonial education in South Asian and came here equipped with educational skills and fluency in English. Contemporary South Asian American writers belong primarily to this middle and upper class are: Indo-American Agha Shahid Ali, Meena Alexander, Bharati Mukherjee, Vikram Seth, Pakistani American Sara Suleri, Javaid Qazi, Indo-Canadian Rohinton Mistry, Uma Parameswaran, Sri Lankan Canadian Michael Ondaatje, and Indo-Guyanese Canadian Cyril Dabydeen. Popularly known as “Patel motels,” they are managed mainly by a Gujarati community that arrived here at times via Kenya and Uganda, often after disastrous ousters by dictators like Idi Amin.

The losses of that exclusion must be recognized, particularly of Punjabi literate, the earliest by South Asians. One advantage of studying only English-language writers is a cohesiveness of language, literary forms, and thematic concerns such as ethnicity, loss of homeland, uses of memory and indigenous folklore as sustaining mechanisms in alien
environments, reconciliation, and hope in creating new spaces of belonging.

In the 1950s and 1960s, it was much more difficult for South Asian American writers to be recognized within an ethnic category than it might be today. Such ethnic visibility in terms of employment, publication and daily life is advantageous and problematic, as is represented by a contemporary generation of South Asian writers who openly engage with issues of ethnicity, location, and racism within mainstream institutions. When one adds a spatial dimension, for instance, migrations, into this temporal unfolding, the intersection of geography with history opens up new areas for imaginative exploration – returning home through the imagination, re-creating home in narrative.

Geography importantly inscribes contemporary history. In their very uneasy habitation within borderlands of different ethnicities, languages, and cultures, recent migrations of ethnic peoples provide significant clues for historical analysis. I want to find a way that we can make a durable and usable past that is not just nostalgic but exists in the present. The present for me is the present of “multiple anchorages.” It is these multiple anchorages that an ethnicity of Asian American provides for me, learning from Japanese Americans, Chinese Americans, African
Americans, Indian Americans, and everyone juggling, jostling, shifting, and sliding the symbols that come out of my own mind. (27)

It is deeply problematic when cultural groups such as the National Federation of Indian Associations (NFIA) present a monolithic cultural identity of all Indians in the United States irrespective of class, religion, and education.

Bhattacharjee analyzes how a community’s need to preserve a national homogeneity, often sited in their cultural traditions, places an additional burden on women attempts at cultural preservation throughout history, women have been regarded as the guardians of tradition, particularly against a foreign colonizer during nationalist liberation struggles. Now, in this different kind of colonized space, immigrant Indians must demystify a “mythical ‘Indian’ identity” unchanged by history and location. For a woman to leave an abusive space of battering and move out of the heterosexual, patriarchal family tantamount to betraying a “nationalist” ideal.

Ironically, as Bhattacharjee points out, “the terms of cultural preservation are set by the dominant power.” For example, in the United States, Indians, along with other Asian communities, are regarded as “a model minority, exemplifying high educational status and financial success” (11). She points out the contradiction in the very phrase ‘model
minority.’ In its desire to belong inside an ‘American dream,’ the Indian bourgeois community:

actively engages in the politics of minority status and representation within the U.S. These activities, dictated over limited resources for people of color, as well as by a rivalry over an imaginary standard of acceptance into the ‘majority,’ succeeds in making ‘race’ into a number game and a policy issue for Indians rather than an area of radical social change and action. (12)

The development of Chinese American literature is obviously closely related to the immigration history of the Chinese to the United States. Chinese immigration to the United States began in the mid-19th century. In Ronald Takaki’s view, at the time, there were several wars in China, such as the First Opium War in 1840, as well as many peasant rebellions in China nationwide and countless internal wars later (Takaki, 192). In addition, there were also several severe natural disasters in China, such as drought, plague, and flood. These factors pushed the Chinese to immigrate to other countries even later. As Kingston remarks on the late immigrants in her book:

…the men – hungry, greedy, tired of planting in dry soil – had been forced to leave the village in order to send food-
money home. There were ghost plagues, bandit plagues, wars with the Japanese, floods...poverty hurt, and that was their first reason for leaving. (17-19)

From the beginning of the immigration history of the Chinese in the United States in mid-19th century, Chinese people have lived in America for over 150 years. However, for a very long period, Chinese Americans were silent and unheard in the mainstream American society and “Asian immigrant workers vanished without leaving behind much written account of their individual lives in America” (Kim 23). This is partly because of their relatively small number in America at the time. In addition, the heavy workload also occupied the immigrants’ lives so that “their time was consumed in struggles for a livelihood” (Kim 23). Furthermore, the majority of the Chinese immigrants were peasants who were illiterate, as they were members of the lower social class who had not had the privilege of schooling in China at the time. Kim also points out that “in fact, labor recruiters in America, in search of a docile labor force, preferred those who had little formal education” (24). Therefore, early Chinese American literature works were “mainly limited to a few autobiographies and oral testimonies by male writers, often in Chinese”. (Grice 135)
In general, early Chinese American literature was limited to a few types of writings, such as poems, newspaper articles and autobiographical writings. The poems are the famous “Angel Island poems”, which were carved by unknown Chinese immigrants in Chinese language into the walls on Angel Island, where they were held before being allowed to enter the United States between 1910 to 1940 (Kim 23). Autobiographical writing is another form of early Chinese American literature, although autobiographical writing was not popular in the tradition of Chinese literature; in fact, in ancient and medieval Chinese literature history, there was little autobiography (although there were a few exceptions) until the 15th century. This phenomenon is mostly because of the influence of Confucianism, which stresses the importance of humility; therefore writing about one’s own life is obviously very self-centered. However, as Kim (24) points out, among the early Chinese Americans, autobiographical writing was the early form to record their lives, especially among the educated people, such as students, scholars, and diplomats, whose writing is “characterized by efforts to bridge the gap between East and West and plead for tolerance by making usually highly euphemistic observations about the West on the one hand while explaining Asian in idealized term on the other”. Lee Yan Phou’s When I Was a Boy in China (1887) is one of the first of these writings.
Later on, Pandee Lowe published *Father and Glorious Descendant* (1943), which is the first book-length autobiography by an American-born Chinese in English. As Kim (60) points out, the value of this book is “Lowe’s love for America coupled with respect for his ‘Oriental roots’”. Two years later, Jade Snow Wong published *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1945), which is “the best known and most financially successful book by a Chinese American” (Kim 59). *Fifth Chinese Daughter* has helped to popularize the belief that “American racial minorities have only themselves to blame for lack of success in American life”, since Jade Snow Wong “sings the praises of American opportunities and life” (Kim 60). Published after the World War II, when Americans became more aware of the distinctions between Asians (especially between the Japanese and Chinese), and began to view the Chinese as allies, both of these books promote the image of Chinese Americans as a model minority, and expressed their “ardent desire for acceptance by other Americans” (Kim 61). Particularly, Wong offers to her readers an autobiography from a woman’s point of view, which later influenced Kingston.

In general, when reviewing Chinese American literature, it is important to notice that the most significant contribution of Chinese Americans is the fact that they have portrayed the Chinese, or Asian
Americans, living in contemporary United States unlike the white writers in the past, thereby challenging the Orientalist stereotypes created by white writers. Moreover, Chinese American literature has its own unique features, compared to mainstream American literature and other ethnic literatures. Firstly, it resembles features of postcolonial context in its contrast of the powerful American culture and the relatively less advantaged Chinese culture. Secondly, those Chinese American writers who have grown up in America and been educated in American schools have been deeply affected by modern American culture, and oral and written Chinese literature is the only source of their knowledge and experience of their parents’ ancestral land China. Therefore, their texts always involve a considerable amount of description of the writers’ imagined past of their family’s ancestral country, Chinese culture and traditions. Thus their interpretation of “China” might not be historically authentic and their interpretation of “China” might not be as accurate as the white readers might expect or believe. Thirdly, Chinese American writers sometimes also use bilingual techniques and contexts, such as adopting Chinese idioms and metaphors into English language.

Furthermore, there is another important feature of Chinese American literature- the “otherness”. Chinese Americans are always
“others”, both in America and China. They are outsiders to the American culture because of their physical features and they are seen to maintain Chinese traditions and culture. In addition, as Skandera-Trombley points out,

Chinese Americans, who have been subjected to genocidal immigration policies, are placed in the situation of permanent guests who must earn their keep by adding the spice of variety to American life—by selectively maintaining aspects of traditional Chinese culture and language fascinating to whites. (158)

However, to the Chinese civilization, they are also outsiders: they are educated in the American way and they are seen as Americans.

Being outsiders to both cultures, Chinese Americans have been confused about their identity. This is a dilemma for some Chinese-American writers, which can be seen in the different names with which Chinese Americans have referred to themselves. In the early immigration period, Chinese Americans called themselves “overseas Chinese”, which means concentrating on their identities as “Chinese”. However, nowadays, “Chinese American” has become the official term, which emphasizes a dual identity as an “American” who is of Chinese origin. But in the equivalent translation of “Chinese American” in Chinese language, there
is still ambiguity in the focus on “American” or on “Chinese”, as it either can be translated as “Chinese who obtain American citizenship” or “Americans who originates from China”.

With the rapid growth of Chinese American literature from the 1970s onwards and with wider attention in the United States, also in the academic field in China, including Taiwan, the discussion and critics on Chinese American literary texts have been treated with equal attention, although most of the criticism and journals are in Chinese language.

However, since the mid-nineteenth century, China has had more contact with the West, with Christian missionaries, technology and science, democracy and egalitarian philosophies. After the establishment of new China in 1949, women have become equal with men, and the old doctrines of patriarchal tradition are disappearing. Nevertheless, as Amy Ling (1990) notes in *Between Worlds: Women of Chinese Ancestry*:

Though China may have taken great leaps forward in official statutes and public pronouncements concerning women, nonetheless, in practice, backed by centuries of history and tradition, the old ways die hard. Moreover, Chinese who have immigrated to other countries, whether motivated by homesickness, alienation, or persecution,
ofter hold tightly to what they have brought from the Old Country; thus, customs and attitudes that may have altered or disappeared in the mother country may still be continued almost unchanged in isolated enclaves abroad. And young Chinese women today - (even or perhaps particularly) those living half a globe away from China - are still haunted by the misogynist proverbs and attitudes of generations past. (9)

This is true in Kingston’s book, as well as in the stories by other Chinese American female writers, such as Amy Tan, who is famous for the novel *The Joy Luck Club*(1989).

Kingston also criticizes American racist traditions. Institutional racism is “discrimination against ethnic minorities that is systematic and embedded in the procedures, routines, and culture of an organization and not simply the product of racist attitudes amongst individual employees and managers”. In 1999 this term was raised in the report of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, which defined institutional racism as follows:

The collective failure of an organization to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin which can be
detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantages minority ethnic people”.

In addition, as Lowe points out in *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (1996):

> racism is not a fixed structure; society’s notions about race are not static and immutable, nor has the state been built on an unchanging exclusion of all racilized peoples. Rather, legal institutions function as flexible apparatuses of racialization and gendering in response to the material conditions of different historical movements. (Lowe 22)

Indeed, in history, the Chinese immigrants’ lives were hard and depressing in America because of the effects of “The Chinese Exclusion Act”. On May 6, 1882, “The Chinese Exclusion Act” was passed in the United States, as the only major restriction on free immigration in U.S. history: this act excluded Chinese labourers from entering the country till 1943, and also made Chinese immigrants permanent aliens by excluding them from U.S. Citizenship. Moreover, the Act affected seriously the Chinese who were already in the United States in that any Chinese who left the United States had to
obtain certifications for re-entry. In addition, besides Chinese, other Asian immigrants have also been treated unequally in the U.S. by various legislations and laws, and Lowe pays attention to “the Chinese as alien non citizen, the American citizen of Japanese descent as racial enemy, and the American citizen of Filipino descent as simultaneously immigrant and colonized national”. (Lowe 8)

Popular Chinese American authors, such as Maxine Hong Kingston(1940), Amy Tan (1952), Gish Jen’s Typical American (1991), Frank Chin(1970), David Henry Hwang(1980), Fae Myenne Ng (1993) and some Chinese poets such as Li-Yong Lee and feminist critics such as Elaine Kim, Shirley Lim, Sau-Ling Wong. The works of these authors have earned readers’ praise as well as academic attention.

Chinese American female writer Amy Tan(1952) has to date authored five published novels: The Joy Luck Club(1989); The Kitchen God’s Wife (1991); The Hundred Secret Senses (1995); The Bonesetter’s Daughter (2001), and Saving Fish from Drowning (2005); two children’s books and other non-fictional works, such as The Opposite of Fate (2004), a collection of her essays. Among all of Tan’s works, The Joy Luck Club, as her first published novel, achieved the most outstanding success and popularity. It was on the New York Times bestseller list for nine months and translated into many languages. Several literary awards
and nominations have been granted to Tan for her work on *The Joy Luck Club*, which was also made into a motion picture in 1993.

*Gish Jen* (1940) is a second-generation Chinese American. Her parents emigrated from China in the 1940s, her mother from Shanghai and her father from Yixing. Born in Long Island, New York, she grew up in Queens, then Yonkers, then Scarsdale. Her birth name is Lillian, but during her high school years she acquired the nickname Gish, named for actress Lillian Gish. She graduated from Harvard University in 1977 with a BA in English, and later attended Stanford Business School (1979-1980), but dropped out in favor of the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop, where she earned her MFA in fiction in 1983. Her first novel, *Typical American*, attempts to redefine Americanness as a preoccupation with identity. “As soon as you ask yourself the question, “What does it mean to be Irish-American, Iranian-American, Greek-American, you are American,” she has said. Her second novel, *Mona in the Promised Land* concerns the invention of ethnicity, and features a Chinese-American adolescent who converts to Judaism. *The Love Wife*, her third novel, portrays an Asian American family with interracial parents and both biological and adopted children as “the new American family”. She asks the question “What is a family?” as a way of asking, “What is a nation?” The latest novel, *World and Town*, portrays a fragile America, its small
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towns challenged by globalization, development, fundamentalism, and immigration, as well as the ripples sent out by 9/11. It explores the changing face and role of immigrants in America, as well as a changing America. World and Town won the 2011 Massachusetts Book Prize in fiction and was nominated for the 2012 International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award. Jen's writing confounds categories like the “immigrant novel,” probing societal constructions and boundaries of every stripe, and moving in a direction that seeks to enrich and even redefine what it means to be American.

Frank Chin (1940) was born in Berkeley, California, but was raised to the age of six by a retired Vaudeville couple in Placerville, California. At six his mother brought him back to the San Francisco Bay Area to live in Oakland Chinatown. He attended college at the University of California, Berkeley. He received an American Book Award in 1989 for a collection of short stories, and another in 2000 for Lifetime Achievement. He currently resides in Los Angeles, California. Chin is considered to be one of the pioneers in Asian American theatre. He founded the Asian American Theatre Workshop, which became the Asian American Theater Company in 1973. He first gained notoriety as a playwright in the 1970s. His play The Chickencoop Chinaman was the first by an Asian American to be produced on a major New York stage.
Stereotypes of Asian Americans, and traditional Chinese folklore are common themes in much of his work. Frank Chin has accused other Asian American writers, particularly Maxine Hong Kingston, of furthering such stereotypes and misrepresenting the traditional stories. Chin, during his professional career, has been highly critical of American writer, Amy Tan, for her telling of Chinese-American stories, indicating that her body of work has furthered and reinforced stereotypical views of this group. In addition to his work as an author and playwright, Frank Chin has also worked extensively with Japanese American resisters of the draft in WWII. His novel, Born in the U.S.A., is dedicated to this subject. Chin is also a musician. In the mid-1960s, he taught Robbie Krieger, a member of The Doors how to play the Flamenco guitar.

David Henry Hwang (1957) was born in Los Angeles, California to Henry Yuan Hwang, a banker, and Dorothy Hwang, a piano teacher. Hwang was the oldest of three children. He has two younger sisters. He received a Bachelor's Degree in English from Stanford University and was educated at the Yale School of Drama. His first play was produced at the Okada House dormitory at Stanford after he briefly studied playwriting with Sam Shepard and María Irene Fornés. Hwang's early plays concerned the role of the Chinese American and Asian American in the modern day world. His first play, the Obie Award-winning FOB,
depicts the contrasts and conflicts between established Asian Americans and “Fresh Off the Boat” newcomer immigrants. The play was developed by the National Playwrights Conference at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center and premiered in 1980 Off-Broadway at the Joseph Papp Public Theater. Papp went on to produce four more of Hwang's plays, including the Pulitzer Prize-nominated drama *The Dance and the Railroad*, which tells the story of a former Chinese opera star working as a coolie laborer in the nineteenth century, and the Drama Desk Award-nominated *Family Devotions*, a darkly comic take on the effects of Western religion on a Chinese family. Those three plays added up to a “Trilogy of Chinese America” as the author described.

*Fae Myenne Ng’s* (1956) is the daughter of seamstress and a laborer, who immigrated from Guangzhou, China. She attended the University of California-Berkeley, and received her M.F.A. at Columbia University. Ng has supported herself by working as a waitress and at other temporary jobs. Her short stories have appeared in the *American Voice, Calys, City Lights Review, Crescent Review, Harper's*. She currently teaches at UC Berkeley.

*Shirley Geok-lin Lim* (1944) was born in Malacca Malaysia. She is an American writer of poetry, fiction, and criticism. Her first collection of poems, *Crossing The Peninsula*, published in 1980, won her the
Commonwealth Poetry Prize, a first both for an Asian and for a woman. Among several other awards that she has received, her memoir, *Among the White Moon Faces*, received the 1997. Born in Melaka, Malaysia into a life of poverty, deprivation, parental violence, and abandonment in a culture that, at that time, rarely recognized girls as individuals, Lim had a pretty unhappy childhood. Reading was a huge solace, retreat, and escape for her. Scorned by teachers for her love of English over her “native” tongue, she was looked down upon for her pursuit of English literature. Her first poem was published in the *Malacca Times* when she was ten. By the age of eleven, she knew that she wanted to be a poet. Lim had her early education at Infant Jesus Convent under the then British colonial education system. She won a federal scholarship to the University of Malaya, where she earned a B.A. first class honours degree in English. In 1969, at the age of twenty-four, she entered graduate school at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts under a Fulbright scholarship, and received a Ph.D. in English and American Literature in 1973. Lim is married to Charles Bazerman, also a professor and chair of the Education Department at University of California, Santa Barbara.

Maxine Hong Kingston is an author whose life writing crosses cultural boundaries and academic disciplines. Her life can be found woven into her first two memories, *The Woman Warrior* (1976) and
China Men (1980). Born October 27, 1940, Maxine Ting Ting Hong was the first American-born child of Tom Hong and Ying Lan (Chew) Hong. Before Maxine’s parents immigrated to the United States in 1925, they had had two children in China who died young. Maxine was named after a winning gambler in the legal gambling house her father then ran in Stockton, California.

Maxine grew up completely surrounded by Chinese Immigrants in her community on Stockton’s rough south side, called Chinaman, spat at, and threatened; she endured the sting of racial hostility in the streets of her neighborhood. When her parents put her in school at the age of five, she spoke no English. She has referred to the first three years of school as her “silent years,” years she captured in the section of The Woman Warrior entitled “A Song for Barbarian Reed Pipe.” She failed kindergarten because she did not speak and got a zero on an intelligence test in first grade because she colored it black, a symbol to her of a curtain that veiled great mysteries but a source of great concern for her teachers. Becoming fluent in English around age eight released Maxine from her linguistic and creative silence.

Blossoming as a student, she published her first essay in 1955. At graduation she was awarded 11 scholarships, several of which she used to enroll at the University of California, Berkeley. At Berkeley Maxine
matriculated as an engineering student. Miserable with her choice, she finally became an English major, a decision that caused her much Inner turmoil. Having seen her parents’ grinding work and the sacrifice of their intellectual interests, she felt Irresponsible and guilty for working at something she enjoyed. Once she adapted, however, she became deeply involved in the counterculture movements that dominated life in the Berkeley of the 1960s—the civil rights and free speech movements, the antiwar protests, and the drug culture.

Maxine graduated from Berkeley in 1962 and then returned to earn a teaching certificate in 1965. In the intervening years she married Earil Kingston, an actor she met at Berkeley and had their only child, Joseph. They decided to leave California in 1967 because the drug culture had become oppressive and the antiwar movement increasingly violent.

En route to the Far East, the Kingstons stopped in Hawaii and stayed; they purchased their first home in Honolulu. At first they tried to live their communal ideals, but such a life was difficult to sustain on an island that was in fact the staging ground for the war in Vietnam. Earil Kingston returned to acting and Maxine to teaching English. The stunning success of *The Woman Warrior* in 1976 allowed Maxine to leave high school teaching and turn to writing full-time. During the 17 years the Kingstons lived in Hawaii, she also completed two other full
length works, the highly acclaimed *China Men*, another memoir, and *Hawai‘i One Summer* (1987), a set of essays.

The Kingstons returned to California in 1984 and settled in Oakland. In response to an Invitation from the Chinese Writers’ Association, Kingston made her first trip to China that same year. She had long avoided such a trip, fearing that she would find that all her descriptions of China and Chinese life would be wrong. Instead, she was pleased to see how well she had imagined the country of her ancestors. In fact, she told Paul Skenazy in an interview: “I did feel like I was going back to a place I had never been” (71). She was deeply moved, upon a second visit, to learn that many Chinese writers, having read both *Woman Warrior* and *China Men* in translation, considered her part of their movement to reestablish the connections with their classical heritage, which had been disrupted by the Cultural Revolution.

Kingston’s first two memoirs gained her the status of a major writer, a national and international figure. When her eagerly awaited third book came out in 1989, Kingston’s wide readership was surprised to find she had eschewed memoir in favor of a novel, *Tripmaster Monkey*. The response from readers and critics was mixed; many lauded her courage in attempting a new form and embraced the novel as a tour de force, while
others were put off by the self-indulgent, garrulous main character, the peace activist Wittman Ah Sing.

Kingston returned to fiction and Wittman Ah Sing in a sequel to *Tripmaster Monkey*. With “The Fourth Book of Peace”, a novel set during the Vietnam War, she sought to answer the fundamental question “How do you come back from war?” She had a polished draft completed by 1991 when catastrophe struck: a wildfire that took more than 20 lives destroyed her Oakland neighborhood, her house, all her belongings, and every version of her manuscript. Already in deep mourning over the death of her father the month before, Kingston found herself stunned and unable to write. When she put a call out for any materials that might help her reconstruct her novel, she was overwhelmed with the response. Especially significant was her contact with veterans’ organizations; out of this contact grew her commitment to community-in-writing sessions that gathered all types of veterans together—those who fought in wars, sometimes on opposite sides; those who resisted; and those who served as civilians. Their focus has been on how one can mend the psychological traumas of war. The results of her ongoing work with this writing group have been her return to writing and the publication of *The Fifth Book of Peace* in 2003, and the initial stages of a compilation of the veterans’
writings. As of 2005 she was also a senior lecturer in creative writing at the University of California, Berkeley.

At the age of 36, Kingston captured national attention with the publication of her first book *The Woman Warrior*. Appealing equally to general and academic readers, it has become the most frequently assigned text in high schools, colleges, and universities by a living American author, according to the Modern language Association. The appearance of *The Woman Warrior* on the literary landscape in 1976 caused nothing less than a revolution in Asian American literary and feminist studies. It was an immediate crossover hit winning several awards, and virtually guaranteeing Kingston a celebrated place as the undisputed sovereign of Asian American writing.

She is still most frequently associated with this work, although her subsequent major books also continue to garner considerable attention. Her sustained popularity can be attributed to her ability to explore universal themes within highly inventive texts that combine an array of narrative forms, predominantly memoir, fiction, fable and legend, and history.

Examining her life provides a lens through which her works and their specific kind of working-class sensibility can be understood. She
made it her mission to devise a new kind of writing textually woven of her people’s dreams, hopes, illusions and disillusions.

Because Kingston relies on such a range of forms within her major works, it is difficult to place them in a single genre. A few critics see The Woman Warrior as fiction, while many others, taking their cue from Kingston’s subtitle, categorize it as memoir. China Men and, to a lesser extent, The Fifth Book of Peace presents readers with a similar dilemma. Even Tripmaster Monkey which is clearly a novel, is filled with allusions to and retelling of Chinese legends. Perhaps the best label comes from the scholar E.D. Huntley, who has characterized Kingston’s work as “postmodern multigenre.” “Postmodern” captures Kingston’s rejection of traditional chronological or logical forms in favor of segments that shift back and forth across time, cultures, and points of view without arriving at any single end or specific conclusion; “multigenre,” referring to Kingston’s practice of embedding her own story and those of her parents and other family members in Chinese legends, suggests the interplay between the layers of a story that evokes her themes. For example, Fa Mu Lan, the legendary woman warrior, is presented as alive in the present because she exemplifies the qualities of active courage for which the unnamed main character is searching.
Maxine Hong Kingston work must begin with her parents. They loved literature and steeped Kingston’s childish imagination in classical Chinese poetry, chants, and a vast repertoire of historical, traditional, and family stories. Her father was a brilliant poet and scholar in China, but forced to give up such a life after he emigrated, he was largely silent during her childhood. Her mother taught Kingston talk-story: Of her relationship to her mother storytelling gift. Kingston says, “My mother is the creative one - the one with the visions and the stories to tell. I’m the technician.” As a young trader two books -- Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Woman* and Jade Snow Wong’s *Filth Chinese Daughter* -- had a strong impact on Kingston. She notes that “the funny-looking little Chinaman” in Alcott’s novel reminded her that people like herself were not a pan of the novel’s world. Wong’s memoir, however, expanded literature to include fully realized Chinese characters rather than stereotypes. (Sharp, 893)

As a mature writer Kingston concentrates on three preeminent figures in the Western tradition. In the nineteenth-century American poet Walt Whitman, she finds a “vision of a new kind of human being formed in this country.” In the poet William Carlos Williams’s prose work *In the American Grain*, she identifies the source for American writing: in her words, a writer must “listen to the ground because out of the ground of
the Americas comes soul and voice.” In fact, when she learned that there was no sequel to Williams’s work, though it ended with Lincoln, she decided she would write a part 2.

In her mind *China Men* is that sequel. Finally, she turns to *Orlando*, one of the novels of Virginia Woolf, because it breaks through ‘constraints of time, of gender, of culture.” which Huntley characterized as “an inherited oral narrative tradition that incorporates family tales and genealogy, history, familiar adages, folklore, myth, heroic stories and even didactic and cautionary pronouncements.” While the universal themes of coming-of-age, the search for identity, and family relationships are fundamental to her work, Kingston is particularly committed to exploring the intertwined strands of cultural adaptation and the definition of the word *American*. Through talk-story she reveals the practical and emotional complexities of Chinese emigration and acculturation and the equally complex terrain that Chinese Americans face in finding a place in American society. For Kingston these stories of cultural adaptation are quintessentially American and deserving of full recognition in American history and literature.

Kingston’s own feminist vision unfolded throughout her life. She not only tells the men’s stories, she also uses her talents as an author and teacher to help the men tell their own stories, thus avoiding many issues
Glory of representation. Kingston notes in the interviews that she struggles constantly with the problem of how to write about Chinese Americans to audiences that often know little of their traditions, less of their customs, and almost nothing of their language. She therefore develops several distinct strategies that she uses at different times in her writings.

She earned a number of honors and awards, among them a ‘National Book Critics Circle Award’ in nonfiction, an ‘American Book Award’, and a ‘National Humanities Medal’. In 1980, she was declared a “Living Treasure of Hawaii” by a Hawaiian Buddhist sect. Kingston was overwhelmed to receive the recognition as she was the Hawaii’s first Chinese-American Living Treasure. More important than these official recognitions, is the cultural position she has assumed as a Chinese American. Her work is believed to be the most anthologized of any living American writer, and that she is read by more American college students than any other living author. Students, particularly Asian American women, look to her as a model and find themselves in her tales. A serious elucidation of her significant works will be carried out in the following chapters.

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