From Cultural Negation to Cultural Hybridity—On Whitman Ah Sing’s Pilgrimage in *Tripmaster Monkey His Fake Book*

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One of themes that haunt a writer is identity. This issue seems particularly essential in Chinese American literature. Confronted with the pull of two cultures—Chinese culture and American culture—Chinese Americans, especially the young generation, feel confused and puzzled. They don’t know who they are. Such an identity crisis makes most of them, if not all, go to the extreme—to be a typical American. Whitman Ah Sing, the protagonist in Maxine Hong Kingston’s *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* offers a thought-provoking identity paradigm—to be culturally hybrid.
I

This paper employs Homi Bhabha’s post-colonialism to analyze Ah Sing’s hybrid identity and Kingston’s hybrid narrative. When exploring the possibility of cultural translation, Homi Bhabha adopts “the realm of the beyond” as an interstice for negotiation. With the existence of cultural difference, there must be cultural translation. He borrows Lacan’s “temporal break” that brings about negotiation, or intervention of something that can take on a new meaning. To negotiate about the cultural difference—cultural heterogeneity—is to elaborate on these heterogeneities to find out the homogeneity for bridging. After scrutinizing the intervention or negotiation, the cultural translation becomes plausible and possible. “Culture as a strategy of survival is both transnational and translational. It is transnational because contemporary postcolonial discourses are rooted in specific histories of cultural displacement, whether they are the ‘middle passage’ of slavery and indenture, the ‘voyage out’ of the civilizing mission, the fraught accommodation of Third World migration to the West after the Second World War, or the traffic of economic and political refugees within and outside the Third World. Culture is translational because such spatial histories of displacement—make the question of how culture signifies, or what is signified by culture, a rather complex issue” (Bhabha, 172). In this case, the cultural boundary is uncertain and complex. “The realm of the beyond” provides a third space for the new meaning, and opens up narrative strategy for the emergence of the new meaning and translation.

The first step for cultural translation is mimicry through which the colonized hopes to release his/her anxiety imposed on him/her by the
hevemonic discourse. However hard he/she tries, imitation is an activity that cannot help him/her run away from his/her dilemma. “It is imitation... when the child holds the newspaper *like* his father. It is identification when the child learns to read” (Bhabha, 61, original emphasis). This example indicates vividly that imitating is far from enough. It is a compromise to the hegemonic culture, and a disavowal to the disfranchised culture.

Mimicry, as a strategy, fails to turn the colonized into an element of hegemonic discourse, which does not mean that cultures are not translational. Cultural negotiation and translation make it possible for the marginalized to identify with the center through identification. There are, Bhabha writes, three conditions, underlying an understanding of the process of identification. First, existing is being in relation to an otherness that becomes the basis for identification. Second, the site of identification is a space of splitting. Third, “the question of identification is never the affirmation of a pregiven identity, never a self-fulfilling prophecy—it is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image.... Identification...is always the return of an image of identity that bears the mark of splitting in the Other place from which it comes” (Bhabha, 45).

Identification emphasizes the birth of a new image for the subject that takes on the assumed image. So it is a question of interpretation—how to interpret the Self and the Other. It does not reject tradition, and memory that is introspective or retrospective and combines the dismembered past to make sense of the present pain suffered by the colonized. By receiving something like a mask, a double, the being undergoes splitting process in his/her body, and
possesses hybridity.

Steeped in the dream to become a 200 percent American or whiter than the whites, the "banana" Chinese Americans possess a white heart although with the yellow skin. "You can take the girl out of Chinatown, but can you take the Chinatown out of the girl" (Lowe, 65)? The answer is "Yes." The consequence of Chinese Americans' efforts to be included into the mainstream is rather ironical. They study hard for a better job in the white community. But the white peers do not agree. Talking with Ah Sing on a bus, the American girl points out the symptoms of Chinese boys. "But you know what's wrong with Chinese boys? All you do is study, but there's more to life than that. You need to be well rounded. Go out for sports. Go out on dates. Those are just two suggestions. You have to think up other activities on your own. You can't go by rote and succeed, as in engineering school. You want a deep life, don't you? That's what's wrong with Chinese boys? Shallow lives" (Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book, 75).[1] The girl's wording is worth considering. "Chinese boys" first indicates that no matter where they were born, they are always Chinese in the whites' eyes. This reveals a self-evident fact that the whites are always in the culturally supreme position to alienate the Other.

According to Bhabha, Other is an image inscribed by the whites whose purpose is to degrade it. The dominant culture recognizes itself through the projection of "otherness", which indicates that Self and Other are relative. The difference is split between Self and Other so that both are incomplete: neither is sufficient. Just as Fanon puts it, the position of the Other must not be considered a fixed phenomenological point opposed to the self. "Why not the quite simple attempt
to touch the other, to feel the other, to explain the other to myself” (Bhabha, 61)?

After turning the difference into Other, the colonial discourse stereotypes the otherness into some fixed images. The fixity, an ideological construction of otherness, contains rigidity and the same order and disorder as well. “Likewise the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always ‘in place’, already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated” (Bhabha, 66). We can see clearly that being “already known” and being “anxiously repeated” are two striking features of stereotype that feeds on the force of ambivalence.

The colonizer needs to interpret the colonized, to put it in a fixed and degenerated positions effectively for the sake of convenient recognition, oppression and discrimination. In this articulation of otherness, the colonizer creates social signs, a critical strategy to marginalize and represent the difference. Therefore, “the stereotype is a complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive, and demands not only that we extend our critical and political objectives but that we change the object of analysis itself” (Bhabha, 68). The white girl on the bus forms certain stereotypes about all the Chinese American boys—they all just study; they are not well rounded; and the do not go out for sports. Their skin color distinguishes them from others, and their life is completely different and shallow. Meanwhile, the girl bases her conception on the ethnicity line. In her mind, there is only “Chinese boys,” “Japanese boys,” “Korean boys,” and so on and so forth when she
addresses Asian Americans. So, however hard he tries, Ah Sing cannot be mixed up with the whites because they are foreigners.

What Ah Sing is proud of is his American citizenship—he has the same privileges as the whites. He would always say proudly to the whites and the Chinese that he is American. His arrogant declaration, however, is mocked. In college classroom, he is a foreign student; on the street, he is a Chinese boy. The ironclad rule in the white-dominated America is that ethnicity is always different from American citizenship that actually means nothing because the whites do not change their cultural supremacy, do not alter their stereotypes about the people of color, and therefore do not accept Ah Sing’s self-assumed American identity. In order to avoid being recognized as a Chinese boy, Ah Sing denies his Chinese identity.

“I not Chinese. I Japanese boy [sic]. I hate being taken for a chinaman. Now which of my features is it that you find peculiarly Chinese? Go on. I’m interested.”

“Don’t say chinaman,” she said (Tripmaster Monkey, 75, my emphasis).

Just as Bhabha points out, negation takes place wherever there is cultural difference. Any single political system contains different ideology and belief, which shows certain difference. “Cultural difference is the process of the enunciation of culture as ‘knowledgeable’, authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification.... Cultural difference is a process of signification through which statements of culture or on culture differentiate, discriminate and authorize the production of fields force, reference, applicability and capacity” (Bhabha, 34). Ironically, the cultural negation of the colonizer, after being internalized, becomes
the fact that the colonized negate their own culture. On hearing that the American girl is criticizing Chinese boys, Ah Sing immediately claims that he is a Japanese boy. How fast his ethnicity changes! He wants to elude the girl's stare and stereotypes. Moreover, in order to please the girl, he employs “chinaman” which is a negative and hostile name for Chinese just like “Japs” for Japanese. His self-contempt is redressed right away by the girl who pays attention to wording—she adopts “Chinese boy” instead of “Chinaman.” The reason why Ah Sing uses the term is that he is whiter than the white girl.

After his adventures, Ah Sing begins to see through the racism. He calls himself “the King of Monkey” whose name, Wukong, means being aware of emptiness. That is Ah Sing’s awareness as well. By dramatizing the scene in which Monkey King Sun Wukong is not invited to the party that is full of delicious food, fragrant flowers, sweet fruits and beautiful scenery, Ah Sing reflects exactly the dilemma of the young Chinese Americans. The party symbolizes the mainstream that still rejects them in some way. So they feel left out because they are excluded from the party “with orgies of race jokes” (Tripmaster Monkey, 316). Disappointed, Ah Sing is “wishing for a cloak of invisibility” (Tripmaster Monkey, 316), just like the narrator in Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison.

The meaning of the invisibility of Chinese Americans is double. First, of course, they are invisible to the whites even if they are American citizens. That is to say, in the dominant group, ethnicity always goes before nationality. They are always viewed as “Chinese” or “foreigners” by the whites as if their citizenship was invalid. Second, they abandon their Chineseness to be a pure American, and
in return they are abandoned by Chinese culture. In this way they become double marginalized, first by American culture, then by Chinese culture. They are vividly named as *jook sing* boys and *jook sing* girls that mean they are isolated in the middle of the bamboo and cannot reach either side. Another reason why Wang Wah Gay in *Eat a Bowl of Tea* asks Ben Loy to go back to China to marry is that this generation of *jook sing* girls show "no respect for elder people" (*Eat a Bowl of Tea*, 19). Moreover, Wah Gay does not like to get "a grandchild as well as a daughter-in-law" at the same time if Ben Loy ends up "with one of those *jook sing* girls" (*Eat a Bowl of Tea*, 42). Discarded by both sides, the young Chinese Americans are in dilemma.

As a member of this group, Ah Sing’s identity is rejected by both the Chinese in America and the whites. One important element in identity is how one is recognized. When searching for identity, Ah Sing tries to cover his Chinese origin to be someone else. But the receivers still treat him as Chinese although this assimilatist holds it true that he has *almost* everything the whites possess: the same education in the same classroom, the same citizenship although with different origins, the same rights as an individual prescribed in the Constitution. He even goes further than the whites—he hold completely negative attitude toward the Chinese minority and despise Chinese to please the whites. But he fails to realize the difference of his skin color and the existence of the racism. Just as Homi Bhabha states, "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha, 86). That is to say, no matter how hard he tries to
imitate the whites, they at most can only come to the level of “almost the same.” Never can he be quite the same.

What Ah Sing is doing in the course of his identity-seeking is like a frog in a well: he lives in a circumscribed space where what he can see is the things in the well, and the small blue sky over it. However, the closure is the site for the frog, the site for Chinese Americans to live in, while the beautiful blue sky is the “triple-millennial party held in Heaven.” The frog of course dreams to have the blue sky to itself. The high well wall, however, imprisons it inside, shattering the fantastic dream into pieces. The height of the wall separates the frog from the outside world. In other words, the deeply-rooted racial consciousness and discrimination divide the whites and Chinese Americans into two different worlds. As long as a frog traps itself into the well, it can never jump out of it. So do Chinese Americans. As long as he is Chinese American, Ah Sing can never elude the shadow of racism. The reason is that racial consciousness works. Everyone is dominated by origin that is beyond us. All the frogs are the same species, but if one of them drops into the well, the frog and its descendants will be entrapped there, unable to share the blue sky with the others above the well. The white and the yellow are all human beings. The only difference is the skin color that throws them into two different worlds—the super whites and the inferior yellows. If it fails to understand the ironclad rule and tries to knock the well wall down, the frog will suffer heavy loss. If they ignore the existence of racism, Chinese Americans will be beaten down just like a crestfallen cock.

The process of Ah Sing’s internalization evokes simultaneously ambivalence about consciousness of the original culture and the
dominant culture. As he grows mature, he holds ambiguous and uncertain attitudes toward the internalization—the reconciliation of the two cultures and the confused hesitation between the identification of them. The confrontation and reconciliation of Chinese and American cultures are extremely complicated. It turns out to be encountering with and infiltration of the past and the present, the Chinese culture and the American culture. In order to keep a space for survival, Ah Sing at the crossroad is compelled to stand by the white supremacy for the sake of security. He does not care much about the past of the Chinese in America because he is American born. That's why he fails as a playwright in the mainstream. A person cannot lose his past, his root. It is extremely important to a writer because it is the source of his/her imagination and creation.

Actually, the past and the present are interplaying, each depending on the other. Our understanding of the present is based on our conception of the past. T. S. Eliot’s analysis of the relationship between tradition and individual talent, although aesthetic, can be employed here to confirm the fact that a poet, or an individual, is enclosed in tradition, or the past. Tradition

"involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what a writer most
II

There are three stages for the identity-seeking—the complete conformity stage, the awareness stage, and the articulation stage. As analyzed above, the first stage is a double-way: the complete adoption of the cultural values, institutions, and practices of the whites, and the disowning of the values and practices, including the physical features, of Chinese minority. Just as mentioned above, Ah Sing not only despises Chineseness, but also rejects his ethnicity. One characteristic in the first stage is that Ah Sing's soul is the product of the whites. He first accepts the Orientalism and the stereotypes about Chinese, and next participates in the whites' efforts to Orientalize the Chinese by calling contemptuously "Chinese" as "chinaman." Just as Bhabha claims, the shadow cast by the stereotypes forces the colonized to elude it. Living in the colonized culture, the colonized is too familiar to feel its presence so that he/she claims that his/her original identity has faded away to such a weak degree that he/she becomes a new Other—the one that is split from his/her self. His/Her new otherness guides him/her to behave and to live according to the dominant culture. In order to be an authentic Other, he/she imitates the colonizer's standard, including morality, value, and ideology, because he/she understands the destructive power of the colonizer's discourse—"turn white or disappear" (Bhabha, 61).

The conducts of the first stage embody speculation. Without any antagonism and subjectivity, Ah Sing embraces the whites' values blindly. He is eager to yield self, antagonism, and Chinese culture, and to sell out his ethnicity. When he wakes up from the dream, he suddenly finds that he has no way to take.
The second stage usually does not come until he is mature enough to understand his social status as American citizen in reality. His dream to be a pure American has been crashed into pieces by the unshakable racism of the dominant culture into which he used to expect to be included. Realizing he is rejected, Ah Sing revisions and rethinks of his unscrupulous internalization that produces some of his ridiculous conducts. Gradually, he finds out that during the process of identification and assimilation, he is only in the position of an object, while the subject, the whites, have the final say. The gazes and the laughter of the whites make him uneasy and uncomfortable—business is business and Chinese is Chinese. The modifier “Chinese” in the phrase “Chinese American” cannot be taken out in the whites’ sense although it is generally believed by Chinese Americans that “Chinese American” is always used to distinguish itself from the other minority groups. Ethnicity becomes an ineradicable sign of negative difference in the hegemonic discourse. Although his conducts and ideas are Americanized, his blood and skin color illustrate the truth that he is a Chinese descendant. Can he skin himself and replant a white skin on him? Or can he, as Fanon concludes, have “an amputation, an excision, a haemorrhage that spatter” (Bhabha, 76) his whole body with Chinese blood?

The serious reality makes Ah Sing realize that he cannot be weak any more after his calm retrospection. He revisions his fetishism of the whites, readjusts the once internalized self, and finds the importance of his Chineseness to his identity-seeking.

Ah Sing describes the feeling of Monkey King Sun Wukong when he learns that he is not invited to join the party. “He feels so left out. Life would not be worth living if he didn’t get to that party. The party
of a lifetime. Why for [sic] did they overlook him? He was most handsome. Was it his personality? His lower-class manners? His clothes not good enough for them? He’s as good as anybody. He gnashed his teeth over the feting and celebrating going on without him. Nobody should leave anybody out of anything. He’ll crash that party. He’ll invade it with his army. He’ll make a scene. He’ll eat everything on the buffet. He’ll overturn tables. He’ll piss in the wine. He’ll show them, leaving him out” (*Tripmaster Monkey*, 137).

Monkey King has self-esteem—everyone should be equal. He analyzes some possible reasons why he is overlooked. Realizing the only way to be included is to fight, he makes up his mind to fight his way into the party to get his share. Ah Sing, of course, does not have his own army. But he can break the stereotypes about the Chinese by challenging the white discourse, resorting to something that he can fall back on.

Refusing to follow the whites’ definition of beauty, Ah Sing finds new beauty in the self: “I declare my looks—teeth, eyes, nose, profile—perfect” (*Tripmaster Monkey*, 314). His “one-man-show” is the declaration of independence of Chinese Americans. He refutes the stereotypes such as “Is China Man like china doll? Like fragile” (*Tripmaster Monkey*, 326). He reclaims the “lost I” because “we want a name we can take out in the street and on any occasion” (*Tripmaster Monkey*, 326). The Hollywood movies represent Chinese by using “me” instead of “I”. He is proud to say, “Me? I’m yellow.” “I’m Gold.” “We’re Golds” (*Tripmaster Monkey*, 326). So far Ah Sing has undergone great transformation: from self-contempt to self-esteem, and to self-retrieval. He succeeds in obtaining active subjectivity out of passive objectivity.

137
The question that follows is how to win independence. Just as mentioned, Ah Sing resorts to something to fall back on. What is this “something”? As a playwright, he fails to have any of his play shown on a white stage. So he turns to Chinatown for help. Ah Sing goes to see the president of the Association to have an idea to discuss with him. “I want to put on a play here. For free. It won’t cost you anything. It will make money for you. For us. For the Family Association, who doesn’t have to pay to see it. The Association can sell tickets, and make money. Will you please donate the use of our hall for a play” (Tripmaster Monkey, 254, my emphasis)? Being aware of emptiness in the American Orientalist discourse, Ah Sing changes his attitude toward Chinese and comes back to his origin for help. His wording—“For us” and “our hall”—indicates that he identifies himself with Chineseness, conceiving of himself as one member of the community, because he finds out that the possible theatre he can create is in Chinatown rather than in the white society. His previous rejection of Chinese culture and Chinese identity to please the whites, however, classifies him into jook sing boy, which leaves a bad impression on the old generation. So his visit is not welcome. The president does not open the door to let him in until he explains a lot who he is. After learning the purpose of the visit, the president declines it directly. “You no can play here [sic]” (Tripmaster Monkey, 255). Ah Sing does not give up, telling him what his plays cover—the stories from Chinese classics, such as the stories about Guan Gong and Zhang Fei in The Romance of Three Kingdoms, about Monkey King Sun Wukong in Journey to the West, and about Dai Zong, Li Kui, and Zhang Qing in Outlaws of the Marsh. His interpretation of Chinese classics pleases the president
and shortens the gap between them. Moreover, he rewrites the stories to insinuate the whites’ viewing Chinese as cannibals. “But, Uncle, we bad. Chinaman freaks. Illegal aliens. Outlaws. Outcasts of America” (Tripmaster Monkey, 261).

Finding that Ah Sing is familiar with Chinese classics and can interpret them, the president finally agrees to his request. It is obvious that his Chinese culture’s background works a lot. If he were ignorant of Chinese culture, he would not build a theatre out of Chinatown. It is his knowledge and interpretation of Chinese classics that reconnects him with Chinatown, and that enables him to make his place.

Ah Sing has reached the third stage—articulation stage. His sense of self-worth and individuality tells him that he should seek individuality as a member of ethnic Chinese. That is to say, realizing the positive attributes of the dominant discourse is consistent with accepting and valuing Chinese ethnic group. In the play, Yale Younger and Lance Kamiyama play the roles of Chang and Eng, the double boys. Ah Sing creates a lively image here: Chinese and American are joined twins as “Chinese American.” The loss of either side will lead to the death of another, just as Eng follows Chang soon after the latter dies. The joined twins are two equal subjects with their self and subjectivity that cannot be lost.

Being aware of the roots benefits the action of identity-seeking. It helps Ah Sing know where he is. To remain independent with his subjectivity is not contradictory to his Americanization. The subjectivity will renew the dominant culture and make it ready for the future. For example, the Chinese immigrants had stayed in America for
nearly one century without losing the self and the subjectivity before the U. S. government changed its policy to include them.

When seeking identity with a new cultural awakening and rising political consciousness, Ah Sing is building Chinese American culture unconsciously. It includes the two cultures without favoring either one. So they have completed the circle—from negation to negotiation and to hybridity. Just as Homi Bhabha writes, “the kind of hybridity that I have attempted to identify is being acknowledged as a historical necessity” (Bhabha, 28). The constructing of Chinese American culture embodies its characteristics—hybridity. Edward Said points out: he grew up as an Arab with a Western education. “These circumstances certainly made it possible for me to feel as if I belonged to more than one history and more than one group” (Said, 1993, x x vii). It not only includes the unique identity that is the hybrid product of Chinese tradition and Euro-American values, but also illustrates the struggles of Chinese to survive and to find a place for themselves in America that is steeped in a consciousness of color hierarchy. Its constituting elements and practices are more than simple combination. They are partly inherited, partly modified, and partly invented, including the practices that emerge in relation to hegemonic culture that denies and subordinates Chinese as “Other.” When rearticulating Chinese cultural traditions in the face of a dominant white culture that orientalizes Chinese, Kingston writes, “Chinese Americans, when you try to understand what things in you are Chinese, how do you separate what is peculiar to childhood, to poverty, insanities, one family, your mother who marked your growing with stories from what is Chinese? What is Chinese tradition and what is the movies” (The Woman Warrior, 6)?

140
According to Lisa Lowe, Asian American cultures are characterized by heterogeneity, hybridity and multiplicity. “Heterogeneity” refers to the existing differences within the limited category, and “hybridity”, the formation of cultural objects and practices that results from the histories of uneven and unsynthetic power relations, while “multiplicity” refers to the way in which subjects are determined by several different axes of power (Lowe, 67).

Lisa’s analysis is to the point. Chinese American discourse, as an element of Asian American culture, is subject to the three attributes. Though sharing the same origin, Chinese Americans come from different regions in China with different social status. The early immigrants, for instance, are peasants while the recent ones are those with technology. “Hybridity” can be seen clearly through Ah Sing’s uniqueness. Speaking like a black, walking like a Japanese swordman, Ah Sing is a graduate from University of California, Berkeley, and is fired as a toy salesman. He rewrites Chinese classics and even transplants them in American context. The stories about Guan Gong and Li Kui are different versions from the original ones. The mosaic shows the feature of Chinese American culture. Furthermore, Ah Sing considers himself the incarnation of Monkey King whose seventy-two changes enables him to be a hybridity with Chinese American sensibility. [2]

III

Not only is Ah Sing’s identity characterized with hybridity, but also the narrative of the novel is the product of hybridity. Kingston repeats that the Chinese myths she has used in her books actually stem from her mother’s talk-stories. Unlike Jade Snow Wong, Kingston herself
does not have a sound grasp of Chinese language, which disarms her to read the original Chinese novels directly. Her assertion in the interview can prove the conclusion. When Professor Zhang Ziqing of Nanjing University, during his visit to the U. S., asks her what Chinese literary writing she had read either in Chinese original or in English translation, Kingston answers, “I’ve read several versions of The Water Margin including Pearl Buck’s translation All Men Are Brothers. I’ve read Romance of the Three Kingdoms, Dream of Red Chamber and The Monkey King or The Journey to the West in many versions. I also saw Hong Kong movies with scenes from Romance of Three Kingdoms. I read Li Po and Tu Fu in translation. My father memorized the classical poetry, the T’ang Dynasty poems. He recited them to us. Then I’ve read Chinese fairy stories. In recent years I read modern Chinese writers like Lu Hsun…. Mostly I heard talk-story in Chinese, Cantonese from my mother” (Zhang, 21, my emphasis). That is to say, Kingston, like the other Americans, just relies on translation, movies, talk stories that are not reliable themselves to get access to Chinese classics. This, however, does not prevent her from interpolating Chinese classics.

The narrative to combine Chinese literary works with the American reality culminates in Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book in which Kingston transplants three Chinese classics: Journey to the West, Romance of Three Kingdoms, and Outlaws of the Marsh. As a playwright, Ah Sing is considering the question all the time—who is he? Is he a Chinese, or an American, or a Chinese American? Living in America, he is rooted in Chinese literature for nutrition and inspiration. His transformation of Chinese classics is unique. When telling the president of the Association the story of Li Kui (Li Kwai
in Cantonese), the Black Whirlwind, Ah Sing associates the Chinese in America with the Black. He says that Li Kui is Black because his skin is black. "He was Chinese and black, a black Chinese" (Tripmaster Monkey, 25). Kingston insinuates ingeniously the inferiority of the Chinese in America who are treated by the whites as the Black. She also concerns with the social problems such as violence and disarmament and intermarriage. Liu Bei (Liu Pei in Cantonese) suggests that they propose to every nation to marry other races to make "unrelated people get together" (Tripmaster Monkey, 143). Next, they talk about the crimes of wars—millions of people had been killed in wars. Zhang Fei (Chang Fei in Cantonese) says, "we’re inviting soldiers and civilians to a place where they quite ending up at the hillsides of skulls. The right disarming, tough Zen non-violence? What is it" (Tripmaster Monkey, 144)? These ancient Chinese heroes are endowed with the concerns of contemporary Chinese Americans.

The plot of Chinese classics has been transmuted as well. In one of Ah Sing’s plays, he rewrites Liu Bei’s will. After Guan Gong is captured and killed by Sun Quan, Liu Bei launches the avenging war against Wu (A. D. 220-280). [3] Before dying, Liu summons Kong Ming (Liu Bei’s military advisor, and Zaixiang, now premier) and says that he will succeed to the emperorship as Liu’s children are not wise enough to be a ruler. Moreover, Liu tells his sons to serve the new ruler. This hybridity and transfiguration entail a better understanding of Chinese literature or some accompanying notes because the otherwise misreading and misunderstanding is unavoidable to the white readers whose knowledge of China is rather weak, let alone of Chinese literature. They will take it for granted to accept the transplantation and transfiguration in Chinese American
writings as what they are and then cultural misreading will lead to new forms of stereotypes. Barbara Burdick, for example, publishes a review on *The Woman Warrior* in the *Peninsula Herald*. "No other people have remained so mysterious to Westerners as the inscrutable Chinese. Even the word China brings to mind ancient rituals, exotic teas, superstitions, silks and fire-breathing dragons" (Amirthanayagam, 56). John Henriksen has similar comment, "Chinese-Americans always 'looked'... as if they exactly fit the stereotypes I heard as I was growing up. They were 'inscrutable'. They were serene, withdrawn, neat, clean and hard-workers. *The Woman Warrior*, because of this stereotyping, is a double delight to read" (Amirthanayagam, 56).

**Conclusion**

What Homi Bhabha writes, "Almost the same, but not quite," shows that foreignness is unavoidable. The fact that Ah Sing tries to hide some part of his identity in the course of identification is ironically ambivalent. The things hidden are considered an impeding obstacle that prevents him from engaging himself in identification. The integrity of the colonialist culture and the colonized culture is destroyed by the activity of involvement and neither can keep its purity. Cultural translation leads to cultural hybridity that is historical necessity. "To be true to self one must learn to be a little untrue, out-of-joint with the signification of cultural generalizability" (Bhabha, 137, my emphasis). Being a little untrue is a strategy to keep Ah Sing's subjectivity. The uncertainty and the interstices enable him to maintain the "foreignness of cultural translation." Therefore, Ah Sing's true self (a little untrue) comes into being after undertaking cultural negation, negotiation, and hybridity.
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Notes:
[1] In the following writings the title of the book will be shortened into *Tripmaster Monkey*.
[2] Frank Chin suggests that Asian American sensibility or ethnic sensibility be possessed to contend against and break the whites' stereotypes about Asian Americans.
[3] Three kingdoms refer to Wei (A.D. 220-265), occupying the North of Changjiang, Han (A.D. 221-263), basing on Shu (now Sichuan Province), and Wu, ruling the South of Changjiang.

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