E WOMEN IN THAI NOVELS: THE N OF IDENTITY, GENDER AND GENERATIONAL TRANSITIONS

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ETHNIC CHINESE WOMEN IN THAI NOVELS: THE NEGOTIATION OF IDENTITY, GENDER AND GENERATIONAL TRANSITIONS

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This dissertation is a study of the interaction between Chinese and Thai cultures in contemporary Thailand. It is also a part of the study of the Chinese Diaspora. The focus is on a specific angle, namely, that of gender, female gender, and how the specific issues of women's status and role according to Chinese tradition versus the norms of modern and Thai society, form an important part of the identity construction process of these women.

The main objective of this dissertation is to examine novels produced by Chinese-Thais from the late 1960s to the present, focusing on novels that relate to gender. I then proceed to analyze how the identity of Chinese-Thai women is negotiated between the ethnic Chinese heritage and the adopted Thai way of life, including new ideas on female status. Finally, we analyze the social construction and reconstruction of the multi-faceted identity of Chinese-Thai women through the negotiation and generational transitions as reflected in Thai novels.

The methodology I used is qualitative textual analysis. I focused on five novels, spanning the period of 1969 to 2008, a period that has seen large changes in the status of Chinese-Thais, and the way they are treated by the state. An important criterion in the selection has been exposure, through the written novels themselves and through renditions in popular television series. The novels are 1) "Letter from Thailand" by Botan of 1969, 2) "Being with Gong" by Yok Burapha of 1976, 3) "Through the Scales of the Dragon" by Prapason Sewikul of 1989, 4) "The Last Petal of the Peony" by Kantima of 2007, and 5) "A Walk through Spring" by Yuvadee Tonsakulrungruang of 2007.

The findings of the dissertation are that Chinese-Thai women have been struggling, for decades, to change their role and status in the Chinese-Thai family and community. As assimilation ceases to be a focal point, and a large Chinese-Thai middle class is formed, this struggle turns into an inner community struggle to reconstruct a new Chinese-Thai identity, one which has no bias against women. These negotiations over the status of women take numerous forms of action in the novels I studied. One common type which is worthy to point out is that of raising the status of women, especially daughters', at the expenses of that of sons. In such cases, the sons are depicted as either being failures or as being ungrateful towards their fathers, while the daughters represent success and gratitude.

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งานวิทยานิพนธ์นี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการขยายฐานความรู้ในการศึกษาเกี่ยวกับชาวจีนพลัดถิ่นในประเทศไทย ซึ่งเน้นไปที่การศึกษาเรื่องการเปลี่ยนแปลงของบทบาทและสถานะของผู้หญิงชาวไทยจีน โดยมีวัฒนธรรมจีน วิถีชีวิต และวัฒนธรรมแบบไทย การเปลี่ยนแปลงของสังคมไทยในปัจจุบัน และแนวคิดใหม่ๆเกี่ยวกับสถานะของเพศหญิง เป็นตัวแปรสำคัญในกระบวนการสร้างอัตลักษณ์ใหม่ให้กับผู้หญิงจีนในไทย โดยใช้วิธีดำเนินการศึกษาเชิงคุณภาพ ด้วยหลักการวิเคราะห์เนื้อหาของนวนิยายในช่วงปี ค.ศ. 1960 ถึง ปัจจุบัน ซึ่งในช่วงเวลานี้เป็นช่วงเวลาที่มีการเปลี่ยนแปลงอย่างมากในสถานะภาพของคนไทยจีน ซึ่งส่วนหนึ่งมาจากวิธีการปกครองของรัฐ นวนิยายห้าเรื่องที่นำมาใช้ในการวิเคราะห์ คือ 1. จดหมายจากเมืองไทย โดย โบตั๋น (1969) 2. อยู่กับก๋ง โดย หยก บูรพา (1976) 3. ลอดลายมังกร โดย ประภัสสร เสวิกุล (1989) 4. โบตั๋นกลีบสุดท้าย โดย กานติมา (2007) 5. รอยวสันต์ โดย ยุวดี ต้นสกุลรุ่งเรือง (2007) งานวิจัยนี้พบว่า หลังจากที่ผู้หญิงไทยจีนได้รับการกดขี่ในครอบครัวมาหลายทศวรรษ จนกระทั่งการซึมซับเข้าสู่สังคมไทยไม่ได้เป็นประเด็นสำคัญอีกต่อไป และการเกิดของชนชั้นกลางที่มาจากเชื้อสายจีนได้เริ่มขึ้น ณ จุดนี้เองที่อัตลักษณ์ของหญิงไทยจีนได้เปลี่ยนแปลงไป เช่น ลูกสาวกลายเป็นผู้ที่ได้รับการยอมรับเท่าเทียม หรือ ในหลายกรณี มากกว่าลูกชาย ลูกผู้หญิงถูกมองว่าเป็นเพศที่กตัญญูรู้คุณ และนำความสำเร็จมาสู่ครอบครัวมากกว่าลูกชาย

ภาควิชา ไทยศึกษา ลายมือชื่อนิสิต .....
สาขาวิชา ไทยศึกษา ลายมือชื่อ อ.ที่ปรึกษาวิทยานิพนธ์หลัก .....
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CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Importance of the Research Problem

The massive migration of Chinese to Thailand from the southern coastal regions of China, which started in the mid 19th century, changed the demography of the country in a significant way. The migration came together with fast urbanization and also contributed to it demographically in a significant way. This created a situation where the ethnic Chinese are estimated to constitute an approximate 50% of the population in Bangkok, and 10% of the population as a whole (again mostly concentrated in urban areas). To clarify, due to intermarriage that took and takes s place and which most likely started hundreds of years earlier, as well as the lack of statistical surveys which tabulate data of ethnicity and degrees of ethnic mix, these figures will always remain a conjecture.

But the close correlation between urban residence and urban occupations, commercial and professional, and ethnic Chinese origin and Chinese migration at the very early periods of Bangkok, as, pointed out by Nidhi Eoseewong (Nidhi Eoseewong, 2005: 75-80) means that an understanding in depth of the culture and society of this important group is important for a better understanding of Thai society and history. Nidhi Eoseewong's research confirms that the Chinese migration did not come into an existing urban environment, but it had in fact had a important role in creating and expanding it. Just as a side note, ethnic Chinese presence in Siam is ancient, and was related primarily to commerce. It was only at the middle of the 19th century and onwards (Skinner, 1957: 31) that migration dramatically increased in scale. That phenomenon continued until China closed its doors in 1949, a situation that only changed again after China's slow opening up from 1978 onwards. This long wave of migration was composed primarily of a large number of Chinese coolies or laborers that came to be employed in Bangkok's efforts at modernization and export

ventures. The modernization related activities included a large number of infrastructure projects, from canals to rail systems, telegraph lines and more. The export ventures were driven by the growing demand for natural resources and the need for a large number of hardy workers to extract or to plant and grow (Pasuk Phongpaichit, and Baker, 1997: 74). The ventures were composed of various collaborations of Western, aristocratic Thai, and increasingly Chinese capital. Thais commoners were kept out of working for these projects and enterprises, as they were still bound by the Sakdina system. Skinner notes that: "the institutionalized status of the Thai masses precluded the personal freedom and geographical mobility necessary in new economic ventures. Moreover, the system discouraged even the further development of Thai craftsmanship and special skills (Skinner, 1957: 96). The Thais were mostly engaged in the growing of agricultural staples, especially rice. This created specialization along ethnic lines (Skinner, 1957: 91).

Today, the Chinese-Thai constitute, as before, a large part of the urban population, occupying major parts of commerce, industry, finance, and, increasingly, academia, free professions. Moreover, nowadays, even what was considered an ethnic-Thai monopoly realm: the government administration and the political system are open to Chinese-Thai participation, and such participation indeed takes place at significant scale.

Skinner's meticulously researched "Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History" and its statement (contingent on conditions he noted and which indeed existed at that time,) of complete assimilation of the Chinese-Thai into Thai culture, language and society by the fourth generation: "The conclusion that third-generation descendants of Chinese immigrants were generally Thai in culture and identification would seem warranted for the period under review " (Skinner, 1957: 134), set the stage for decades' long academic debate in defense or in criticism of the validity of the prediction. An immediate counter proposal was by Coughlin, who saw dual identity among the Chinese-Thai, Chinese on the inside, and Thai on the outside.

But the influence of Skinner's view and the Thai values of accommodation

and tolerance, as well as a similarity in some religious practices (Skinner, 1998: 408) often ascribed to the hybridity of Siam. This characteristic, which is often looked backed at with nostalgia, lead often to a feeling that Thailand is assimilative by the nature of its culture. In fact, this was not unique to Siam, but common to all dynastic empires in Europe.and many other places. These were, prior to the emergence of nationalism, practically ethnic-blind, and centered on the dynasty. Examples offered concerning the ethnic composition of the highest echelons of society (Nidhi Eoseewong, 2005: 66) show the top power structure to be ethnically composed of Mon, Persian, Brahman, and Chinese ethnic extract (Nidhi does not refer to pure ethnic Thai presence in that circle of power, though all these families have gone through numerous mix marriages with ethnic Thais. As much of the aggressive ethnic-nationalistic vision of Thailand introduced by Marshal Phibul Songkram in the 1930s, is slowly taking a back seat in Thailand, there has been a growing perception among Chinese-Thais and many ethnic Thais, that there is no ethnic issue and that as all are Thais nationality wise, all share the same language, and, in many senses, the same culture, ethnic origin and a few remnants of some traditions are of little interest. This is at least the prevailing state of mind which I encountered in numerous conversations with Thais in a period of over 25 years. The only difference clearly acknowledged was occupational differentiation. It is of course the Thai values that are supposed to play the main role in real life, at least according to the point of views which sees assimilation as the state of affairs. Skinner was an academic, but still he offered strong theoretical backing to what later became a popular sentiment.

Skinner, it must be emphasized, was not at all oblivious to possibilities of "intermediate societies," and individuals conducting themselves with flexible, situational identity. Skinner examined this point in detail (Skinner, 1957: 128), but he was convinced that in Thailand it is at most an individual phenomenon. This phenomenon might involve numerous individuals, but his main argument was that these individuals do not create particularly strong affiliations between themselves as organized communities.

But present research points to a persistence of ethnic Chinese identity and the

preservation of many Chinese cultural traditions. Tong and Chan claim that: "contrary to skinner's assertions, as far as the Chinese in Thailand are concerned, assimilation as defined and prescribed in the American sociological and anthropological literature has not taken place. Neither does it seem to be a useful, sufficiently dynamic concept to delineate and make sense of the complexity of the relationships between the Chinese and Thai in Thailand (Tong and Chan, 200: 19). Tong and Chan point to a number of dimensions in which Chinese identity persists. These include some language conservation, maintenance of festivals and other cultural events, maintenance of Chinese education and of occupational differentiation, low level of intermarriage and even the persistence of Chinese newspapers. Chan and Tong emphasize the differentiation between situational identity, in fact, adjustments of behavioral patterns in different environments aimed at maximizing benefit (Tong and Chan, 2001: 20) and which can take different faces according to circumstances, versus the core or expressive identity, "a psychological core formulated since birth in the family, nurtured and maintained before, during and after contact with a foreign culture. A person thus usually and typically has one primary ethnic identity, one reference group, one heritage (Tong and Chan, 2001: 6). Tong and Chan do not devote much time to the family institution, but do comment that "Unlike Thais, Chinese worship ancestors. This is used by many Chinese to maintain their identity as it differentiates them from the Thais and it also acts as a reinforcement of their historical linkage with China" (Tong and Chan, 2001: 11).

The opposition to Skinner's conclusion includes other scholars. Szanton conducts a research in the city of Sri Racha and concludes that: "the process of assimilation of Chinese migranhts and their Thai born descendants have in fact been highly variable in post-World War 2 Thailand. While some acculturation with the Thai has been occurring, assimilation is not taking place to the degree that has been commonly predicted despite the virtual lack of continued Chinese immigration, an analysis of occupational, intermarriage and other demographic data indicates the continued existence of a behaviorally distinct Sino-Thai population segment, which is the product of, and is continuing to experience processes of social differentiation (Szanton, 1983: 99).

In addition to these observations, we should note the change of some of the main assumptions which skinner mentioned as the base for his assimilation claim. These changes include government policies, degree of contact with China, and the possible arrival of new Chinese "blood". The massive contacts with China on all dimensions, the rise of China as an emerging prestigious superpower and the interest it generates in its language and culture all across the world, and the arrival of new Chinese to Thailand, often as entrepreneurs, people in various professions, and more, have at present and might still have a growing impact that might lead to the strengthening of a Chinese identity, or resinification, as it is often referred to.

Also, Skinner's assumption of flexible, hybrid identity being individual, with these individuals not connections exclusively on that basis, can be observed everyday. But I believe what is missed is the simple law of numbers. Since the Chinese-Thai constitute the vast majority of the metropolitan middle and upper class population, maintain both a variable Chinese identity, while adopting Thai customs, some when it suits them or when it is required as a demonstration of their being Thais, and some absorbed naturally through contact, then they have no need to seek similar individuals and form with them separate communities. Why should they when in fact almost all those that surround them have the same frame of mind and a similar identity profile.

The importance of this dissertation is therefore to contribute to an important and growing body of research which focuses on this, perhaps most pivotal community in Thailand. More and more research established that the Chinese-Thais are in many senses a distinct society a distinction which also overlaps with class divides and occupational divides that solidify the differences as they in fact always did, but which runs along a borderline that expands the power territory of the Chinese-Thai to new spheres.

What we offer is to look at this community through the angle of gender: the female side and its relation to identity. Obviously, there are many dimensions of the Chinese-Thai community to explore along different distinctions, such as residence

(Bangkok, other major cities, semi-rural), professions, wealth, age and/or generation, length of stay in Thailand (generations wise), being pure ethnic Chinese or intermarried and more. Some have been explored, but might be helped by further research, or more updated research and some have yet to be explored.

The importance of the study lies in avoiding a monolithic look at the Chinese-Thais in Thailand, and on emphasizing the need to focus on different angles and sub-groups in depth, so that the bigger picture that will emerge will be more rich and detailed. Furthermore, the importance of the dissertation is also a direct derivative of the importance of the community which is studied, which forms the very central hub of Thailand's functioning as a modern state.

1.2 Data Sources

The main data sources I used in this research are five Thai novels published between the years 1969 and 2007.

The criterions for selection were mainly the exposure that these novels have received. My focus is on the reader, rather than on the author or the pure literary value of the novels. My assumption, based on Umberto Eco, is that: "To organize a text, its author has to rely on a series of codes that assign given contents to the expressions he uses. To make his text communicative, the author has to assume that the ensemble of codes he relies upon is the same as that shared by his possible reader (hereafter Model Reader) supposedly able to deal interpretively with the expressions in the same way as the author deal generatively with them" (Eco, 1984: 7). My assumption is that exposure, popularity and longevity, all indicate that the readers indeed dealt interpretively with the text in correspondence with the way the author dealt with generatively and that there has been a broad meeting of minds which applied to a large population of readers.

The novels I chose are:

1) "Letters from Thailand" by Botan (pen name), first published in Thai in 1969.

2) "Being with Gong" by Yok Burapha (pen name), first published in Thai in 1976
3) "Through the Scales of the Dragon" by Prapason Sewikul, first published in Thai in 1989.
4) "The Last Petal of the Peony" by Kantima (pen name), first published in Thai in 2007.
5) "A Walk Through Spring" by Yuvadee Tonsakulrungruang, first published in Thai in 2007. (Studied her in its English translation under the pen name: Judy Chan)

The five novels I selected answer a few requirements which I considered as useful, based on Eco's reader-centered approach:

1) As already mentioned above, exposure has been a critical criterion. All the novels selected received wide exposure in Thailand; the first two novels became a part of the curriculum of the Ministry of Education, are still recognized universally, and, as mentioned "Letters from Thailand" also became an international success. "Being with Gong" was also produced as a movie and as a cartoon book for children. "Through the Scales of the Dragon" has been reprinted many times, and was converted to a television series that was so successful that Kasian Tejapira, a prominent Thai scholar, saw it as the embodiment of a revitalized and proud Chinese-Thai identity. Describing how the hymn of the song became, in a way, the "anthem" of the community. (Kasian Tejapira, 1997: 89-90). The most recently published have also received wide acclaim. "The Last Petal of the Peony", has also been converted to a successful television series, while "A Walk Through Spring" earned important literary awards.

2) As exposure was a critical criterion for me rather than the background of the authors and what inspired them, I wanted to be sure that the novels have touched an emotional chord among a wide readership. In other words, that the novels had resonance with the readers and the characters and motifs were

recognized as genuine. It was also important for me that the texts will be highly regarded, because this criterion is another assurance of long term availability. This does not constitute a literary judgment per se, because the high regard can be on account of only certain aspects of the novel, such as the plot or some characters, but still, these need to be gripping or convincing enough. In other words, my selection is attempted to be the selection of the readership. Obviously, this is not and cannot be an objective criterion, and is based more on different pieces of information rather than on an objective measure that could be applied uniformly to all. I also have to accept the fact that exposure was driven by completely different agencies, ranging from a government promotion through the school curriculum and based on state ideology, to spontaneous acclaim coming out of the community itself. The last two novels, "The Last Petal of the Peony," and "A Walk Through Spring" distinguished by award and television series, are relatively new, they achieved wide exposure recently, but their longevity still needs to be proven (as compared to "Through the Scales of the Dragon" which already had nineteen editions when I read it).

3) The novels span a long period of time, close to forty years, during which much changed in Thai society, politics, policies regarding Chinese, and the role that ethnic Chinese Thais occupy in society. That period also straddle two eras, one in which assimilation was a primary value, and the later one, where the maintenance of Chinese cultural identity is not an issue. In fact, today it is often viewed as a commercial advantage for the country, of course as long as complete loyalty to the state and the monarchy are maintained. The fact that we straddle two eras allows us to see whether the issue we focus on has changed its form in the transition.

1.3 Objectives:

The main objectives of this dissertation are:

1) To examine novels produced by Chinese-Thais from the late 1960s to the present

(focusing as much as possible on novels that relate to gender, or contain content that relates to it).

2) To analyze how the identity of Chinese-Thai women is negotiated between the ethnic Chinese heritage and the adopted Thai way of life, including new ideas on female status.

3) To analyze the social construction and reconstruction of the multi-faceted identity of Chinese-Thai women through the negotiation and generational transitions as reflected in Thai novels.

To fulfill these major objectives, I distinguished a number of more detailed sub-objectives which can assist in attaining the main objectives. These are:

1) To find out what gender biased components of the traditional Chinese family values still persist among Chinese-Thais. To find out how different members of the family unit, and particularly women, accept, reject or are indifferent to these values and their application in daily life. Acceptance or rejection does not have to be vocal and blatant. Meaningful silences, hints and indirect expressions, can all express rejection or acceptance just as well.
2) To establish whether there appears to be relative uniformity in these gender components of the traditional Chinese values across the different novels, or are there significant variations in different periods or in different locations or social strata.
3) To find out how the different core families in the different novels understand and relate to Chinese traditional values, and how they see the Chinese-Thai community and its values vis-à-vis Thai society.
4) Last, and most important, to identify Chinese-Thai women who reject the gender bias in Chinese traditional values, to see how they negotiate their agenda of amending or eliminating these biases, and how these negotiations do not merely involve this set of socio-cultural norms only, but rather how these negotiations involve the entire issue of ethnic Chinese identity and maintenance versus assimilation, all from the view point and the actions of Chinese-Thai women.

1.4 Methodology

The methodology we use is qualitative textual analysis. It is true that we do read texts (and in post-modernism "read" rather than "interpret" is the common verb for what we do). But post-modernism does not restrict the noun "text" to written productions only. It includes movies, fashion, music, and practically any cultural artifact the produces meaning (McKee, 2003: 4-5).

As mentioned earlier, our interest lies in the reader of the narratives and not in the producer. This is the reason I will not delve deeply into the biographical details of the authors. The focus on the audience is the prevailing approach in text or narrative analysis today (Elliott, 2005:10-11).

There are many types of textual analysis, ranging from the qualitative, which is the one I chose to use, and going to elaborate quantitative and linguistic methods. I think the following description by Mckee sums my approach the best:
"Texts are the material traces that are left of the practice of sense-making– the only empirical evidence we have of how other people make sense of the world. John Hartley uses the metaphor of forensic science to describe this process. Forensic scientists never actually see a crime committed. By the time they arrive on the scene, it has gone forever. They can never wind time back and witness it themselves; and they can never be entirely certain about what happened. But what they can do is sift through the evidence that is left-the forensic evidence-and make an educated and trained guess about what happened based on that evidence. ……This can stand as a metaphor for what we do when we perform textual analysis: we can never see, nor recover, the actual practice of sense making. …As Hartley says, forensic science relies on 'clues.' This is how textual analysis also works. We can never know for certain how people interpreted a particular text but we can look at the 'clues,' gather evidence about similar sense-making practices and make educated guesses (McKee, 2003: 15).

I found this last portrayal to be particularly enlightening and the key words were "clues" and "educated guesses." In order to find such clues and form educated guesses, one cannot remain completely external to the text; there is a need to be involved, and the more opportunities there are for far ranging comparisons, the more chances there are to shed light, from unexpected corners, on "hidden clues". One has to utilize a large range of tools. This might create sometimes the sense that we are engaging in "creative writing" versus "academic writing," but in my opinion, when we engage with cultural artifacts such as novels, lack of creativity and wide ranging comparisons might make the research look more correct from a "form" point of view, but make it much poorer in "content."

1.5 Hypothesis

Based on an analysis of the selected Thai novels and their historical context, this dissertation argues that Chinese-Thai women experienced and actively participated in the process of a social construction of a multi-faceted ethnic Chinese identity based on their perceptions of their traditional status and their desired status as women through the negotiation of gender and generational change.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The topic of this dissertation, which focuses on Chinese-Thai women in relation to issues of identity and intergenerational change as it relates to identity, touches on what was until recently a relatively shaded corner of the much larger debate and research devoted to Chinese-Thai identity. Research on "Identity" of the Chinese-Thai or Chinese in Southeast Asia in general, was strongly related to urgent political issues. In times when new nations were founded, the place within society of large population of Chinese migrants, their becoming an integral part of it, or a separate society, their role in the economy, all these were existential issues. They all related, once one unraveled the different local circumstances, into a simple question of identity. Will the Chinese migrant population assimilate to local societies and identify with them or will they preserve their own distinct identity. In the later case the question is howwould that be accommodated with the new nations states? Will they form hybrid societies, accepting part, but not all of the host country's culture and language, and maintaining part, but not all of their homeland's culture and language? Will they strive to return to China? Or will they attempt to do what Singapore did, and demand either certain autonomy or even complete separation, . Their dominance in the local economies made that issue a crucial one for these new nations. These were not tribes or populations of neighboring ethnicities that were left within the borders of the new nation due to various "Durant" lines that were carved arbitrarily, blind to population distributions, blind to the existence of people. The Chinese were not border people, on the contrary, they sat in the centres of the capital cities and other

main cities, they had a huge role and control in and over the economy, and they were in the heart of things.

The overwhelming importance of these issues led to a focus on issues of "Identity" and "Assimilation." Gender was not a part of the question, families were parts of communities, and the communities were where the interest lied.

Before getting into the discussion of gender and identity, and the way they play out in Thailand, I think there should be some clarification of the gender issue, or the inferior role of females in Chinese society, traditions, which were always an important part of the models of the Chinese family, the models which are attributed to Confucius, as the sage that gave them a logical place within a larger vision of society which aimed at social harmony.

2.2 The Confucian Doctrine and the Traditional Model of the Chinese Family

The Confucian doctrine, as we know it today, is a social philosophy, which rather than focusing on the divine or the transcendental, as many other ancient systems of thought did, is dedicated directly to the issue of social harmony. The historical background of its creation is the Spring and Autumn period in China, and the great social and political tumult and decay of that period (Schwartz, 1985: 56). The desire, in such times, to develop a system of thought that leads to peace and harmony are therefore not surprising.

The Confucian tradition is often associated with the concept of Li. Superficially understood as related to antiquated, "received," rituals and manners, it is in fact much wider than that: "If the word Tao seems to refer to an all encompassing state of affairs embracing the "outer" sociopolitical order and the "inner" moral life of

the individual, the word Li on the most concrete level refers to all those "objective" prescriptions of behavior, whether involving rite, ceremony, manner, or general deportment , that bind human beings and the spirits together in networks of interacting roles within the family, within human society, and with the numinous realm beyond…We are reminded again of the shadowy boundary between proper ritual to ancestors and proper behavior towards living kin members….Yet what makes Li the cement of the entire sociopolitical order is that it largely involves the behavior of persons related to each other in terms of role, status, rank, and position within a structured society. It does not simply refer to general behavior of unconnected human beings in certain universal categories of human situation. Within the family, it involves proper behavior of father to son, husband to wife, elder brother to younger (and vice versa)" (Schwartz, 1985: 67-68).

In other words, Confucius aims at social stability and harmony, in contrast to chaos, and he creates a system of prescribed behaviors and relationships which is aimed at preserving that stability. According to the Confucian view, the family, as the nuclear component of society as a whole, is where it all starts. One cannot build an orderly whole which is composed of chaotic units. The orderliness of the family is projected outdoors. The emphasis on hierarchy and allocation of roles within the family should therefore not be surprising. In the West we can encounter theoteical views supporting hierarchy from Aristotle to Weber. These concepts are applied to society at large or to organizations. Confucius's emphasis on the family attempts to give more solid grounds to orderliness in the bigger social platforms: "To Confucius, it is precisely in the family that humans learn those virtues which redeem society, for the family is exactly the domain within which authority comes to be accepted and exercised not through reliance on physical coercion but through the binding power of religious, moral sentiments based on kinship ties. It is within the family that we find the root of public virtue. The choice is not between a "government of freemen and equals" and a government of hierarchy and authority, but between a government which is suffused with the spirit that maintains the harmony of an ideal family life and a government in which hierarchy and authority are based on brute force or mere

interest without any sense of spiritual-moral constraint." (Schwartz. 1985: 70).

Viewed thus, the emphasis on the family, which indeed has resulted in the longest lasting tradition of orderly and stable family life, is, in the final analysis, a means to an end. And the end is the creation of a peaceful, harmonious society. That end was pursued by numerous philosophers and social thinkers for thousands of years, but their focus on the means to achieve that were either based on the individuals themselves, or on the larger edifices of society. Since the aim is a peaceful, harmonious society, the prescriptions for its building block, the family, had to be based on the same principles as one wishes to operate in society as a whole. Applications of these principles which created families ruled by brute hierarchies, stifling authoritativeness, humiliation and suppression of the lower in status, not to mention the extremes of infanticide, are perversions of the Confucian system of thought, which defeat its very purpose. Harsh, force based, cruel family systems are a recipe to societies which are harsh, cruel and force based. This is exactly what Confucius attempted to change.

Going a step further than the Confucian philosophy in its broadest terms, Chinese literary tradition is abundant with manuscripts that prescribe the ideal behavior of a woman with the family. In some of these the issue of women is a part of a larger whole, but there are also specific manuals for recommended behavior. The most important one is the canon of "Four Books for Women." Of these four, the first and most influential has been Ban Zhao's (45-113 A.D.) "Lessons for Women." Ban Zhao, a great female scholar, is not deviating from the rules that oblige women to be deferential to her father, her husband, her parents in law, her eldest son, and even to seek harmony, at the cost of self effacement, with her brothers and sisters in law. She phrases her manuscript with nouns such as "harmony," "devotion," and "correct manners." These are mirrored by "obedience," "sacrifice personal opinion," "yielding," "compliance," and "acquiescence." Talking about women's qualifications, listed as: womanly virtue, womanly words, womanly bearing and

womanly work, she qualifies by saying: "what is called womanly virtue need not be brilliant ability, exceptionally different from others. Womanly words need be neither clever in debate no keen in conversation. Womanly appearance requires neither a pretty nor a perfect face and form. Womanly work need not be done more skillfully than that of others. Ban Zhao both recommends the virtuous conduct, and warns of specifically numerated aberrations. The achievement she is known for is in fact the encouragement of offering education to women on the grounds that it is only through fine educations that women can understand the social order and refine their abilities to conduct themselves properly" (Wang, 2003: 177-188).

Another manuscript "The Analects for Women" by Song Ruoxin and Song Ruozhao, two female sister scholars, repeats the same messages, in even greater details. It also devotes different chapters to different aspects of behavior or the proper behavior in different situations and with different people. The level of detail is astounding: "The first thing for any woman to learn is the principle of deportment: that of purity and chastity. If you are pure, then chastity will follow; if you are chaste, then you will be honored. Don't turn your head and look while walking. Don't show your teeth while speaking. Don't sway your dress while standing; Don't laugh out loud when happy. Don't shout when angry….While at home, every woman should revere her parents….Parents in law are masters of the husband's family. When you enter their gate, you become his bride and you should behave towards your parents in law as towards your own. Serve your father in law with respect. Don't look directly, and certainly do not walk with him or converse with him….If your mother in law is sitting, then stand. If you are given an order, then do as you are told. Don't startle her or frighten her when you open the door in the morning….When a woman is married, her husband will be her master among relatives.…The husband should be firm and the wife yielding. An affectionate couple relies on each other. At home, treat your husband as you would treat a guest. When he speaks to you, listen attentively. If your husband has some evil ways, remonstrate repeatedly…In general, there are boys and girls in the family. As they grow old there is a sequence in teaching them. The right to instruct belongs in fact to the mother. Boys should be sent to a school or a

teacher…..Keep your daughter in the women's chamber and seldom let her out. She should come immediately when called and go immediately when told to do so. If she shows any inclination to disobey, scold her and make her feel ashamed. In the household, instruct her to be diligent in everything: sweeping floors, burning incense….don't indulge her childish foolishness…Don't let her jump around…Don't let her recite poetry or sing songs…." (Wang, 2003: 327-340).

These details can be seen as extensions of the primary text, "The Book of Rites," one of the five Confucian classics, only that as it is considered to have been compiled later as it is denoted with the Chinese character for "record," rather than that for "classic," or "scripture." The point I would like to single out is that of sons versus daughters: "When the child was born, the husband again would send twice a day to inquire for her (his wife-my comment)…If the child were a boy, a bow would be placed on the left of the door; and if a girl, a handkerchief on the right of it" (Wang, 2003: 58). We definitely do not see here a recommendation for fathers that beget daughters to react negatively as we will see occurs often in our novels.

And let us again see the real underlying logic of it all: "When there is generous affection between father and son, harmony between brothers, and happy union between husband and wife, the family is in good condition. When the great ministers are observant of the laws, the smaller ministers pure and their duties kept in their regular relations, and the ruler and his ministers are correctly helpful to one another, the state is in good condition" (Wang, 2003: 52).

There are many points to be observed from these texts. First, we are clearly told that it's the mother's duty to look after the education of the children. This is not only a major responsibility as compared to prescriptions about housework and behavior towards husband and elders, it actually means that the mother holds the key to the reconstruction of the principles of family and social harmony across

generations. This is a key social role.

We see obedience dispensed to parents and parents in law, both to the father and the mother, the father in law and the mother in law. There is no gender differentiation mentioned here. Elders are elders, male or female and they deserve equal respect. The husband and wife are declared to be reliant on each other and the wife is encouraged to "remonstrate" with her husband if he strays to evil ways. So wives are not voiceless, they are an essential side in a partnership. Their being female makes them weaker side, but does not downgrade them to redundancy, or lack of worth. Also, we see no gender preference at birth. Sons are definitely necessary by the logic of patrilineal lines, but both are welcome at birth.

Last, but a very important point on the place of gender in social harmony: The last quote from the "Record of Rites" and the parallel drawn between families and states is illuminating. We earlier talked about the effect of transference, that from family harmony to state harmony. Here, Confucius is reported to draw direct parallels. In this structure, female inferiority seems to be an added feature derived from other systems of thought or traditions. It is not "essential" to the main point, and in this case, not even mentioned. It is as if patrilinearity is "imposed" on what could essentially be a gender-neutral social philosophy. Confucius, likewise, when writing about the state, does not prescribe who are the "smaller ministers," the "greater ministers," and not even the "ruler." These details are to be filled by others.

It is most probable that gender hierarchy developed separately, and is often attributed to the yin(阴)-yang(阳) cosmology which sees the world as an interaction between two elemental forces: yang(阳) the sunny, heaven-oriented, positive, rational, masculine, hard, forceful and constructive element, and yin (阴), the shaded, darker,

earth-oriented, negative, emotional feminine, soft, submissive and destructive element (Poceski, 2009: 70-71). The juxtaposition of these qualities is not necessarily universal. Fertility, as the ultimate constructive force, is often associated with the earth and with feminine, and is worshipped in many cultures, such as India and in the ancient Mediterranean. But given such a cosmology, an attempt to create social and family systems which are rational and positive, rather than emotional and chaotic, has, by definition, to delegate the feminine to a controlled situation. It is possible that the "submissive" side of the "yin" (阴) is a reflection and a reaction to fears of its emotional and sexual ("shady"), earthly powers to undermine hard, and forceful social systems born of the ratio (the sunny side).

On this critical component of the Chinese cosmology, let us look at a summary of the thoughts of Dong Zhongshu, who is credited, among many other things, to have compiled "The Five Classics" canonical, which became, by a 136 BC edict, the official curriculum for the imperial advisors, and for examinations at the Imperial Academy: Dong believed that the natural and proper relationship between yin(阴) and yang(阳) is continually revealed to human beings through the behavior of objects in the natural world. Yin (阴) and yang (阳) are likened to the sun and moon, and Heaven and Earth. In turn, 'the model of man and woman takes as its prototype yin (阴) and yang (阳).' For Dong, yin (阴) and yang (阳) are neither equal nor complementary, nor opposite and of radical different value. At times, yin (阴) is associated with what is clearly the negative pole of a contrast: the greedy part of human nature, as opposed to the benevolent yang (阳). In this sense, it is clear that yang (阳) is more generally associated with positive characteristics. At the same time, yin (阴) and yang (阳) are associated with oppositions in which both parts are necessary. This is most clearly the case in nature: "Heaven takes yin(阳) as the

exception, yang(阳) as the norm….This relationship of both hierarchy and interdependence between yin(阴) and yang(阳) is the explicit normative model for the relationship between husband and wife…What this means is that although society needs the achievements of yang(阳), yang(阳) requires the presence of yin(阴) ….Dong's influence on later Han scholars …placed yin/yang theory at the heart of Han Confucianism" (Wang, 2003: 162-163).

One last note in this regard is that Chinese history does not show a complete linearity over time of the gender equilibrium. As Polecki shows, Confucianism was not the only doctrine, system of thought or religion that had wide ranging influence on Chinese life: "In previous chapters we already noted the relatively open attitudes and participatory opportunism offered Chinese women by Buddhism and Dao, even if the two religions at times succumbed to prevalent social mores in their treatment of women and were not immune to occasionally manifesting misogynic sentiments. Let us end this survey of Confucianism by briefly looking at its impact on the status of Women in traditional Chinese society. To a large degree, Confucianism defined prevalent Chinese attitudes and discourses regarding gender. Consequently, Confucianism is often reproached for its significant roles in the systematic patterns of gender inequity that were predominant throughout Chinese history. Confucian teachings were a patriarchal system, in which men took precedence over women and dominated the domestic and public sphere (Poceski, 2009: 92).

When looking at larger historical patterns and trajectories, it is undeniable that Confucian ascendancy and the increase in the influence of Confucian norms correlate with lowering of the status of women (e.g. the Qing era), while women enjoy higher status and increased opportunities during periods when Buddhism and Daoism are dominant (e.g. Sui-Tang period). The contrasts between the artistic presentations and visual imagery of Chinese women from different periods can be quite striking. On the one hand, we find Tang women depicted as playing football or riding horses as members of hunting parties. On the other hand, there are the images of memorial

arches for chaste widows as well as the custom of binding feet from the Qing era (though the custom of foot binding can be traced back to earlier periods).

As Poceski notes: "It is of course unfair to place the whole blame for women's oppression at the feet of Confucianism, as there are other factors that contributed to perpetuation of the patriarchal system. ….Nonetheless, indubitably Confucianism was a major influence on the essentialist construal of gender roles in China…. that buttressed prevalent forms of patriarchy, even if women's confinement to the domestic sphere and the emphasis on strict gender stratification were meant to foster stability and harmony. As was noted previously, prevailing Confucian models of hierarchies and interpersonal relations bestowed an inferior status on women from birth until death, women were expected to show respect and obedience to the men in their lives, especially their fathers and husbands as conveyed by the so called "three forms of obedience" (which include their eldest son after being widowed). The rise of neo Confucianism orthodoxy, with its absolutist ideas and penchant for intransigent moralizing, further deepened and solidified deep rooted patterns of gender inequity. A prime example of Confucian influenced attitudes is the cult of female chastity….one of its core creeds was the stigmatization of remarriage……(it) celebrated the chaste widow as a heroic figure and an exemplar of key cultural values." (Poceki, 2009: 208-210)

2.3 Reconstructing Confucius: Confucianism and Feminism

We reviewed above a number of points aimed at clarifying the philosophy that underlines the gender bias in Chinese traditions. Some understanding of the roots of the tradition is essential as our dissertation deals with how Chinese-Thai women negotiate their gender status, as dictated by those long standing traditions and their identity in a new country, and, it should not be forgotten, a modern world with values of female equality. Negotiating their gender status is making decisions of whether they can maintain a Chinese cultural identity as part of their Thai national identity,

should they discard it, being unable to reconcile it with their feelings as modern women, or should they attempt to restructure the contents of their Chinese cultural identity by taking out the gender biased elements they cannot live with and maintaining other elements which they are content to preserve. The challenge lies in the fact that the Confucian doctrine and especially its values of the family, are at the very heart of Chinese identity, and have been a mainstay for thousands of years. They are not a peripheral tradition or a festival which would be much easier to tackle.

Interestingly, however, these women are less and less alone. As Confucianism is back in fashion in China, as a classical Gramscian usurpation of culture by a state ideology aimed at control, so also do Chinese women, raised on the principles of gender equality under Communism, try to reconcile the two. This phenomenon is expressed in a number of recent books, some of which have attained massive public exposure.

"Confucianism and Women: A Philosophical Interpretation" by Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee is exactly such at attempt. The goal, as Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee confides in a deeply emotional and personal conclusion, is "to answer to myself what it means to be a Chinese Confucian woman," that is, to resolve "the tension between being a feminist and being a Chinese" (Li-Hsiang, 2006: 159). Li-Hsiang shows her true Chinese national colors by attacking Western critics who view with superior compassion the abject situation of Chinese woman living within their culture and who are offering their Western wisdom as a remedy (Li-Hsiang, 2006: 1-13). Rosenlee sets out first to survey Confucianism and its related doctrines, and to show how they relate to the forms which gender status acquired over time. She then sets out to construct the foundations of a new Confucianism which would be both loyal to Chinese heritage while also allowing women a respectable, fair status and free opportunities. The vision embodies the Confucian ideals of self improvement and cultivation, and in that sense it retains the Confucian touch (Li-Hsiang, 2006: 149-158). But the attempt to maintain the Confucian spirit does not cancel out a strong insistence on feminist values and the ideas of complete equality.

Li-Hsiang's line of reasoning is similar to some of my own thoughts, expressed above with much less knowledge of the history of the tradition, and that is the separation of the dualities of yin (阴)-yang (阳) yin-yang (and in her study: nei/wu (内/外 or inside/outside), from the main line of Confucian thought, seeing it as an external imposition. Critics of the book point out at her lack of accuracy in tracing this supposedly "imposed layer." This goes way outside the scope of this dissertation, and of my knowledge and understanding. What is important for me to point out is the sheer reconstructive attempt, and its being conducted strictly within a Chinese cultural context, actually with resentment towards foreign intellectual intervention.

Another important contributor has been Li Chenyang in her edition of articles: "The Sage and the Second sex: Confucianism, ethics, and gender". Unlike Li-Hsiang's single instrument of reconstruction, Li Chenyang tackles the issue from a number of fronts. The first is historical and involves numerous attempts to reinterpret recorded historical events and texts as not being derogatory of biased towards women. This effort is a detailed sequence of cases analysis's in which each case bear different characteristics and is addressed differently. There are references to numerous attempts by similarly minded scholars to interpret such cases, so the result is not necessarily coherent. Obviously included are records of the numerous Chinese heroines and saints, the stories of whom fill the pages of books about women under Confucianism, books dated before the attempts at merging Confucianism and feminism, and stories which are part of Chinese education from young age.

We find statements such as "The obedient daughter, the faithful wife, the sacrificing mother, characteristics of the Confucian woman, is qualities any man would find ideal. Similarly, the woman would find ideal the obedient son, the faithful husband and the sacrificing father. Therefore, the characteristics of the Confucian woman, rather than being the norm, are probably better thought of as the ideal" (Li, 2000: 9). Such arguments sound stretched. So do also arguments such as "If the five

classics fostered the subordination of woman to man, the fostered even more the subordination of youth to age. Thus, in every age of Chinese history where Confucianism was exalted, the woman who survived, the woman who had age and the wisdom and experience which accompanied it, was revered and respected…even if her son was the emperor. It is perhaps this fact, more than any other, which enabled the woman of traditional China to accept for so long the status imposed on her (Li, 2000: 7).

If historical study shows how much room has been left for women in ancient China, philosophical analysis of Confucianism and feminism may reveal how much room Confucianism can extend for women. In order to see this we must examine the philosophical aspect of Confucianism, finding out whether Confucianism is capable of accommodating women's equality. In the 1990's, some authors started to point at presumed philosophical similarities between Confucianism and feminism. In his essay "The Confucian concept of Jen and the Feminist Ethics of Care: A Comparative Study"…Chenyang Li points out that Confucianism and Feminism, though dissimilar in many aspects, do share similar ways of thinking in ethics. He outlines several parallels between Confucian ethics and care-oriented feminist ethics. First, as moral ideals, Jen and care share an important similarity. Through an analysis of the Confucian concept of Jen, Li argues that this concept carries a strong care orientation. Second, in contrast to Kantian and rights based moral theories, both Confucians and feminists advocate the human person as socially connected, not as disinterested, separate individuals. Third, both ethics emphasize situational, personal judgment, character-building, instead of rule following. Wary of rigid general rules, they both allow flexibility in moral practice and regard the ability to make moral decisions under particular circumstances an important aspect of a person's moral maturity. Finally, both Confucian ethics and feminism advocates the use of gradations. Because the self is socially constructed and defined, a person has more obligations toward related or more connected ones, specifically one's obligations towards parents and family members are greater than obligations toward others (Li, 2000: 12).

My interest in this literature, which gains vast popularity, especially in China, with more popular books such as "Confucius from the Heart: Ancient Wisdom for Today's World" by Dan Yu, stems from the fact that it represents a massive attempt at reconstruction of what Chinese identity, so closely linked with Confucianism, means. The determination to keep it all within Confucianism, not even trying to reconstruct a gender equal Chinese identity that revolves around Buddhism or Taoism, shows that there is a strong strand of nationalism in this movement. To what degree it is state supported is difficult to tell, but the fact that Confucius is back in favor with the authorities in China, who are opening a large number of Chinese language centers around the world named after him, might imply that there is support.

2.4 The Skinner Hypothesis

We will move back to Thailand and the Chinese-Thais. Among several books written about the Chinese in Thailand, G. William Skinner's "Chinese Society in Thailand- An Analytical History," published in 1957, stands as a father figure of this field of research, due to its being the most a meticulous research of the history, society, and demographics of the Chinese in Thailand, looking at their history, and providing demographic data in great detail. It is outstanding not only as far as Chinese in Thailand are concerned, but also as compared to academic writing about other Chinese populations in the region. Full of hard facts, numbers, archival data, it stands as a fortress of objectivity in a field that often feeds on anthropological researches conducted on small groups, and with a strong feel of subjectivity.

But over and beyond the realms of objective facts, Skinner made a prediction that was very specific, and, in the historical context of the book, sounded strong and solid. The prediction was a full assimilation by the fourth generation (Skinner, 1957:134). Such predictions are powerful because they set imaginary deadlines. Also, by the force of their nature, they become an area of contention which divides

futures researchers into supporters, contenders, and those that look for formulas which are more ambivalent and leave room for more possibilities and diversity.

Skinner himself, it must be emphasized, did not phrase the prediction in a deterministic way. He spelled out conditions to its becoming a reality: "In historical perspective, one can conclude that the chief factors influencing the rate of Chinese assimilation in Thailand-taking Thai and Chinese cultures and Thai social structure as given-are the content and amount of Chinese schooling available to local born Chinese; the sex ratio among ethnic Chinese; the proportion of China born Chinese in the ethnic Chinese population; the nature and extent of the differential in treatment and legal status between Thai nationals and aliens, firstly, and between Thai nationals of immediate alien extraction and other Thai nationals, secondly; the scope and ability of Chinese agencies to promote Chinese nationalism; and the effective influence in Thailand of the government of China. All these factors can be influenced to some degree-many to a crucial degree-by Thai government policy. The position and role of the People's Republic of China is the most important of the relevant factors outside Bangkok's control. The situation may very well develop in which Thailand has no choice but to recognize Peking and allow the establishment of Communist Chinese diplomatic and consular office in Thailand. This development or any general victory of Communism in Southeast Asia would certainly retard Chinese assimilation (Skinner, 1957: 382).

We can note a mention of "the sex ratio among Chinese" and in fact, this topic is the only one which interests Skinner as far as gender issues are related (skinner, 1957: 126). He earlier mentions that "Perhaps the primary social fact about nineteenth century Chinese society in Siam was the dearth of Chinese women. Prior to 1893 women almost never emigrated; females cannot have exceeded 2 percent or 3 percent of the Chinese arrivals during the immigration period 1882-1892. At that time, lineage councils in the emigrant areas of south China never permitted wives to accompany their husband abroad for fear of losing the family entirely. Emigrants

were supposed to make money abroad in the interests of kin oriented goals and then return to tend to family affairs. It was even more unthinkable for unmarried girls to emigrate, except, of course those who, because of family poverty, were sold into prostitution" (Skinner, 1957: 126). Having noted that Chinese migration was starkly gender skewed, Skinner later marks the increase of the proportion of Chinese female immigrants which started to gain ground in the very first years of the twentieth century, and reached 20-26 percent of total migration in the period of 1921-1931, 26-31 percent in 1932-1941, and 31-34 percent in 1945-1949. Skinner notes, in relation to these figures, that: "Perhaps the most significant trend in Chinese migration in the past thirty five years has been the increase in the number of women immigrating to and staying in Thailand, for its sociological consequence has been the establishment of more and more purely Chinese homes and a rapid decline in the intermarriage with the Thai populace" (Skinner, 1957: 190-191).

Skinner also briefly touches on the marriage patterns among the Chinese, saying: "In family life, as with residential arrangements, a core Chinese pattern is distinguishable from the Thai. Parental arrangement of marriages is much more strictly adhered to by first-generation Chinese than by Thai parents. Elopement is a common actual if not an ideal pattern among the Thai, while for first generation Chinese it is rare indeed. Divorce, too, is not only common but casual among the Thai, while immigrant Chinese take a strict view. The idea of a large family is still kept alive by Chinese immigrants, while the Thai tend to settle on a lower preferred number of children……The crowded quarters where Chinese tend to live often force a local-born son Chinese son to set up a separate household eventhough his parents would prefer to have him and his family under their own roof…...local born Chinese generally value well being more strongly than their parents, and they are more prepared to limit family size in the interests of higher living standards. Local born Chinese women usually refused to tolerate the subordinate role in which Chinese immigrants mothers-in-law would cast them" (Skinner, 1957: 312-313).

Skinner touches here briefly on some of the family and the corresponding gender inferiority issues we discussed, an important one being the subordinate role of the daughter in law: "Local born Chinese women usually refuse to tolerate the subordinate role in which Chinese immigrant mothers in law would cast them" (Skinner, 1957: 313). Correlating to that, there is the desire to have a married son living with his parents, which in fact is the only way to attempt to have the daughter in law to "fulfill her duties," even though, as we saw, there is much resistanance to that. More important, continuing to live together will fortify the solidity of the family as a multi-generation affair, an affair that is considered as preceding the present living generations by uncountable ancestors, and which the present generations see their life's duty to perpetuate. Skinner is aware of that, but his main focus, though, is on the centrality of the family institute, which derives from its solidity. For example, he also confirms that both Chinese and Thai men look for other women than their wives, but in the case of the Thai, these extra marital affairs quickly lead to the dissolution of the family, as the other woman is usually set outside the family, while in the Chinese case, the tendency is towards having concubines; where the other woman, usually younger and prettier, is brought into the household, especially when the family is wealthy and well established (Skinner, 1957: 313). We will see in the chapter four cases where it is the first wife herself who arranges such concubine, which works in her interests, if her husband does seem to be in need of additional female engagement. By doing so, the first wife retains power over the situation much more than if it was done outside of her view. Skinner does not dig deep here, but treats it as one of many other socio-cultural issues.

2.5 Babas, and Other Chinese-Indigenous Hybrids

Coming back to the issue of sex ratio and the earlier period's shortage of Chinese women, it should be noted that the absence of Chinese women migrants was not always translated into complete assimilation. This is evidenced by the phenomenon of Chinese Babas in the British Strait-Settlements, the Mestizos in the

Philippines and Perankan in Indonesia. These were mixed marriage communities that created unique culturally hybrid identities. Such communities were also often encouraged by the colonial powers not to assimilate but to remain a middle layer between the colonial representatives and the local population (Suryadinata, 1997:8). Skinner describes such communities in detail. In an article significantly named "Creolized Chinese Societies in Southeast Asia," he dwelt on these three groups, stating that:"As of the mid-nineteenth century, the Chinese Mestizos of the Philippines, the Chinese Peranakans of Java and the Chinese Babas of Melakka (Malacca), Penang (Pinang) and Singapore, which in each case constituted a discrete and stable community alongside of, but clearly distinguishable from, the Chinese as well as indigenous society. In each instance the cultural mix of Chinese and indigenous elements had stabilized into a "tradition," and the language of daily use within the community –while clearly influenced by Chinese in Grammar as well as lexicon-was an indigenous based Creole" (Skinner, 2001: 52).

But what more are important are the changes in these communities which "shifted away from the patrilineal, local and patriarchal bias that was basic to the traditional Hokkien system. Chinese surnames were retained in all three intermediate societies, along with surname exogamy. But apart from this survival, the kinship systems had become essentially bilateral rather than patrilineal. The localized patrilineage of the Hokkien Chinese had disappeared and in its place bilateral kindred was evident during rites of passage. There was a distinct tendency in the ancestral cult to worship the lineal ascendants of the mother as well as of the father. Weddings might be held and the bridal chamber prepared, in the parental of the bride as well as the groom. Uxorilocal (matrilocal-my comment) marital residence, everywhere wholly acceptable, was the preferred form in the strait Settlements, most of eastern Java and certain regions of the Philippines daughters inherited along with the sons, and in particular the inheritance of real property tended to follow marital residence" (Skinner, 2001, 62-63).

So if that was the case in these three important spots of Chinese settlement in the nineteenth century, why didn't the same happen in Thailand? Skinner addresses that clearly: "there was in Siam no racial barrier to complete assimilation. Differences in physical appearance between Thai and Chinese are not marked…the Thai showed preference for certain physical features-fair skin especially-more typical of Chinese than of "pure blooded" Thai….Lukjin were not a class apart-as were the products of many varieties of mixed marriages in Southeast Asia…there was no middle ground in the matter of identification, no Sino-Thai culture with distinct values or outward signs….while nothing approaching a stable Sino-Thai culture developed in nineteenth century Siam, local Chinese culture did undergo remarkable changes in the direction of Thai culture which…facilitated the assimilation of local born Chinese to Thai society. ..as Gtzlaff, with his usual sweet temper, noted in the 1830's, the Chinese were 'very anxious to conform to the vile habits of the Siamese' (Skinner: 1957, 128-129).

2.6 Family-Cohesion Capital vs. Erotic Capital

For Skinner, closing the door on hybridity is essential to the final prediction of complete assimilation, but the reasoning provided is weak. One could forward similar argumentation in any place where no hybridity was created, or, as we shall discuss further on, Skinner could have missed a hybridity that concealed itself under forceful assimilative government policies.

In any case, it is obvious that gender is a key factor as the sharp increase of women immigrants created pure Chinese families and the numbers were big enough to support self contained communities that could conduct their lives among themselves, while contacts with indigenous population were mainly through trade and the necessary contact with government officials. Women immigration obviously acted as a powerful obstruction of assimilation (Skinner, 1957: 190). It is here, on my opinion,

that Skinner's argument faces a problem: In neighboring countries, intermarriages created hybrid societies, not so in Thailand, in neighboring countries, successive waves of immigrants, which included more Chinese women, created new communities that were loyal to their Chinese identity, but in Thailand it created at most a temporal slow down, but the march towards assimilation did, nevertheless continue in its inevitable track. Besides Thai hospitality, the great attraction of the "vile habits of the Thais," some lack of religious contradictions, and so forth, the difference is not explained. The "vile habits" are earlier mentioned by Skinner when he refers to the accounts of Chinese travelers of the 15th century: "According to Fei whenever a Siamese woman meets a Chinese man, she is greatly pleased with him, and will invariably prepare wine to entertain and show respect to him, merrily singing and keeping him overnight. The husband in such a case, according to Ma, is not perturbed but flattered that his wife should be beautiful enough to please the Chinese. From this idyllic account, it would appear that the Chinese had other reasons than trade for resorting to Siam" (Skinner, 1957: 3).

But such sexist allusions are not exclusive to Siam, August Barthe, is quoted as saying: 'The Brahmans of Cambodia 'do not appear to have been very scrupulous about racial purity.' It seems, rather, that these Brahmans were obliged to stretch the rules of Endogamy considerably if they wanted to found a family. ….a Chinese text of the fifth century affirms that 'in the kingdom of Tun-sun, there are more than a thousand Brahmans of India. The people of Tun-sun practice their doctrine and give them their daughters in marriage; consequently, many of these Brahmans do not go away' (Coedes, 1968: 24). The Cambodians are close to the Thais and it is well known that there are great numbers of mixed populations. In fact, the "charm" does not stop in continental Southeast Asia, but extends to island Southeast Asia as well.

Let's read the accounts of Andre' Roosevelt, a close relative of both Presidents Roosevelt, when he visited the Island of Bali in today's Indonesia. This is by far the most vivid account I have read, bordering, at some points, on the poetic.

We will see that the fascination was not restricted to Chinese men or Brahmans: "He saw a village woman with earthenware pot on her head. She walked with sublime indifference and, as they passed, her shawl slipped carelessly from her shoulders, baring a young Balinese bosom. So the topless, or 'shirt-less', reputation of the island's women folk was not, after all, a travelers fantasy. Powell's (Roosevelt's companion- my comment) reservations about Bali and books were crumbling. 'The bronze bowls of her maiden breasts projected angular, living shadows' he recalled. All the carefree and exotic promise of an island Elysium seems to be embodied in this woman. She was 'part of a vast spreading Wonderland.' Those magnificent Balinese breasts, much photographed by Roosevelt and others, proclaimed incomparable fertility; her artless grace epitomized the ubiquitous aesthetic of a people for whom 'life is art'; and as for history' in her eyes' according to Powell, 'burned the afterglow of fallen empires' (Keay, 1997: 13-14).

All that says that friendliness and "Erotic Capital," as Catherine Hakim refers to it in her new and provocative book "Honey Money: The Power of Erotic Capital" seem therefore to be spread across the region. Hakim, an expert on women's employment and theories of female position in society is a research fellow at the London School of Economics, and coined the phrase in a paper for Oxford. Haklim encourages women to use that "capital" to advance their position, but the catchy phrase did not invent this kind of capital or the knowledge of its existence and the way of its use.

All these comments are meant to make one important point in our discussion. Chinese men in Thailand and the region did not spurn their country's women folks in favor of the locals and their celebrated powers, as many other migrants did. Their loyalty to their Chinese identity and the ideal of the stable and long lasting family line was unshaken, and once the opportunity to fulfill that presented itself, they rushed to go back to their roots. The immigration of Chinese women was not prohibited from the Thai side; it was prohibited from the Chinese side, that is, not as government

policy, but as a local practice. It was relaxed only when conditions in China deteriorated sharply at the fall of the Qing Dynasty and the onset of the period of a great lack of stability under Chiang Kai Chek and the period of Warlordism. Life in China became so precarious that chances of survival upon the return of a male were probably slimmer than if his Chinese family joined him abroad. Women also immigrated to be betrothed in the foreign lands, or as we will see in the Thai novel "A Walk Through Spring", they also simply migrated for work on their own.

2.7 The Choice of Ethnic Family Cohesion.

The fact that the vast increase in Chinese women's immigration led instantly to the formation of pure Chinese families and from these, communities, points clearly that assimilation was not what the male immigrants had in mind, but rather the preservation of their traditional patrilineal family lines. Skinner pointed out that hybrid Chinese communities preserved Chinese traditions in part but opened up on the issue of strict patrilineal lines, a core part of traditional Confucian family values (Skinner, 1957: 312). Wang Gungwu notes, about these very same hybrid communities, that "These communities were established when the males (many of whom already had wives in China) fathered children and wanted, in particular, their male descendants to retain what they considered to be Chinese virtues essential to their social and commercial well being. Without the benefit of formal education, this was achieved by the continuation of religious and other customary practices, notably everything related to birth, marriage and death and the best known calendrical festivals. Male children, however, were also introduced to basic elements of the Chinese language, particularly the spoken dialect of their fathers, to enable them to sustain the vital links with the growing China trade. And the China trade, especially when it enabled the males to travel to China from time to time, provided them with the key ingredients of a more or less Chinese lifestyle, and reinforced the tradition of sojourning. Thus, to remain Chinese required frequent contacts with China. Those who had wives and children in China might also bring their Chinese sons out to help,

and even ultimately inherit, the overseas business. These sons, who would have learned to read and write Chinese before they came, would also assist with the task of cultural maintenance among the local members of the family" (Wang, 2000: 58-59).

What Wang describes are Chinese men married to local women, but determined on preserving their Chinese ways, traditions of festivals and rites of passage. Of special importance was to tie their male offspring to the study of Chinese language and sending them on trading routes that maximize their exposure to China, while at the same time, bringing their China born Chinese sons to help their new, foreign based ventures, both as possible inheritors (since early marriage precedes sojourning, they are most often the seniors) and as a further reinforcements to strengthen the link and knowledge to China of the local members of his family. Skinner, on the other hand, pictures a much stronger drift towards the Thai family traditions as far as second generations were concerned (Skinner, 1957: 129).

2.8 The Persistence of Tradition in Gender Relations

Interesting light is shed upon the status of women in this era by Koh Tai Ann, in her article "History/His Story as Her Story: Chinese Women Biographies Writings from Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore," published in a collection of articles "Southeast Asian Chinese-The Socio-Cultural Dimension" by Leo Suryadinata. These biographies, as Koh explains, are written by the "lucky ones," namely, well educated, well attended to, daughters of successful patriarchs. But nevertheless, their biographies are " dedicated to patriarchs and being accounts of powerful fathers and grandfathers (albeit much loved by the narrator in each case), whose public achievement were only possible to Asian men in colonial and post colonial days and whose position thereby conferred on the writer's families glory and prestige. Their privileged position rendered them unable to see and provided them with no incentive to resist a world of andocentric determination and construction (in the post-modern

sense of the word-my comment). Rather, these memoirs may be regarded as metaphorical of ancestor's worship of patriarchs whose status and/or wealth had made their daughters or granddaughters education and travel possible….The inferiority of the wives and daughters in relation to the males was thus masked by these privileged women's enjoyment vicarious glory and the attendant material comforts…..Their perception of these privileges and pleasures was such that these daughters even forget their real female inferiority and gloss over resultant cruel miseries such as Queeny Chang's case, an unfortunate marriage arranged according to traditional Chinese custom to fulfill an unspecified, probably commercial obligation incurred by her uncle. In the case of Yeap Joo Kim, although we are given to believe that she is merely describing her illustrious grandfather's life, re-presenting his story, in fact she has to fill in the marginal family details, thereby inscribing, in the process, the stories of his two subservient wives, the female servants and bond slaves, the women who were imprisoned in his mansions and who played the supporting minor roles. In short, they provided the infrastructure for his continuing comfort. Janet Lim, on the other side, escaped from her iron cage, that same social system which sanctioned forced arranged marriages, female infanticide, concubinage and female slavery " (Koh, 1995: 256).

Reading those biographies themselves, I found it astonishing how these Western educated women confronted a tradition that was lying just below their comfortable existence all the time: "'Aunt told me that you've been corresponding with a young man in Penang. You can't do this because you're engaged to someone in China,' 'What? Engaged!' OI cried out. 'Mother never told me. Am I to be married and go to China?' 'Not so soon off course. Come, let me show you something'…….Pointing to a picture she said: 'This is the man you're going to marry and these bangles are the tokens of your betrothal. Our uncle arranged this marriage three years ago when you were only thirteen' "(Chang, 1981: 68-69).

These direct testimonies strengthen the argument that Chinese traditions and

especially the gender bias embedded in the practically sanctified dogma of maintaining a patrilineal line were not so easily abandoned, even among those closest to Westerners.

2.9 Assumptions behind the Skinner Hypothesis

My opinion is that Skinner was impressed by two recent events. Both events relate to conditions which Skinner listed himself as catalysts or obstructers of assimilation.

The first, the proportion of China born Chinese within the Thai Chinese population was clarified by the closure of Communist China. There was no idea of any sort at that time of the durability of the regime, but since it did look like a fortress from the outside, there could have been an overly high estimate of how long it will remain closed as it was. The assumption of zero new Chinese for the long term was an important factor then.

The second issue concerns Thai policies. While until 1955 the Thai government mixed anti-Sinicism and anti-Communism in a fright campaign which Skinner compares to the Nazi intertwining of anti Bolshevik and anti-Semite hatreds and fears (Skinner, 1957: 376). However, after the return of Marshal Phibul from his world tour in 1955, he took a sharp policy U Turn and initiated numerous soft policies aimed at encouraging Thai-Chinese to adopt a Thai identity (and become Chinese-Thais), while offering them incentives in the forms of complete acceptance as Thais. Skinner provides many reasons for the policy change, ranging from impressions Marshal Phibul gathered during his extensive tour, to fresh geo-political developments which reduced the fears of an aggressive red China which prevailed before (Skinner, 1957: 377-380).

The third issue was contacts with China itself. Skinner sees that as the biggest factor outside of the Thai government's control, and he seems to worry, as earlier quoted, of the possible consequences of Thailand having, for various reasons, to recognize China and allow the opening of a Chinese Embassy and Consular office in Thailand. Skinner notes that this "would certainly retard Chinese assimilation (Skinner, 1957: 382). If that was what Skinner thought would be the effect of the opening of a mere embassy, one could wonder what he would think of the kind of open relations, extensive, movement of people for tourism, education, investments, trade, and even the visits of Chinese-Thais to ancestral villages. According to his formulation, such extensive contacts would not retard, but reverse assimilation.

2.10 The Arguments against Skinner

First, we should take note that Skinner's ideas of assimiliation stand in contrast to common perceptions of Chinese "unassimilatability" which prevailed earlier, and were even entertained by Thailand's king Rama the 6th.

This was derived from racist Eurpeans and American who were anathemic to the so called "yellow race", and in fact often compared the Chinese to Jews, as parasitic outsiders. For example, descriptions formulated by Robert Elegant, one of the great "prophets" of the Yellow Peril/Red Peril," and obviously not a great Chinese lover: "Once ill educated peasants and coolies got the full rice bowls and silver mounted chopsticks-they sought when they left the South China coast packed in the 'tween decks of malodorous junks, they strove to recreate a way of life they never knew. At a comfortable distance in time and space, the motherland assumed a beauty unknown when they scratched the stony soil of Fukien for a handful of rice and weeds…..the intellectual foundations of the world of the overseas Chinese were a hodgepodge of half-understood Confucian precepts, often passed from one illiterate to another, but usually bolstered by the teaching of an exiled scholar, long after the civil service examination system collapsed in 1906-and the Confucian way of life with it-

the Hua-Chiao tried to live as they thought the gentry of China lived" (Elegant, 1959: 44-45).

Elegant's aggressive, but now so comically outdated venom, is still useful in presenting an "uglifying" (A verb inflection which is a favorite of the Indian writer Salman Rushdie) mirror to entities that are celebrated and worshipped today. In this case, I mentioned it purposely as a devil's advocate to celebratory, but detail-poor descriptions of a rising class and its attempts to forge an identity.

Of course, all this discussion can be seen as outdated. Living in the world of Foucault and Anderson, in which communities are imagined and traditions and beliefs are constructs, the question of what are the characteristic, cultural and social, of the Chinese-Thais, may not seems to be of great interest, because these attributes, whatever they are, are constructs with no objective validity. Whether they were a mishmash of memories of traditions, distorted and twisted, and were "passed from one illiterate peasant to another" or whether they were set by a conference of great scholars convened to issue a definitive "scripture" that will encompass all the "correct" details of the culture and the tradition, is of no interest. Both are equally "valid." But if we study the ways in which a certain tradition works in a concrete society, such as gender and ideas of identity in ethnic Chinese society in Bangkok, we are not looking at constructs. Anderson himself mused about the difficulty of defining a nation, and points at "The political power of nationalism vs. their philosophical poverty and even incoherence….this 'emptiness' easily gives rise…to a certain condescension" (Anderson, 1991: 5). But on the other side, Anderson notes, set against this conceptual poverty, stand a phenomenon which is perhaps the strongest force in the history of the past 150 years. Elegant can mock the base of the identity of the ethnic Chinese in Thailand, others, which we shall refer to later, might watch them celebrating real achievements that changed Thailand. Similarly, tradition of gender roles and hierarchy can be construed as randomly selected, randomly made tight or loose, and subject to each household's whims. And yet, and let us take this

case back to mainland China, if you look at the face of a child, a baby girl, that was cruelly stuffed into ashes or sand until death, then these elusive "traditions" look at you with the power of life and death.

More important for our discussion are the counter claims to Skinner, made on the basis of later studies. There are many attempts to dispute Skinner, mostly go into great details in field studies. A good example of that approach is the works of Tong and Chan in "Rethinking Assimilation and Ethnicity": The Chinese in Thailand. Chan and Tong state that: "We argue that assimilation cannot be seen as a straight line, one-way, lineal process of the Chinese becoming Thai. At the very least, we suggest that assimilation be conceived as a two way process which, in the long run, will leave the Chinese with something Thai and the Thai with something Chinese. The important theoretical question is no longer whether the Chinese in Thailand have been assimilated or not, but rather how they, as individual and as a group, go about presenting themselves in their transactions with the Thai and other Chinese, and why" (Tong, and Chan, 1998: 1).

Tong and Chan are coming out of the view that "An ethnic identity is not necessarily an all-or-nothing, permanent thing. One may claim one identity in one situation and a different identity in another situation, depending on the relative pay offs….. ('and that'-my insert) ethnicity is neither completely expressive (or primordial) nor completely instrumental (and situational); rather, it usually is both instrumental and expressive, and theories that oppose the two perspectives have posed a false dichotomy. On occasions of cultural "get together," ethnic identity "thickens" while the past tradition is being selectively re-enacted upon, not simply repeated" (Tong, and Chan, 1998: 4).

Chan and Tong then proceed to present various other models of how ethnic identities are constructed. As against the initial rejection of a solid singularity in

favor of flexibility and change, they mention distribution, that is, a person might hold one identity as central within himself, while towards the outside he displays different nuances of that identity or even totally different identities, mostly to avail him in the pursuit of various interests. This, of course assumes not just a syncretic identity composed of different elements from both cultures, but a constant game of masquerades. Obviously, though, the "core" identity can be itself syncretic, and the acting out part can simply emphasize or de-emphasize certain facets of that core hybridity. Another view looks at a group, and contends that while at the center of the group, the core identity "thickens," when venturing out to engage with people outside this close circle, one adjusts his behavior and adopts accommodative identities that allow him better and smoother interaction

After analyzing Skinner's work and its premises, the authors go out to check the reality on the ground, according to different categories: language use; education and especially the availability of Chinese education; organizational, namely, the continuation or not of Chinese organizations; occupational differentiation and whether the older, clear cut differences between occupations typical of Chinese and those typical of Thais persist; and the last three: religion, traditions and ethnic identification. In all of these categories, Tong and Chan find a continuation of a Chinese identity, adapted, but alive. In none of these are there any signs that Chinese practices had completely died out. Obviously, there are changes, one cannot compare it to what took place 50-60 years ago, but in a sense, the greater openness of today's Thailand and the greater confidence of the Chinese-Thais allows them to display these with no need to hide or conceal.

Tong and Chan point at many traditions and religious practices being preserved and maintained. From my observations I participated in many such events, and was impressed, like Tong and Chan, of its liveliness, of large participation, and of its having been legitimized to the point that some have practically become national events. In fact, large and small retailers promote and even prominently advertize

events and special sales that relate to these festivals. The events are open to all, and Thais participate in them freely. But then Chinese traditions were never exclusive with syncreticism having always been a part of Chinese culture, as contrasted to Western ones.

As far as our topic of interest is concerned, they find that "in Thailand today, we still find a large number of Chinese who continue to carry out ancestral rituals. This observation receives support from Punyodyana survey, which indicated that nine out of ten Chinese respondents were engaged in ancestor's worship. This figure is for group one respondent, but even for Group Three respondents, supposedly the most assimilated, sixty three percents claimed to be ancestor worshippers (Tong and Chan, 1998: 31). The observation of ancestral rites is central to Chinese religious life and contributes substantially to the integration and perpetuation of the family as a basic unit of Chinese social life. Moreover, ancestor worship is linked to the idea of Xiao or filial piety, according to which children owe their parents obedience and are committed to its perpetuation for the family name and lineage**.**

On the issue of intermarriage, Tong and Chan present different studies, which, in my opinion, convey different message. In the first, where the question was whether there is a Thai member in the family, without limiting it to the nuclear family, the findings, of Punyodyana (who will be reviewed later), were that the "yes" answer ranged from sixty percents in the most assimilated of her three groups to around thirty percents in the least assimilated group. The weakness of these findings lies, of course, in the ambiguity of "what does having a Thai member of the household means?" There is no indication of the size of the household or the generation to which the Thai member belongs to. Though the number correlate with other aspects of assimilation, they do not provide a clear picture on their own. Coughlin, on the other side, surveyed intermarriage directly, though with a small sampling and found it to be rare (Tong, and Chang, 1998: 21). My own view is that in any serious survey of this sort, social class considerations have to be taken into effect. Chinese form the bulk of the middle

class and the dearth of intermarriage might also mean a dearth of cross-class marriages, which is natural in all societies. Stanzon points to ninty percent pure Chinese-Thai marriages in the first generation, sixty percent in the second generation, and fourty seven percent in the third and fourth generation. That is a significant number considering that there is a much larger supply of Thai brides (Stanzon, 1983: 111).

Regarding intermarriage, Tong and Chan refer to cross-ethnic stereotypes and found there material that indicates barriers to intermarriage (namely, negative stereotypes, particularly of Thai men). Punyodyana researched that systematically, looking at stereotypes of males and females of all categories (Chinese-Thai males; Chinese-Thai females; Thai males; Thai females) and by all categories, and found strong stereotypes that vastly favored the Chinese (even by Thais themselves). But we have to remember again the class factor which might be the real culprit behind the prejudice, even though, to be fair to ethnicity, their being "good family men," also worked strongly in favor of the Chinese.

Also mentioned, close to our topic, are "cultural differences between the two groups regarding marriage rules. For example, Chinese are generally patrilineal and patrilocal, whereas Thais are matrilineal and neolocal …..It is significant that to note that a larger percentage of the Chinese in Thailand today claim that they would prefer to marry another Chinese instead of a Thai. Some reasons given were:" 'my parents would approve of it and would be happy with a Chinese-in-law' or' as Chinese we would understand our customs better' " (Tong, and Chan, 1998: 19-21).

These findings are highly relevant to our discussion. The persistence of gender preferences is important, but we can also see the lack of details. Tong and Chan formulate this point in the broadest terms possible, lacking concrete details, and presenting a general standard formula. Having accepted their statement, we would

want to know exactly how daughters are treated. How are they treated compared to sons in terms of preference? Are any of the practices so well known to be still so strong in China of gender selection based on ultra-sound findings exist in Thailand or not? Do couples behave on the basis of male-female equality or not? If not, what is the actual hierarchical situation? Are there any remains of the daughters-in-law traditional roles or not? Skinner already noted the resistance to that custom of Thai born Chinese women, as quoted earlier.

I searched through a large volume of research about Chinese in Southeast Asia but I generally found tremendous literature on the subject, but much less specific focus on certain components to which a new, hybrid or purist (imagined, off course) Chinese identity would address itself and in particular, on the topic of gender relations and hierarchy.

Prevalent formulations are along the lines of the following: "In that broad sense, it is not helpful to our understanding of most Southeast Asian Chinese who have not been assimilated to such an extent that they deny their Chineseness accept all the political and economic norms of the new nation-state. I prefer a narrower definition of culture which focuses on two kinds of norms. The first are Chinese cultural norms which the Chinese consider binding on them as Chinese (even when they are unable to attain them). They include the learning of the Chinese written language, the preservation of family ties especially observing norms about birth, marriage and death, and the support given to clan, district…." (Wang, 1988: 14).

The last study I would like to briefly survey is Jiemin Bao's "Martial Acts: Gnder, Sexuality, and Identity among the Chinese Thai Diaspora." The book is the closest topic-wise, to this dissertation, and is based on field studies. It is also a supporter of the view of flexible identity or hybridity, rather than an all-or-nothing concept of assimilation. But its focus is more on male sexuality than female gender

roles, and the way Chinese man used their mobility in the early 20th century to hold households both in China and Thailand, and how this has been transformed in the present into prevalent cases of betrayal of their Chinese wives in Thailand and holding affairs with Thai women outside the household. This contradicts Chinese norms of prioritizing the family institution (concubines are treated as part of the family, either as producer of sons, in case the first wife fails in that or as late age comfort providers. According to Bao, Chinese tradition frown on sex for pleasure only, and this behavior might reflect prevalent norms among Thai males, who do pursue sex for pleasure. In over twenty five years of knowing a large number of Thai businessmen and factory owners, I can only confirm her findings. Bao's focus is on the male as the actor, mine is on the female as the actor, and in that sense, I could not find useful material besides the interesting observation that bolting out of the Confucian "shackles" is not only a female agenda, as was my thinking at the outset, but is also a male agenda.

Another article by Jiemin Bao: "Sino-Thai Ethnic Identity: Married Daughters of China and Daughters-in-Law of Thailand," published in the "Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science " closely examines marriage rituals among the Thai Chinese and identifies cultural hybridity that includes Chinese, Thai and Western motifs. The interesting point was the reaffirmation of the persistence of the Confucian values as far as female inferiority in the household persists. Bao is known as a meticulous researcher, and such finding confirm that the gender-identity power negotiations which I examine, are far from existing in literature only, but are in fact relevant and real. Obviously, the thesis does lean on this as a central pole, but it is a helpful affirmation.

2.11 The Thai Academic Perspective

This section will first introduce the views of prominent Thai scholars on the issue of identity and assimilation, invariably forming a revision, confirmation or complete rejection of Skinner thesis. The scholars are Dr Supang Chantavanich, Dr Kasian Tejapira and Boonsanong Punyodyana. The first two, especially Supang, have academic reputation beyond Thailand and have published numerous works in different areas of Social Studies.

The three scholars take different stands on the issue of assimilation or integration, but all recognize the fact that assimilation as described and predicted (conditionally) by Skinner, containing an element of "forgetting" the past, ancestral identity (Skinner, 1957: 134), does not reflect the reality in contemporary Thai society, definitely so from the late 1980s onwards. Boonsanong's study, published in 1971, is by far the earliest of the three, the others having been published in the 1990s. However, while Boonsanong presents a detailed empirical study, the conceptual framework is faulty, is I will show below, and it ends up substantiating assimilation over time rather than showing differential assimilation.

Dr Supang offers a succinct post-Skinner formulation of the identity of the Chinese or their descendent living in Thailand: "most of the Siamese-Chinese of of the mid-twentieth century have all become Thai citizen, and the appropriate term for them should be "Thais of Chinese descent " or "Chinese-Thais or Sino-Thais". These ethnic Chinese live comfortably in Thai society because they can keep their ethnic Chinese identity while at the same time use their national identity as Thai. This dual identity is accepted as long as the Chinese prove their allegiance to Thailand and express their national ideology by supporting the three traditional and everlasting symbols of Thai nationalism: nation, religion and king. It is possible to be a Thailand an ethnic Chinese all the same time as the Thais define national identity in political, cultural and ideological terms, while ethnicity, in terms of descent and traditional practices, does not come into conflict with Thai national identity" (Supang Chantavanich,1997: 254). I find a lack of full clarity only as far as culture and religion are concerned. This is because the traditions which the Chinese-Thai are said to keep are rich with

religious and cultural practices which are Chinese are different than the Thai ones. The syncretism of the cultures of both Thais and Chinese allow a free mix of religious beliefs, especially when the Thai Theravada Buddhism stand again Mahayana Buddhism of the Chinese, or Confucianism, which is hardly a religion and more a system of ethical and social values. But the exact nature of the culture remains unclear, allowing for both elements to mingle and coexist. As Boonsanong cites Dr Puey Ungphakorn, the cultures not only mingle but probably mutually influence each other (Boonsanong Pudyodyana, 1971: 1).

Another Thai scholar, Kasian Tejapira, offers a somewhat different view. His is also a very different picture of contemporary Thailand than Skinner would have predicted. In his article "Imagined Uncommunity: The Luukjin Middle Class and Thai Official Nationalism", Tejapira describes the rise of the "Luukjin" (literally: off spring of Chinese) as the bulk of the middle class. He finds in their identity orientations fascination contradictions: "These Luukjin have the following characteristics: 1) They are of Chinese descent but are basically illiterate in the Chinese language. 2) They speak, read, and write Thai and therefore, paradoxically, are relearning Chinese culture, reviving their ethnic consciousness, and reimagining their Sino-Siamese identity through the medium of the Thai language3) They work in the most vibrant, dynamic, advanced, open cosmopolitan sectors of the economy and culture, but remain subject to one of the most inefficient, rigid, authoritarian, clientelistic and outdated bureaucratic state in Southeast Asia….. They are gaining power as the largest group of entrepreneurs and consumers in the increasingly cohesive and unified national economic and cultural market….(Kasian Tejapira, 1997, 86).

While Supang emphasizes duality (with more weight on the Thai side of that duality), Kasian sees a Chinese-Thai. The term he uses, "Luukjin or sons-of-China, a common-use, not an academic term, demonstrates that point. But the singularity versus duality is important. Both define a mixed identity, but stand on different point on the scale between Thai identity and Chinese identity, even though Supang see the duality as

contained within the definition of Thai identity). Her definition includes differentiated ethnic group and their heritage, Kasian might not reject this definition, but he places the Chinese-Thais outside of it. Outside of it, that is, because Supang's definition of Thai identity accepts different ethnicity and traditional practices, while Kasian emphasizes elements of culture which are not relics but are future oriented. Also, the nationalistic elements which Dr Supang stresses are absent in Kasian's formulation, but rather an aversion to the state, its authoritarianism and lack of modernity is emphasized.

In his article, Kasian goes on to assert the hybrid Luukjin identity of this group, the bulk of the middle class, by referring to the immense popularity of the television series of one of the five novels we focus on as a source of information in this study. The novel, "Through the Scales of the Dragon" by Prapason Sewikul, is a triumphant novel that celebrates the great success of a Chinese tycoon whose character is modeled on a few leading tycoons in Thailand. The series, according to Kasian, inspires a great wave of expressive pride in Chinese ancestry and identity, and at the event Kasian attends, the guest burst in singing the title song of the series. The words, according to Kasian translation from Thai are self explanatory:

"From the Chinese land overseas

on a small boat drifting afar

penniless like a beggar

arrives in the Gulf and land of Siam

like a dragon in hiding

flees away from the flames of war

to a shelter one feels grateful for

ever more determined to make good on this life.

Builds a legendary business and romance

To win public acceptance and reputation.

Gives birth to a new generation

The new wave of great energy.

Fights the battle of the business world

With flexible wisdom and nerve.

But, alas, as to the battle of love,

Harsh wounds are inflicted on the heart.

Through the days and nights of toil

Contemplates the coin of past struggling.

Dragon begins to spread its wings

Pay back things it owes to this land"

Kasian then immediately notes:"It struck me then that this was the long missing anthem of their own imagined community" (Kasian Tejapira: 1997, 89-90)

Kasian does not address the particularities of the culture of the Luuk Jin. He describes a community but characterizes it in very broad terms, as we cited part of above. Besides their being Thai literate, relearning their Chinese heritage through Thai, and the rest of the socio-economic class characteristics, we don't know much about them, and what are the specifics of their Chineseness, and are there any common traits or is it a situation in which every person invents his own Chineseness.

Boonsanong 's study is statistically based. It examines 3 groups of Chinese-Thais, the first and second being differentiated by level of education, age and to a smaller

degree, income. The second degree originally intended to be differentiated from group one only by a much higher level of formal education in the Thai educational system, is also significantly younger and enjoys higher income. The difference between the groups age wise is more significant the income difference. In fact, Boonsanong makes it clear that her plan was to have educational difference as the only variable of difference, but finding the desired distribution of respondents did not succeed in practice. The third group is composed of Chinese-Thais working in government, all with relatively high level of education, higher than those of group two simply because over half of the population of group three is in the age group of 25-34, while about forty percent of the population of group two is of the age group of 15-24. Group three has lower income levels, but that can be expected, when public and private sectors are compared. It is not mentioned in the work, but this large and unintended, originally, age gap, accentuates the income differentials. This is because a large number of group two is students or at the beginning of their career. If successfully controlled for age, the income of group two would be much higher than group one (Boonsanong Pudyodyana, 1971: 5-9).

These three groups are compared in terms of different characteristics of culture and ethnicity, which Boonsanong indicates are similar to those used by Skinner (Boonsanong Pudyodyana, 1971: 2-3). These include language use, occupations, religious practices, interpersonal associations and intermarriage. The results show group three as the most assimilated, group two as also assimilated, but less than group one as the least assimilated. Degree of assimilation is the dependent variable. Boonsanong refers to her study as showing “differential assimilation”, but I wonder if it showing not differential assimilation”, but “assimilation in process”. Group three is clearly a special group, as Boonsanong points out herself, by saying “it represents a discreet sociological grouping” (Boonsanong Pudyodyana, 1971: 7). Since the employer is the state, it is unconceivable that it will employ unassimilated immigrants, that an unassimilated person who doesn’t as “belonging” will want to be in its employment and that once having entered a working environment mostly staffed by ethnic Thais and representing a still nationalistic Thai state these employed

Chinese-Thais will not follow the line even more than before. That this group assimilates fastest is more of tautology than a cause and effect The age difference between groups one and two is crucial, as formal Thai education was being slowly forced upon second generation Chinese, and as it became clear to their parents that it is an advantage. The younger they are, the higher their chances of entering the system. Assimilation is a process over time, when groups are differentiated by age, they stand on different points on the time/assimilation axis. In that sense, rather than exposing differential rates of assimilation, the study seems to show that indeed assimilation takes place over time. In that sense, this study seems to substantiate Skinner's hypothesis rather that offering a revised version.

The topic of identity is also addressed in dissertations. The following one focuses on Chinese women, and their status, bringing it further to our topic. In a dissertation titled "Status and Role of Women in the Chinese Family in Contemporary Thailand: Case Studies of a Conservative Group in Bangkok Metropolis", dated 1988, Ms Teunpit Chaipromprasith conducts a series in depth interviews with 20 families in different areas of Bangkok. Tuenpit declares a direct cause and effect relation between maintaining Chinese traditions and female status in the family: "Based on what we said earlier, it would be interesting to observe whether it is true that for Chinese people in present times who maintain Chinese traditions, as they follow these traditions more strictly, so it shall be reflected in the status of women in the family. On the other hand, whether in case Chinese traditions are followed less strictly, so will these women have an opportunity to enhance their role in the family, which implies that Chinese women will acquire a higher status in the family? This point has not yet been addressed in a definitive way"(Teunpit Chaipromprasith, 1988: 7). In other words, the question is whether adherence to Chinese traditions and women's status are a "zero-sum-game", with the increase always coming at the expense of the other. Teunpit phrases her research question in a simple manner, and options of reconstructing the identity to accommodate a higher status of women are not part of her discourse. From her point of reference, reconstruction would be a fancy for dilution or reduction. She treats the tradition as objectively given.

However, as Teunpit proceeds in her dissertation, she in fact considers the status of Chinese-Thai women in the family not against the degree of cultural level of maintenance, but against personal and socio-economic parameters. These are the women's age, the women's generation (relative to the first generation in Thailand), their level of education (differentiated into Thai and Chinese) and they work outside the house and have independent income or not. Teunpit observes the correlation between variables, but her conclusions that link them in the same direction are in fact self explanatory. Namely, that the younger they are, and the more generations in the country, so does their education levels grow, especially Thai education, as also does their inclination to work outside the house and earn their own income. Finally all these are linked to a higher degree of rejection of gender bias or female inferiority. In a way, the dissertation ends up as being on a similar track to that of Booonsanong, at least as far as correlating age and education with a practice conceived as traditional Chinese, female inferiority in the household.

The original suggestion of linking the level of tradition maintenance to women's status is interesting in itself, but the results in the 1980s would probably be that the more Chinese traditions are maintained, the lower would be the women's status. Today such a research could be of greater interest, especially if it would reveal a reconstructed, but reinvigorated Chinese identity, such as the case we will see in the Thai novel "A Walk Through Spring", where the raising of the status of women to the center in nevertheless accompanied by a strengthening of the links to tradition.

In addition to the above studies which focus on identity, there are a number of studies about how Chinese-Thais, their characteristics and culture are reflected in Thai novels. The majority of these dissertations are descriptive. These dissertations are useful for our study as sources of some observations about certain characters, but

these are isolated observations. Reviewing these dissertations will not be productive as they do not offer hypotheses that could help us develop our argument.

The most interesting dissertation I found is by Patcharee Varasrai, titled: "Thai Novels Depicting Chinese Society in Thailand", submitted in 1994in Chulalongkorn University. Patcharee offers a panoramic view of 14 novels, starting with "Letters from Thailand" of Botan, and ending with "Through the Scales of the Dragon" by Prapasson Sewikul. Both these novels, as well as "Being with Gong" of Yok Burapha are included in our study. The structure of Patcharee's dissertation is based mainly on classifications. In the main chapter where the 14 novels ranging from "Letters from Thailand to "Through the Scales of the Dragon" The novels under review are divided into: 1) Novels that focus on Chinese-Thais in their struggle to succeed and Novels that focus on the lives of Chinese-Thais from the angle of family life. 2) Novels that present Chinese-Thais in a comic way. There are chapters on literature prior to "Letters from Thailand" and chapters on the Chinese-Thais as viewed in Thai novels. Since not all the writers in the list of 14 main novels are by ethnic Thais, such as Prapasson Sewikul, it is not clear where Patcharee draws the line between Thais and Chinese-Thais, as it is not explained elsewhere. This honest oversight by itself is a demonstration that while there is a clear recognition of "Chinese-Thais as a group, which is implied by the fact that such a dissertation was written, the lines between Thais and Chinese-Thais can be blurry.

Another interesting dissertation written on the subject is "Chinese Main Characters Moral Behavior in Thai Novels" by Ms Nitta Chantapanyasil, 1998, Chulalongkorn University. The dissertation examines the moral principles and behavior of main characters in a six novels, two of which are by Botan, two by Yok Burapha, one by Prapasson Sewikul and one by Sopak Suwan. Three of the novels: "Letters from Thailand", Being with Gong" and "Through the Scales of the Dragon", are also reviewed here. Nitti includes interviews with the writers, which I will refer to later. The methodology is quantitative text analysis and it offers interesting insights as to

the values quantitative distribution. The discussion is interesting but is not differentiated clearly by values which are clearly based on Chinese heritage and those that might have been acquired in Thailand, borrowed from Thai culture. This is perfectly legitimate as the it was not a part of the objectives, which focused generally on:"studying the forms of behavior which are offered as good examples for modern people, by surveying and reviewing the moral behavior of main characters in Thai novels about Chinese-Thais"(Nitta Chantapanyasil,1998: 6). Namely, the values, twenty in all, can sometimes be guessed at as being more Chinese or more Thai, but many are more universal. For example: "courage to stand behind your principles", the value with highest ranking, or "using reason", the second one, are quite general, even though the first one sounds like having more Chinese character, as it reflects less flexibility in adjusting to situations, which is a recognized Thai characteristic, while the second one is a value often pointed out in Thai culture, and is related to Buddhist principles. The third and fourth: "gratefulness" and "compassion" are usually seen as Thai values. Analyzing the values by culture would be of great interest, but just by the short discussion above one can see that the Chinese main characters are portrayed as having absorbed Thai values to a large extent. Diligence, persistence and thrift appear only in the tenth and twelfth ranking. The findings are surprising, as my own impressions of reading the texts are the last mentioned Chinese values of diligence, persistence and thrift play a much more central role in the narratives. It could be that there is a question of context in which the Thai values are referred to that could play a role. Nitta describes the variable as the number of time a behavior corresponding to this or that value appears (Nitta Chantapanyasil, 1998: 51). Seeing the actual list of "value behavioral events" could help understand the findings better, namely, to what degree they reflect actual absorption of Thai values, as it looks at a first glance. In any case, there is no gender distinctions in the data or analysis, or values that pertain to the view of women's status.

The most updated and by far most analytical and sophisticated on the topic are those by Nattanai Prasanam. Natthanai deploys the conceptual tools of both Postmodernist and Diaspora studies to approach his topics. Natthanai published two paper, one

focusing on "Being with Gong". The article focuses on the socio-political background of the novel, and its use by the state as part of an ideological campaign of assimilation. In the article, titled ""Yoo Kab Kong by Yok Burapha: The Pursuit of Integration Ideology in the Thai Social Context", Natthanai applies the concepts of Hegemony of Gramsci and Ideology of Altthuser to see how the character of Gong represents, for the state, the ultimate quiet model minority, in fact perfectly fitting Supang's definition, which, at the same time drives his descendant, Yok to completely assimilate and forget his ancestral heritage, which approximates Skinner's formulation. Nevertheless, on a very fine analysis of the text, Natthanai discovers a layer that might have escaped the state ideologists, and that is a silent but consistent opposition of Yok, Gong's grandchild, to that relentless drive, revealing, in a way, a future of possible maintenance after all.

Another article, which is closer to our topic as it addresses identity and gender, is:" 'A Walk Through Spring' of Yuwadee Tonsakunrungreuang': The Writing of Identity and History by Cantonese Diaspora women". The article, as its name suggests, focuses on one novel, which is part of our reading (under the pen name Judy Chan in the translated version) and on how Chinese identity is reconstructed in a way that transforms the status of women. This reconstruction is performed in a manner which the kitchen as the center of the home, well within the female-space (in terms of genderized space) of the home. Female warmth, happy retelling of tales of old times, and lots of homely cooking transform the harsh Confucian house into a worm home. Natthanai links this to the fact of its being Cantonese rather than the majority of Chinese-Thais who are Tae-Chiu, the largest Chinese dialect group in Thailand, which is distinguished from the Cantonese in different cultural aspects. Natthanai points at the numerous similarities of the novels of Amy Tan, also a Cantonese (as most of American-Chinese are). This suggests that the common picture of Chinese-Thais is misleading, with substantial differences between dialect groups. The grandmothers in the novel are actually acting in the only way they know, they are not "reconstructing", but the Cantonese model is offered, in a sense, to other dialect groups to study as a model top reconstruct their own. This is done in the novel

through the active participation of the future groom of the grandmother, her sister and their two friends. Watthanachai, the future groom, is half Tae-Chiu, and he is thought, through action and stories, the secrets of the Cantonese model of an harmonious home, where women play a critical, and never inferior, role.

CHAPTER 3

OVERVIEW OF DIASPORA LITERATURE OUTSIDE THAILAND

3.1 Introductory Comments

This chapter will be devoted to placing our main focus of study in a comparative international context. In essence, it will be an exercise in comparative literature, only that there will obviously be a heavy emphasis on the background of the literature and the messages embedded in those literary works, rather than the forms of the literary expression. When going deep into our selected texts we will need to leave no stone unturned, but here, in this chapter of comparative perspective, we will only look from a bird's view at some authors or specific literary works, belonging to or created by other migrant ethnic minorities, or ethnic Chinese living in other countries. We will focus on authors and literature where the issues of identity negotiation, Diaspora, and finally, at least in some cases, its relation to gender relations, are obviously the center point of the literary text. Specific literary works will be cited only for the purpose of making general observations. We will not examine them in their entirety.

Looking at some historical aspects of the literary arena from the point of view of a more traditional scholar of literature, I find the following observation useful for our purposes: "The postwar years gave us dozens of writers on both sides of the Atlantic for whom ideas form a large part of the fictional enterprise……Often the greatest pressure in the novel has come from writers from "emergent" groups-minorities, women, citizens of former colonies –who understandably have a lot to say after being spoken for and spoken about for so long" (Foster, 2008: 243).

Our focus here is exactly on that content-laden novels Foster is describing. It is on novels generated in the wake of the both the great retreat of Colonialism and the rise of nationalism in ex-colonies, as well as the successful waves of human right movements and the enactment of more liberal policies, particularly in the US, which allowed minorities, migrant at source or indigenous, much more freedom, equality and freedom of expression. The period covered therefore spans from the emergence of nationalist movement in the first part of the 20ths century, with actual independence actually having been gained mostly after World War 2, and the period of the 1960-1970s in the United States. This later period, even though primarily an American phenomenon, had international repercussions.

Foster groups minorities, women and citizens of former colonies together. In practice these are often treated separately. But there are good reasons for the co-grouping. It is not only that those feminist movements took a ride on the general clamor for rights, but they are inherently linked to it. Feminist groups in the West have already flourished and gained many rights compared to a past in which they were excluded from many arenas, such as the political system: "Woman suffrage in the United States was achieved gradually, at state and local levels, during the 19th Century and early 20th Century, culminating in 1920 with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, which provided: 'The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex'" (Women's Suffrage in the United States,2011, [online])

While this was one big step, there were many more to take. Discrimination in employment was legislated against in 1963/4: "Compensation discrimination in employment is prohibited by the Equal Pay Act of 1963, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, and Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, all enforced by the U.S. Equal Employment

Opportunity Commission. Collectively, these statutes require employers to compensate employees without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, or disability" (Equal Pay Discrimination: Facts, 2011, [online]).

But even in this century, the issue still exists. Things legislated are not always followed in practice: "Gender discrimination in the workplace continues to be a major problem in the workplace despite the passing of time since laws such as Title VII or the Equal Pay Act were enacted to combat the issue. Sexual or gender discrimination at work occurs whenever an individual is treated differently on account of their gender and may affect anything from hiring decisions to promotions. Relatedly, sexual harassment is a form of gender discrimination similarly prohibited by federal law and the subject covered in detail within Find Law's Sexual Harassment section. Below you will find information on gender discrimination, including an overview of gender discrimination laws, some frequently asked questions, and examples of illegal interview questions (Employee Rights: Sex/Gender Discrimination, 2011,[online]).

And this all relates to societies that have long prided themselves on their liberty and equality and had these values presumably pointed at as what distinguishes them from third world countries, colonies and regimes ruled by "Oriental Despots."

So, the issue of gender discrimination was acuter by a few degrees in societies, or ethnic groups where old cultures that consigned women to a secondary place prevailed. When Western women fought for their rights, they fought prejudice, but it was not a prejudice that already already much weaker roots in basic tenets of the culture that defined their identity. It was a prejudice that was the remnant of sets of older beliefs and opinions which viewed women as inferior, as if based on empirical observations. And indeed, once women were allowed in in the full sense of the word, gender distinctions eroded dramatically. Empirical "proofs" pointed not only at equality, but in many areas, at superiority.

But in the older societies mentioned above, empiricism (even though blinded and manipulated for long in the West) was not yet the declared rational for discrimination. The rational was wedded to the foundations of the culture, it was a revealed truth, in some of the Abrahamic religions handed by God, or it was an inherent part of the only system perceived to be able to assure social harmony, as in China.

Fighting for their rights, women from these countries were not only fighting to be given the opportunity to "prove themselves," but were in fact fighting their ethnic and cultural identity. This was especially acute in Diaspora societies, where groups struggle to maintain an original identity. In the home states, now nation states, the tension might have been (and this is a conjecture) less tense because the nation state itself attempted to monopolize identification, or identity, and was therefore less picky in selection on what cultural elements to focus on. The national identity of Communist China had no place for gender discrimination. In Indonesia, composed of so many ethnic groups, and "In contrast to Muslim nationalists who insisted on an Islamic identity for the new state, the framers of the Pancasila insisted on a culturally neutral identity, compatible with democratic or Marxist ideologies, and overarching the vast cultural differences of the heterogeneous population. Like the national language--Bahasa Indonesia --which Sukarno also promoted, the Pancasila did not come from any particular ethnic group and was intended to define the basic values for an "Indonesian" political culture" (Pancasila, 2011, [online]). Since different groups have surely had different perspective on gender roles, a decision to go for a culturally neutral identity meant that the state created a superseding identity, to which ethnic traditions had to bow.

In Diaspora, we hear of mixed identities, rooted in ethnic group distinctions, but still containing a layer, thinner or thicker, of identification with the nation state. It

is important to note that nationalist movements and the independence of formerly colonized territories had nothing to do with the creation of Diasporas, most of which were in fact created as a result of Colonialism. They also did not create the idea of the need of individuals to adhere to their cultural traditions, to form ethnic communities or long for a homeland. These sentiments are as ancient as the biblical hymn of the Jewish Babylonian Diaspora expressed so well in Psalm 137:1 of the Old Testament, and forever became a symbol of physical or even spiritual, displacement.

In this chapter I will focus on comparisons to two Diasporas: The American Chinese Diaspora and the Indian Diaspora. The main motivation of this chapter is that it is helpful to understand things by placing them in comparison to phenomena with which it shares numerous features, but from which it also differs. By then exploring the differences, and understanding what the focus of our study, Chinese-Thai literature, is not, we can obtain a sharper understanding of our topic.

I wish to note that my original plan was to include the Malay and Indonesian part of Southeast Asia in the comparison. I thought it fruitful to include a comparison within the region, as the movement of Chinese to Thailand and to other areas in Southeast Asia was one historical phenomenon, with just different corollary sub-streams. All areas or countries in the region went through exposures to Colonial hegemonic power in different shapes, which played an important role in creating the "pull factor" on Chinese immigration to the region. All areas or countries in the region went through nationalistic awakenings which always referred to their Chinese minorities in a negative manner. However, the language barrier did not allow any direct access to original works, except a number of biographies, written by ethnic Chinese women residing in the areas of what used to be called Strait Settlements (Singapore, Malacca, Penang), which were part of the British Empire in the mid 19th century or slightly before. These works were commented upon in an article by Ko Tai Ann, who wrote also other articles on the subject of literature. Besides that, there is an important bibiolographical book by Claudine Salmon, and articles by Leo

Suryadinata. Nevertheless, I found the limited access to original works as a barrier.

It is obvious to me that such a series of comparisons is a grand task. My aim is obviously not an attempt to exhaust these comparisons, as each could be a subject of a few dissertations. The aim, as mentioned above, is only to get a clearer preliminary understanding of the Thai case, which is our focus.

A typology of Diasporas proposed by Cohen which attempts to cover the vast range of Diasporas that exist, offers numerous sets of objective circumstances which created the Diaspora, and were the background to its conditions in the host country and its interaction with the host country's population. (Cohen, 1997: 23). Cohen differentiates between "Victim Diasporas," examples being Africans and Armenians, not to mention the Jewish Diaspora; "Labor and Imperial Diasporas," examples being the Indians, the Chinese and British (Imperial), and "Trade Diasporas" examples being the Chinese, the Indians, the Jews and the Lebanese (Cohen, 1997: 24). As we can see, overlaps exist.

Diasporas are an objective historical fact, but the ways they look at themselves and what they identify themselves with, is a subjective matter. This creates the tension Cohen refers to between traditional historians, demographers and anthropologists, trying to establish "ontological" facts, on the one hand, and postmodernist thinkers, trying to deconstruct such ontological entities and show them to be relativistic entities, mere constructs or "inventions," on the other. On the one hand, the post modernist perspective is the more academically accepted one today, and as we look at expressions of identity or Diaspora identity in literature, our natural inclination will be to use this perspective. On the other hand, I believe that looking at literature, or narratives, (using the more post modernist prevalent term), as merely "factories" of artificial concepts serving, knowing or unknowingly, some political or ideological masters is, I believe, reductivist and often extreme. My view is that

literature also expresses strong emotions and these emotions, like "tables or chairs," have an ontological basis, whether or not you think that they are generated by perceptions or ideas that are "constructs." I will try to combine both the post modernist view and the genuine consideration of these emotions, these memories, "as they are."

Benedict Anderson utilized a Gertrude Steiner line in referring to identities, especially national or large group identities, saying "There is no there there. My view is that the borders can be blurry. Las-Vegas and Walt Disney theme parks are admittedly artificial constructs (and they are not pretending to be anything else) compared to systems of ceremonies and rituals of ancient civilizations. But, if we refer to the quoted Steiner's line, in talking about identities as constructs, then we can perhaps say that: "they are the there that is there now." Numerous "ontological" phenomenon were an artifice a few hundreds or thousands of years ago, and vice versa.

An important point: The topic of Identity would not become a topic of literature if it lacked an element of pain. And the topic of Identity, especially as it concerns Diaspora communities, has no meaning if there is no tension between the competing poles of "Homeland" and "Newland," old traditions versus newly discovered tradition.

The pain and tension expressed in the literature usually focuses around three areas: 1) Abusive, oppressive treatment at the new land. 2) The pain of seeing the disintegration or other negative situations in the land of origin. 3) The pain of striving to define or create a self which embraces two legacies in a way that enhances the sense of self-worth. This pain is real, regardless of what it is fed by, stories, i.e., narratives or a struggle between a desire to stay in the host country and the desire to go back "home."

In any case, we should remember that "Stories Hurt". You can deconstruct the story told, but you cannot deconstruct the pain felt.

To cap this part, and since this dissertation is concerned with literature, I would dare to make a poetic analogy and compare the transformation of the unfocused, slowly eroding nostalgia and a frail, eroding clinging to traditions, which characterized many displaced ethnic groups into vibrant, enthused, aggressive movements to T.S.Elliot's powerful image of a cruel April which mixes "memory and desire" in his "The Waste Land," expressed in the unforgettable words:

"April is the cruelest month, breeding

Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing

Memory and desire, stirring

Dull roots with spring rain"

(Eliot, 1930: 51).

Unannounced, the lines are imbued with strong female connections. It all takes place in a "Waste Land", an originally Celtic mythical place where lack of fertility reigns. The Diaspora can be imagined as an emotional Waste Land of the self. The Diaspora person has "dull roots" in a faraway home and very little roots where he is. But the lack of "fertility" is important, fertility being almost always associated with women. Indeed, most Diaporas started with the migration of men only. These communities were a spiritual wasteland, they were hardly even "communities", and it was the immigration of women, allowed much later, that enabled to turn them into communities. Women and children lead to an awakening sense of identity. We can

say that men, the relatively more literate members of a community (at those days), represent "memory", and women "desire". Reconnecting to old cultural tradition and pride awakens the dull roots of the spirit like spring rains. It develops aspirations, self consciousness, and life.

There is no image that could capture the process by which diasporas bring up memories of past histories, coming with a strong desire for a unique identity, recognition, the ability to "claim" their unique space, like that of Eliot's image of "mixing memory and desire." The image of "stirring dull roots with spring rain" conveys how the slowly eroding traditions, often maintained less and less, are awakened (or reinvented, as the postmodernists would say), by the "spring rain" of a feeling of new creative powers, both also driven by the ability to be in contact again with a previously isolated or dysfunctional homeland. Diaspora attempts to claim their new land is often based on attempts to demonstrate their achievements and contributions there. It is an attempt to strike roots.

So why is April a cruel month? We should remember that in the Greek Mythology, the divisions of the year into seasons is caused by the abduction of Peresphones by Hades, and the agreements reached with the mother, Demeter, that she will be allowed out to the world six months of the year: "In Greek Mythology, Persephone, the Goddess of Spring, lives half the year in the underworld when the earth is barren. When she returns to the natural world in spring, her mother Demeter allows the earth to flower. When autumn comes, Persephone returns to the underworld to resume her role as Hades' wife and Queen of the Dead. Every year, as spring returns, Persephone returns to the earth and all is in bloom. Persephone is also sometimes called Kore, the Maiden of Corn. The seed corn descends into the earth so that from near death new life can germinate. Some scholars have defined Kore as meaning "complete within oneself." The myth is known for its opposites: innocence and wisdom, death and rebirth" (Zill, 2011, [online])

In our context, the powerful statement that "April is the cruelest month," and the myth of Persephone, could also offer interesting clues as to what women go through in Diaspora settings.

3.2 The Chinese, Indian and Jewish Diasporas: Historical Notes

The Chinese Diaspora, especially that of Southeast Asia, was made of two categories, namely, traders and laborers (coolies), with traders predating laborers by what could be an undefined number of centuries, if not millennia. Traders indeed predated laborers, but were far fewer, by the very nature of the differences between these professions. The fact that two segments existed at point of emigration, does not mean that class differences were fixated. In the 19th century coolies crossed over to commerce, initially at a very small scale. Many did remain at that scale, namely small shop owners, workshop operators or small traders, but others became the owners of massive conglomerates in different areas of commerce, finance and industry. This was the basis of the numerous, and highly popular "rags-to-riches" success stories. These very stories became an important part of the ethos of this Diaspora, often superseding memories of the ancestral land, in their power to inspire and to create a sense of community.

The Overseas Chinese were often compared to Jews, not only as a political slogan, but as a basis for academic research. A good recent example is "Essential Outsiders: Chinese and Jews in the Modern Transformation of Southeast Asia and Central Europe" edited, by the distinguished scholars Anthony Reid and Daniel Chirot. In reality, one has to bear in mind that the Jews were first and foremost a religious community (Sand, 2008: 219), and their religion was highly exclusive, the direct opposite of the syncretic religions of the East: Buddhism, Taoism, and even

Hinduism. Jews resisted adaptation to host societies over millennia, but "assimilated or not, the Chinese overseas did change. They have been variously adaptable, and they have demonstrated that the idea "once a Chinese, always a Chinese" is simply not true" (Gungwu, 2000: 39-40). The Chinese held on to traditions or beliefs, but the borders of their community were less rigid than the Jews, at least in earlier periods. Gungwu's comment is different from earlier observations. These earlier comments focus on supposed about Chinese "unchangeability: "Even if a Chinese became a natural Asian, King Rama the 6th argued, he would still remain a Chinese at heart without any consideration for his adopted homeland" (Alexander, 1973: 45).

The comments of Siam's King Rama the 6th are interesting not only because it directly relates to our case directly, but also because he brought much of his notions from Europe, and they were modeled on comparisons to the Jews, as the very title of a pamphlet ascribed to him: "The Jews of the East" immediately reveals. In that sense, it is not clear to what extent the earlier perceptions of Chinese exchangeability are genuine or transference by analogy of the perceptions of Jews in Europe. In any case, the fact that Jews were never coolies (in fact were forbidden from agricultural and artisan work), the fact that their homeland was tiny geographically, nonexistent politically, but part of a Messianic vision that enveloped Jew and, in fact, all of mankind, makes it clear that it is, at the base, a very different kind of Diaspora. Its main distinction is its having been the "Ur Diaspora," the one that established the term. Not that it was the only displaced group of people, but it was the first who "made a big deal out of that," if we can borrow street language.

Bearing this in mind, there is perhaps one Diaspora that lends itself most easily to comparison to the Chinese one, and that is the Indian Diaspora. Like the Chinese, we have here a combination of overseas trading a communities and laborers. In both cases the traders appeared first, while the laborers were a later phenomenon. As mentioned earlier, that was an important reason for my focus on the Indian Diaspora in this comparison.

Both types of laborers were recruited, either voluntary, as indented labor, or in various other ways including force or trick, to serve the needs of industrial European powers for labor that will process agricultural and mineral raw materials to supply their industries. Since China was not under the rule of one European power, but was encroached upon by many, the Chinese labor spread more widely, based on particular labor needs in different countries. Some migrations of the Chinese were completely voluntary, and founded on entrepreneurial "get rich quick" motives, such as the Gold Rush in California in the mid 19th century (Pan, 1990: 53). Most other flows were based on contracts to work in different foreign countries, only that there were numerous cases of deceit on the side of employers, and sometimes sheer coercion. One of the reason for distribution of different dialect groups in different areas of Southeast Asia was the lack of security of labor immigrants, probably aware of possible traps, and therefore the need either to follow in the footsteps of family, friends, or at the very least, member of the same dialect group, with whom they share a language and some geographic and cultural affinity. The Indian labor flows, on the other hand, with India being a part of the British Empire, mostly followed in the footpaths of the Empire's vast territories (Cohen, 1997: 60), and were deployed where resources existed that needed to be developed. It was therefore conducted in a more organized fashion, and not in a free-for-all grab for human labor force.

As far as the profile of the movement in terms of the typology we suggested above, there was a difference. The Indians went to British colonies, not to Britain. This statement excludes some educated Indians which the British Empire brought over to Great Britain to study, but to return to India, so they can apply these skills in helping the administration of India. This small group explains the fact that the Indian Diaspora was much quicker to develop an Intellectual community along Western lines. From the perspective of production of literature, this created a "shortcut" compared to the Chinese Diaspora, that consisted of coolies and men of commerce and industry (some being ex-coolies, as mentioned before) slowly establishing themselves, with only consecutive generations gaining the privilege of becoming academics. The majority, though, went to colonies which were much less developed

than India, and which were granted independence later than India. For example, an important concentration of Indians lives in Trinidad, which also attained independence in 1962.

The Indians, going as workers in the footsteps of the Empire, were coming as part of the same grand political entity; they "didn't cross borders." They were under the same ruler, the same Queen, in most places. That smoothed any interaction with locals. Also, the Indians were not only workers; they were also recruited as soldiers in large numbers and were stationed throughout the Empire. Further, they were also recruited as colonial administrators. That again gave them a much stronger position in places to which they immigrated, voluntarily or not. They were not just a Pariah commercial minority as the Chinese and the Jews were.

But there is one difference between two Diasporas which is not related to the nature of the host countries, but relates to the nature of the homeland, a difference that seems to impact the Diaspora sense of identity as I felt it was reflected by the literature I read. The point is that China was created as a political entity by the Chinese. India, as a political entity, was patched and then carved by the British, after the Empire of another foreign ruler, the Mughal, disintegrated. The British filled the gap. The Chinese had their hundred years of humiliation, from the 1840s to 1949, coming in different formats: multiple foreign encroachments, warlordism, and the savage Japanese invasion. But these hundred years are set against a powerful narrative of 4,000 years or more of continuity. Even periods of foreign rule of invaders from the northern steppes: The Mongol, The Jin, The Qing dynasty itself; periods of segmentation: Warring States, Autumn and Spring, Three Kingdoms and more, are all embedded in a continuous narrative that conveys continuity of "one unit. Ironically, one of the classics of Chinese literature, and the most celebrated one among Diaspora Chinese, is the "The Tale of the Three Kingdoms," written on the basis of a real period in Chinese history which is all about internal disunity and strife.

Here is one area where the Chinese resemble the Jews, namely the powerful narratives of imagined continuity which captured their imagination. The sequence of

the Jewish narrative, by the way, is being contested now in a new book titled: "How and Why was the Jewish People Invented" written by Shlomo Sand, an Israeli scholar that teaches in France and the University of Haifa in Israel. Sand puts in question a narrative that was celebrasted by many other nations as a symbol.

In any case, while every Chinese child is able to name all the dynasties going back 4-5 thousand years, and the names of many of these dynasties are well known by many non-Chinese in the world, India does not have a parallel narrative of continuity, a narrative that would organize (and invent if needed) a linear history, clear to grasp, that demonstrates the solidity of the "nation" and its continuity. This is a narrative that includes periods of disintegration, which are nevertheless happily incorporated as different phases within that continuum, rather than something that breaks it.

The Indian writers face the hard question of "is there a there there" or is it simply an incongruous patchwork created in London or in the minds of descendants of Mongol invaders that became the "Indian" Mughal emperors. The Indian Diaspora also face a much more fragmented homeland, ethnically and linguistically and the fact that the language that unifies it English, the language of the former conqueror and creators of India as a nation state. Their fluency in the language allowed them a much shorter route to being able to express themselves globally and their Diaspora published literary works that reached a wide audience. This is reflected in a richer pool of highly acclaimed Indian literature in English. This, however, also detracted from their ability to express a proud identity of their own. Today, there are modern Indian Diaspora writers who strive to embrace Hindi words into their narratives. This linguistic weaving is particularly evident is the works of Amitav Gosh.

Chinese migrants and their descendant have been straddling the linguistic transition much longer, namely, the transition in which one cannot express himself in a literary fashion in the old language, either because it is half forgotten, or because as

first generation migrants, they are occupied primarily with making a living and establishing themselves economically. The second and third generations Diaspora generations were often also occupied with commerce, with an acquisition of local language at a high literary level coming later on. And then, (with the possible exception of the US after all remnants of the 80 years of restrictions of Chinese and discrimination against them were lifted), the issue of expressing one's feelings of split or unsettled identity in the host languages of countries that had little tolerance for unassimilated minorities and nationalist policies, that in fact attempted to eradicate minority cultures and identities was a dangerous move. English, on the other hand, is global and neutral, and, moreover, many areas in which Indian settled did not have such nationalistic restrictions against Indians, either declared or latent. One can easily note that a lot of important Indian Diaspora literature emanated from the Caribbean's, where hybridity and cultural and racial tolerance ruled.

The similarities between the two Diasporas are first the fact that they were a unique mixture of laborers/coolies and merchants with a possibility of movement from the first to the second. They both refer back to gigantic homelands, the two most populous nation states on earth. They both refer back to ancient unique civilizations, highly literate and sophisticated. They have no need to invent traditions and invent the literary and artistic accomplishments of the past. Like the Jew's Old Testament and its consecutive books, like the Talmud, these cornerstones of human heritage are there, very ontological. They would defy any attempt of a postmodernist reduction, deconstruction, or analysis that would find them to be inauthentic or fraudulent in any sense. Different aspects of these written cultures can be emphasized or de-emphasized, but when an ancient culture is a written culture, the room for later manipulation is narrower. Even if the events described are themselves narratives created for a purpose of those days, and many indeed are, they still retain their greatness as literary and cultural achievements. The "deconstruction" of the Old Testament, formerly accepted as the word of God, started in the 17th century with Baruch Spinoza, way before postmodernism was invented, but the Old Testament never lost its appeal of a text which, if not divine, then is overpowering and long

lasting. The possession of such irrefutable cultural heritage offered a great sense of pride in one's community and identity, a thing which was available to both Diasporas.

The other similarity between the two Diasporas, which relates to a big part of the second half of the 20th century, is that the ancestral lands offered little attractive prospects. In 1949, the Communists not only shook off any foreign presence (except that of the Russian, and that by invitation), but they practically sealed off the state, while imposing upon it a Communist system antagonistic to the commercially oriented Diaspora Chinese.

Since 1978, under Deng Xiao Ping, China started to open up, and gathered pace as a global economic power house of semi capitalism, but under an iron-fist rule of the Communist party. As happened during and after the Tianamen incidents of 1989, and even at present, there still could be retrenches. India achieved independence in 1947, but what followed was also mired in economic and social stagnation, corruption, red tape which was a part of excessive regulation by a government that was ineffective, engaged in misled development theories of its own, a legacy that still lingers, but much weakened. India is only slowly emerging into a more liberal system now, and attracts much attention, but this process is still hesitant, provisory and incomplete. Changes in both places are transforming this situation now, with China ahead by perhaps two decades in terms of the past tense. But the future is uncertain. Both places could encounter reversals in their level of attractiveness to their Diaspora, as a place to go back to, either fully or by shuttling, an increasing phenomenon that also changes the meaning of Diaspora (Ong, and Nonini, 1997: 10).

3.3 Literature of the Indian Diaspora

We mentioned earlier the English literacy of Indians, and the existence of an

intellectual Diaspora, which meant that Indian Diaspora literature gained maturity and acclaim much earlier than the Chinese one. We see a developed critical writing on this literature, with many scholarly works that look at Indian Diaspora literature as a whole, whereas in the Chinese case, critical literature often focuses on Chinese Diaspora literature in specific countries, with the most prominent one being the US. In general, Chinese Diaspora literature, with language barriers between works written in English and works written in other languages, makes the task of looking at the whole much more daunting.

The Chinese and Indian labor Diasporas experienced pain, but not to the degree of "Victim diasporas". The American-Chinese voice of pain is primarily directed at the racist US Exclusion Laws (which were adopted by other Western countries), as well as the suffering of coolies and indented labor and the subhuman way they were often treated. There is much less expression of pain or bitterness in Chinese literature in Southeast Asia as regards to restrictions imposed on them by colonial powers or emerging nationalist movements which turned into independent states. The Thai case shows particularly little pain, reflecting objective historical circumstances. Overall, Chinese-Thais feel that by immigrating they improved their situation, the host country was friendly, and with the exception of government imposed restrictions on expressions of Chinese culture for a few decades which lacked s real popular resentment, as in the U.S, they were treated fairly.

On the Indian side, the pain seems to be that of the long colonial rule (or foreign rule, in India itself) which the authors feel has crippled Indian society, and therefore their sense of pain has more to do with their views of the ancestral land now and in the past than with discrimination, exploitation and abuse in the countries in which they settled.

Indian authors do not express frustration at being looked down at racially, nor

were they feared in any corresponding way to the "Yellow Fear": Western (and Southeast Asian) paranoia directed against the Chinese. England never had the kind of deep, resentful racist bias towards Indians as the US had towards Chinese. Also, Indian settlers in colonies gained a superior status and were treated benignly by the colonial powers. There never were incidences such the "Batavian Fury," where Chinese were massacred in Dutch Batavia (today's Jakarta) in 1740, after which, Chinese faced segregation in Ghettos and severe restrictions (Pan,1990: 35-36) or the kind of massacres or expulsions which the Chinese faced in the Philippines from the 1603 massacre onwards (Pan, 1975: 34).

An outstanding scholar on the subject, Vijay Mishra, in his "The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diaspora Imaginary", offers some insightful perspectives. He focuses on the writings of V.S. Naipul. V.S.Naipul is a third generation ethnic Indian born in Trinidad, who received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1991. Naipul wrote profusely on issues of identity as a Diaspora Indian. His writings are permeated with pain, or what Mishra calls "trauma". Trauma, for Mishra, is almost a parallel concept to Diaspora, and he spends considerable time to exploring the roots and history of the concept of trauma. Mishra focuses on Naipul because, as he states in what might be the corner stone of his study: "I want to explore the idea of "writing Diaspora" in an analogy with writing trauma or writing mourning. Although there is nothing original in use of the phrase "writing Diaspora" which was the title of Rey Chow's early book (1993), I want to think through how the narrative of traumatic experience and recollection gets enacted in the literature of the Diaspora…although in one sense 'writing' may be seen as cure of trauma, that is not my primary concern here. Instead I wish to examine the ways in which the post traumatic moment produces Diaspora narratives always haunted by the specters of trauma" (Mishra, 2007: 118).

Naipul is tormented by the trauma of having been (not himself, but his ancestors) torn from an ancestral land three generations ago, and on finding, when

first visiting it, that his dreams of it were merely a mirage, a mythical construct which does not correspond, in any sense, to the reality he faces. As Mishra comments: "Of all the writers on Diaspora, Naipul alone seems to have grasped the finality of the journey and the meaning of those "willed acts" undertaken to cope with what Sudesh Mishra has called "the psychology of dislocation in the plantations" (Mishra, 2007: 143-4). Indeed, nothing has prepared Naipul for the real India and he sees an ancient and continuing culture through the eyes of Diaspora.

Set against the sense of trauma, some on account of being taken away from the homeland, but mostly on account of returning and finding it so "othered", there is the notion of fatalism, so well associated with the Indian frame of mind. As Naipul phrases it in a compact but devastating manner, in "House for Mr. Biswas: "Fate have brought…him from India to the sugar estates, aged him quickly and left him to die in a mud hut in the swamplands (Naipul, 1995: 22). Going back to the concept of "othered," it should be understood that India, as a "homeland," is othered not because it changed, but because the observer changed. But, as we shall also see in the next paragraph, the returnee is "othered" not only because India did not change and he did, but also because he was extricated from the shackles of fatalism. Seeing a homeland that keeps traditions and heritage out of choice is different than going to a place that has no conception of being able to change itself, or that chooses a traditional way actively.

"A House for Mr. Biswas," is symbolic by the very story of a man "looking for a house, i.e. home in Diaspora". The desire for the house, a desire fulfilled only at the very end of the narrative, starts early on (Naipul, 1995: 196-201). It ends, symbolically again, in disaster: the house is an unfit work of fraud which she slowly collapses. Mr. Biswas is weak, as will be manifested throughout the narrative. He starts from a low point, having caused the death of a calf of his father and then causing his father's death who was desperately diving to look for him in the marshes, while he himself hid in shame in his room (Naipul, 1995: 30). After a time of odd

jobs, he finds himself attracted to a daughter of the powerful, land owning Tulsi family. The family is headed by the dominant Mrs. Tulsi, the widow of the highly regarded "Pundit Tulsi," and she rules it high handedly, with her plantations Overseer, Mr. Seth. The marriage of Mr. Biswas to Shama, one of Mrs. Tulsi's fourteen daughters, is the start of the main part of the narrative.

The weakness of the main protagonist, a male, renders the entire issue of gender relations oscillating between tradition and a modern outlook. This process of oscillation is different than anything in Chinese literature. What we find in both cultures is that having sons is better. But the Indian preference is not backed by any professed ideology, or presented as a crucial part of the foundations of social orders. We find the ambiguity in the first discussion about his future marriage: Mr. Biswas tried to gain information if Sharma likes him 'The child,' he said desperately, 'what about the child,' 'what about her? Seth said. 'She is a good child. A little bit of reading and writing too'……..', 'Just a little bit. Nothing to worry about. In two-three years she might even forget'……'I mean,' said Mr. Biswas, 'does the child like me?' Mrs. Tulsi looked as though she couldn't understand. 'What's the matter, you don't like the child?,' 'Yes,' Mr. Biswas said helplessly. 'I like the child.' 'That is the main thing,' Seth said. 'We don't want to force you to do anything. Are we forcing you?" (Naipul, 1995: 86). These are obviously "arranged marriages." It's interesting to see how both education and non-education are fine, what counts is what is good for the prospective husband. He is told she can read and write, this said probably in reference to the fact that he is educated. He is still hesitating because he wants to know if she likes him, but nobody understands this kind of "wanting," so it is suspected that his hesitation is because he does not want her to be educated, so her educational credentials are discounted, but his issue, of wanting to know if she likes is still not grasped. So lack of education is not an article of faith by itself, it's just a question of what a prospective groom wants, the girl's own wants are of no interest, and Mr. Bisaws's deep interest in that is revolutionary.

The society he describes contains women who are second class and those that dominate: "In the days that followed he learned something new: how a woman nagged. The very word, nag, was known to him only from foreign books and magazines. It had puzzled him. Living in a wife-beating society, he couldn't understand why women were even allowed to nag or how nagging could have any effect. He saw that there were exceptional women, Mrs. Tulsi and Tara (his aunt-my comment), for example, who could never be beaten. But most of the women he knew were like Sushila, the widowed Tulsi daughter. She regarded them as a necessary part of her training and often attributed the decay of the Hindu society in Trinidad to the rise of the timorous, weak, non-beating class of husband. To this class Mr. Biswas belonged" (Naipul, 1995: 142). These kinds of observations are spot-on statements of gender relations versus identity. We won't get more explicit than that. The formula is simple: Indian identity is derived from Indian culture and tradition. Indian culture and tradition involve the delegation of women to secondary place (and that can take lots of forms). Therefore, the only logical conclusion is that treating women with respect, with humility contributes to the undermining of Indian identity. Here we see strong resemblance to the Chinese dilemma.

Before we go on with Mr. Biswas, let's make a critical observation: It's not the Indian women who clamor for higher status, for respect. It's the exact opposite: its Indian men. After all, it is Owad, Mrs. Tulsi foreign educated son, the cream of the cream, who tells Sushila, the most beaten wife (and his sister) that: "'In Russia you would be a Doctor, free.' 'Doctor like you?' Sushila asked. 'Just like me. No difference between the sexes. None of this nonsense about educating the boys and throwing the girls aside'" (Naipul, 1995: 520). Ironically, Owad's influence is so wide, his communication skills so admired, that he recreates the family on Saturdays, the unity that was missing from it for so long. But the get-together he arranges is marked by the sisters of Owad excluding themselves from his discussions with Dorothy, a Western teacher, Mrs. Tulsi (their mother) and the brothers. The sisters "did not feel excluded….the sisters cooked below the house and sang and were gay. They were even anxious to exaggerate the difference between their brothers and

themselves. It was as if by doing so, they paid their brothers a correct reverence; a reverence which comforted and protected the sisters by assigning them a place again" (Naipul, 1995: 524).

If the Indian men are the true liberators of Indian women with Mr. Biswas, they are still, in many ways, liberators by default. They are not anxious to keep the traditions, they don't see the zero sum game assumed in the tradition, and they have no time for outdated "assigned places". It is all very ambivalent and multi-faceted.

With Salman Rushdie, the most celebrated Indian Diaspora writer of today, we go into a different territory. Traditions are either turned upside down, or perhaps other traditions are let loose. In Indian folklore there are, after all, Goddesses that couldn't be conceived of in China. The consort of Shiva is a powerful destructive-creative force of nature. In her Kali manifestation, she is a men destroyer, adorned with rings of men's skulls while her multiple feet trample the heads of numerous men. Kali is a shameless dominatrix, who belongs to the world of sexual fetishes where men want to be humiliated by women. This is not a place where women are submissive, second class citizens.

First of all, rejecting the picture of India as fatalistic and therefore lacking in energy: Rushdie himself notes, in his nonfiction book "Imaginary Homelands" that: "What I tried to do was to set up a tension in [Midnight's Children], a paradoxical opposition between the form and content of the narrative. The story of Saleem does indeed lead him to despair. But the story is told in a manner designed to echo, as closely as my abilities allowed, the Indian talent for non-stop self-regeneration. This is why the narrative constantly throws up new stories, why it "teems." The form--multitudinous, hinting at the infinite possibilities of the country--is the optimistic counterweight to Saleem's personal tragedy (Rushdie, 2001: 47).

Salman Rushdie's novels adore creativity and adore powerful, creative, dominant women. He is not arguing with tradition, he just rides over it as if it doesn't exist. In "The Moor's Last Sigh," the story revolves around the marriage, in Cochin, between a Jewish poor but determined child and a descendant of Vasco Da Gamma himself, an aristocratic family. With a Jew and a mixed breed Portuguese at the center, the novel is still, more than anything, a celebration of India's variety, hybridity, colorfulness, bottomless productivity, all of which are the real "Indian Identity". Rushdie is offering a vision of identity in hybridity that rejects what it sees as the dry, impotent nature of any purist identity which emphasizes the exclusions. This is perhaps much bigger than any other transformational writing on identity. In this big picture, women, as man, are taken to their full potential, destructive or productive or both. The very first description of the getting together of the two bigger-than-life parents, says it all: "Abraham Zogoiby walked out of Jew-Town towards St Francis's Church, where Aurora da Gamma was waiting for him by Vasco's tomb with his future in the palm of her hand" (Rushdie, 1997: 86).

And indeed, the power of Aurora is great: "My mother Aurora Zogoiby was too bright of a star, look at her too hard and you'd be blinded. We may perceive her indirectly, in her effects on others-her bending of other people's light, her gravitational pull which denies us all hope of escape, the decaying orbits of those too weak to withstand her, who fell towards her sun and its consuming fires (Rushdie, 1997: 13). The mother and father are different, he is a business shark and a mafia king, she is a force of nature on her own, and depictions of that are strewn throughout the novel.

But even Rushdie admits the fact of old traditions. Not only are they the preserve of the masses, but they reach the exalted, cosmopolitan family itself. A move to disinherit him (an only son) when he declares his love to his just-widowed

girl friend "Uma Sarasvati", a daughter of a bitter business rival of his father soon after his sister's death, is led by his mother: " 'From this moment on,' said aurora Zogoiby, 'you are no longer our son. All steps to disinherit you have been put into place. You have one day in which to collect your effects and get out. Your father and I never wish to see you again.' 'I support your mother fully,' said Abraham Zogoiby. 'You disgust us. Now, get out of our sight' " (Rushdie, 1997: 278). This dramatic scene, in which it is the mother who expels the only son (the father sounds more like an echo), contradicts in its deeper essence all gender traditions. Since when, one may ask, is it the mother who has any authority to disinherit a son. The rejected son reflects soon after: "I knew that other people –most people-were living in this country of parental absolutism; and in the world of the masala movie these never-darken-my-door-step scenes were two a penny. But we were different; and surely this kind of fierce hierarchies, and ancient moral certitudes had not been my country, surely this kind of material had no part in the script of our lives" (Rushdie, 1997: 278).

There are no conclusions because, paradoxically, truly "liberal" parents" would destroy the first law of the saga in which Rushdie refuses to create an orderly universe. It's the law of Chaos. That law refers us to Genesis 1.1. The English translation of the first lines of Genesis is "In the Beginning God created the heavens and the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the deep." In fact, this is a deficient translation: in Hebrew, there is no "without form." The exact word is "Chaos" and the word for "The Deep" is a still much stronger word, stronger even than "Abyss," and contains a touch of the "chaotic" in it. Rushdie's world is not a liberal one, it's chaotic. He wants it to be that way. As he says: "India was uncertainty, it was deception and illusion" (Rushdie, 1997: 95), and within in it seems that the power of female figures outweigh those of males, even though it's crowded with powerful males. We should not forget Abraham's mother, Flory, demand to him, as God demanded of his ancient name sake (the Biblical Jacob), to "have his first born," because the mother is not Jewish and the son will therefore be a bastard**.** Her curse, when betrayed of that demand, or cheated out of it, falls on the son whose life runs at double the normal speed**.** In the bigger picture, Aurora and Flory determine

the plot, the father, with all his immense power, hangs between the dead Flory and the super alive Aurora. The son is a sad observer. The novel is generous towards women, because the creative, hybrid chaos that is India has, below the superficial surface of skewed gender roles, an enormous respect, bordering on worship, to females fertility and females power. Without it, we would lose half the potential of life. Rushdie is against any suppression that suppresses life and definitely foremost creators of life. Rushdie is not arguing with this or that tradition, he believes in hybrid chaos (to a certain extent off course). The Moor, Boabdil, sighs as the Christians, representing the suppression of variety, creativity, win and come to impose their dull, dry impotent culture and life. Rushdie's only law as far as culture is concerned is against "Monoism" of any kind.

In a later novel, "The Enchantress of Florence," Rushdie depicts an encounter between East and West, where the East, represented by the third, and most prominent Mughal Emperor, Ahkbar, is not only a figure of immense power and charisma, a great warrior, but is also a figure of intellectual brilliance, curiosity, a philosopher, a poet, in short, a Renaissance man through and through. In this narrative, the Westerner, the Florentine Vespucci, is a highly talented person but his position is relatively low and fragile. He introduces Akhbar to notions of releasing the monopoly of Central Asian of Mughal ethnic stock on power in the higher levels, and introduces far more inclusive systems that give representation to Indians of all groups (Rushdie, 2009: 312). Akhbar is a descendent of the Mongol line starting with Genghis Khan, the line that embodies Asian power. The symbol here is significant, because it turns Akhbar from a mere foreign ruler into an all- India ruler. While Vespucci is appreciated on a personal basis, he is never appreciated or looked up to on the basis of his being European, The Enchantress of Florence, Qara Koz, who in fact is the intentionally forgotten cousin of Akhbar, is worshipped in Florence, and also feared because of memories of the Mongol "Golden Hordes," who threatened Europe from the it's east. She is told, with a deep respect: "You are a princess of the blood royal of the house of Tamerlane and Genghis Khan. You know how the world works" (Rushdie, 2009: 293). The novel therefore inverts India and the West in terms of

perceptions of power and cultural development. I doubt that this is accidental. But he also inverts gender relations. Again, a powerful female figure has the city of Florence at her feet. It's not only her being of the blood royal of Tamerlane and Genghis Khan, but it's also her personal charisma, wisdom and beauty.

According to this view, India was not an abode of inertia, but of cultural and commercial vitality. Naipul's "power of inertia" was not the product of Indian culture, states Lal, it was a Western narrative that was imposed upon Indians. Naipul mentions that Britain created the Indian political unit and its borders as it is now, but Lal goes a step further, claiming that the state of mind that this generated in Indians, which Naipul observes, is in itself a Western myth, a Western narrative.

But it was not only men that worked to undermine the prejudice against women. One highly popular contemporary Diaspora Indian author, Kiran Desai, continues with these notions in her recent novel "The Inheritance of Loss." "The Inheritance of Loss" opens with a teenage Indian girl, an orphan called Sai, living with her Cambridge-educated Anglophile-Indiaphobe grandfather, a retired judge, in the town of Kalimpong on the Indian side of the Himalayas. Sai is romantically involved with her math tutor, Gyan, the descendant of a Nepali Gurkha mercenary, but he eventually recoils from her obvious privilege and falls in with a group of doomed ethnic Nepalese insurgents. In a parallel narrative, we are shown the life of Biju, the son of Sai's grandfather's cook, who belongs to the "shadow class" of illegal immigrants in New York and spends much of his time dodging the authorities, moving from one ill-paid job to another, while his father imagines him as a great success story. What bind these seemingly disparate characters are a shared historical legacy and a common experience of impotence and humiliation. "Certain moves made long ago had produced all of them," Desai writes, referring to centuries of subjection by the economic and cultural power of the West.

Sai, the main female protagonist is told by a confidant, Noni: "'Time should move. Don't go in for a life where time doesn't pass. That is the single biggest bit of advice I can give you'" (Desai, 2006: 102). In that sense, there is also a hint of Sai's latent potential to get out of the loop. Sai does not leave the Diaspora, but she is part of what Foster brought together, as earlier noted. We find in her a sense of quiet power, observing, getting over the melancholy produced by the judge, the violent madness of the cook and the phantasies of the cook. Issues of gender relations do not dominate the novel, which is devoted to the issues of fatalism and trauma which we encountered in Naipul and the interpretations of Naipil, and which we also found rejected vehemently by Rushdie who blame the West for maiming India and for inflicting upon it a "narrative of inertia". We find here all these topics, being in Diaspora in one's own country, the dead-endness of it all, we find here the India that would depress Naipul so deeply, the India that he would feel so othered from. It is interesting, from a gender point of view, that the force to transcend this "marsh of the marshes" is a girl, nothing cosmic as in Rushdie, an intelligent girl with feeling, a power of observation and a power of conviction. In comparison to her, the men lack what it takes. Other female figures, Mrs. Sen, Lola and Noni, are mostly elderly women, who though themselves are trapped, are still smart enough to see the picture and give Sai valuable advice

The ending of the novel: "The five peaks of Kachenjunga turned golden with the kind of luminous light that made you feel, if briefly, that truth was apparent. All you needed to do was to reach out and pluck it" (Desai, 2006: 357). Sai can look at the truth in the eye, the fact is, the men can not and that is why she is the only figure for which there is hope. Reading a few Indian Diaspora novels, Sai offers a refreshing humane figure, a person we can identify with.

Set against Sai, Bharati Mukherjee's "Jasmine" is wild, unscrupulous, a "Kali." But the novel is different in more ways. It takes place in the US, to where Jasmine finds her way, it is, unlike the other novels reviewed so far, much more of a Diaspora

novels. Like most Diaspora novels, it takes place in the host country and it confronts the immigrant against the host country. Issues of comparative values, "here" and "there" are spread throughout the narrative. Jasmine is both an active participant and a keen observer. The combination of both gives the narrative its flow of action and reflection.

The old gender biases are still mentioned with contempt: "If I had been a boy, my birth in a bountiful year would have marked me as lucky, a child with a special destiny to fulfill. But daughters were curses. A daughter had to be married off before she could enter heaven, and dowries beggared families for generation. Gods with infinite memories visited girl children on women who needed to be punished for sins committed in other incarnations" (Mukherjee, 1989: 39).

The above description applied to India itself. In America she Jasmine is in no need to adjust to new gender roles. She defines gender roles. "I feel so potent, a goddess" (Mukherjee, 1989: 12), she tells herself. She tells how she got "in": "The day I came to Baden and walked into his bank with Mother Ripplemeyer, looking for a job, Bud was a tall, fit, fifty-year-old banker, husband of Karin, father of Buddy and Vern, both married farmers in nearby counties. Asia he's thought only as a soy bean market. He'd gone to Beijing on a banker's delegation, and walked the great wall. Six months later, Bur Ripplemeyer was a divorced man living with an Indian woman….Asia had transformed him, made him reckless and emotional. He wanted to make up for 'Fifty years of selfishness' as he calls it….fates are so intertwined in the modern world, how can a god keep them straight" (Mukherjee, 1989: 14-15). The upside-down gender relation continues through mouthfuls of cultural and identity wisdoms, mostly referring to her relationship with Du, the Vietnamese refugee they adopted and her scorn of Westerners who have something to say about Asian women, trying to be nice, always remaining off the mark. She describes: "It wasn't hard to get

pregnant, but it wasn't very natural either. It shames Bud that now, for sex, I must do all the work all the moving, that I will always be on top" (Mukherjee, 1989: 35. Bud, her Western, now crippled, husband will always look at her from the down side. "You have nice hips, she said (Taylor, who got her into the U.S). But she gave the "you" a generic sweep. "You" means here: 'you teeming millions with wide hips breeding like roaches on wide hipped continents'. "Nature meant you to have babies" (Mukherjee, 1989: 14-15).

But Jasmin shames the West and men not by her fertility, sexuality and smarts only She is also "The Man" by fighting instincts; her ability to squash opposition and move on, the Kali in her is powerful: "The smell of singed flesh is always with me. Du (the 14th year old Vietnamese refugee she and Bud adopted-my comment) and I have seen death up close. We've stowed away on boats like Half-Face's, we've hurtled through time tunnels, and we've seen the worst and survived. Like creatures in fairy tales, we've shrunk and we've swollen and we've swallowed the cosmos alive" (Mukherjee, 1989: 240).

Ironically, the novel starts with the following citation, as motto: "The new geometry mirrors a universe that is rough, not rounded, scabrous, and not smooth. It is the geometry of the pitted, pocked and broken up, the twisted, tangled, and intertwined" taken from James Gleick's "Chaos." And that is a term we talked plentifully about in regards to Rushdie.

And what about the "hips?" The wide hips of tropical women, considered "vulgar" by modern "slim worshippers," are turning from a sign of inferiority to a sign of female reproductive superiority, not only compared to the female remnants of Victorian times, but to their men, and even more so, to men of their own communities. Their identity is renegotiated by the way the value of their womanhood is renegotiated. Their identity is not determined by old traditions of female inferiority

but by the reemergence of the fertility goddesses of old. Jasmine is not in need of American liberalism to renegotiate her status in society compared to old traditions and to see whether she can remain both a Hindi at heart and an American in daily life, reconciling the two, while rejecting Hindi gender bias. Hindi identity, merged with new or hybrid identities, is much bigger than traditional gender biases. Another shred of evidence is offered By Mrs. Sen: in "The Inheritance of Loss": "Pixie would marry an Englishman and Lola would almost die with delight. 'Everyone in England wants an Indian girl these days!'" (Desai, 2006: 354). The demand for Indians is not based on a longing to oppressive gender relations; it's a longing for the opposite.

In the end, it is all chaos and attempts to pave straight ways on a landscape that refuses straight lines. Even Sai, the gentlest of them all, states: "Life wasn't single in its purpose…or even in its direction.The simplicity of what she'd been taught wouldn't hold. Never again could she think there was but one narrative and that this narrative belonged only to herself, that she might create her own tiny happiness and live safely within it" (Desai, 2006: 355). Identity is by itself a feeble construct, and the attempt to anchor it in immutable gender relations that incentivizes half of humanity to swear by them is doomed. This is so not only because of the backlash of the oppressed side, but because many of the "oppressors," when given a voice, need and worship the oppressed, much less than they need the oppression itself. It is well expressed in Indian Diaspora literature where men lead the way. What was the sign of backwardness can be the sign of creativity; the bigger the attempt to set straight lines, the bigger is the chaotic backlash. Jasmine is just such an example. Jasmine, in all the confusion of her multi cultural influences, says: "Deep inside I am Hindy, and what constitutes my "Hindi identity" is my being able to be whatever I wants to be, as suits me: "I have had a husband for each of the women I have been. Prakash for Jasmine, Taylor for Jase, Bud for Jane, Half-Face for Kali" (Mukherjee, 1989: 197). What is left here to deconstruct, when all has been deconstructed already.

3.4 The American- Chinese Diaspora Literature

Let us now turn to some comparative notes with the American-Chinese Diaspora literature.

The American-Asian literature, taken by itself, is embedded with historical issues which are unique to the Chinese in the United States, and to the United States itself. The biggest difference, compared to Chinese migration to Southeast Asdia, is the fact that migration was not continuous until 1949, but came in two separate and distinct waves. Unlike Southeast Asia, there was no history of commerce and sojourning that spanned centuries before the more massive movements of labor migrations started in the mid 19th century. That means that there was no prior base of familiarity. The two waves of Chinese migration to the USA, spanning the period 1849 to the 1870s, being the first and the 1940s and onwards being the second, are distant by about 70 years. The first wave resembled the migration to Southeast Asia, except that it had more elements of free enterprise from its onset. By this I refer to the gold rush in California. The second wave followed the formation of an alliance between the beleaguered Nationalist government in China and the U.S against Japan during World War 2. That forced the US to abandon its racist Exclusion Laws of 1883, which were aimed specifically at Chinese. This brought migrants, mostly middle class who ran from the war, and then ran from the specter of a Communist takeover.

We mentioned the Exclusion Laws. These were a combined effect of white men's fear of Chinese willingness to work hard for less and take their jobs, all combined with a racial bias that was inflamed by agitators.

The real impetus definitely came from an atavistic fear of a "yellow flood" that will put white men out of work. Lynn Pan quotes the following popular song of

that time:

"O workingmen dear, and did you hear

The news that's goin' round?

Another China steamer

Has been landed here in town.

Today I read the papers

And it grieved my heart full sore

To see upon the title page

O, just 'Twelve Hundred More!'

O, California coming down,

As you can plainly see.

They are hiring all the Chinamen

And discharging you and me

But strife will be in every town

Throughout the Pacific shore

And the cry of old and young shall be

'O, damn, "Twelve Hundred More." (Pan, 1990: 94)

The combination of racism and fear for their ability to make a living led to a string of pogroms starting in the 1970s, and in spite of lobbying by economic interests that wanted the Chinese labor and even Christian organizations, the government could not resist the strong popular sentiment which led to the infamous Exclusion Laws of

1882, which barred immigration to the USA of Chinese workers. Exceptions were made for teachers, merchants, students and tourists. These restrictions were further tightened when the authorities became aware of workers passing off as some of the allowed categories. Furthermore, while those that resided in the US at the time the laws came into force were assured of the right to leave and return, four years later, that right of return was taken away from them (Pan, 1990: 96). Since the phrasing of the law was explicitly race based, it left the Chinese who remained in the US in a pitiful situation. They crowded in small Chinatowns, with no new blood, disconnected from their homeland and looked down upon.

If we go back to the previous section on Indian Diaspora literature, we can see the applicability of the notion of melancholy in this situation. As Ann Anlin Cheng notes in "The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, assimilation and Hidden Grief": "Indeed, Asian American assimilation highlights the fact that assimilation for the racially marked body brings a whole different sets of problems. Assimilation tenders a promise of ethnic intermixing that draws itself short if the color line. As Michael Rogin has argued, American usage of ethnicity as something that can comfortably straddle this double bind (as something assimilated and yet distinct) in fact elides and excludes the inassimilable fact of race. After all, the standard of assimilation, "Americanness," denotes whiteness…Within the national imagination , Asian Americans in particular suffer a "phantom illness": because they occupy an unstable position in the ethnic-racial spectrum, their projected place in America is ghostly (consider, for example, the easy colloquial confusion between the terms "Asian" and "Asian American" whereas a similar elision between the terms "African" and "African American" is much less acceptable or even likely" (Cheng, 2001: 69).

The melancholy Chinatowns, which served as "human zoos" for tourists for decades, were filled with new life in the 1940s under the situation described above, with new migrants, mostly middle class, who started in Chinatowns, but moved on.

More recently, as China opened up, there are plenty more immigrants and statistics of intermarriage between them and whites point out that they are in fact a preferred partner and are now looked at very favorably. Their academic achievements and good reputation as family people, successful people, all contribute to that. It seems that the race barrier Cheng pointed at has now been broken or is being broken.

American Chinese novels have three types. The first are family sagas that are produced by descendants of Chinese patriarchs who came in the mid 19th century, worked as gold miners, train-track builders and other professions and managed to stubbornly create families, and survived the batteries of obstacles that were meant to force them into a slow death. The obstacles included the fact that there were very few Chinese women, as well as the legal prohibition to marry white women and the social stigma such couples, who lived and raised children, were subject to. These family saga's are therefore heroic, and rightfully so. Many of these involve (unofficial) white wives.

There are different types of saga novels. The gender issues usually result from the identity of the main protagonists. Such for example, Lisa See's "On Golden Mountain" is story of a powerful patriarch who managed to go through the harsh period of exclusion, married a white American wife and raise a family whose story is recorded by one of the descendants.

Authors such as Laurence Yep go beyond the mere multi-generational fictional saga. The fact that it is aimed at younger readership reveals the ideological-didactic nature of the series. What he produced is an attempt at creating an epic narrative that spans the entire period of Chinese existence in the US. Titles (with dates attached, indicating the historical nature of it all), are denoted as belonging to the "epic saga" titled "Golden Gate Chronicles", tracing one family, and include: "The Serpent's Children (1849), Mountain light (1855), Dragon's Gate (1867), The Traitor (1885),

"Dragon Wings" (1885), The Red Warrior" (1939, "Child of the Owl" (1965), "Sea Glass" (1970) and "Thief of Hearts" (1995). Writing the series started in the 1970's, and was completed only recently. Almost all the novels on earlier periods are heroic, the character are muscular, strong, the "unsung" American Pioneers, there is sometimes even a touch of "Soviet Realist" literature", and its muscular working class builder-heroes. All novels convey a great deal of pride. Only at the later novels, such as "Child of the Owl", we encounter the kind of identity deliberation existent in so much other American-Chinese literature, and the whole issue of being torn between an American and a Chinese identity.

Such novels or series of novels seem not to relate to gender issues but they do. For the Chinese in the USA, gender issues were not an exclusive female domain, but very much also a male domain. Chinese males were looked down at by white Americans and felt emaciated. They were looking to reassert their manhood, and one way was by looking at their strong willed ancestors that survived exclusion against all odds or traced themselves back to the "heroes" of the railroad track building.

These male-gender problems are most loudly expressed in Frank Chin's work. Chin was a radical writer from the 1960 and 70s: "In an essay titled 'Racist Love' (1972), Chan and chin assert that the stereotype of Asians as docile and compliant 'good minorities' is the product off 'racist love. Stereotypes based on 'racist hate' are masculine, and include Black studs, bellicose Indians, and Mexican bandits. Racial villains of this type are hated because they cannot be controlled by whites; even so they command respect and are superior in many ways to the buffoons, servants, and loyal sidekicks (various names of Chinese characters in popular literature-my comment) that are the products of racist love. Chinese Americans, according to Chan and Chin, have been more subject to racist love than racist hate, particularly in recent years, and the result has been the loss of Chinese American 'manhood' through castrating paternalism. What seems to anger Chan and chin is that 'white America is securely indifferent about us as men' and that Chinese Americans men have become

'the white male's dream minority…patient, submissive, esthetic, passive, accommodating, and essentially feminine in character.' A race without sinful 'manhood'" (Kim, 1982: 178-179). The two writers then go on to protest how in clearly racist popular books such as Fu Manchu, Chinese males are depicted as "sexual jokes," and how the daughter of the evil, practically "a-sexual" Fu Manchu surrenders to his white male enemy, proving that "white balls are irresistible."

I delve into this because it contains unique elements, where racism and exclusion laws create a male gender issue. We won't be able to understand the female gender issues without understanding how the pride of being a male, so dominant in Chinese society, have been shattered in the USA.

And indeed, the better known novels written by American Chinese were written by women. What is even more important is that they often go along mother-daughter relations, sometimes also including grand-mothers. In other words, they go along undeclared matrilineal lines.

A "saga" novel of this type is Irene Kai's "Golden Mountain: Beyond the American Dream." The narrative spans four generations and flows between China, the US and Hong-Kong. The narrative, which in essence is a story of adaptation to and assimilation in the USA, shows amazing confusion in issues of gender roles and gender hierarchy. The confusion is expressed through a mixture of powerful women on the one side and respect and preservation of the traditional Chinese gender roles, on the other. Strong women are not created in the US. While still in China, we hear that one of the ancestors "Sing Tai looked at his wife. Her back was straight and her feet were planted solidly on the ground. She was a woman accustomed to making decisions with an iron will. 'Even if it is a girl? Who has ever heard of educating a girl?' Sing Tai asked, raising his eyebrows incredulously (they recently found that the wife was pregnant-my comment). 'Money can buy us things but an educated child

brings status into our household…..'Whatever you wish. I just want to get out of our situation and provide a better life for all of us' "(Kai, 2004: 4).

But the same strong willed wife, Wong Oi, also "envisioned her eldest son coming home one day a handsome 'Guest of the Golden Mountain'. He would bring a fortune back to the family, fulfilling his filial duty as the eldest son" (Kai, 2004: 5). More so, she arranges for her husband a concubine to increase their status, even though she quickly starts to hate the stranger that takes her place. When her grandson James is found to have an affair, while they all live in Hong-Kong, she says: "It is a well known fact that James has male children with another woman outside of our household. I want him to bring them home and legitimize them. Their mother should be an official concubine living under our roof especially because he has only daughters with his wife" (Kai, 2004: 30). But she is confronted by her granddaughter in law in the least respectful way. The grandmother is stunned by the insolence of the "lowly granddaughter in law" and by her grandson's "sheepish" reaction.

Kai relations with her family are distant. She keeps in touch with her great-granddaughter: "One afternoon, her great granddaughter played on Wong Oi's bed pretending it was a stage. …..'Oi Ling" Wong Oi said, 'you should have been a boy. You must have run too fast before you were born and forgot your penis'….'I should be a boy? I'll be your great grandson. I am strong, you see!' Her great granddaughter flexed her muscles. 'I have strong arms and I can carry all the things you want….'you have a strong body and a strong spirit, the worst things for a girl. Be a good girl, and learn to smile without showing your teeth…if you don't learn how to hide your emotions you will have a hard life. No man wants a wife who displays her feelings and always shows what she is thinking'" (Kai, 2004: 33).

Soon afterwards, Wong Oi, already isolated in the Hong-Kong residence, is informed in close succession of her son's and then her grandson's death. For her "all

hope was lost, Wong Oi now was truly nobody. Without her son and grandson she had lost her rank and had become a woman who would depend on the generosity of the other women in the household" (Kai, 2004: 40). Wong Oi, mostly neglected, soon dies.

Her daughter in law, the author's grandmother, is the daughter of the Governor Chan, who wants to marry his daughter to a family connected to America. Governor Chan has seven sons, but he cherishes his youngest, a daughter, not only because its customary to cherish a young daughter coming after plenty of sons, , but because he wants "to treasure her and teach her to be a woman of the new age. She would be educated and her feet would not be bound. She would be of the first generation of the liberated women. He was a progressive man of great insight with an ambition to bring change to the world. He knew change must come from within, starting from the family and then spreading to the community…" (Kai, 2004: 52).

I could go on and on with the saga, the points that I find of great interest is the lack of interest in male lines. The discourse of having sons continues but the author shows that the difference between following a male line or a female line is a matter of individual choice. She chooses to follow a matrilineal line, and simply by this act of subjective choice, she annuls the entire validity of the ancestral traditional doctrine.

The figures in the novel are, like I mentioned, contradictory. Wong Oi, a strong woman, teaches her great granddaughter Oi-Lin (in fact, the author, Irene) that women should be weak. She struggles to maintain power while believing women should have no power, and she is dumped by daughters and granddaughters in law that are not only unrespectful, but are in fact disdainful. Only her husband's old concubine, which she despises (but whom she in fact have arranged for him) shows her some sympathy, as well as the author, when young. Governor Chang, a powerful man, talks about female liberation while in China and before any of his offspring

would dare to consider it so consciously.

The cycle closes between four generations when Chang's great granddaughter finally answers his call for women liberation and for more modernity for women by publishing this family saga which focuses on four generations of women.

Another well known American-Chinese novel "Wild Swans", tells the story of three generations of Chinese women in twentieth century China: Jung Chang, her mother and her grandmother-spanning from the warlord period, the civil war intervened by chaos of the Japanese invasion, to the Communist period" (Lai, 2007: 2). It ends with the granddaughter, Jung Chang, being allowed, after the fall of Mao, to go to study in England after obtaining a scholarship. The novel has been so successful that it was translated to 30 languages and sold over 10 million copies.

Again, while not a Diaspora novel in the sense that implies a long stay in Diaspora, but rather a Diaspora that comes only at the third generation from adulthood, we see the same matrilinearity as a dominating theme. Lai explores the interpretations of that: "Marinne Hirsche (1989) recognizes a shift from the paternal, as formulated in the classic Freudean model, to the maternal in her study of selected women's autobiographies …and she calls these "feminist family romances," where, owing to the psychoanalytic feminist preoccupation with pre-Oedipal mother-child bond, the male position is relegated to the secondary. Audre Lorde (1993) initiates a new triangular relationship where the father figure is replaced by the grandmother, just as Naomi Ruth Lowinsky (1990) contends that the motherline is not a linear structure, but a continuously evolving one that connects one generation to the other and the past to the future, and she uses "looping" to describe women's pattern of telling stories from their motherline, traversing different times and places and drawing interesting interconnection among generations. As Yu illuminates, though the life stories in Wild swans are written in an apparently objective, third –person narrative,

Change's detailed descriptions equip the reader with their subjective experiences. Moreover, there is progress in her matrilineal narrative, so that "the life of a daughter repeatedly departs and revises the life her mother is living'-Just as Chang's grandmother has bound feet, cannot possibly lead the life of her daughter as an educated and devout communist officer, Chang's mother is trapped in her stout loyalty to Chinese Communism….(Lai, 2007: 3-4).

The fascinating fact in these interpretations is that they completely ignore the cultural context of the narrative. Is Chang simply expressing feminist views that focus on "pre-Oedipal child-mother connections?" or does she purposely narrates along a matrilineal line to turn upside down the traditional Chinese male-based culture. Chang's attacks Mao-Tse-Tung in regards to how he treated women and his many wives as slaves, how he humiliated them, how he cynically used the principles of equality to take advantage of women, how he cunningly maintained the same old male-centrism that has been the norm for thousands of years while ideologically committed to the opposite (Lai, 2007: 5). It is perhaps anger at this demonstration of male's persistent addiction to power, in spite of all ideological declarations of the opposite, that angers her the most. I view this work not as an attempt to reach ac pre-Oedipal father-less stage, but a protestation of an adult against men, simply by showing that though the males are necessary in the chain of reproduction, they can be sidelined in a narrative which focuses on the real important figures: the women. And isn't that what numerous male-produced narratives just did. By this, Chang appropriates the "Yang" (阳) to herself and her ancestors, and sidelines man to the shadows of "Yin" (阴).

As these sagas end, so ends Chinese identity and tradition. Irene Kai, settled in an isolated Oregon coastal community, divorced with a daughter, dates a guy she met through the internet. She says: "David was on his way. I was nervous and excited. I checked myself in the mirror. I saw a strong and muscular woman. My long

black flowing hair fell down my back. I wondered what my grandmother would think of this. No Chinese woman older than thirty would have loose long hair. What a risqué thing to do, and I was meeting a man I had met on the internet. She must be rolling her eyes in the grave (Kai, 2004: 346). We have here assertiveness, power and a comic sneer at the past. Nothing in the way of a Chinese woman, , just an American feminist through and through.

Irene rushes to tell her three sisters (no brothers!!) after she meets David and find him to be wonderful. She doesn't tell them he is married but looking for divorce. She mentions that "through David I realized that an ideal relationship was to be able to support each other in working through weaknesses, to encourage each other to be more of who we are, to have the patience to listen to each other's fears and difficulties, and most of all, to be each other's biggest fan" (Kai, 2004: 349). Again, no hint of a traditional division of gender roles, what Irene portrays is the coming together of one yin-yang with another yin-yang.

Matrilineal sagas are not the only literary form in which the gender/identity nexus is expressed in American-Chinese literature. They are perhaps just extreme in their rejection of men. In fact, the American Chinese literature itself has two women writers as champions, who do not write sagas; these are Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan. Recently more talented writers joined, and their take on identity and gender issues is still more radically different.

Amy Tan is perhaps the best well known writer in terms of popularity, but she is not considered the most distinguished one. The one considered the most distinguished and most literary refined one is Maxine Hong Kingston. Kingston started to write in the late 1960s, a similar timing to that of Botan. Kingston deals with exactly the same issues as Tan, namely identity as an ethnic Chinese woman. As we noted earlier, writers such as Frank Chin, of the same period, focused on identity

as an ethic Chinese Man, for the reasons mentioned before.

Kingston's seminal book "The Woman Warrior" is also a landscape of consciousness and experience of a contemporary American-born daughter of Chinese immigrant parents. The Woman Warrior is about women, but it is primarily about the Chinese-American attempt to sort fact from fantasy in order to come to terms with the paradoxes that shape her life as a member of a racial minority group in America" (Kim, 1982: 199). The Woman Warrior narrator is the daughter, and it revolves to a large degree on a mythic-poetic attempts to reconstruct or "invent" a Chinese identity which is based on fables, tales and shreds of history she was exposed to. As she recreates herself in a mythic milieu, she lets that invented personality step out into the real world and confront it in different ways (some ending up violent). Kim notes that "the narrator of The Warrior Woman 'sees double' almost all the time: she has two vantage points, and the images are blurred. Continually confronted with dualities, contradictions and paradoxes, she struggles to discern 'what is real from what is illusory' by asking questions, trying to name the unnamed and 'speaking the unspeakable.' First, she needs to know what is her Chinese heritage and what is simply imposed stereotypes or individual idiosyncrasies' " (Kim, 1982: 199).

The novel starts with the exposure of a family secret of an aunt that got pregnant during her husband long absence in the "Golden Mountain." The fact having been discovered, it brings incredible shame of betrayal and probably incest (the villagers all belong to the same family name and are interrelated, marriages take place with people from outside the village-this is a quite ordinary situation in rural coastal China of that time). What ensues is a nightmarish pogrom on her aunt's house; she suffers severe beating and ends up jumping into a well, and dies. Out of shame, her name is erased, and her mother swears her not to mention that the story was told.

Kingston explains: "Whenever she had to warn us about life, my mother told

stories that ran like this one, a story to grow up on. She tested our strength to establish realities. Those in the emigrant generations who could not reassert brute survival died young and far from home. Those of us in the first American generations have had to figure out how the invisible world the emigrants built around our childhoods fits in solid America. The emigrants confused the gods by diverting their curses, misleading them with crooked streets and false names. 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…..Chinese Americans, when you try to understand what things in you are Chinese, how do you 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 are the movies" (Kingston, 1989: 5-6).

Kingston goes on to narrate the story of the aunt, how her four brothers (including the author's father) went to the US, while the aunt remained with his parents who "expected her alone to keep the traditional ways, which her brothers, now among the barbarians, could fumble without detection. The heavy, deep rooted women were to maintain the past against the flood, safe for returning. But the rare urge west had fixed upon our family, and so my aunt crossed boundaries not delineated in space" (Kingston, 1989: 8). Kingston continues to describe how her aunt goes through a process of self identity erasure: "At the mirror my aunt combed individuality into her bob"; "More attention to her looks than these pullings of hairs and picking at spots would have caused gossip amongst the villager"; Women looked like great sea snails—the corded wood, babies and laundry they carried were the whorls on their backs. The Chinese did not admire a bent back; goddesses and warriors stood straight" "There are stories that my grandfather was different from other people, 'crazy ever since the little Jap bayoneted him in the head'. He used to put his naked penis on the dinner table, laughing. And one day he brought home a baby girl…he traded one of his sons, probably my father for her. When finally got a daughter of his own, he doted on her. They must have all loved her, except my father, the only brother who never went back to China, having once been traded for a girl"

and the most horrifying comment on the moment of suicide: "Carrying the baby to the well shows loving. Otherwisec abandon it. Turn its face into the mud. Mothers who love their children take them along. It was probably a girl; there is some hope of forgiveness for boys" (Kingston, 1989: 8-15)

The aunt story is the first out of five in the book, all surrounding her from different angles. In the second she fantasizes about becoming a woman warrior, a Fah Mulan: "When we Chinese girls listened to the adult's talk-story, we learned that we failed if we grew up to be but wives or slaves. We could be heroines, swordswomen. Even if she had to rage all across China, a swordswoman got even with anybody who hurt her family. Perhaps women were once so dangerous that they had to have their feet bound. It was a woman who invented white crane boxing only two hundred years ago" (Kingston, 1989: 19).

The fantasy narrative continues with her flying over majestic scenery to reach an old couple up in the mountains who teach her how to be an expert fighter. She practices for years and wins many battles. At the climax, she challenges a Baron who pillaged her parent's village. She faces him while he holds his profits fondly. He tells her it is his money; it was not taken from her. He asked: "'who are you?', 'I am a female avenger', then-heaven help me-he tried to be charming… man to man 'oh, come on, everyone takes the girls when he can. The families are glad to be rid of them', 'girls are maggots in the rice', 'it is more profitable to raise geese than a daughter' he quoted me the saying I hated. 'regret what you've done before I kill you' I said…'you took away my brother'….'you took away my childhood' 'I don't know what you're talking about, we've never met before' 'you've done this' I said and ripped off my shirt. I saw his startled eyes at my breasts; I slashed him across the face and on the second stroke cut off his head" (Kingston, 1989: 43-44). The power fantasy ends with her "coming back" to San Francisco, facing all the prejudices against women without her sword. The gender bias is thrown at her face again and again; she has a super sensitive hearing to that, she hopes that her army of

swordswomen is still hiding somewhere.

We covered only two of the stories, and her gender pain is already more vivid, more powerful, more stirring than anything we read before. But yet, it is so different than the sagas we reviewed earlier. We find a hint to matrilineal line in the third story where her mother, named "Brave Orchid" studies to be a medical practitioner and then travels around China. She is a healer, in the modern sense and a shaman, in the traditional sense. She fights maladies and ghosts everywhere. She is braver than most of those around her. Nevertheless, she witnesses, as she travels, demonstrations of the worst kinds of prejudice against women and especially daughters, without being taken aback by it, it is part of the world, infanticide included. The daughter hopes she did not do that, she has a recurring nightmare about a baby dying in the toilet from constipation due to a blockage in his intestines. She says: "I hope this hole-less baby proves that my mother did not prepare a box of clean ashes besides the birth bed in case of a girl. The midwife or a relative would take the back of a girl's head in her hand and turn her face into the ashes' said my mother 'it was very easy'. She never said she herself killed babies, but perhaps the hole-less baby was a boy' " (Kingston, 1989: 86). One is left wondering whether the author wishes her mother to have committed infanticide on boy. The whole episode is enigmatic: why does the dream of the hole-less child dying serves as possible proof that her mother did commit girl's infanticide? What is the connection between her mother having never told her that she killed babies, and the thought the dying child in her nightmares is a boy?

Her mother leaves to the U.S after the aunt's suicide. In her new life in the US she continues to practice her full knowledge in the service of the old traditions, including the gendered ones: "Even here on Golden Mountain grateful couples bring gifts to my mother, who had cooked them a soup that not only ended their infertility but gave them a boy" (Kingston: 1989, 86). Nevertheless, her mother wishes for a cut from China, to make it clear that it's not a place to go back to, that America is the place. She says: "I don't want to hear Wino ghosts and Hobo ghosts. I've found some

places in this country that are ghost free" (Kingston, 1989: 108).

The end of the story re-establishes the matrilineal motif: "She got up and turned off the light. 'Of course, you must go (from California where there are still plenty of ghosts-my comment), Little Dog'. A weight lifted off me. The quilts must be filling with air. The world is somehow lighter. She has not called me that endearment (little dog-my comment) for years-a name to fool the gods. I am really a Dragon, both of us born in dragon years. I am practically a first daughter of a first daughter" (Kingston, 1989: 108-109). "First daughter of a first daughter", a turning-upside-down of the traditionally cherished first-son-of-the-first-son.

We had devoted already much attention to this novel and have not yet covered it in full. As we can see, it is so dense with stories and images and observations about Chinese women's gender and identity, that it's hard to do it justice in such a limited space. I am not even counting here the multiplicity of interpretations that has been given it. Some are fascinating, such as Cynthia Wong's view of the "Woman Warrior" as a manifestation of a "double", an alter ego, a shadow. As she notes: "Despite widespread disagreement on many other theoretical issues, students of the double are remarkably consistent on one point: the central role of psychological "disowning" in the formation of the double…..all would agree that the double is formed repression and projection, in a general defensive process known as splitting, decomposition, or fragmentation. The double is asymptomatic of a crisis self acceptance and self knowledge: part of the self, denied recognition by the conscious ego, emerges as an external figure exerting a hold over the protagonist that seems disproportionate to provocation or inexplicable by everyday logic" (Wong, 1993: 82).

Kingston was often accused as being a "sell out" to "white America," in her presenting exotic Chinese tales; she was also accused of putting her feminist agenda way ahead of the ethnic agenda that other Asian intellectuals of her era were devoted

to, and whose war cry was that of "claiming America." The movement was seeking a new cultural foundation that will make them a part of America, but which recognizes their distinctiveness. Kingston is part of that. Her second book, "China Men," is a song of praise for the hard working Chinese men who built so much of the infrastructure of the American pacific train system, and were then ignored in a shameless way (they were chased away from the scene a day or two before the completion celebration, and in their place, Irish track builders that came from the west side of the rail, but worked more slowly than the Chinese, and took fewer risks, were photographed putting the last strip that connected West and East coasts. If anything, that book shows that Kingston has no beef with Chinese men as individuals and she feels for their plight in America.

In a sense, being in America, surrounded by Chinese tales and traditions, she tries to do what she explicitly mentions a few times, that is, to sort things out in her brain. She is split in many ways, and I fully agree with the concept of a double. She looks at three poles: America; the China that she hates with its chauvinistic male dominance; and the China that she adores, vibrant, full of tales and history, which includes great Women heroes and America. She wants to reconcile these places, places not merely in the geographical sense but in the imaginative sense. Chinese female heroism spans from the legendary swordswoman which she dreams of being and which she sees as a reflection of real women in the past, to her fearless mother. The bias towards women is everywhere, its hiding in every crevice; it horrifies her and disgusts her. America is where she is, and where she wants to be and where she wants to claim her place.

In the first two novels we read, Chineseness is dropped in disgust, regardless of whether it is old China or Communist China which keeps the prejudices under different veils. The adoption of a matrilineal narrative is a declaration of disengagement. Kingston, on the other hand, does not want to disengage. She wants to re-arrange, "renegotiate" her Chinese legacy so that she can keep what is good for

her in order to stake a claim in her new land. She wants to be freed from the prejudice against women, against daughters, to be freed from the weakness and complicity she sees in many women and girls. She wants to keep the female heroism, legend like, memory like, observed by herself, whatever is the source, and to derive strength from these to establish herself in America. She is aware of the racist bias; she feels she cannot establish her place on the basis of exterminating her legacy, in order to derive power from those that look down on her, as Chinese, by adopting their legacy. She needs tools of her own, her own tradition, but she refuses to accept the part of her tradition that tramples on women.

In a strange sense, one of the doubles that I see in "The Woman Warrior" is that it feels, sometimes, that it encompasses a Rushdie and a Naipul in one novel. This "duplicity" is the co-existence of great, elaborate and proud tales of glory on the one hand with a deep sense of melancholy and defeat on the other. But unlike neither Rushdie nor Naipul, Kingston story has a third dimension, and that is America. In between the pride and the melancholy, she looks, not for what is real, as she says, because reality includes both, but for her own construction of a Chinese-American identity that suits her best.

If Kingston broke a new path with an exquisite piece of literature, Amy Tan followed in her foot-steps, popularizing the genre in a way that made her novels a worldwide household name. Her novels provide an interesting vantage point for us on ethnicity and gender, as the two interact. Amy Tan focuses almost exclusively on mother-daughter relations, as Kingston does, with the mother being, as with Kingston, a first generation immigrant.

Always told in first person, never involving narrators, the novels offer a transitory world were memories of the past and the search for an identity in a new land, are closely intertwined. This "mixing of memory and identity" invariably makes

it a "cruel" process, to use T.S.Elliot's simile again. There are always secrets hidden in the Chinese past that seek to be revealed, and the revelation of this hidden pain is what releases the new generation, born in the USA, to move forward. There is a clash between the Chinese identity and American identity, the daughters most often try to turn their backs on their mothers heritage while fathers play a minor role, American husbands most often attempt to drag the Chinese daughter away from her Chinese heritage in order to assimilate her completely in the American way of life.

This inter-generational dialogue, as a narration technique, is what established Amy Tan's reputation. The interweaving of voices in Amy Tan's best known novel, "Joy Luck Club" is highly systematic, as we will see soon. Amy Tan's novels generally rely on the first person narrator: a first person narrator or narrators of the immigrating generation vis-à-vis a descendant's generation narrative voice. It is only in the "The Hundred Secret Senses" that there is only one first person narrator, an immigrant, who conducts an imagined dialogue (in fact a monologue) with her sister, Kwan. "The Kitchen God's Wife" is similar, mainly first generation narration, with occasional narration by the second generation. In the "The Bonesetters Daughter" the narration is in the first person and is divided almost equally between the mother and the daughter, the mother being a first generation immigrant. As mentioned, "Joy Lucks Club" is the most structuralized, with four first generation mothers, four second generation daughters, and sections that interchange between one generation and the other, with each section separated into four chapters devoted to each of the daughters or mothers. It is, indeed, a very architectural narrative.

Critics focused on Tan's "privatization" of the identity and gender issues: "Tripmaster Monkey' (a novel by Kingston-my comment) and 'Jasmin" narrative claiming of America is almost entirely overshadowed by the meteoric success of Amy Tan's 'Joy Luck Club" (1989). A book about mother-daughter relationships and

cultural displacement and recuperation, 'The Joy Luck Club' harks back to the familial rifts and reconciliations of 'The Woman Warrior' and departs from Kingston and Mukherjee's preoccupations with Asian American integration. If her fellow writers choose to substantiate the individual in terms of the national, situating their protagonists in the re-imagined community of the USA, Tan manages to limit the trials and tribulations of her characters to the genealogical family, apparently independent from the larger society. The focus on the filiality of the 'club' rather than the consent of the 'country' is an amazing act of narrative privatization (Li, 1998: 111). Li goes on to analyze the structure of the novels. Focusing on "Joy Luck Club" he elaborates: "The American daughter's stories are neatly sandwiched by the autobiographical tales of the novel's Chinese mothers. This maternal enclosure of the daughters' stories is strengthened with local framing by a vignette at the beginning of each section. There is a quasi language of myth and tale; the mothers would impart their life lessons to the daughters, whose American ears, for the moment, seem deaf to Chinese accents" (Li, 1998: 112). Li goes on to expand that the duality of mother-daughter relationship, again mentioning the presumed pre-Oedipal nature of the phenomenon, runs parallel to a cross ethnic conversation between highly westernized daughters, and in Tan's novels the daughters are indeed so, and the Chinese traditional women, constituting two parallel conversations in one. While the mothers flood their daughters with wisdom, the daughters both appreciate and suffer from it. We can see a good examples of appreciation in this small story: "I was six when my mother taught me the art of invisible strength. It was a strategy for winning arguments, respect from others, and eventually, though neither of us knew it at the time, chess game….my mother imparted her daily truths so she could help me and my older brothers rise above our circumstances" (Tan, 1989: 89). Appreciation is there. Significantly, Waverly, the daughter, and her elder brothers are all together and we see no gender differentiation. Later on, as Waverely becomes a celebrated chess player, her mother "had a habit of standing me while I plotted out my games. I think she thought of herself as my protective ally. Her lips would be sealed tight, and after each move I made. A soft "Hmmmmp" would escape her nose…..One time I complained that the bedroom I shared was so noisy that I couldn't think. Thereafter, my brothers slept in a bed in the living room facing the street (no male gender

superiority here-my comment), my mother would proudly walk with me. "this is my daughter, Wave-ly Jong." She said to whoever looked her way" (Tan; 1989, 100-101), Waverly starts to feel more and more stifled by her mother's shadow being all over her. She says the unspeakable: "why do you have to use me to show off? If you want to show off, then why don't you learn to play chess?" (Tan, 1989: 101). She runs away, and comes back only hours later to a silent hostile mother. She goes to sleep dreaming of her playing chess with a hostile, hating mother and losing disastrously. It's the end of that career. That was an example of suffering from interaction with the mother. If Waverly's story is a refute to the result-obsessed American Chinese mother (famously portrayed in the recent novel: "Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother" by Amy Chua) then Rose Hsu Jordan runs into issues of the opposite kind: she marries a Westerner, not exactly feels welcome by his parents, but her husband, a medical doctor, having committed a mistake durting an operation, is ruined by a malpractice suits, loses his self confidence. Whereas he was the dominant figure in the house, he needs her now to be a decision maker. She can not. She is paralyzed. A modern American, she is bound by inferiority shackles from the far past. " (Tan, 1989: 122-127).

These are just examples, the mother-daughter "pre Oedipal" ties are not proclaimed or hinted to as a feminist statement, but we see enough to understand that male dominance is not the central motif here. The mothers hold the power, and the conversations between mothers and daughters are the key to the transmission of values, for their daughters to be better equipped to have their standpoint in America. It is indeed much privatized, but the reality is that such issues are indeed private. They come to public when laws and policies are called on to change.

Li, referring to another scholar (Angelica Bammer) notes: "In her reading of Eric Hobsbaw, Balmer has tried to convince us that in the era of 'post'…the nation is no longer the guarantor of social coherence or cultural authority, as ethnicity steps into the breach to provide a new identificatory locus. The 'family', in the more literal

(domestic) or community/clan, should, in her view, become the nation's alternative. Amy Tan's affirmation of the private nature Asian Americans as both filial and parochial is synchronous with this premature definition of a nation's obsolescence" (Li, 1998: 117). One cannot escape the sarcastic sense that a bit of good old Confucianism is what the doctor would prescribe for such social illnesses. Perhaps Amy Tan is that new Confucius, and his male supremacy bias is literally history. Amy Tan, unlike Kingston, is much more "post gender-negotiation." There's a twenty years gaps between them, and in a few years only, Kingston would be able to see her grand Chinese woman warriors on screen, worshipped by masses of men, Chinese and Western, as well as to read that Confucianism and feminism are one and the same.

My last two references, skipping many other novels which are mostly, like Tan's, highly private but without the Chinese fairy tale mystique, represent a new and very different genre. Gish Jen, a woman author, in "Typical American" (1991) and David Wong Louie, in his "The Barbarians are Coming" present different stories (200). Both refer to exactly same generation as Tan and Kingston, the father of the protagonist, Sterling, of Louie's novel runs a laundry, a choice obviously made to proclaim "American Chineseness" with no shame whatsoever. His son goes to the finest gourmet cooking school in America, rubs shoulders with Connecticut's wealthiest, snobbiest women and falls in love with a Jewish daughter of a fabulously rich investor and real estate developer, while his parents keep on promoting a Chinese new immigrant, pretty as a dole. He divorces Bliss, the Jewish wife, who falls in love with an adventurous white man, he tries to fall in love with the beautiful Yuck, the parent's proposal, but finds that "the tenderness that I feel (to Yuck-my comment), the bright yearning she wakes in me, is grounded in history, something that shined in the past, and as such it is merely nostalgic" (Louie, 2000: 364).

Jen's novel is a story about a Chinese family that escapes to the USA at the nick of time in 1949. Originally determined to maintain their old world ways, and making

fun of whatever is presented to them as 'typical American', they slowly develop the desire to be that 'typical American'. In the end, they succeed. Much of the narrative is conducted through Ralph, the second generation son, his own family, his friends and parents. Ralph is an academic in pursuit of tenure; all his friends are highly educated. At first being introduced to his future wife Theresa by his sister Helen, Ralph is horribly drunk: "Theresa stared. 'he is drunk' whispered Helen in English'. 'This is a meeting' he continued, switching to English too. 'A meeting with a rotten egg', 'She's not a rotten egg', said Helen. 'What does that mean, rotten egg?' Callie wanted to know. 'Just eat' said Helen. 'Chinese expression' said Thersa evenly. 'Meaning a woman of no virtue.' 'What's a woman of-?', 'Eat' ordered Helen. Then to Ralph: 'Enough!' (Gish, 1991: 208).

It is very hard to deliver the spirit of the novels in quotes, what I tried to convey, is they both are fast speed, full of events, observations. Ethnicity is both a subject of humor, it is a material of jokes, but then again, it is sometimes the subject of serious thoughts, but never serious to the degree of existentialism or melancholy, there is points of sadness that flow with the irony. This is post-gender, and if it is not post-ethnic, it is definitely not dominated by ethnicity; rather it dominates ethnicity, because it observes it from the sides, with a tear or a smile. With the parents passing away, even that will fade away.

In the end of Louise's fast narrative he sits with his son of Bliss, his divorced wife. The son's name is Moses. He prepares for him a dish, a Chinese dish that Sterling's considers as a homely dish. Moses finds it hard to believe it is Chinese, in fact, it is a kind of cereal that could just as well be an East European dish, but it is not, it is Chinese. And then Moses finds he enjoys it and is proud he helped a bit to prepare it. The father feeds the young son, they both feel warmth. It's an end that is not an end. It's just a special private moment in a fast and smart story that narrates ethnicity so intensively, until the reader finally understands that like Yuck, this whole luggage "is grounded in history, something that shined in the past, and as such it is

merely nostalgic," and ironic and funny and sad. Both these authors are in no need of any identity reconstruction, and they would make fun of the Confucianism=feminism attempt. Rather than bound by post-modernist dictates to "reconstruct," they in fact look at it all from the view point of a thinker who sees the construction sites of identity, sees their artificial nature, and scorns what for him is a useless endeavors.

Kingston wanted to sort her life. I repeat again that wonderful sentence: "I continue to sort out what's just my childhood, just my imagination, just my family, just the village, just the movies, just living". Amy Tan and her mothers are also sorting out, for the benefit of the daughters, the second generation. But for the protagonists of Louie and Jen, what is mainly left to sort out is "just living." They are not looking to sort out the rest, not because they have sorted out everything, but because they mentally skipped that step, they are aware of these things, they feel them, it is the building blocks of their lives, but their free intelligence, their sense of independence, of the free and open America, puts them out of harm of these "things." The "things" might call them, but they are tied to chains of time, geography and different sets of mind, and cannot really touch them. At most, they can make them be aware of their existence, while allowing a focus on "sorting out what's just living."

This freedom from the shackles of the past, which allows them to use language that Kingston could view as a cunning trick to confuse the ghosts and the living is what I appreciate about these latest books. "They look at it," to paraphrase Salman Rushdie famous comment on Naipul "As only free intellects can."

3.5 Concluding Comments

Having read a number of important literary works produced both by the American-Chinese and Indian Diaspora, and literary analysis works written about

them, the main insights that I gained are both of different models of identity deliberations of similar immigrant minority groups, and how these deliberations relate to gender issues, or, particularly women issues. In this section I will draw potential comparisons to the Thai novels, which will be reviewed in chapter 4. Since these potential comparison are drawn in advance of the review of the Thai novel, their full meaning will be much clearer when the next chapter is read.

There are numerous motifs that appear both in the American-Chinese and the Indian novels which parallel the Thai novels which I will review and analyze in the next two chapters. On the other hand, there are motifs which are unique to these literatures and which do not appear in the novels, at least not in those review. Such motifs may yet appear in future Thais for reason which I will explain below.

One such motif is negotiating gender status by elevating the women and reducing the men. The main difference is that while in the Thai novels the comparison is between siblings, in the other two literatures, specifically the Indian one, it is not. In Desai's novel, the main character, Sai, appears as the only figure of integrity, clarity and strength. She is surrounded by three men: the judge, the cook (and his son, Biju), and her boy friend Gyan. The three men are half delusional and lost, each in his own way. The judge is lost in self hate as an Indian, as he quietly laments his heydays of studying in England, the most prestigious level of education afforded to an Indian subject of the British Empire, and his subsequent high position as a judge under that colonial administration, and even after independence is gained. As an Indian in an independent India he is lost. He looks down on Indians as his former colonial masters did, and he is therefore locked in a no-man's land of proud servitude without the masters being around anymore. He is therefore a weak character. The boyfriend is swept by a local rebel group of ethnic Nepalese Gurkhas who demand autonomy and even statehood. It's a small, but very proud group. Much of the pride is based on having been known as the best non-British soldiers who served the British Empire (with some members of the group still serving Britain from Nepal itself later on, but on a private basis). The manly pride of this group of warriors creates illusions of power that are soon crushed by the Indian army. After all, the group is a tiny drop

in a big country like India. Their delusional sense of masculine warriors power, based on having served a colonial master well, and the audacity of their demands relative to their population size is delusional and pathetic. The cook longings for his son, who lives in New-York, are sad. He thinks his son is successful, that he builds a strong future in America, when in fact his son is an illegal immigrant, without papers, working in the lowest paid and most demeaning jobs in the shady underworld of New-York, where illegal immigrants practically live in the sewers and perform jobs that in India would be delegated only to Dalits, the Indian term for untouchables. Sai soars above them, not with disdain but with compassion. But she is I a much higher state of understanding, and possesses courage to look reality in a clear manner, planning to tackle on that basis. Her clear sightedness, her intelligence and her courage, all bear semblance to one of the main female characters in the Thai novels: Meng-Ju in "Letters from Thailand". In the Chinese gender differentiation, courage, clear sightedness and intelligence, are all classic attributes. It is women who are supposed to be emotional, delusional, irrational, just like the judge, the cook and boyfriend who turned fervent, but mindless, ethnic Gurkha rebel. We have here a yin ( )-yang( ) reversal.

Jasmine is a much meaner type. Coming to America she manipulates men at her will. She can be kind and she can be ruthless. She is ruthless even to the degree of killing. But she is not using the men's weapons only; she is mostly using women's weapons. She is using what we will later refer to as "Erotic Capital". It is more typically Indian, where the culture has much space for narratives of erotic, powerful, and even destructive goddesses and humans. India is rich with the worship of fertility goddesses. Salman Rushdie's novels are also rich with powerful, and enticing women, such as Aurora in "The Moor's Last sigh", and Kara-Koz in "The Enchantress of Florence", though their eroticism, which by itself symbolizes fertility, is augmented by other forms of fertility, such as creativity. Kara-Koz, a proud descendant of Genghis Khan and Tamerlane, easily scares the Europeans, as Jasmine dominates Americans. But part of her strength is male related to her warrior like ancestors.

This form of female power, directly derived from the "Yin" ( ) side, does not appear in the Thai novels or American-Asian novels. It reflects a much deeper respect for women in the Indian tradition than the Chinese one. This respect might be often latent but is there. Perhaps there is too much fear here of raw erotic female power, suppressing it at all cost (by even binding their feet to turn their weakness and fragility to a source of less threatening erotic interest). This fear is perhaps one of the primordial reasons for wanting to suppress women. In the Thai novels we find the opposite. In "Being with Gong", the young boy, Yok, worships Thai females sexuality. Jasmine declares the power of her hips, and Yok indeed focuses on that. The only figure similar to Jasmine is the attractive but destructive Thai prostitute, Phani, in "Letters from Thailand". Phani is also smart, attractive and ruthless. But as mentioned, she is Thai and we find no clearly identified Chinese woman character that resembles either.

So the use of female-elevation/male-downgrading exists here in the Indian literature, but is not always parallel in form. But the American-Chinese novels hardly do that. The reason for that probably lies in the different circumstances of Thailand and the U.S. In the U.S, Chinese males felt as being looked upon as much inferior to white American men, or even other minorities that are perceived as more manly. We saw that demonstrated in Frank Chin's angry writings. While still attempting to duplicate the Chinese family structure, the males could never achieve the same level of respect when dealing with whites. Chinese machismo has been already been trampled upon, and there was no need to degrade it further. Quite to contrary, men writers such as Laurence Yep, but also prominent female writers like Kingston tried to write book that extol Chinese men as proud and strong males. Yep is attempting in almost all of his numerous novels and Kingston is focusing on that in her book "Chinese Men". If a feminist as Kingston dedicates a book to that, then it is obvious that degrading Chinese men is not part of American-Chinese women do to extract themselves from the gender bias in their ancestral culture. The fantasy woman warrior in Kingston's "The Woman Warrior" is raising herself. She kills men, but there is no message of degrading Chinese men in general.

What the American-Chinese women often do is detach themselves from Chinese men, or, in fact, from the Chinese community in general, as Irene Kai d"Letters in Thailand", Meng-Ju, mentioned above. Meng-Ju is the only female character in the Thai novels to do that. This is related to the novel having been written in a period in Thailand when assimilation was a government imperative. Amy Tan's daughters (and many more female characters in other American-Chinese movies) are also going in the same direction of attempting assimilation. The main motif recurring in Amy Tan's novels is the dialogue where mothers work to either bring the daughters back to the Chinese fold, or at least give them enough Chinese cultural content that will touch their heart and which they keep as a deeply ingrained heritage.

We should bear in mind that in the US, female rights movements existed independently of the desire of Chinese women to change the gender biased rules of the Chinese family. This offered Chinese women plenty of venues to pursue these goals either outside the American Chinese community or within it, but with full backing of the majority culture where activism was prevalent. Not bound by the constraints of their own community, gender status negotiations were therefore much more open, and as Chinese second generation immigrants became more integrated with the surrounding society, the options of opting out of the community either by simply moving away, as Irene Kai does or by introducing Western boy-friends or husbands, as was often the case in Amy Tan's novels, was often enough. The high mobility of people in the US and a view of engaging with white males with the right background as upward mobility all support these options. This was not the case in Thailand, where the options for special mobility are lower and the attractions of intermarriage are also mostly lower due to class considerations.

While the Indian do not have to dig too deep in their culture to find sources of women's higher status and power, Kingston has to resort to fantasy in conducting a deliberation within her inner world, using Chinese-only female characters that offer models of female power and female independence. Her fantasy stories of women heroines are derived from an exploration of Chinese history and traditions, an exercise

not practiced by other authors. Her sources, as we saw in Polceki's study in Chapter 2, were reliable, but not as prominent as the Indian figures. In a sense, Kingston is the best example of attempt to rewrite the status of women through a detailed study of the Chinese heritage as a whole; not taking contemporary or recent biases as reflective the tradition as a whole. The interest of delving into the Chinese folklore, even though less comprehensive and less focused than Kingston, is nevertheless much more prevalent among American-Chinese writers than Thai-Chinese. This greater folkloristic depth imbues the communal identity with a richer sense of shared heritage. This force stands against the earlier mentioned factors of larger spaces for mobility and of greater attractions to assimilate in terms of upward mobility. In a sense, Kingston prophesized the present trend in China and in some other locations of Chinese Diaspora to "sort it out" within a Chinese context, not by opting out or by introducing foreign elements in. It is possible that the rising influence and power of China, the feeling of pride in being Chinese and the desire to reconnect to one's own roots are driving this momentum of reconstruction of the positions of males and females as regards the "nei" ( ) or the inside, versus the "wai" ( ) or outside. We only find traces of such reconstruction in the Thai novel "A Walk Through Spring". It focuses, however, of traditions of cooking with the kitchen turning into the center point of the home. There are many tales, but most take time after the move to Thailand. The Thai literature is therefore still much more forgetful of China than the American-Chinese. The female characters in the Thai novels do not lift themselves on the basis of deep glances into their heritage, but on excellence and success in the present, with no link to China. One of the reasons for that could be that the Chinese-Thai community in Thailand is much larger and more concentrated. There is less need to dig into the traditions and literature to gain confidence as a Chinese-Thai in general, and this affects the degree of fluency in those traditions and therefore their availability as a tool of gender status reconstruction. It is also possible that while both the U.S and Thailand are future oriented societies, the phenomenon of seeking roots in old ancestral lands has become well established and common in the U.S. for a few decades, while in Thailand it was frowned upon until quite recently, as contradicting government policies. The situation in Thailand has turned much more liberal in that respect in the past few years. This could possibly lead to new forms of Thai literature

about the Chinese-Thai.

CHAPTER 4

A REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF THE SELECTED FIVE THAI NOVELS

In this chapter and the next chapter, we turn to the main literary works under consideration, namely novels written by Thai authors of Chinese ancestry. Our focus here will be on gender issue and the way they interact with issues of identity and inter-generational transitions. Our previous chapter on the same topic as reflected in American-Chinese and Indian Diaspora novels were aimed at providing a comparative context for the Thai-Chinese case, which is the focus of this chapter and, in fact, of the whole dissertation.

As mentioned earlier, the five main novels on which we will focus will be, in chronological order,

1) "Letters from Thailand" by Botan, published in 1969.

2) "Being with Gong (Grandfather)" published in 1976.

3) "Through the Scales of the Dragon" by Prapatsorn Sewikun, published in 1989.

4) "A Walk Through Spring" by Yuwadee Tonsakunrungruang (or Judy Chan in the recently published English version), published in 2008.

5) "The Last Petal of the Peony" by Kantima, published also in 2008.

The section about each novel will be divided into five subsections. Our main topic, "Chinese Women in Thailand" will be the last. The first two sections will present the duality of first generation immigrants versus succeeding generations; will represent the subtopic of intergenerational transition. The other duality, perception, by Chinese in Thailand, of Thais, Thai culture and Thailand versus perceptions of

China, Chinese and Chinese culture, represents identity issue.

Out of the group on which we will focus on, the earliest two novels became a part of the Thai school curriculum. Due to that important fact, these novels were probably the most widely read. These two novels are: "Letters from Thailand" and "Being with Gong." However, since inclusion in the school curriculum hints at their being utilized as part of a state ideology, we will devote a section after the review of both to explore the relations of their contents to the state ideology of that era. Inclusion of books on this topic in a general school curriculum is an important statement, especially in a country which went through a concentrated period of effort of state-led formation of a national identity, and which had, during the first few decades of the 20th century a serious issue with the Chinese minority, which it suspected as a dangerous foreign element (culturally and politically, not racially) and which it attempted to assimilate by series of decrees which repressed any expressions of Chinese cultural identity (Skinner; 1957, 250-251). The selection of these two novels doesn't seem to be random. In "Letters from Thailand," they present a narrative of the life and feelings of antagonism and conflict of a new Chinese new immigrant; from the moment he departs China. The book, following the mental travails, mostly self inflicted, of the immigrant, ends with his being awakened to the possibility that his bias and bigotry are mistaken, and it were these which were the root of his anguish. "Being with Gong," continues the narrative into an idealized story of happy co-existence, mutual respect and friendship between Thais and Chinese immigrants. Significantly, there are no scenes of first arrival in "Being with Gong". First arrival and the first period carry the highest potential for cultural dislocation and feelings of alienation towards the locals. The wounds explored in detail in "Letters from Thailand" are therefore found healed in "Being with Gong." A reader that is exposed to the two novels, especially as a school child, is treated to a strong socializing narrative that "explains away" any real life event that could present a different reality.

"Through the Scales of the Dragon" also had an astounding commercial success,

with over 20 reprints in 18 years, and an extremely successful and popular adaptation to a television series. The last two novels were also commercial successes, either winning literary prizes or being translated to English ("A Walk Through Spring"), or by becoming successful television dramas ("The Last Petal of the Peony"). In a sense I decided to focus on these five novels because they reached, in different ways, the largest audiences, and therefore seem to accord with the readership identifies with.

4.1 "Letters from Thailand" by Botan

4.1.1 The First Generation

The main character, Tan Suang U, represents an extreme type of a first generation. He seems to be almost as committed to prejudice against the host population as he is committed to advancing himself. He is antagonistic towards Thais and what he considers as Thai culture. Likewise, he is later even more deeply antagonistic to any inclination of his children towards accommodation to and assimilation into Thai society. This motif starts from the very early scenes in the book.

On the other hand, while still on the boat, Suang U comforts himself by saying to himself that "We Chinese carry our homeland us in our hearts and minds. I have reason to feel sad, for even if I should someday live among red-haired foreigners, I would still be Suang U from Po Leng village. When I feel lonely, that must be my first thought" (Botan, 1994: 9). This statement is in fact generic and corresponds to a large number of observations of Chinese immigrants of that or succeeding periods. This sense of fierce loyalty to the homeland has been observed and therefore it corresponds perfectly to statements that either denigrate the Chinese overseas or try to present them as non assimilated foreign group: "The loyalty given to China by the overseas Chinese is the more profound because it is largely irrational. Such

unthinking based on one of the world's oldest continuous tradition, is easily corrupted" (Elegant, 1959: 4). That loyalty (the corresponding "other side of the coin" being lack of loyalty to their new homes) is often compared to that of the Jews: "King Rama 6 of Siam called them (The Chinese) the Jews of the East….'Even if a Chinese became a naturalized Asian', King Rama argued, 'he would still remain Chinese at heart without any consideration for his adopted homeland' (Alexander, 1973: 45). Both Rama the 6th and Elegant are, in different ways, antagonistic to Chinese immigrants. In that sense, Suang U's very first statement is a reflection of a stereotype. It is well known that many immigrants from many countries have felt and feel attachment to their ancestral land as a psychological anchor when arriving fresh to their destination, especially when the migration is often not considered as permanent, and therefore there is no point of comparing the homeland, as troubled as it can be, and a place considered as a work destination only. Many, on the other hand, also felt relief at being freed from a place, though ancestral, where they suffered horrible deprivations, ranging from famine, oppression and war. But the Chinese (and Jewish) attachment to their original identity, whether reflected in physical or cultural locations, has often been considered as the case in extreme.

But Suang U's story, as expressed throughout the novel is unique in one important sense: The epistolary style of the book gives Suang U an opportunity to express himself in the first voice and in real time. That is a mechanism to break the reason, which is usually offered for scanty literary expressions of labor immigrants, which is the fact that they are so occupied with making a living and attempting to promote themselves. It's true that Suang U had, as mentioned before, a quick path to success, but whether his lifelong prejudice is reflective is a question that can only be addressed by in-depth interviews with living 1st generation immigrants of that period. We have no information on how the figure was created and whether it was created from actual familiarity with first generation immigrants, or was it constructed in a way that will the shattering of prejudice more pronounced and make that point more dramatic.

As we already noted, Suang U is not disembarking in Thailand without any connections or resources. He goes with friends that have a relative in Bangkok, and meets, on board, a freight manager who is looking for accounts clerks for his cousin in Bangkok (Botan, 1994: 2-3). While having no formal education, he demonstrates writing and reading skills, which he acquired from his mother who was worked in an aristocratic family as a governess, and was allowed to study with the daughter until her adulthood and marriage (Botan, 1994: 3), and was then married to a farmer.

This little detail stands silently at the background of the novel. The fact that his mother was educated and had thought him what allowed him to instantly get good prospects upon arriving to Thailand is never compared or confronted with his consecutive objection to his daughters attaining high education. It's a blind spot that stands at the very center of the narrative and Suang U's self-contradictory attitude towards Chinese women.

In any case, the freight manager, Yong Jua, is convinced and refers him to his cousin, Nguan Tong, who runs an import business of Chinese produce, which he sells to Chinese in Thailand. Not only does Yong Jua refer Suang U to a prestigious job (alternatives would mostly be physical work), but he also takes such a liking to him that he adopts him as a "son", an act that is related to Suang U's having no father and Yong Jua having lost his wife and son in great floods in Bangkok (Botan, 1994: 5).

Suang U's statements, cited above, come therefore after a series of events that offered him, on top of his being with a friend that has an uncle in Bangkok, also new and exciting opportunities both for work, as well as his very own warm personal relationship with a rather senior person, a relationship which is not only functional, but also genuine. One could expect a person in this situation to be extremely glad, as

the purpose of his journey, namely the ability to earn, is settled for him in a miraculous way on board the ship and before even reaching destination. It is enigmatic that Suang U proclaims that "Shame on me, I must force myself to think of the future. It is exciting to realize that soon I will be a bookkeeper…and you (his mother: my comment) will be able to afford a few luxuries when I am able to send money home" (Botan, 1994: 9). The "I must force myself to think of the future" is a significant statement. How can a new immigrant not think about the future once arriving and settling in a new country? Here is another blaring self contradiction in Suang U's character.

Prophetically, shame about thinking about the future is following Suang U throughout the novel. The length of his "correspondence with his mother, spanning decades and receiving no answer attests to that. Suang U came from the same village as Seng, and in spite of their dispute and fist fight (Botan, 1994: 7) (which is later mitigated), there could be ways to search for other routes to track his mother, or his younger brother, and learn how they are doing. But off course that would contradict not only the structure of the novel, but, more significantly, the meaning embedded in the structure. As much as the structure allows us a firsthand glimpse of the mind of an immigrant in real time, it also is a part of the action taking place within the novel; it is not external to it: "The people of our neighborhood, I learned recently, find my letter to you a great source of amusement. 'Did you know' they whisper to any new comer that will listen 'that for twenty years Tan Suang U has written to is mother in China, and he has never received one letter in return? He must be getting, you know…' (Botan: 1994, 449).

It signifies a "never letting go" attitude that is completely irrational. The umbilical cord to China, to his Mother, or simply to "Mother China" is never severed. His acceptance of Meng Ju's marriage, of the high personal worthiness of her ethnically Thai husband, and his mother, and through them, of an admirable Thailand he never saw or wanted to, all are expressed through the dead umbilical cord that lives in his

imagination and defines what he is.

4.1.2 The Descendants

The first child and only son of Suang U, Weng Kim, the heir, the carrier of the venerated clan name, is the greatest betrayer, not only of Suang U's aspirations, but also of his entire patriarchal world view which he bring him from China, lock, stock and barrel. Weng Kim grows as a spoilt brat who both lacks any sense of fealty, while at the same time resentful of the expectations heaped on him as a the only son. That makes him a dependent rebel, by definition a tragic role.

Weng Kim introduces the Thai prostitute, Phani, to whose charms he fell, practically "The Sum of all Nightmares," into the house, shaming his family, shaming himself, and eventually having his will to rebel broken up when she betrays him. He then ends up in the original arranged marriage (to a mixed Chinese-Thai daughter of Suang U's oldest friend) that his parents wished for. But it is a marriage where his wife dominates him and plays, in some senses, the "male" figure: "when her husband returns from his business call in the afternoon, Rose is like a fish thrown into the water a moment before certain death; leaping about, grinning her great shark's grin, dominating and devouring him ruthlessly" (Botan, 1994: 490). His wife, Chaba, never forgets his having brought to his home a Thai prostitute, while being her promised husband. The fact that Suang U initiates the hosting of Phani as a way of giving her a chance does not fit into his general behavior (Botan, 1994: 395). Instead of his father, it is she who is exacting the retribution for a rebellious act aimed at his father. The "emasculation" of Weng Kim is the final nail in the coffin of any shred of a traditional Chinese male role.

Weng Kim shows very scant interest in his father when he knows his father's

life was in critical danger (Botan, 1994: 488), and even that scant show of his interest does not seem to be born of genuine emotion but has more to do with pretensions. Weng Kim, however, is deeply concerned with his father when he guesses that his father might still have plenty more money then he earlier distributed (Botan, 1969: 509), but he is not aware that his father offered him these hints in order to study his reaction, and Weng Kim reacts in exactly the way he was expected to, namely, to be keenly interested only in money. Ironically, that is perhaps the only time that Weng Kim performs according to what his father expects him to be out of full free volition. He is expected to be an unfilial, ungrateful, greedy son, and he happily reveals the truth.

Suang U's youngest daughter, Meng Ju, the one whose birth he despised not only because of her being another daughter, but because her birth was resulted in complications that made his wife unable to bear more children (i.e. sons!!) turns out from an almost unacknowledged daughter, to be the only compassionate, sincere offspring that loves him unconditionally, with all his grumpiness and biases, and offers him a warm shelter; her and her Thai husband and his mother.

Meng Ju is the only one that offers him the side in him which created the novel, but never participates in it, namely, his warm feeling to his mother, unwavering in spite of having no reply, for decades. This, after all is another great contradiction in the novel. Meng Ju's husband, Winyu, explains the letters as a form of a diary, and that "he wrote those yourself (Suang U) as much as to your mother. They are probably a good outlet for your feelings, especially about those things our generation doesn't understand very well" (Botan: 1994, 449), but one could view it as the good and noble in Suang U, which lurks behind the flow of bitterness. Indeed, when switching from his complaints to his addresses to his mother, both the language and the tone change dramatically. I presume his remarks about Meng Ju's resemblance to his mother (Botan, 1994: 503) are not accidental. Meng Ju's love and affection towards her father are never answered in terms of the way he distributes his fortune,

leaving her with nothing. But while Suang U's love to his mother is never answered, Meng Ju's is. In that sense, Meng Ju is far more than the neglected but finally the most loving of his children. She might be the answer he finally gets for his 22 years of letters.

The two middle daughters, Chey Gim and Bak Li serve more as background characters. They do not rebel in any significant ways, they are selfish, less or more, and are far from either showing devotion and gratitude or from showing the extreme lack of it. Unlike Meng Ju and Weng Kim they express little genuine opinions and emotions. The novel could be written without them, but would then fall to the danger of lacking any middle ground between Meng Ju and Weng Kim. They present the lives of a silent majority, with little drama, and since they do not rebel, they face neither the humiliation of defeat nor the glow of triumph. They have little interest in "identities," Thai, Chinese or any third option. "Identity" as a concept is a term by which they or their descendants can be examined by, but is not a part of their internal discourse. It's not a part of their agenda, which is to survive with their families and businesses. It will play a role in their lives only when it affects these private realms, usually not on an individual basis but as general socio-economic trends, which they will have to adapt to, most probably without much consideration of their own. Interestingly, while Chuey Gim gets married on an arranged marriage arranged by her father to the son of an old business colleague (Botan, 1994: 353); Bak Li get married to a Chinese person who made her pregnant out of wedlock (Botan, 1994: 423). Diametrically opposed in their "matrimonial arrangements," they still remain the same in many ways of life style and way of thinking. The matter-of fact manner in which Bak-Li's pregnancy is handled stands in great contrast to the dramatic stating story of Kingson's "The Woman Warrior," which describes how a woman that was left alone for years we a husband that settled in the US, has gotten pregnant. The nightmarish description of how she is persecuted, abused, beaten by the villagers, and finally kills herself is the very start of the novel, and its very first paragraph is the introduction to this tale: " 'You must not tell anyone, my mother said, ' what I am about to tell you. In China your father had a sister who killed herself. She jumped into

the family well. We say that your father has all brothers, because it is as if she has never been born" (Kingston, 1989: 3). The span between the atavistic scenes in China described so vividly by Kingston and the matter of fact manner in which a similar (not exact) is sorted out by money in Bangkok are testimony to how much has changed. The view might still be the same, but the passions involved are heavily diluted.

4.1.3 The "Intermediate Generations"

Unlike numerous novels of the genre, which focus primarily on a clear-cut sequence of generations within the same family, "Letters from Thailand" features an intermediate level. Obviously, an "intermediate level" has to belong, in itself, into a numerically distinguishable first, second or perhaps a third generation. Its being intermediate is created by it's being one of these, but sufficiently removed in age from the "generational sequence" that forms the focus of the novel. I specifically did not name it as the "the general sequence of the family…," because intermediate can be part of the family or very close to it, but are not a part of the specific sequence.

In "Letters from Thailand", we have plenty of such characters that play central stage roles. The most prominent ones are Ang Bui, the sister of Suang U's wife, Mui Eng, both of who were born in Thailand, but are of the same generation as Suang U, just a bit younger. The novel never discloses whether Nguan Tong was the immigrant and we are therefore in the dark as to whether his two girls are second or third generation in Thailand. The detail is never mentioned but one could assume he is a first generation immigrant because Chinese women were free to immigrate since the 1920's (Skinner, 1957: 190), and Nguan Tong's wife, Tao-Geh Nie, is Chinese. Nguan Tong himself expresses plenty of observations that show him to be a traditional Chinese. He complains bitterly of having no sons to inherit him, to succeed him (Botan, 1994: 29), he is interested in marrying Mui Eng to Seng, Suang U's estranged friend from the village who had a wealthy merchant uncle to go to in

Bangkok, because "He's my friend's relative, he's a merchant, the right age, Chinese and not ugly. What else do you want?" (Botan, 1994: 49). The sequence of "Chinese and not ugly" is significant. The "ugly" represents, in a way, any insurmountable physical deformities. Once could almost rewrite as "Chinese and not a cripple." The meaning would remain similar, and the pairing of these two traits is racist on the most elemental level, much more than a presumptive pairing such as: "A merchant and not a Thai."

Mui Eng follows a conventional path of marriage and children, her sister, Ang Bui, does not. But her rebelliousness, her refusal to play traditional females roles, her interest in books, learning and other "manly interests, are introduced to us from the first part of Suang U's encounter with her (Botan, 1994: 27-29). She is also distinguished by her looks: "…This morning the other daughter, the little dark one, ran into the office while Nguan Tong and I were working….and Gim was right-if she didn't wear Chinese clothes, she could pass as Thai" (Botan, 1994: 27). Her coloration, making her passable as a Thai, is an introduction to her being different, to her ease at straddling communal differences.

Ang Bui is an unusual character in the fact that while being a key character, she remains a "constant", unlike the other key characters that surround her: traditionalists (Suang U), misguided rebels (Weng Kim), underdogs that develop and shine (Meng Ju), all of whom go through gut wrenching transformations.

Ang Bui's importance can be perceived throughout the novel: her modernity, her independence, her free thinking, being so much everything which Suang U is not or is against, even though they always remain close relatives that accept, even respect each other. There is something in Suang U's respect willingness to listen to her comments, and ability to conduct with a dialogue, with all prejudices expressed, that hints at another Suang U. A "real one" would probably attempt to shut her out.

But her ultimate centrality in the narrative is spelled out loud only at the very end of the novel when Suang U finally goes to propose to her, an act suggested to him before, after Mui Eng's demise. His last statement that "Meng Ju says she is willing to speak to Ang Bui on my behalf before I set out on the momentous journey to her house, but she assures me that there is no question Ang Bui will accept me. I suspect myself that she is right- and if ever there was a woman with sons in her! After all, it is no sin to hope" (Botan, 1994: 512). The wording is significant: "momentous journey," and his observation, ironically mixed with a throw back to his "good old Chinese chauvinist" on hoping for sons, that "if ever there was a woman with sons in her are the ultimate tribute to her independence and her utter rejection of traditional gender roles. In a way, he turns upside down the image of the "ideal woman" that "has sons in her". Such a woman is not any more a submissive, nonsensical, uneducated female, but an assertive, independent, free thing one. It's a recognition that "real son" require both partners of the marriage to be independent and strong. But the logic gets complicated within itself, because the keeping of the ideal of "having sons in her" becomes inconsistent with underlying notion of equality. After all, the "sons in her" sounds like a statement in the present. The sons are in her (now), the sons are her.

"Letters from Thailand" ends in a few cycles being closed. The closure with Meng Ju and Winyu resolves both issues of ethnic prejudice and gender roles (Meng Ju being the de-facto "elder son"). But it is still, after all, the final realizations of a man whose life has sort of ran its course; all he can do is torture himself for his blindness. The very last closure, Ang Bui, supersedes it exactly because it is not a closure but a beginning. A new beginning for a Suang U that has learnt and has accepted what he learnt. There are no jade bracelets this round, but there are things which infinitely more valuable.

To sum briefly, "Letters from Thailand", does not rely solely on the triangle of: 1) First generation interaction with the new land and its people versus the homeland. 2) Second Generation interaction with its country of birth and its parent's homeland. 3) The intergenerational negotiation on how to preserve of the heritage versus how to embrace of the new home. "Letter from Thailand" adds figures that stand above the fray, offering, by words and examples, other ways, which transcend the conventional formulations. Written at a period where the straightforward dialectics of assimilation vs. non assimilation (as negotiated between generations) formed the main options debated, Botan's novel is one of the progressive texts that present other options of how more complex identities can be created.

4.1.4 China, Memories of China, it's Culture and its People

Suang U's initial "Identity" statement of the fact that every Chinese carries his homeland within him practically starts the book off. It could be argued that as this is not a diary, but letters to a Chinese mother left alone in China, Suang U is bound to display his loyalty to China not only on his account but also on her account. He mentions different cultural events and facts, which make China dear to him, but in essence, in these letters, China is his "Motherland" not only figuratively, but also literally. He is writing to his mother and his mother is, in a sense, China.

In that sense, "Letters from Thailand", by the very nature of its immigrant son-to-mother epistolary nature, is tilted towards an emphasis of loyalty and love towards the Mother and her Land, a display of loyalty which is strengthened by stressing distance and spite towards the new country. Since we can never separate what Suang U feels in his daily life, and what he feels when he sits, facing a sheet of paper and an

image of his beloved mother, writing a letter to her, or even what he wants her to feel, we are facing an ambivalent account of his feelings. While the point of view here is that of the main character himself, it is nevertheless, a point of view which is practiced in a very specific situation and consistently so.

But on the other side, there is no attempt to idealize the Chinese in all circumstances. Yong Jua points to Suang U, when hearing his friend, Gim, observing that most of the coolies in the port are Chinese, that: "Many of them have come here and worked like slaves all their lives for a few Baht to pay off their passage. The wise ones made their sacrifice before they came, not after. Many of the coolies you see here would have been far better off back home in their fields. And yet a few of them actually become millionaires from no better beginning than this-hauling seventy-five kilo loads from ship to truck and back again under a broiling sun" (Botan: 1994, 15). The case is also obvious from observation of Suang U friends who came with him on the boat from the same village. One, Seng, got into a fight with him, and besides being lucky having a rich uncle in Bangkok, appears to be a quarrelsome, conceited individual, lacking the attributes of education, i.e. culture, and hard work. Gim, who stays with Suang U, under his patronage, lacks, or seems to lack, ambition and drive, is lazy and a bit envious of his far more successful friend. All these and many more episodes reveal the fact that while "Chineseness" is idealized on the conceptual level, the picture changes when you look at specific Chinese individuals.

Nevertheless, the pride in all things Chinese and the spite towards things Thai is also expressed as observed in other Chinese, and these observations strengthen the prevalence of the bias. When Ang Bui, the younger daughter of Suang U's employer, Nguan Tong, expresses an interest in learning to read Thai (which, she notes, she can speak), her angry father retorts angrily in what becomes an exemplary dialogue not only on the perceived superiority of Chinese language and culture versus Thai novels, which Ang Bui expresses the wish to read. The father goes ahead and describes Thai literature as "Trash", while freely admitting that this "knowledge" is derived from

looking at the covers. This is not exactly strong credentials for becoming a judge of literature (Botan: 1994, 31). When the daughter still persists, the following father–to-daughter dialogue on assimilation ensues: "'Well, how it can be wrong to learn Thai? I was born here, and I can't even read the street signs. What sense does it make?', 'It is not necessary for you to learn Thai' he said stalking into the room. 'I forbid it. You start reading Thai, and before you know it, you'll be thinking like a Thai. That's all I need!....'" (Botan, 1994: 32).

However, the motif of lack of respect to Thais combined with admiration to the land itself and its abundance, stands against another duality, that which concern his feelings towards Chinese, China and Chinese culture. Suang U never stops extolling the superiority of Chinese culture, and Chinese work ethic and perseverance. The two come here as a package, they are adjoined here not only in scattered phrases of self-congratulation, but in the personal history of Suang U himself. His literariness coupled with his work ethics is what took him forward. In him, they are both embodied as two sides of the same coin.

Nevertheless, on top of the belief in the advantages or superiority in one's culture or group's norms, there is also the important factor of memories of childhood, a heartwarming psychological support that counteract against the natural feeling of alienation in a new, foreign and different place. While memories are the exclusive possession of the first generation of immigrants, there is almost always the effort, by this generation, to impart to their descendants the sense of these memories, either by telling, but more importantly, by preservation of ceremonies, festivals, traditions, literature and language. This effort of maintain the link is performed in three ways, as individual families, as a community, which allows the pulling of much larger resources, and last, but very prevalent, as negativity, namely, as an effort to isolate the community from the larger host society into enclaves, ghetto's.

But of the three means of preservation, we find surprising poverty as regards the first one, the personal one. Even the communal one, though thicker, is still scanty. It lacks the magic, the story telling, and the visual, without which it shrivels to become a forced act, performed in recognition of a need to pay some respect to an irrelevant past. The first two are active, positive components; they are there to enliven the links. The third is a negative force. The demonization of the other strengthens the links out of communal fear and hostility towards the other.

Cohesion bred by negativity is not new. Shaked quotes Shai Agnon, a Jewish Nobel Prize for Literature winner, telling "And I said to him: So how are they, the Jews? And the shopkeeper laughed and said: The Jews how are they? Without the gentiles reminding us that Jews we are, we long would have forgotten that Jews are we. And I told him: And yourself, how of a Jew are you. And he said: In that I am a Jew like all the other Jews" (Shaked, 2006: 17).

But here it is the negativity towards Jews that reminds them of their roots, of their being a community apart. "Letters from Thailand" takes great care to marginalize any negativity towards Chinese, and it indeed reflects a reality of general acceptance in the general population, notwithstanding some derogatory strands which almost always exist at the borderlines of two different ethnics groups brought apart. Hostility, which led to measure to eradicate Chinese identity, were a top down movement based on the emulation of the extreme examples of European nationalism, and on the discovery of a similarity between the millennia-old hated "others" of Europe, the Jews, and the hereafter to be the "others" of Siam and Southeast Asia, the Chinese. So Suang U's negativity-bred pride in his Chinese routes is not a result of him being subjected to persecution; on the contrary, he, in his personal and immediate world, is the persecutor of the Thais. This is counter logical to almost immigrant situation. They are almost never the persecutors (even if only in their private domains). Negativity is almost universally bred from the persecution of them by the hosts.

By far, the missing part is a China that is alive with vibrant memories, with stories. Not the "big China", but "his China". We noted that before. Suang U has little to say about his native Po Leng village. He talks about size "The ship is as big as Po Leng Village" (Botan, 1994: 2). He reminiscences the New Year in Po Leng: "Our New Year celebration in Po Leng seems just past, although six months have gone by since that wonderful day. I remember getting up very early, tiptoeing about the house so as not to awaken you, and preparing our morning tea. Then I prayed alone at our family altar, in the cool stillness of dawn. Later in the day, we made a rare trip to town, together, a trip I shall never forget" (Botan, 1994: 9). Shortly after, he also refers to his younger brother (also referred to briefly in the very opening of the book and in very few other places, but without imbuing him with any personal characteristics, all we ever know about him is that he is the younger brother) : "I am reminded of the gigantic carp Younger Brother caught in our stream last spring…do you remember how he ran home across the field leaping and shouting? I'm willing to bet he will never eat a more delicious carp, and each year that carp will grow a little longer, a little fatter" (Botan, 1994: 9). The story that is most relevant is that of his mother and her education (Botan, 1994: 3).

All of this is in fact contained in the very first letter. Further concrete references to China are scant. Suang U observes that Chinese girls in Thailand have the audacity to refuse arranged marriages: "In Po Leng, parents did the choosing and children the marrying. I think it was the best way" (Botan, 1994: 33). Suang U remembers the beauty of the Moon Festival in Po Leng, with "all the village girls entering the temple grounds together, carrying their offerings and their prayers to the moon, our Goddess of love" (Botan, 1994: 36). He goes on to describe how in Bangkok each family has its own celebration, placing tables with good food in front of their shops, but then he follows up immediately with the annoyance at Thai making fun of the festival, citing science books to dispel the myth of the Moon. He concludes by stating that "I think the Festival is a lovely and important tradition. ….such

traditions are especially important for people like me who are far away from home" (Botan, 1994: 36).

It's also worth noting that Suang U's generalizing comment on the importance of festivals as a link home for immigrants is expressed on the 20th of September 1945, while he arrived to Thailand only a month before. This sounds misplaced, too early. New immigrants are not apt to philosophize on such matters so early in the game. These are the sort of conclusions that are usually arrived at later. And if he has such realizations so early, why is there so little in the way of intensive "positive" Chinese cultural follow up later (positive in the sense of "for itself," as against being used as a means to fend off Thainess)

Not only do we have here scant, dry memories, intermingled with unavoidable negativism that I find disproportionate (the fact that Thais look at the moon scientifically is simply a difference of opinion; after all, we don't hear of pogroms where "Thai Kazakhs" riding into the Chinese alleys, burning the sacrificial tables and shafting children with their swords). It is true that Suang U is an accountant, not a story teller, and that could justify his differences from Kingstone's fantasizing adolescent story telling (talking story) girl. But on the other hand, Amy Tan's mothers are well-grounded, practical women, and they do lot of storytelling of semi imaginary tales that took place in China.

Just as a point of reference, Suang U of "Letters from Thailand" has the most to tell about China of all the main figures in the surveyed novels, except the grannies in "Walking Through Spring." And besides these scant details, and that fact of his teaching Chinese reading, writing and some briefly mentioned Chinese literature to Nguan Tong's daughters (Botan, 1994: 28), all there is are proverbs, referral to customs, Confucian euphemisms. These last few "generics" are what we shall also find in the following novels.

To sum briefly, China, in "Letters from Thailand" does not reside in memories enlivened by stories (as in so many American Chinese or Indian Diaspora novels), or by myths, such as was the Land of Israel for Jews. It's practically forgotten as a living, vibrant place once it is left. All the altars of ancestors, all of whom carry their own stories, are reduced to repetitive cliché's about recopies for success, and patriarchal dictums that repeat, again and again, the high value of sons, the low value of daughters, and all that can be derived from that.

4.1.5 Thailand, Thai Culture, Thais

The whole initial period of Suang U in Bangkok, prior to his engagement and marriage to Mui Eng is dense with observations on Thais, Thailand and China. Thais are describes as drunkards (Botan, 1994: 43), gamblers (Botan, 1969: 59), and fake, as for example the preference for fancy paper diploma's as a means to flaunt education pedigrees and hiding their true feelings (Botan, 1994: 51). Suang U declares himself to be essentially tolerant, or as being willing to give credit, but as he says: "I am willing to respect the Thai, but so far I haven't seen much to respect" (Botan, 1994: 43).

But Suang U's lack of respect to Thais contrasts with his deep appreciation of the land itself. Only a very short while after his arrival, Suang U expresses his sense of wonder at the beauty of Bangkok's riverside scene in almost poetic form "it was easy to be distracted by the wonders to be seen on the banks of the Chap Phraya. Flourishing trees burst with fruit, temple and chedi spires poked up into the clear blue sky above Bangkok, and every manner of river craft jostled for position on the busy, colorful river" (Botan, 1994: 56). The sense of wonder is not only as regards beauty, but also opportunities. In an early stage, Yong Jua, points to Suang U that Thailand is

a rich and plentiful land, rich with fruits and vegetables (Botan, 1994: 20), statements reminiscent of the biblical archetypical scene of Jacob entering the land of Israel which is described to him as the "The Land of Milk and Honey."

"Letters from Thailand" is unique in the way it tracks these different aspects almost all throughout the book, obviously as observed by Suang U. From beginning to end there is ceaseless commentary on these issues, and besides the ending part, which offers a dramatic negation of Suang U's continuous denigration of Thais, the book proceeds, like a person leaping on stones in crossing a river, between one derogatory comment to the other.

Not all the comments are condescending towards Thais, there are individual exceptions: Some are definitely positive, as towards Chaba, Suang U's childhood friend's Gim Thai wife (Botan, 1994: 133) who is not only a dedicated hard workers but even tries to learn Chinese to converse with the Chinese clientele (obviously a huge reason to be in her favor), but that, on the other hand, is more than balanced by his son, Weng Kim's, love affair with the Thai prostitute, Phani (Botan, 1994: 387-411). Phani, who eventually outmaneuvers Suang U by using his invitation for her to live with the family (This decision of Suang U to play a Dr Higgins to a Phani being the Eliza Doolittle is odd, and its only logic can be that the overriding drive to cultivate a son to continue his line, can bring him to take unthinkable roles), to steal a large amount of money and jewelry, is a unique character in the book. While superficially presenting all that is wrong in Thais, as per the views of Suang U, she can almost be seen as a fictional entity that is brought into life from the nightmarish imagination of Suang U's perverted bigotry. His repressive regime, his incessant hostility towards Thais, drives his only son (and, in his worldview, only sons really count) to run away and bring home the complete manifestation of his nightmares. Phani continues to haunt Suang U long after she took away with the money and valuables. Rose, the daughter of his childhood friend Gim and his Thai wife Chaba, who was not only "promised" as a bride to Weng Kim, Suang U's son, but who had

feelings for him, feelings which were not reciprocated, is very much aware of the periods of few months in which Phani spent with the family, invited by him. As noted earlier, after Phani takes off, the originally arranged marriage takes place, only so that the broken down Weng Kim finds himself in marriage with a wife which still has feelings for him, but dominates him completely, and hates his father, a lot of which can be traced to the Phani affair (Botan, 1994: 490).

Both Suang U himself and his friends and family do not spare their words in describing him as anachronistic, stuck in an irrelevant past, unwilling to move with the times. And indeed his complaints of Thais and his repetition of his understanding of the Chinese-Confucian values are repeated throughout. Even though Suang U shows signs of adjusting here and there to reality, such as learning to read Thai (Botan, 1994: 215), enjoying reading Thai (Botan, 1994: 245), these are still adjustments forced by practicalities. This, by the way, is not unusual, most adjustments of immigrants to a new country start from practicalities, and the extent of these are very much related to the size of the immigrant group and its level of concentration. Large, physically concentrated and relatively self sufficient immigrant groups often have very few practicalities requiring adjustment, besides, perhaps, contact with government offices (and in the case of immigrant Chinese, they enjoyed for a long period, and throughout Southeast Asia, the convenience of having a "Kapitan China," a Chinese indigenous/colonial government-appointed official to regulate their affairs.

It is only at the end, finding himself with no real, loving place to stay among all his children, he discovers that Meng Ju's Thai husband, Winyu, can single handedly (and with his mother) dispel a life time of bigotry and misperception. Winyu is noble, a hard worker, an honest man and a filial son. He is a teacher, a scholar. Winyu is, alas, the "Ideal Confucian Man", and with all of Suang U's years of being a merchant, he cannot escape remembering that he got so quickly to be an established merchant because he was, at least to the degree life afforded him, a

scholar too.

And the merchant in him bows in shame when observing Winyu's mother: I wrote earlier in this letter that I came to their house for peace and time, but I have found much, much more. Winyu's mother, a poor old Thai lady who sells candy in the streets, feels sorry for me. My bakery produced in an hour ten times the candy she sells in a month, and she feels sorry for me. That is something to think about, and when I have thought about it long enough, I believe I shall be ready to live the rest of my life" (Botan, 1994: 507).

Suang U's last tribute to Po Leng is at the exact point where he accepts Thailand, the people more than just the land, and rejects the competitive mercantile, greedy environment of Sampeng, stating: " This neighborhood (Sampeng: my comment) is larger than our village and as all men in Po Leng were farmers so all men here are merchants. But no one bothers about his neighbor, and each does as he pleases. A man in Po Leng was closer to a distant cousin than a Yowarat merchant is to a brother in his house" (or his own son, one can add) (Botan, 1994: 494).

In the end, it is Suang U who is the Eliza Doolittle, and it is his daughter and son in law who, as the Prof's Higgins's, who raise him from his lowly state, vulgar state of mind, to a much more refined one.

The famous dictum that "In Rome, Be a Roman", is based on practicalities and not on the idea of embracing the new home out of deeper rooted considerations. Suang U, at the end of the novel, forgets practicalities and embraces his new home for its inner worth and the inner worth of its people, and for no material gain. And it is here that finds his salvation.

4.1.6 Chinese Women in the Novel

The previous five sections have provided us with detailed background material to tackle our main area of interest. It's obvious that Chinese women play an important role in the novel, in spite of Suang U being the center of it. Our discussions will focus particularly in relation to issues of identity and intergenerational negotiations. Suang U is a man surrounded by ethnic Chinese women of three generations: his mother, his wife, Mui Eng, and, perhaps more importantly, her sister and his future wife Ang Bui, and his youngest daughter, Meng Ju. Also, he has two elder daughters, Chuey Gim and Bak Li.

Suang U has little serious respect to his wife: "Do you know, I believe Mui Eng has never had a serious thought in her life. Everything about her is superficial which she proved once again by giggling all through the freak show and pleading with me to stay and watch it all over again" (Botan, 1994: 213-214). The elder daughters start off with a voice of their own, such as when Bak Li (at the age of seven) declares her desire to be a radio presenter. Her father rebukes her and the following dialogue ensues:" (Bak Li): 'uhg, who wants to stand in front a stove all day or scrub floors? I don't mind the sewing part, though. I can sew while I am on the radio'. (Suang U:' such work is unsuitable for your daughter'. 'Why,' Weng Kim asked, 'Why shouldn't younger sister be a different kind of woman, if she can' (Suang U): 'That is quite beside the point. I don't know what a different kind of woman is supposed to mean, but I expect to see my girls marry and present me with lots of grandchildren.' (Bak Li):' Aunt Ang Bui isn't married, she hasn't any children, and she's a grown up lady'. (Suang U): '…Ang Bui is not yet married, but-she is still a young lady, and she will marry someday' (Botan, 1994: 256-257).

But this streak of independence is not maintained. Perhaps the most significant sign is the pursuit of high school education. The elder sisters make no issue of going out of school at the end of primary school, only Meng Ju insists on continuing (Botan, 1994: 327). In a significant statement, Ang Bui tells Suang U: "But she (Meng Ju-my comment) has more going for her. Weng Kim is a nice average boy and the older girls think of nothing but clothes and boys. Chuey Gim has more going for her, but my dear sister gift-wrapped her brain" (Botan, 1994: 328).

Ang Bui's observation accord well with Suang U's earlier made point that: "It is time to think of the two older girl's future. Chuey Gim is now learning to sew from a friend of Mui Eng's, and Bak Li is content to help her mother. She eats, sleeps, and works, dresses neatly and is a good girl; she will make a fine wife" (Botan, 1994: 318). Ang Bui's remark about her sister accords well with Suang U's earlier observation about his wife's ever having had a serious thought.

There is not much more than that needed to establish that both the mother and her two elder daughters will not contribute to a discussion about Chinese women, identity and intergenerational negotiations. This said, there is maybe one relevant point that comes up later in the narrative. That is, once married, the two elder daughters lose interest in their father, and are not really helpful when his house is burnt down and he looks for shelter. Nevertheless, Chuey Gim accepts him without any problems. He leaves because he cannot stand the atmosphere in the house and business, where workers and customers are all engaged in a conversation about how to catch men: "Twenty or thirty years ago….when fathers sought husbands for their daughters and young women were not required to approach every eligible man with the savageness of cobras cornering a rabbit fallen helplessly into their nest. What have women gained, I ask you? (Botan, 1994: 499). There is another thing that bothers him there: "I suppose that what bothers me most in this shop is that all the things I disliked in Mui Eng have been developed to a fine art here; extravagance, and disdain for good taste are catered to, declared respectable and even necessary for "happiness". (Botan,

1994: 500). This is again a display of his lack of respect to the frivolity of Mui Eng. But Mui Eng was a good wife in traditional measurements, and she "gave him" a son, she worked hard for him where he needed her, she was obedient. She was a woman, aren't all women a bit frivolous? Do any of them entertain serious thinking? Off course they do not. So why is Suang U bothered about these things? Mui Eng did right by him as the ancestors would have judged. Isn't that enough? Suang U also refuses to go to the miserable house of Bak Li, her obsessively stingy mother in law and husband, who also betrays her left and right, again not because she would not take him.

There is nothing unfilial here from their side, though, in fact, aren't Chinese daughters supposedly a mere burden who once married do not belong to their parents family any more but rather to their husband's family. Aren't they the "sewer in front of the house". Not really, Chuey Gim was willing to help. Who wouldn't really was his son and especially his daughter in law, supposedly obligated to serve him above all. It is really in his first born son's house that he is really treated off-handedly and crudely (Botan, 194: 490-492), and as he leaves, he also overhears their conversation, intensely abusive of him (Botan, 1994: 490-496). So who is really "the sewer in front of the house," one can wonder.

We can see that as Chinese women figures, Mui Eng, Chuey Gim and Bak Li are not transformational here. They carry on a life style that with a few exceptions (such as Bak Li's getting pregnant out of wedlock, but then getting married to the offender, Seng Huat), are simple and is carried through with no real raising of agendas, that would be the base of intergenerational negotiations. They do get swept with modern times, the details of these; they do not suggest new principles.

It is the other three women who matter more:

First: His mother: The fact that the story is based on letters to a mother, the mother is raised high here, and Suang U looks up to her. The seeds of what is to come are planted right here. Suang U's lives by the one sided correspondence with his mother. As mentioned earlier, diary, as Winyu says (Botan, 1994: 449) or not diary, he is getting, well, crazy or not, as his neighbors who know of that one sided correspondence say (Botan, 1994: 449), the letters always maintains the same emotional level. He, off course, never gets answers, because of the police censor that holds and collects these letters. But his mother knows that he went with Seng, she might well have an address or can get one from Seng or Gim's parents (after he settles down). Perhaps the silence of the mother is not a technicality; perhaps it is a point of significance. Towards the end, he compares Meng Ju to his mother**.** This is of great significance. Maybe his mother "doesn't wish to answer." Maybe the intergenerational negotiation goes in two directions. Maybe his mother gave up on her grumpy, male chauvinist, grotesquely traditional, bigot of a son, leaving it to her grand-daughter, so similar to her, to transform him into something better because she is too far to do that.

Suang U observes that: "I read somewhere that every generation surpasses the previous one, that it is unavoidable…how opposite from the beliefs and customs of my youth. Confucius taught that the progresses only towards calamity when children do not follow the ways of parents and ancestors" (Botan, 1994: 464). Maybe in this narrative, Suang U represents the Confucian view point perfectly, he embodies it. Meng Ju represents the exact opposite he mentioned. Maybe both views are right, and wrong, at the same time. Some generations represent decline, some others soar to higher grounds. Maybe it's just a pendulum.

Second: Ang Bui: Ang Bui, Mui Eng's sister and Suang U's sister in law is introduced into the novel from a very early stage, when Suang U starts to work for

Nguan Tong, and continues to play a central figure through his marriage life, in which she is very involved, and until the very and beyond. Beyond, because the novel ends with Suang U going to propose to her (Botan, 1994: 511-512).

His acquaintance with her starts before he even sees her, but sees, for a flash, Mui Eng's classic moon-like white face, perfect Chinese beauty. Mentioning that to Gim, Gim comments: "Nice, eh? The other one isn't bad either, but she's little and dark, like a Thai." (Botan, 1994: 24). He meets her first when he is asked to help the girls interpret a phrase from Three Kingdom. She confides that they have nothing to besides a bit of reading, that she wants to go to school, to which her father responds: "I shall not change my mind about sending girls to school. You can read and write already, and that was a mistake. What more do you need?" (Botan, 1994: 28). Ang Bui then inquires as to Suang U's extent of reading, and then asks him to be their literature tutor. Nguan Tong resists on account of Suang U's hard work, but Suang U agrees, and the father finally relents, concluding: "What am I to do with such girls. I have no son, you know. It's a terrible disappointment, I don't pretend otherwise. No one to carry on the business, no son to honor me when I die. Just two ill-mannered, demanding girls with unsuitable ambitions, especial this one (Ang Bui-my comment) The other one (Mui Eng-my comment) isn't so bad-stubborn but at least she acts like a girl." (Botan, 1994: 29).

Nguan Tong's statement here is prophetic. Suang U will suffer all his life learning of how erroneous it is, Nguan Tong does not, in fact, suffer, even though he entertains Suang U's gender prejudices. But he might be much softer on other prejudices. But what is more important is that entertaining these gender prejudices is an important component of a "Chinese identity." It's at the base. A lot of other cultural elements can be compromised upon, but this lies deep. It is also inherently linked with the desire for family continuity and unity. It is a basis for family harmony. All these values, most probably predating Confucius, but having been canonized and promulgated by his and his followers, all need a male succession line.

We described Ang Bui above at the very first point where she enters the narrative. She is independent, a free thinker with a mind of her own from that very early childhood stage. She is also the same at the very end of the narrative. I could bring hundreds of quotes, but just a few will be more than enough:

"He watched Ang Bui pour boiling water carefully into the family's best porcelain teapot, then turned to Yong Jua. 'Why must this child always have some irritating remark to make? She is born here, and it shows every time she opens her mouth. I tell you; soon it will be impossible to raise a child properly in Bangkok. She even wants us to rest on Sundays like the Thais, who have forsaken their own religious days to imitate the foreigners" (Botan, 1994: 68). This is not about assimilation into Thai society, which is actually described here as a copier of Western society. It's about the irritating fact that Ang Bui says what she thinks.

" 'Oh father,' Ang Bui interrupted, 'that is so unfair! There are many parents who must rely on their daughters even when they have plenty of sons. Do you imagine that all sons are perfect?' Her father's eyes flashed with anger. 'Even a worthless son carries on the family name, which is something the most faithful of daughters –supposing there are any left these days-cannot do!' Oh that again!' she retorted. 'Who made it so? It is a stupid idea that a child may only bear its father's name. If it is so important to the Chinese to have their names carried on, then why not let the child carry its mother's name if there are no sons in the family? If Suang U's family were here instead of in China, you would never see the children they will have. How would you feel then?' 'Off course I wouldn't like it but a child belongs to the father's family. That is only natural.' Father, it is natural because you think it's natural!!' " The argument is continued with Tao Geh Nie, Ang Bui's mother intervening to stress that, yes, the mother's blood flows through the child as much as the father's blood and she is the one that goes through the pain of birth. The men then

agree that it's impossible to reason with a woman, they mention that in Thai families the women control the purse, Chinese know better. (Botan, 1994: 70-71). There is plenty of content here, what is striking are three things. First, Ang Bui's superb logical-analytical thinking. Second, the men's nonsensical retort that you can't argue with women (especially, one could say, when she is logical and the men are not). Third, Nguan Tong's wife, an old generation woman is joining their side and hints that women, even of the old generation, are not dumb, they understand the fact that it's all lacking logic, but they do not feel they have the power to resist a system that have sanctified the principles of their suppression. Ang Bui's standpoint is now clarified in so exhaustive a manner that it easy to draw a line from here to the end of the novel. Again, we should emphasize that she has no beef with Chinese culture as manifested in Amy Tan's novels and others. Her argument is with one central tenet that is the base for many others. She even agrees that the tenets will remain, but that they will not be established on male's primacy. Chinese identity, in her eyes, is too much intertwined with gender bias. Suang U's blind adherence to Chinese identity as language, culture, his abhorrence to Thais, is all symptomatic of new immigrants. She is against the negative part of it. She is neutral on the positive side of it. But the gender bias is what she will fight against, and if the Chinese identity adheres to that as a central tenet, she will reject the whole edifice.

Ang Bui is a constant that stays herself all through the story. Her constancy is not a child of dogma, but a child of rational non attachment to any dogma, mixed with authentic humanism. She is the only "real man" in the sense that men like to think about themselves. She is a rock, upon which and around which flow the other characters. In that sense, she is like Suang U's mother who is always a part of the narrative, except that the mother is silent, Ang Bui is not, she speaks, she suggests, she gives things, but she intervenes only in circumspect manner. The borders of the nuclear family allow only a certain level of intervention and she is smart enough (she is smart in general), not to cross the lines. She has herself, she is happy with that, she is confident; she will not bow to any cultural dictates of what a woman's role or duties in societies. She doesn't care much what "they" will say about her. She is the perfect

opposite to Suang U, she is the solid Yang to his whiney Ying.

With Ang Bui, Botan does not only reject traditional Chinese gender role, she does much more than that, she almost puts them upside down. Botan was ideologically a feminist. As mentioned earlier, the movements of the 60's in the US were not only about ethnicity, they were in coalition with feminism. Foster mentions that too. In that sense, the resistance to Chinese traditional gender values are related to an agenda which is not related to anything Chinese at all, but to another movement altogether.

"I have informed the children of my intention to close up Mui Eng's shop and move to Thonburi, Meng Ju alone had any comment to make and that was critical. 'Papa, mary Auntie…She cares for you, and I know you care for her if could only swallow your pride….'What, is a daughter her father's matchmaker nowadays?' " (Botan, 1994: 466).

4.2 "Being with Gong" by Yok Burapha

Unlike "Letters from Thailand," a novel that spans a generation and offers a rich kaleidoscope of personalities and events, "Being with Gong" is a much shorter and simpler novel, offering a glimpse of life rather than a chronologically meaningful span. The weight is on descriptions, and a few events that take short spans of time, often a day, with many of the chapters starting in the early morning of the day. There is no captivating plot taking place chronologically, nor is there an attempt to capture short periods of time and dig them to enormous depths in the manner of books of the type of "A Day in the life of…….Leopold Bloom" ("Ulysses" by James Joyce), "A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch" by Soltzenitzin and more. Rather, one can see the book as a series of sketches of life, simple, humane, endearing. But still, even

without the compression into a "day," the novel widely explores the surroundings of the main characters in great detail, compensating for the brevity in time. The characters themselves, though relatively simple, leave, especially in the case of Gong, plenty of questions which are not raised or answered.

4.2.1 The First Generation

If the ending of the "Letters from Thailand" instantly answers the question of why it became a part of the Thai school curriculum when restrictions on Chinese cultural and linguistic expressions prevailed, it is also clear that the inclusion of "Being with Gong" was not embraced because of the way it ends, but because of the way it progresses throughout, in fact, from the very first moment. *"Being with Gong" is not the story of a grumpy, antagonistic Chinese i*mmigrant that wages, for his entire life in Thailand, a campaign of abuse of Thais, until he experiences, at the end of the novel, a revelation that those he personally "persecuted" are in fact his best friends and benefactors. Like Paul on the road to Damascus to persecute Christians, Suang U sees a bright shining light, hears the voices, and converts.

Throughout the novel, Gong displays the values of tolerance, lack of any prejudice, of mutual respect, of humbleness with dignity, hard work (without the imperative that it will lead to riches, or expected to be a "formula" for riches), of understanding the value of education, of kindness. Suang U, after his "conversion" would have derived much from reading "Being with Gong". After having accepted the great treasure of Thai values, comparing them negatively to his Yowarat community, his sons, the greed that leads to no happiness and self respect at all, as he witnessed on his skin in his own family, reading "Being with Gong", would be reassuring. Both Ang Bui and Meng Ju are second generation and he has no tool to determine what shaped them, the Thai environment, the Chinese ancestry, or a happier blend of both. But Gong, with all his years in Thailand, is first generation,

having arrived at a similar age as Suang U, he is manifestly Chinese, but he is proud in his values, his dignity, and the sense that in his case "The Thais never won", they didn't have to and there was no need to. He doesn't refer to any confrontation of identities.

Ah Gong needs no conversions. A wise old man, living with his young grandchild, an orphan, in a classic rural setting, where the Thais constitute a farming majority (The officials, including teachers, live separately, but are also ethnic Thai), and the Chinese, living in a small shop house row, a market, acting their traditional role as traders. Ah Gong personifies harmony, mutual respect, and humanity which seem to be fed not only from his Confucian beliefs, but from still deeper wells of humanitarian feelings.

Since the novel takes place in the present, we know practically nothing indeed of Gong's past. The novels ends with a party celebrating his passing of an important age, 70 years (Yok Burapha, 1991: 274), and at an earlier stage, Gong mentions that ""Gong lives in Thailand a long time, half a century, and knows and is familiar with the Thai people and their real character" (Yok Burapha, 1991: 93). We are not privy to details of that long span of time. Did he arrive "as is" in terms of wisdom and tolerance, or did he come with any prejudice and changed his ways of thinking, and if so, how, spurred by which events, starting off with how "deep" of a prejudice, of sectarianism. The book offers no clue. But the end of the book, to be referred to shortly, with a very brief sketch of his life in Thailand spent in small rural communities, and with no indication of wealth, suggest that his wisdom of now is not an overcoming of negativities, but a maturity, a deepening, of what he always was. He encounters cases of prejudice and helps resolve them in a positive way. If he had a stage of prejudice being won over, one would expect him to refer to that.

Yok is 12-13 years old (Yok Burapha, 1991: 1) and his parents perished, was

that Gong's first family? If there was another, has it perished or was it estranged? How was Yok's grandmother, when did she pass away? Considering the early age at which people married at that time, the pairing of a seventy year old grandfather and a 12-13 years old grandchild (only grandchild) is not very usual. It means relatively late marriages, but is it Gong's late marriage, his offspring's? Both? We are also not told about Yok's parents, except that considering his age and the fact they are not mentioned by him, means demise when he was very young.

At the end of the novel, in his "Si-Ed" birthday party, we have a brief summary of Gon'g life, reconfirming his length of stay in Thailand since he was 18 years old (Yok Burapha, 1991: 93), mentioning he lived in various places in the central region, until, having become an adult (the Thai terms "num yai" is not age definite, but we can assume the passing of thirty), he settled in this community, as one of its pioneers, and never moved on. (Yok Burapha, 1991: 281). This could explain late marriage but not necessarily. Immigrant settling in different place did not know that these are temporary places and avoided marrying (just as the Thai couple that eloped and settled nearby Gong) (Yok Burapha, 1991: 125).

The brief summary at the end, in a party which is not just a birthday party but an important passage in life (Yok Burapha, 1991: 274) is significant in the fact that it hardly adds details of his biography. It is as if the author reiterates, to readers that "did not get the point", that this is what you will know, and as for the rest, one is welcome to add his own ideas, or more likely, is simply of no importance. In other words, the message needs no past or future, it is here, and it is valid in any time.

So who is Gong? Let us go on a little journey. Both Gong and Yok express their deep appreciation of Thai peasants as "children of the land", rooted, connected to nature and healthy. This concept of what can easily expressed in Thai as "Phumibutr"(Thai) is, far as far can be, from the Malay/ Indonesian sectarian, in fact

racist, concept of the Bhumiputra. In these countries, the term is a mechanism of division: "Of all the terms which have been used to refer to the indigenous status, the labels "bumiputera" and "pribumi" are preferred because they both emphasize the relationship with the land ("Bumi"). They reinforce the status of indigenes as being the original inhabitants of an area to which other groups have migrated. It is therefore not sufficient to discuss Malaysian and Indonesian plural societies in terms of various racial and/or ethnic communities. ….now that we have indentified the categories…There is one area left to explore-namely, the issue of cultural identity. In neither country is the term used to describe cultural phenomena; no attempt has been made to speak in terms of a bhumiputra culture-of bhumiputra dance, bhumiputra music or bhumiputra art forms. Ethnic group referents, on the other hand are often used as cultural categories" (Suryadinata, 2004: 75-76)**.** In other words, while in "Being with Gong" the terms "sons of the land" is used uncharacteristically as a romantic concept, which is all love, love that is not supported at any point by shadow hatred, in other countries it's a political terms used to group together diverse groups as a political force, not a real ethnic-cultural unit (or there might be attempts to unify them culturally by decree) so as to create walls between "us" and "them." In fact, it was in Thailand that such decreases were prominent. Part of the infamous Ratniyom of 1939 included the second decree that outlawed "Non Thai" or "anti Thai" activities, making it so obvious that the identity is defined negatively, while the fourth decrees aims to suppress local identities of "sons of the soil" throughout Thailand (Reynold, 1991: 5-6).

This idealization is a bit like Tolstoy's idealization of the Russian Mujik, and indeed at his later years he practically became one. The similarity lies because Tolstoy's love of the "people of the land" is not fed by hatred of "others", of the Jews, the "Chinese of the West".

What is the point of this distant comparison? It is that the loaded concept of "Bhumiputra" can be both born of love, and it can be inseparable from hatred of the

"other": Jews, Chinese, sometimes Indians and more. Tolstoy would embrace Jews and Peasants together as humans. Gong does the same for Chinese and Thais. Usually, there is a sense of mutual contempt, fear and hatred.

Tolstoy is among the most revered writers of all times, and Gong is an elderly, poor basket weaver in a small Thai rural community, more than that, he can't even read or write, neither Thai, nor Chinese (Yok Burapha, 1991: 32). Tolstoy comes from the nobility representing the highest echelons of the "people of the land", who later steps towards those that are literally on the land (even engaging himself in a school for peasant children), while Gong is a part of the minority which is supposed to be looked at in disdain. They couldn't be more far apart in every sense.

But they both represent two important principles:

A) They don't need to personally "assimilate" or "acculturate" in order to be both fully proud of the Identity they feel defines them, while extending a loving hand to the others, be they the overwhelming (for some: dumb and scary) majority, or to the small (for some: parasitic and exploitative) minority. They are not just neutral. Their own sense of identity is augmented by the love of the other community, not by the hate of it, a stark contradiction to most explanations of what creates "identity" B) they are both iconoclastic through and through, each from his own perspective. Tolstoy combines strong sense Russian identity, but even a stronger sense of autonomy of what identity and his power to shape it. He is committed to the grail, but he will fill it with his own free blood. In his own micro cosmos, Gong does the same.

In that sense, I see much greater depth in the figure and personality of Gong, as he could also be read as an archetype of what Frank Chin call "Stereotype of Chinese (Chin wrote "Asian" as fits the American context, I substituted it for obvious purposes) as docile and compliant "good minorities"…the product of "racist love" (Kim, 1982: 174). In that later sense, the book could be interpreted in its entirety as a

semi-governmental propaganda.

4.2.2 The Descendants

There is only one descendant, Yok, a 12-13 year old kid, raised by his grandfather Gong for as long as remembers himself. Skipping a generation is not an accidental feature. It is also not only an issue of "intergenerational relations". It does more than that. It defines Yok. Parents are much more an object of rebellion than grandparents. With grandparents, age gaps are much too wider to facilitate direct clashes. Yok is inquiring about his parents by Gong refuses to tell; only saying that he will tell him later. Furthermore, a child leaving with an only grandparent, aware of the demise of his parents, is in a fragile situation with practically no back up alternatives. Children with lots of elder family members often play their little political games and shrewdly play the elders against one another.

Yok, unlike Suang U's children, is exposed to one model, as described above. The Thais do not range from "Phani's" to "Winyu's," or just manual workers. The Chinese do not range from tycoons to coolies. The ranges are narrow. The specificity of the socio-economic field, and the existence of workable balance (with some Chinese a bit more self enclosed, some more open) is different than Bangkok where multiple forms of accommodation or lack of accommodation exist and offer themselves as models for emulation or striving)

With such a stable, homogenous (in its balance) surrounding, and his grandfather, a towering giant of wise, unassuming humility, much more of a Lao Tzi than a Confucius, Yok is a budding, pliant, "sensitive plant" and the novel is about

how he is being fed, nourished, by his Grandfather, his teacher, his friends (especially Lamduan), even the coquettish Thai administrator wife, Tong Ho, and how he encounters various instructive events. He is involved in only one conflict, taking place in school, where he is abused first by Somkiat, an arrogant child of a high official, in fact the supervisor of education the district (Yok Burapha, 1991: 130-131).

As unrelated as it may sound, in my opinion Yok, as a character, can best be captured as a somehow romantic figure. The narrative, with Yok as the narrator, is naïve, open eyed, sympathetic, lacking corrupting adult knowledge. In addition, he is surrounded by mostly uncorrupted adults. His love and comradeship with Lamduan, a daughter of the "the earth", or "nature" are symptomatic. Her description, as "daughter of the land", the description of her physique as robust, healthy, glowing (Yok Burapha, 1991: 65), can be captured not only through the prism we used above to look at the love of nativism, peasants, "people of the land", but in a different, apolitical, fresher, "Rousseauesque" sense.

When I try to feel Yok, I can't escape a romantic poem by Percy Bysshe Shelley

"A Sensitive Plant in a garden grew,
And the young winds fed it with silver dew,
And it opened its fan-like leaves to the light.
And closed them beneath the kisses of Night.

And the Spring arose on the garden fair,
Like the Spirit of Love felt everywhere;
And each flower and herb on Earth's dark breast
Rose from the dreams of its wintry rest.

But none ever trembled and panted with bliss
In the garden, the field, or the wilderness,

Like a doe in the noontide with love's sweet want,
As the companionless Sensitive Plant
(Shelley, 1889: 254).

Yok is the tender Chinese plant that is nourished by Gong's rays of love and tolerance, and is planted on the rich Thai soil, like his companion Lamduan. (so, unlike Shelley's flower, he is not companionless). He will be formed by both, as positive influences. We will never know what he will be when he grows, but because of his grandfather's openness, his case is not a straight forward one of assimilation; it is more a case of a "co-breed". He is a Son of Thailand", he is a "Son of China", he is a son of both, and seamlessly so. There is none of the Kafkaesque "being torn apart" in him.

4.2.3 China, Memories of China, its Culture, its People

In a pattern similar to "Letters from Thailand", just stronger, China as a living place has no footprints in the novel. Gong's age can explain that aplenty, but elder Chinese in American Chinese novels are not limited by age and their memories are vibrant and rich. Unlike Suang U, we don't even have the shreds of village memories, even though in that earlier case, the son-to-mother epistolary form requires some kind of a minimum of concrete references to concrete places, or events, however laconic they are forced to be.

China comes in as a source of barely referenced wisdom, that is, it is quoted as from an "indiscriminate pool" of proverbs, sayings, and observations. It's difficult to explain the exact meaning of this. Folk wisdom is a human treasure that exists everywhere, and having passed through oral telling, it is unreferenced. The main exceptions are the Chinese and Jewish traditions. In the Chinese traditions, idiom and

proverbs mostly stand with a story behind. One can buy today book of Chinese idiom proverbs or idiom where each idiom is accompanied a story of long ago. That makes this world so lively, as it is populated by people and events. In the Jewish tradition, almost all idioms or proverbs are referenced to the bible or later traditions whether official (Talmudic and more) or collected oral traditions, all referenced to certain Rabbis in certain situations. Chinese school student learn these studiously, it's not the preserve of the select. From my own experience I can say that most Jews with links to tradition in some stage of their lives will know where wisdoms come from in the bible, or which Rabbi it was that coined later proverbs. Since it works both as oral and as part of elementary studies, or any Jewish Sunday school outside of Israel, a text where wisdoms are mentioned (and play an important part) without any referencing or context could seem unnatural, even today, not to mention decades ago. The transformation of Chinese wisdom into an unreferenced pool depersonalizes, and cuts it off from roots in tales and stories that imbue them with "life".

In that sense, both in "Being with Gong" and later novels, there starts an indiscriminate mixture between a general referencing to Chinese sources and general reference to what is described as "Boran said," and with "Boran" translated as "The Ancients," it's not clear whether the "Ancients" are also their "Ancestors", for which there is another clear term in Thai. This goes a further step from mere de-personalizing the wisdoms into de-nationalizing them. In comparison, any flip through the huge number of modern "self development" modern books will find that they take great care to reference their prescriptions for life.

Gong himself provides an anti-traditionalist philosophy which can be linked to that: In conclusion of a conversation with a Chinese neighbor, a mother that is unhappy with her son's decision to marry a Thai, Gong comments to Yok that this person is "is do bound by traditions and customs, unaware that traditions and customs were created only to facilitate, to serve, happiness in life, and here she wants life and happiness to serve traditions and customs, life should be suppressed, should be made

to serve, should be made a mere slave, of traditions and customs, as Yok just witnessed" (Yok Burapha, 1991: 218).

In other words, referenced words of wisdom that rely on the referencing as for their support have no weight. It has no weight whether Confucius, Mencius, Lao Tzi or many others said that (or authored a tradition). The wisdom has to stand on its own. Obviously as well, ascribing wisdoms to the "Ancients" offers them no validity. All this is fair enough and represents the core of what the European Enlightment was all about.

But again, it forgets that so much of Chinese wisdom is rooted in lively examples that do so much to demonstrate how this idiom work in real life (while in the Jewish traditions they are often the fruit of a detailed and subtle debate). Forgetting that is not liberation from irrelevant, random shackles of the past, it is forgetting a rich culture based on roots that are as alive today, as they were then, on real stories from people's lives, not just dogma.

Most other references to Chinese customs are practically "children's anthropology". Yok observes various differences between Thai and Chinese: Eating habits, social habits, work habits, snippets of world views, and so forth. It's not our mission here to delve into these details: Chinese love to eat pork; Thais love to eat spicy food…. There is much, much more. These are numerous because the novel is action poor, and moves along Yok's observations as he moves around, does things, interacts with other people. All of Yok's "anthropological" observations have one big common and critical thread. They are not judgmental. There is no good or bad. It is either neutral, or, each side has its own advantages or non advantages. It is the complete opposite of Suang U's numerous observations which are judgmental.

4.2.4 Thailand, Thai Culture, Thais

The first, and critical question here, coming before the question of how Thailand is perceived by the main protagonists, whether it is appreciated, or not appreciated, and so forth, is which Thailand we are dealing with. Unlike "Letters from Thailand", here is a rural setting, a small strip of shop houses with Chinese small time traders and artisans, all surrounded by large rural Thai majority, and ruled by authoritative Thai officials, living a relatively fancy life. The Chinese, engaging in a cash economy, might have, in some cases, more liquid assets than Thais, and some are moderately wealthy, but we don't have the overwhelming income gaps we find in the metropolis, Bangkok. A Chinese community exists, but its need to interact with Thais is broad, and it's too small to turn itself into a self enclosed place such as Yaowarat. Unlike Jewish small townships in Eastern Europe, Shtetls, it is distinct but without much borders. This comes back again to the cultural element: The Shtetls were religious communities, not only ethnic, where learning and scholarship of the Jewish traditions were the most prestigious occupations which were supported by the community as its "living heart". This "scholastic heart" was surrounded by small time merchants, generally fitting the profile of Gong's community. Without that scholastic heart, that sets the rule and the adherence to traditions, the intercommunity borders are much more open, as, again, in the case of Gong.

One can assume that Chinese do not arrive here straight off the boat, so this is not the scene of possibly antagonizing "first encounters". Its small economy has little room for the creation of tycoons, or in any case, it doesn't have the Chinese entrepreneur who rises up to accumulate capital and create a larger economic unit based on agricultural resources. There are much less manifestations of the more negative aspects of "Thais" and "Thailand", which Suang U is so happy to point at, and which are more symptomatic of big city life, modernity, than any specific "Thai" traits.

Thais are farmers, mostly for basic crops, but Chinese also work the land, with vegetables and fruit growing being their specialization (Yok Burapha, 1991: 163), Chinese are specialize as merchants, but Thais also attend markets selling their produce, the Chinese being those that facilitate the trade between the provincial town or even Bangkok, and their small district. Chinese are artisans; Thais are government officials, but not only fancy and arrogant parasites. Most perform important social roles such as teachers (with the exception of Banyong, Yok's teacher, a great admirer of Gong, and an admirable and courageous figure on his own. A Chinese ancestry is hinted at, by referring to his parents vegetables and fruits orchard (we shall return to that later). The administrative chief is described as being down to earth, sympathetic, often seen mingling with people in order to gauge things, and to understand if there are any difficulties that need to be addressed (Yok Burapha, 1991: 139).

Thailand is represented favorably throughout the book. The positive tilt is obvious. In "Letters from Thailand," Winyu studies a report titled "Primary Education in the Provinces: An Overview", perhaps a description of schools like that in which Yok studies. While reading he retorts to Suang U's comment that he never saw a Thai working hard like him in an annoyed fashion: "You never spent a day on a Thai farm; you ought to some time. Instead of comparing every Thai with the laborers in your bakery" (Botan, 1994: 504). In "Being Ah Gong," Thai farmers are looked upon not only favorably, but in appreciation, as hard workers, dedicated, honest, steady. Statements like "all the farmers (Thai-my comment) that dealt with and knew Gong are good people, honest, buy and sell in a straight forward manner, and have a kind heart, which is the one of the main traits of Thai people, not only that there are no trickery in their way of doing trade (does someone else use trickery????-my comment), but they might even add up a a little present after the deal is sealed" (Yok Burapha, 1991: 171); "the fact that Thai love peace and a quiet solitude, as the owners of each square inch of this, their land, is what allowed the wandering Chinese to establish themselves here, start mercantile activities, and found this market. In

some communities like these we hardly see Thai and some might think that the Thais are the minority" (Yok Burapha, 1991: 93). If one notices, both statements imply negative commentary on the Chinese.

Gong says: "All of us, born on this earth, need to have a sense of gratitude" (Yok Burapha, 1991: 186). Gratitude, which with "Nam-Jai" is most often cited as core Thai values, is adopted by Gong. His gratefulness to the protection offered him by the generosity of the Thai King is also often mentioned: In the beginning and at the end of the novel. Gong freely recognizes, appreciates and appropriates Thai values that fit his world view. Here he is blind to labels describing "country of origin"

What is often a sore point: Thai Officialdom, does not escape criticism, but is neither uniformly negative. As mentioned, many lower rank Thai government employees fulfill important social roles, such as teachers, even though they act with some exaggerated self importance. The novel dotes on the teacher Banyong, practically an adopting father of Yok (Yok Burapha, 1991: 272) and a close friend, even admirer, of Gong (Yok Burapha, 1991: 56). Other teachers are described respectfully; the departing Nai Amphoer is described admirably as a man of the people, one who goes out and mingles with people in places like the market place, in order to hear of their affairs at first hand. His successor is described, during the farewell party at the end of his term, being of a similar kind, thus signaling continuity of good governance (Yok Burapha, 1991: 271).

It is only the sons of high officials who are described as often being spoiled and arrogant. The only scene in which a high official is portrayed in a highly negative light is the one following a scene in which his son, Somkiat, abuses Yok, who, defending himself, injures Somkiat. This results in a scene in which the father of the spoiled brat, who is the chief of education in the Amphoer, is coming, in an arrogant and abusive manner, to inflict heavy punishment on Yok without bothering to check

the facts. Here, however, the entire body of the teachers and headmaster, having checked the facts, stand behind Yok. The fact that some of them are close to the Nai Amphoer, who is above the chief of education, is mentioned as a "political advantage." Still, not punished, Yok is still compelled to apologize is a demeaning way, by prostrating at the feet of Somkiat and his father, and offering them the semblance of worship. Chachawal (or "Pom") (Yok Burapha, 1991: 20), another son of a high official, is a friend of Yok, but also occasionally shows his arrogant and spoilt side (Yok Burapha, 1991: 72) . The novel, however, does not focus on Pom but on his mother, Mrs Tong Hu, and on that, later.

As regards government officials, we need to bear in mind that there is another marker, one that separates them from both the Thai farmers and the Chinese merchants and artisan, and that is their status, which is superior. They are not one with the Thai peasants. They live separately and do not intermingle with the other two groups unless as part of their work. The markers are therefore that of class (Yok Burapha, 1991: 192), and it's not spelled out if there is also Chinese ancestry, pure or mixed, within their ranks.

What is missing is the Thai temple and Thai Buddhism, except for side remarks, such as when Teacher Banyong explains to his pupils that in the past, the temples served as schools (Yok Burapha, 1976: 50) and a detail of his history that after the greatest love affair of his life failed, and he came out broken hearted, he became a monk for a period, to regain his balance (Yok Burapha, 1976: 55). This "horrible omission is diligently rectified in a later, "female version" of "Being with Gong", namely "Ah-Mah," by Chaiwat Damrongkitkulchai, 2007 (where the grandfather figure is replaced by a grandmother figure, and the story is prolonged to a life span instead of a glimpse, but the novel never achieved popularity and literary wise it, in my opinion, weak).

The silence speaks loud, but what does it really say? It does not reflect anything beyond the fact mentioned already. Gong is an iconoclast; he does not need the institutions to guide his spirit. He is not against such institutions when they assist other people in their spiritual advancement. Maybe Gong spent time in a Thai Buddhist temple, maybe not. If he did, he learnt the important things, and moved on. Thailand for Gong is primarily its people. Institutions are created by and reflect people, perhaps the people as a whole, perhaps by bad, corrupt groups, or by good intentioned groups. The Sangha, as the most prevalent grass roots institute in Thailand broadly reflects the good values of Thailand and of Thais, and Gong, seeing Thais in that highly positive light does need the institution as a mediator. Gong himself embodies a number of Buddhist values, knowingly or not. As said above, Gong does not "buy" values on the power of "brands."

Another feature of Thailand particularly unique to "Being with Gong" is female beauty. What could be construed as a minor detail is perhaps not at all. The administrator's wife, "Kun-Nai" Tongho is clearly identified as Thai by her physique. Yok, throughout the book, displays a secret admiration of Thai female beauty (Yok Burapha, 1991: 22-23, 75, 144, 244), with a particular emphasis both on its sense of health and strength, as well as the feminine, curvy lines it displays in a somewhat teasing manner. In fact, we can't avoid stating clearly that Yok's comments contain a strong sexist tone, but not in a negative way. In a world were "sex" has been commercialized to such a degree, and presented as immoral conservatives, ranging from Victorians to various religious doctrinaires, in Yok's world, sexuality is linked, in an innocent way, to what it was linked to from time immemorial: fertility. (And that is the source of the numerous fertility goddesses that flourished in the distant past. There are no Chinese beauties in the novel, and definitely no Chinese women with the powerful sexual appeal we find in descriptions in Indian novels such as (Mukherjee, 1989: 14-15). There are no ugly Chinese women either. It's as if beauty and sex appeal (because no other description can be applied to the way in which Yok observes these elder Thai women) are not part of what Chinese women are about. This latent motif of "Chinese a-sexuality" also echoes in rebellious Chinese-American

novels of the 1960-1970, where the main complaint is that of a "disexualization" of Chinese males!!! as we saw in chapter 3. And behind the profusion of images seemingly coming from different aspects of life, there exist strong links. It's the implicit equation of sexuality=virility=connection to nature=being sons of soil=being rooted, grounded, "real." This has interesting implications to the issue of Chinese Women, which we shall get to later.

But Yok's infatuations remind me of what also pervaded the Zionist movement, starting from the ideological drive to go back not only to an ancestral home, but to become "sons of the soil" there. In the Jewish Diaspora in East Europe we find, in lack of any other words, a "fetish," of wholesome Ukrainian, Hungarian, Polish and Russian peasant women, their healthy tan, robust, buxom physique and golden braids, a fetish which haunted pale, unexercised Diaspora Jews, divorced from nature and married to scholarly or mercantile life. The desire was that of becoming this enchanting other in their own homeland. Early Zionist self depictions, and even artistic renditions, celebrate the new "sons of the soil," and demonstrate a bottomless hatred (or self hatred, one could say) of the "Diaspora Jew." Up to this day I am struck by the fact that Zionist proud visual portrayals of women were nothing but a portrayal of those Ukrainian or Hungarian wholesome peasants, now renamed as "Jewish Zionist Pioneers."

The Diaspora Jew is characterized both by his pale, sometimes sickly looking physique and his either scholarly or mercantile occupations. Jews immigrated to Israel to become "sons of the soil" (that is, in fact, the secret behind the question of why Israeli agriculture is so advanced: at a times when peasants only dealt with agriculture and before it became a subject for science, in Israel, professors and scholars from the leading capitals of Europe, took spades with pride. Soon enough, their intellectual and scientific background made "miracles in the desert."

All this, but with spite to any Diaspora mercantile activities, I still recall, as a young child, being confronted by our towering agriculture teacher (for city boys!!!!), Noah, a elderly giant of a man, who came with the pioneering and highly celebrated second wave of Jewish immigration to what was in his days the British Mandate of Palestine. He saw me taking a coin and holding it in my teeth. "Take it out he said. Don't put money in your mouth. Money is a dirty thing". He didn't refer to hygiene but to the moral value of money. Noah would have liked Lamduan a lot, could he have seen her showing her disdain for money, flatly refusing Yok's offer of splitting the wages for their work (Yok Burapha, 1991: 257).

While Gong towers above ethnic distinctions, loyal to what he was born as, but not bound by it, Yok's secret desires reflect a yearning to be, like Lamduan, "real," to connect to the earth, to shed a sense of rootlessness nobody ever told him about but which he feels at the innermost, and least rational layers of his beings. He says to himself: "Lamduan, I shall never forget you for even one day of my life, I who is just one penniless shop house kid" (Yok Burapha, 1991: 251). Somewhere, beyond all of Gong's enlightened teachings, beyond the Gong that encourages studying Thai first, to study in a Thai school, to postpone Chinese school for maybe later, there is something infinitely stronger. Yok worships Thais, through their women, through Lamduan, they represent the fertile land, and he wants to connect to the land. He doesn't want, like Gong, to stand above the "fray" He will assimilate….because he has to.

4.2.5 Chinese Women in the Novel

Unlike Botan's novel, "Being with Gong" features very few Chinese women, even though it features, as already mentioned, Thai women in a very positive light. The main episode that features a Chinese woman figure is that where Aunt Ngek Ju, a neighbor, resists her son,'s marriage to a Thai woman: "'But I don't want Ah Peng

(her son-my comment) to marry that woman' she emphasized. (Gong) Why, who is that woman?', ' I don't know', 'Ao, not knowing is not the issue…what is so bad in her that you refuse to have her as a daughter in law', 'it is Thai' Aunt Ngek Ju blasted out and against started sobbing as if a horrible disaster took place" (Yok Burapha, 197: 215-216). Later on, Gong arranged for Peng to pretend to go to Bangkok out of frustration, Ngek Ju relents finally when she realizes that opposition to the marriage will make her lose her son, and shortly after the marriage, realizes how wonderful Nuan, Peng's Thai wife is. (Yok Burapha, 1976: 269-270).

In relation to this case, Gong has lots to say about the blindness of tradition, how it is rooted in lack of education (Yok Burapha, 1976: 218- 223). He also links it to the issue of male primacy. Gong says: "Chinese of the old generation see the marriage of as a matter of supreme importance, especially in the case of the older son who will be the most important person in the house when his parents pass away, and will carry the family's name. Due to that, there is a great deal of worrying about who will be the daughter in law, will she be good enough for him, will she be good enough for the family" (Yok Burapha, 1976: 223). Gong also says that: "Concerning the marriage of a daughter, Chinese do not see it as an important matter. They look after her until she is ready to marry and then let her marry her away, because they believe that 'having a daughter is like having a sewer in front of the house', which you have to take care so that it doesn't create a stench. If not looked well after, she can create pollution and shame the family. Therefore, marrying a daughter off comforts the mind of traditional Chinese family head (Yok Burapha, 1991: 225). Gong continues here to describe the subservient role of women in traditional Chinese society, their being the "hind legs," their perceived unsuitability for education, and when she needs to work besides the house work, she has to do it at home, or, if the work has to be conducted outside the household, she must go with a group. Daughters of wealthy families do not work, and just stay at home, perhaps learning some handicraft work and live luxurious life. Also, when a husband cannot be easily found for a daughter, her mother will start worrying that can't "be sent away" or "got rid of" (Yok Burapha, 1991: 32). Gong simply spills out a detailed description of the prejudice against

women and its aspects.

This description goes from here to a detailed description of matchmakers, and we will leave it at that. The description goes on along the tracks of Yok as the young anthropologist, as the novel is full of numerous other observations he makes about Thai and Chinese customs. Description aside, it's obvious from Gong assigning these customs as traditional, dogmatic, and ancient, that he is basically against this world view. Gong, like Ang Bui, is an independent thinker, and he despises the clinging to archaic traditions at the expense of life. But besides this implied disagreement, Gong makes no explicit declarations, as he so often does on issues of inter-ethnic relations, and ethnic bigotry. He would agree with a hypothetical Ang Bui in his narrative, but it's not his focus. He is more interested in the ethnic than the gender issue.

Yok is even less interested, and he is too young. But his practical fetish with Thai women is not without meaning. Thai women probably attract him not only because of their physique, or "latent fertility", but because they are so more their own persons, so much freer, natural, unconfined, the proverbial "Amazons" whose sexuality is unsuppressed, is challenging, teasing, again, I refer to (Mukherjee, 1989: 14-15). In his own way, and by preferring the other, Yok expresses his distaste to the sewers in front of the house, the docility, the servility. Yok would admire a young Ang Bui or Meng Ju. Maybe the way they would move their thighs would not match Tong-Hu's, but they will be his kind of girls, different than Lamduan, but definitely best friends or more. So Yok judges the end result of the gender status of Chinese women from the innocent eyes of a 12 years old Chinese youngster. He doesn't like the kind of women it produces, he likes the opposite. He is not arguing out of rational principles, and that may make it perhaps even a stronger kind of vote against the Chinese gender role system. In different novels, especially those of Indian descent, we could see clearly what Yok seems to be longing for and he might end rejecting Chinese tradition, and especially it's gender bias part, because for him, it is so unnatural.

4.3 "Letter from Thailand," "Being with Gong," and the State's Ideology and Propaganda

The above two novels stand out from the rest in one important sense. Though both were written as part of a number of novels written by these authors that concern Chinese-Thai and that these other novels are very different than these two, still these two embody strong messages that support assimilation. "Letter from Thailand" main character is a Chinese immigrant that consistently abuse Thais, but ends up learning that it is a Thai (or rather a Thai, his son-in-law Winyu and his mother) who really stand for him in times of need. In standing for him, they display selfless grace and kindness that he did not encounter among his fellow Chinese-Thais. Their acts are accompanied by words that bring to his attention that his opinions of Thais are narrow-minded, based on a very small group of Thais he encountered in very specific conditions, and that beyond his narrow horizons, there stands a nation imbued with values of kindness and humanity. He learns that the mindless pursuit of money leads to misery and that being happy with one's lot is where happiness lies. And he also learns that rather than indolent and lazy, as he always saw them, they are hard workers, but that their hard work is not necessarily money oriented. Suang U concludes by a strong declaration: "I am sometimes ashamed of my defeat, ashamed that I failed to live here as a true Chinese, and raise a Chinese family. I could not shelter them from the thousands of daily experiences which made them another people, another race. There are so many of us Chinese here, yet the Thai have won. And it was never a contest anyway…If there is a better man than Winyu Thepyalert, I have not seen him. I was of the opinion that a good heart is not money in the bank….(Botan, 1991: 510). The declaration of defeat, and the admittance of the nobility of the Thais, the recognition that though the Chinese-Thais are numerous, they never had a chance, is a recognition of the superiority of the Thai culture and the poverty of the Chinese way of life as he knows it (and of course, his knowledge is limited, or compromised by pursuing a commercial race for money in Yowarat). The

declaration is a clear admittance that assimilation is not only the necessary path, but it is the preferred path. It's a path to be chosen not because of policies but because it is where his heart takes him.

"Being with Gong" sends the same message, but from a different angle, which is a Chinese elder, also first generation immigrant, who we meet, unlike Suang U, not at his arrival but decades later. Gong stands for humanistic values which transcend ethnic divides, but he sees in the Thais that surround him positive values, there is more negativity among the market Chinese even if that is not declared, and he encourages his grandson to adopt Thailand as a true home, to study in the Thai school, not in the Chinese one, and to fit in. His grandson's admiration of the Thai farmers, particularly his school friend Lamduan "the soul of the earth," demonstrates a deep desire to abandon the drift of Diaspora life, and to grow roots in Thailand's fertile ground, among its gentle and kind people. That is also a call for assimilation, just lacking the need to overcome prior biases.

The inclusion of these novels in the national curriculum indicates that they were considered as useful in a policy of assimilation. The Thai government, facing Chinese Nationalism (which, being Republican, was considered as a threat to the status of the Monarchy), Chinese massive immigration that effected demography and, due to the immigration of Chinese women, created Chinese-Thai communities that were more and more separated, and then faced with the threat of Communism, and the misguided fear that Chinese-Thais will serve as a fifth column All these led to nervous policy responses, repressive as far as manifestations of Chinese identity and self organization were concerned, but oscillating between an earlier fear of assimilation though of not being genuine and the desire to inflame Chinese hatred as a nationalistic rallying cry (Skinner, 1957: 375-376) and the later policy initiatives of Marshal Pibun Songkram that aimed at active assimilation, encouraging abandoning Chinese citizenship, accepting Thai citizenship, loyalty to Thailand and the King. This open door to assimilation was accompanied by closing doors for Chinese cultural

expression of any kind (Skinner, 1957: 379).

Thai scholars have noted the usefulness of such novels for the propagation of the state's assimilative ideology. Natthanai Prasannam notes at the beginning of his article "Yoo Kab Kong" by Yok Burapha: The Pursuit of Integration Ideology in Thai ocial Context that his research: "aims at studying Yoo Kab Kong (Life with Grandpa), the novel by Yok Burapha, through Gramsci's conception of Cultural Hegemony and Altthusser's conception of Ideology. The study will focus on the reproduction of the ideology of integration as reflected in the novel. It is found that Yoo Kab Kong illuminates the identity of Chinese diasporas in Thailand which is related to the discourse of "under the Royal charisma" constructed by the state for integrating the Chinese diasporas into the mainstream. Comparing this novel to other Thai Chinese diasporic Literature, it is obvious that Yoo Kab Kong does not depict the conflict between Chinese people of different generations and does not value the memory of homeland as Chinese American writers do to shape their Chinese identity. Moreover, the Thai government includes this novel as a recommended book for school students as well as reconstructs it in popular media such as movie, cartoon book, and television series to reinforce the status of "model minority" of the Chinese Diaspora. The state uses this novel to pursue the ideology of integration among other ethnic groups to be aware of 'Thainess'" (published in Naresuan's University's "Humanities Journal", year 4, 2nd volume: January to April 2007, 97-120).

If such characterization applies to "Being with Gong", it definitely applies to "Letters from Thailand", as both been utilized in the same fashion. However, "Letters from Thailand" has numerous features that are different from "Being with Gong". Unlike the former it does not have any continuous declaration of loyalty and gratefulness to the king, and rather more expressions of appreciation of the land and its fertility. Also, while not rich in Chinese culture, and in fact, non of the Thai novels can be compared to the American ones in that, it can't be said not to value the memory of China as a homeland. Not only is it remembered, and the ancestral Po

Leng village is mentioned deep into the text, but it is most touchingly remembered in the decade's long correspondence with a mother that doesn't write back because the letters are withheld by a police censor. That last feature is the one that throws a touching, humane light on Suang U with all his grumpiness, and puts the government, represented by the censor, in a very cruel, almost sadistic light. "Being with Gong" is conflictless with the exception of his straightening up his Chinese old fashioned neighbor Ngek Ju. "Letters from Thailand" is all conflict, especially of the generation kind. Only one of his children, Meng Ju, marries a Thai (Weng Kim marries a half Thai, but one who would not be focused on as representative of Thainess, or even half Thainess). The others remain in Tejapira's Luukjin community, with no signs of a fast and/or sincere assimilation. They will adjust, so it seems, where they will have too, and that could also be a situational adjustment. The argument in favor of Thailand lies partly in the way Suang U's disdain towards his new land makes him grotesque, but mainly it lies with the trio of Winyu, Meng Ju and Winyu's mother. They appear (except Meng Ju) in a small part of the novel, but in a very effective and concentrated way.

The issue of "model minority" referred to by Natthatanai puts into question the contents of the state ideology. Model minority, an American term often looked at as degrading because it stops from full acceptance, is different from assimilation which means full acceptance. Minorities can persist in a society which does not see their differences as compromising their full membership in the society at large. In such case, being an ethnic minority is no different than being an ardent fan of a sports team, member of a club, a religion or any other grouping based on different principles and interests. In a way, Gish and Louise's view of their ethnic identity is similar to be so.

The Thai government sought assimilation rather than the creation of model minority, which usually are maintained in such status due to racist barriers. The academic literature confirms that this did not exist in Thailand, and if it did, it was

only directed at dark skinned groups.

Natthanai refers to a number of Thai dissertations about Chinese-Thai literature, most of which descriptive, for example a study by Thaniwat Boontoh who focuses on "Being with Gong" as a novel which describes the ways of life of Chinese-Thais. Natthanai, on the other hand, focuses on altthuser's concept of Ideology produced by the state and Gramsci's concept of state Hegemony in what people are directed to believe by the state, with thought control being an instrument that can replace physical force if exercised correctly. In our case, "Being with Gong" fits the bill more smoothly because its pro state (or grateful to the state) all through the narrative, it lacks, as Natthanai points out, conflicts with Thais or the state, and it projects an idyllic and harmonic state of affairs which supposedly reflects Gong, but in fact represents Thailand, with Gong being a character that is particularly attuned to that and who works to foster it more.

However, "Letters from Thailand" has the advantage of being a international success, which better explains it's promotion, but more than that, the idyllic of "Being with Gong" are sometimes too saccharinic to be taken as realistic, which gives it a certain sense of being an utopia. "Letters from Thailand" has a stronger feel of the tensions and hardship in life; it is more convincing to the degree that some people think the letters are genuine. The fact that acceptance of Thailand: "The Thais have won" and have done so as a triumph of goodness. Like vanything in life, achievement won by struggle is appreciated more than gainng it without struggle. The tension and suspense of that gives more value to the success of placing Suang U on the path to assimilation.

So we have two narratives that are suited to serve the needs of the government and are mobilized to do so. They are very different, but they reach the same conclusions. Botan's narrative is provenly more convincing, and its having been an

international success is a proof of that. But neither government that look for instruments to foster ideologies are not picky as for the exact literary details of plot and characters as long as the point they want made is made. In a way, one can say that "the proof of the pudding is in the eating". The pudding, or the state ideology conveyed through these novels was well taken, and that's the proff of its effectiveness, not withstanding the vast differences between the novels

4.4 "Trough the Scales of the Dragon" by Prapassorn Sewikul

4.4.1 The First Generation

We mentioned earlier, when writing about "Letters from Thailand", the dictum of "In Rome, be a Roman" prevailed. If the Jews "invented" Diaspora and maintenance of identity in Diaspora, at least as concepts we often refer to, the "In Rome be a Roman", similarly defines adjustment, accommodation, and, in the ultimate sense, assimilation. "In Rome, be a Roman", is an attempt at a good practical suggestion, it is not an ideological statement. But it has a stand-point which says that assimilation is the optimal strategy.

Suang U, as a first generation immigrant, attempted not to be a Roman in Rome, actually he was sneering at non Romans attempting to be Romans in Rome. An important point in that novel was that he did not refuse to be a "Roman" after carefully checking what being a Roman means, and whether there is only one standard of being a Roman. He was superficial, based his impressions on a very limited range of observations (as Winyu tried to convey to him at the end (Botan: 1991, 504). But, as we saw, not only did he discover the beauty of Rome, but ultimately, any shred of his attempts to remain, to a certain degree, a non-Roman in Rome were utterly vanquished. Rome won.

In the third novel, Sewikul's "Through the Scales of the Dragon", the main protagonist, the Patriarch Liang Suepanich, while clearly defining himself as Chinese throughout the narrative, is not fastidious on where the borders lie. The point is that Chinese identity is never defined in a purist fashion which attempts to prescribe that every facet of life corresponds to a cultural norm which is considered to be Chinese. It happily mixes up with local cultural traditions which it does not reject due to their being not Chinese and it embraces Chinese traditions when they seem to fit, or not to be a source of problems or obstacles.

An interesting way to describe Liang's stand in a terminology of the internet age, it is that for Liang, being Chinese is the "default option" in matters of how to conduct him in different situations. . This term is useful because when discussing different identities and the issue of how the individual makes decisions on what to be or not to be in different areas of life, then this individual is managing options, while freedom to manage these is limited by certain established rules, either legal, or accepted social "rules of the game". But he would most probably still consider himself as Chinese even if he had to act more Thai in more situations, as many of his friends do.

Another way to put it is that he he has a mind to maintain a "core Chinese identity", but adopts practical identities or semblances of such, when needed. The inner/outer, core/peripheral dualisms are common in literature on the subject of identities and Diasporas. Post Modernists say that "In recasting the analysis of identities and sub-subjectivities, we reject the conventional assumption that a person simply "has" or "possesses" an Identity. Roger Rouse notes the presumption of liberal discourse that identity "is something that non problematically connects individuals to society"," with individuals who share some common traits thereby having an "identity" as members of a particular group in society. In contrast, critical

anthropology, feminism, and cultural studies have come to view identities and bodies, though variously marked, possed, and experienced, as unstable fortmations constituted within webs of power relations. Different identities-gender, race, nationality, subculture, dominant culture-intersect in and constitute an individual" (Ong & Noninin: 1997, 24-25).

In between the view of identity of a singularity, the view most often promoted by the nation-state, and its view, as presented above as a nexus of many sub "identities", there a plethora of compromises which view one of the axis's in the plethora as a core and the others as adaptations to circumstances. The base is usually ethnic and is often closely related to race. Most of the others are flexible, but only one stands out, not only as equal in inflexibility to ethnicity, but, in fact, much harder, and that is gender, a facet which was often ignored completely in earlier literature of identities, national identities, assimilation, and so forth.

Some models talk of "pretending" to adopt foreign customs; I personally do not think that Liang ever "pretends" to be more Thai than he is. He adopts what he has to, or what is useful, but it becomes a part of him, whether outside or at home. He doesn't seem to conduct different "outside life" and "at home life". In that case, he is more of a more flexible nexus, compared to Suang U's attempt at singularity.

The components which compose Liang's identity are, again, not a formula. There are no formulas, and there is nobody to declare or enforce them. We can see that in the fictious writer's maternal grandfather, a wealthy tycoon in his own right has a very different take on life than Liang, regardless of the fact that both him and Liang came from China at the same time and started in the same manner, which is grueling physical work. The maternal grandfather is a happy spender, going out on for expensive meals, music shows, girls, and card games, while Liang keeps and watches every baht, spends his entire time at work or thinking about work. The

maternal grandfather claims that he knows only of this life, he made money and he wants to enjoy it to the fullest, noting jokingly that would he be born a dog in his next life, how he would be able to buy the things that make him happy. (Prapassorn Sweikul: 2006, 285).

It is important that Liang's story is told by one of his grandchildren, and it therefore lacks the details of what went through his mind in the first months or years of his arrival, which is the driving force of the narrative of Suang U. The delegation of the narration to an offspring, and a grandchild at that, assures us of sufficient opaqueness, perhaps a desirable result in a novel that is more focused on actions than feelings and thoughts. But nevertheless, Liang himself is quoted plentifully on his memories from this formative period. The fact that we find no "Suang U" in these ventures down memory lane proves little, because immigrants that succeeded and made a fortune in their new land, would naturally tend to forget the prejudices and moments of bitterness of their time as a new arrival. In any case though, if such prejudices existed, they did not feature prominently later on, while Suang U hangs on to them as to dear life itself.

One more thing a third generation narrator would find it hard to record is the development of his elder's character, especially a grandfather. On the other side, recording his actions in business and career, in matters of family development, are observable and can easily be recorded, even if based on a mosaic of memories heard as stories by other descendants and the protagonist himself, not to mention firsthand experience. But development in matters such as his process of accommodation with the new country is practically impossible to record, because, again, of the opaqueness of the inner world. In any case, though, the novel betrays no signs of such processes of inner adjustments. The only hints we might get are all involved with Liang's need to confront recalcitrant descendants and the troubles they sink into.

However, unlike Suang U, he never reveals any signs of attributing these problems to the surrounding Thai society and its values and its effect on his children. Liang has no beef with Thai society. Two siblings who sink low are both described as being badly influenced by being with common workers and adopting their life style, but while the tragic case of Anarakorn takes place in Thailand, where an assignment to bring a spoilt brat down to earth by placing him on the production floor results in his socializing with negative elements among the workers, tilting towards alcoholism and gambling, ending in death in a gambling conflict, (Prapasson Sewikul: 2006, 296-300), the case of Chanachai takes place in Hong-Kong, during his apperenticeship on the docks, getting involved in the gangestery life of sailors and stevedores (Prapasson Sewikul 2006, 67).. Liang's inner reckoning, which causes the deterioration of his health step by step, is not about his being in Thailand or his failure to maintain Chinese identity in his family. It is the suffering of a head of a sprawling three generations family clan, who loses his ability to keep the clan all together and united, and keeping that clan is what he sees as his most important calling.

In spite of Liang's analysis of the relative importance of where one was born and where one was is buried, there is an expectation that born and buried in Thailand, his descendants, if managing to remain a family that will always keep its unity, will remain, as he does, or in different ways, Chinese. Unity of the clan is therefore the key to maintaining a "core" Chinese identity, which is basically the inner feeling of "who one is". While being grateful to Thailand, Liang and his descendant are socially involved mostly with their own, namely Thais of Chinese origin, and they maintain close and active ties with Hong-Kong, the center of Overseas China at that time. These are not memories, stories, nostalgia of an ancestral place that has been closed for all practical reasons; these are real things which are an important part of the present. I will expand more on this point further on.

An important concluding remark to this section would be that as objectively as a comparison can be made, considering the very different narrator point of views,

Liang, compared to Suang U, is much more interested in minding his own business and family than in sitting and grumbling about the ways of life of Thais. Since their migration time is similar, since both men start from the bottom and are commercially oriented, the differences between them might be less an issue of "personality types" and more an issue of how the writers want to describe this generation. Obviously the writers are individuals with different point of views, but one cannot ignore the time gap between the times in which the novels were written.

I believe that this by itself reflects the changes that the ethnic Chinese community went through, and the way it looked upon itself at different times, more than a reflection of what this generation was like, broadly speaking. Each consecutive generation has different interpretation of his ancestors, especial ancestors that stood in the very middle of crucial cross roads such as immigration. Agendas and viewpoints change, and any new narrative will incorporate these. These new interpretation, new narratives, teach us far more about the narrators, than their subject of narration.

4.4.2 The Descendants

Liang, with three wives, has a sprawling clan. The fact that the age gaps between the different wives is more or less a generation, creates a situation where grandchildren of the first wife correspond in age to the children of the second wife, and their children age roughly correspond in age to the children of the third wife.

The wives themselves present an ethnically diverse picture. The first, the "China wife", Mei-Ling, married Liang and bore his first two sons, Andy and Tian, while he was still in China. The marriage was supposed to fortify Chinese links, as it was done with many prospective immigrants (Prapasson Sweikul: 2006, 8). Andy, married Peggy, the single daughter of a Hong-Kong shipping tycoon, and had one

son, Chanchai (Prapasson Sweikul: 2006, 23). The marriage itself was a grand and happily approve affair, but Peggy's choice to medically close the doors on any future children, in order to be best able to preserve her good looks, was a source of much aggravation, especially to the mother, the "Chinese wife" (Prapasson Sewikul: 2006; 24). Tian elopes, while studying in Hong-Kong, with a Thai-Chinese class mate (Prapasson Sweikul: 2006, 18). The wife is from good enough background, but the elopement aggravates his mother. Andy has one son, Chanchai. Originally the pride and object of many hopes, he does practically everything he can against the family, its business and its reputation. He is the only one exempted from starting at the bottom of the organization, a revered mechanism to avoid over spoiling, due to his mother's power, her father's riches and the fact that he took care of Liang in Hong-Kong during his 6 years of exile. First, opening a competing venture with his mother, a venture which copies the family company's commercial formula, but coming in as a bitter commercial rival. Failing, he is rescued generously by his grandfather, against the wishes of other siblings. He takes the "prize" and starts a financial pyramid scheme, which booms at the beginning, becoming national phenomena, but inevitably collapses in the end, leaving him with huge debts. He runs away to Hong-Kong, the family decides not to rescue him, and Liang, getting up in age and recognizing the enormous sacrifice that will be demanded from the family, and the little expected gratitude, acquiesces to his other children's strong opposition to a rescue. Chanchai also engages in incestuous with his cousin, Anantana, which ends in a bad way, as we shall describe shortly. Chanchai walks out of a pre-arranged marriage just before it is conducted, driven by the lingering effects of the affair with Anantana. Tian has two children. Rawee, a sort of black sheep in appearance and manners, is forced into a prearranged marriage serving family interests. He later rebels against that and finds himself tempted by a company employee, who also tempts his half brother, Anon, all leading to plenty of conflicts. His sister, Duangdao, is the only to leave the family voluntarily, choosing to pursue simpler life as a farmer. Failing in two farming ventures financed by her father, she ends up running a small backpackers bungalow in the south, maintaining very little contact with the family.

The second wife, Niam, who he marries in Thailand, and who helps him in his formative years there, is either Chinese or Thai-Chinese. This point is never clarifies. She bears him five children. The first, Nat, after whom many of the family's earlier companies are named, marries Orn, a school teacher. Nat is a happy member of the family, has lots of friends and is on good term with all members of the family. He disappoints his father and grandfather only by eloping with Orn, a school teacher who is older than him by 5 years. The two have children and we have no information about Orn ethnic identity. Niam's second son, Nop, the father of the fictious writer, is a simple but warm person, who remains a factory man all his life, indicating his down to earth disposition. While being shy and secretly in love with a simple Thai working class woman, he is forced into a prearranged marriage with an astonishing beautiful and gracious lady, too fancy for him. His wife, Suwitra, is the daughter of another Chinese tycoon with strong relations with Liang. We hear plenty about this maternal grandfather, who is the only relative of Liang's age who is referred to (except for Peggy's father in Hong-Kong). Their children are Napa, the writer, and Napit, her elder brother, who plays a small role in the narrative. The third child, Anut, a daughter, is one of the more outspoken, and yet cool-minded and perceptive characters in the narrative. She is married to Adon, a university professor, whose exact ethnicity is not specified. Their marriage seems smooth; they have one son, Rintorn. The 4th child, Anon, a son, is one of the more accomplished ones. Graduating with a Phd in Business Administration from the USA, he introduces new ideas of modern management, and becomes a central figure in the family's ventures. His personal life is messier. He is unmarried, infatuated with the same staff-member-turned-temptress as Rawee, his half brother, he buys an apartment for her, and spends much time with her. His business acumen seems to satisfy his parents. We don't hear much in the way of disappointments with his way of life. Niam's fifth child, Anantana, a daughter, main role is to act out a nightmarish incestuous love affair with Chanchan, her half brother. Getting pregnant and then having an illegal and medically dangerous abortion, she stays in the house, more as a shadow than an active person.

The third wife, Malai, a Thai from the north, is an arranged comfort wife. As can be expected, she is humble and lacks confidence in her position. She bears two children: Anongpanga, a daughter, and a son, Anarakorn. The two present diametrically opposed cases. Anongpanga, a youngest daughter favorite of Liang, is strong minded, independent and extremely bright. She insists on studying abroad (the only daughter), comes back and impresses Liang and his close circle of advisors, family member and outsiders, to such a degree, that she is appointed as the manager of a large new venture. Having married/eloped in the US with a Thai man, and having divorced him for the usual reasons of womanizing, she has one son, Chawiwan, whom she raises as a single mother. In contrast to her stellar success and position, her brother, Anarakorn, is the worst tragic case in the family. Brought up spoiled to an extreme degree, he cannot accept the family's tradition of starting from the bottom of the organization. He starts to get, with factory workers, into heavy drinking, and soon moves on to gambling. Later found to have stolen large amounts from the family to cover gambling losses, he finally over gambles, is unable to pay, and is beaten and stabbed by gambling gangsters. He becomes comatose, neither live nor dead, for the duration of the narrative

4.4.3 China, Memories of China, its Culture and its People

In "Through the Scales of the Dragon", like its predecessors, China itself is not remembered clearly. It's understandable from the point of a grandchild, who "touches" China only while telling the story of the first of Liang's wives', Meiling, and the two sons she gave birth in China. The marriage was a result of grandfather's interest in moving out of home to the city of Swatow and trying his luck in the Southern Seas. Grand grand father and Grand grand mother were afraid that that grandfather will fall to the charms of ladies from foreign countries, so they asked a matchmaker to find an in-law. Grandfather never saw big grandmother (my comment: common reference in the novel to the first grandmother, Meiling), and they had only two and a half years together, but had two sons….and when Uncle Andy was four

months old, Liang went on his way to Thailand, as was his earlier intention, and left big grandmother and the two sons in China" (Prapasson Sewikul: 2006, 7-8).

This is the only China "story" in the book; it's dry and factual almost as if it was taken from a standard history book about Chinese immigrants to Southeast Asia. The only slight addition to that is a description of a photo big grandma when she was still in China.

The remnants of a China are reflected in three spots. The first, as in every one of the novels in this review, is the prevalence of Chinese proverbs, sayings and/or certain situations, mostly from the Three Kingdoms, which is often referred to in lieu of sayings, and has an important role: "Given its immense popularity today, …and its capacity to offer ruthless advice to up-and coming business executives, The Romance of the Three Kingdoms is surely more than just a fable about the unity and dismemberment of an ancient Chinese empire. The Romance, which tells the tale of the last years of the Later Han and the more than two decades of indynastic turmoil until the partial reunification under the state of Qin (265 BC) is renowned as a vehicle of signification in premodern Asia" (Reid; 1996, 115)

But there are references, there is no Chinese purism. When the fictious writer tells of the period when Grandmother Niam and Liang's kids were still young; both parents, who were both believers in integrity and ethical values such as gratefulness, used to tell them different stories, including Chinese stories. Liang was especially fond of a story that demonstrated a child's strong sense of filial devotion, stealing an orange for his sick mother in a sumptuous dinner to which he was invited because the city head recognized his exceptionally talented, and how the orange dropped away from his robe when bowing to the city head. But Liang remembers the story so well not only because of the demonstration, but also because it is referred to in a famous scene in Three Kingdoms. Again, the inevitability of Three Kingdoms as the main text

referred to does not correspond to what I understand is the case in China, where the main canon is composed of four main novels, of which Three Kingdoms is one (The others being "jorney to the West"; "The Red Chamber" and "The Marsh of Bandits"), a number of tales which became very famous, and thousands of idioms (gushi) behind each there is an ancient tale. I have no way to check if the focus on Three Kingdoms is coming from Guangzhou, but it seems to be repeated not in Thai Chinese novels, but also in America Chinese novels (as well as the "The Marsh of the Bandits", as attested by Frank Chin's "Donuld Duk". It could simply be that the vast numbers of stories of survival, conflict, struggle, guile and cunning that are contained in the novel appeal to people that are in a Darwinist situation, where they have to struggle for their very life, an instable situation where every day contains terminal risks, but also great opportunities.

The above description of Liang and Niam's educational practices with their children also features Niam introducing the children to Buddhist Jataka tales as they walk through temples and observe wall paintings, at times when Liang is absent, evidencing cultural hybridity (Prapasson Sewikul: 2006, 104)

In "The Scales of the Dragon", and other later novels, Chinese beauty comes to its own. We discover Chinese female beauty aplenty. The writer herself reveals admiration for her mother's majestic beauty, the mother having been married to her father by arranged marriages, being a descendant of a Chinese tycoon who is an old friend of her father. As she says: The feeling I had towards mother were as if she was a fairy or a goddess in the fairy tales which Grandmother Niam used to tell us. Mother took care of her looks all the time, she used fragrant perfumes…mother knew how to speak in a sweet voice and excellent manners and gentleness, and knew how to use, in her speech, high and low tones so as to make her speech sound like a melody. I recall that Anongpangna, when she was young, was so entranced by my mother that used to secretly call her 'The Beautiful Nightingale'" (Prapasson Sweikul: 2006, 39).

There is also a temptress, Pariaporn, who is a mixed child of a Chinese father and a Thai mother, both of the lower middle class (Prappason Sewikul: 2006, 200). As she plays between the married Rawee, a grandson of the first, "China Grandmother", and Anon, a son of the second mother, she wreaks havoc in the family. But besides her abilities and arts of wooing and cajoling men, we are not served much information about her physical sensuality. In general, we find no sensual Thai beauty in "Through the Scales of the Dragon", while it was noticeably there in both the first novels.

Not only the selfish, morally loose Weng Kim, but even the young, and pure Yok has his own moments of observation that reveal a budding teenager, whose objects are Thai women, not Chinese ones.

While Thais in "Through the Scales of the Dragon" are mostly political-economic agents, coming in either specific persons of power, or as collective masses, Thai-Chinese do appear as individuals that play a part in the plot, becoming more prevalent and showing up as members of the middle class, unlike Rose, the daughter of Gin and Chaba in "Letters from Thailand", who still refer to the days of peddlers and coolies.

To sum up, China is not addressed as a motherland in the emotional way we found so prevalent in the Indian Diasporic literature, or as a reservoir of fantasies, as we found in American Chinese literature. It lacks emotion, it lacks imagination. It lives in concrete, mutually beneficial connections with other Chinese, sharing a language or an ease in understanding each other and it leaves in values. These values always draw on understandings of the Confucian classics, where different figure identify themselves more with different values. In the case of Liang, as in most, the

primary value is the continuity of the family line. His main concern is the clan. He is not attached to geographical continuity of the clan where the ancestral temple is, he recognizes that something has to give. It is the livelihood, the prosperity; of the clan which can assure assure its continuity, not the old stone tablets. Commitment to unity is the value he works to transmit to his offspring. His decline, his aging, are clearly shown as closely associated to cases where descendants shame, leave or betray the clan.

At the end, the prosperity created by the "generative" Confucian" values (thrift, hard work, self sacrifice…etc), can even undermine the "conservative" (in the meaning of "to conserve", not in the meaning of a political disposition) "Confucian values, instead of fortifying them. But rags to riches are not meant to be an "inter-generational" recurring affair, a Sisyphean cycle, in which one reaches the vines, but can never move them on to the next generation. With all the efforts of many tycoons to impose harsh regimes on sons, it is just never the same as truly starting from rags.

In any case, we now know well that in both these examples, the "nomadic" nature of Diaspora, (nomadic not in the sense that it necessarily keeps on moving, though it easily can, by the fact of its being "away"), is kept in check by the stubborn gravity forces of the nation state. Much of the "wandering Jew", and the Asian Region or Transpacific "sojourner" to "nomad" Chinese terminology were created before Israel was established to later become a hub of modern technologies and before China leaped from a "just opened" close Communist state with first steps in labor intensive light industries to an advanced world power with a highly nationalistic ideology. The combination of economic opportunities and "the stir up of dull roots" (Elliot) exerts pull powers which are beyond mere economics

4.4.4 Thailand, Thai Culture, Thais

And where do Thais play a crucial role, where are they really important, beyond some very isolated family scenes which are not a crucial part of Liang's main story. Thais often play a prominent role not as individuals but as a collective. Liang sets up an empire that started by producing goods. What does he need more than anything else? He needs Thais, because Thais constitute the majority of the population and therefore most of his consumers: "What is important is that Thais use plain fabric from baby blankets to shrouds. We can say we can sell to them from the cradle to the "grave" (I parenthesized grave because Thai do not bury)" (Prapassorn Sewikul: 2006, 25). This, by the way, contrasts with the smaller business of Suang U, which caters to the ethnic Chinese population.

It appears therefore that Thais are, first and foremost, "blanks" on an economic-political map through which the Suepanich's need to navigate in order to maximize their financial and economic strength, while keeping, and that is the only value superseding money, the unity of the clan. None of the members of the clan ever bothers to consider "Chineseness" versus "Thainess" on its own merit, except in passing comments of no importance, reflecting heavily diluted "inherited" bias, or, as mentioned above, in comments on marriage considerations.

Interestingly, Liang accepts Thai names. (Except for himself personally, but without any problem for the family name). Unlike Suang U, who fights it teeth and nails and where the issue comes up not only when he is forced legally to adopt a Thai name, but whenever a person close to him shows signs of using the Thai name voluntarily, Liang has no such issues. Liang is worldlier, and he sees little point to fight issues that will gain him nothing and will disadvantage himself and his family as professedly foreigners. But Liang has his own take on it, and that is the refusal of using or allowing using nicknames (Prapasson Sewikul, 2006, 16) Nicknames, which in Thailand came before "real Names" and "family names", represent the opposite of

ancestral family continuity. In Chinese culture, the individual is first a member of his family and a part of long chain of ancestors. The willingness for sacrifice stems in part not just from the ambition to advance oneself, but more so, to advance future generations, and to show fulfill one's obligations towards his predecessors. So Liang tactically takes the Thai names but insists on a respectful naming and familial naming system that will preserve the ancestral chain he continues.

This ambivalence does not only come through such a flow of mixed messages, but is also resolved in an important statement of Liang: "Though Thailand is not the birthplace (The Thai term used, "baan kaet", is closer in meaning to "homeland" though the direct translation is "home where one was born") of Grandfather (my comment: referring to himself), the real one being China, but Grandfather (i.e.: himself) always have emphasized that his dying place will be here (my comment: Thailand)…Grandfather says that for Chinese people, both places, the one they were born in and the one they died in, are of deep significance in their lives, and sometimes, the second even has higher significance, because we cannot choose the place of our birth but we can choose the place where we will live in, and the place where we will establish our homes and our families, until our very last breath" (Prapasson Sewikul: 2006, 68).

The statement is of importance not only because of the equal status it gives to China and Thailand, with an implied tilt towards Thailand, when saying the place of death could even be more important, but in the fact that it contradicts the deeply ingrained, and well known desire of Chinese immigrants to be buried in their homeland and particularly, in their home village, with their ancestors. This deep ingrained cultural motif is not about one's self, but rather about connecting oneself to what always transcends it, namely, the family continuity in life and death.

So while this statement starts with "Grandfather says that for Chinese people",

sounds as another statement reflecting adherence to a born Chinese identity, it does not state the conventional take attributed to Chinese tradition. Whether Liang has one traditional proverb to support this view, or whether he bends tradition to fit his reality, is not known.

In other words, Grandfather says, or hints, as a Chinese person, that identity and location can be separated. Liang "prophesizes", in a way, the recent popular discourse of modern Chinese identities where location is not an absolute: "The multiple passport holder is an apt contemporary figure; he or she embodies the split between state imposed identity and personal identity caused by political upheavals, migration and changing global markets. In this world of high modernity, as one scholar notes, national and ethnic identities become distinctly different identities while at the same time, international frontiers become increasingly insignificant as such" (Ong: 1999, 2). In the same note, Ong also quotes Anderson who holds similar views. The diversity coexisting with unity has no better expression than the Jewish one. Jews, the longest continuous Diaspora that maintained its identity, always proclaimed "If I shall forget thee, Oh, Jerusalem, may my right hand be cut off". It's a statement which Jews are required to continuously repeat to themselves. But it always was, until the 19th century, a vacant declaration of loyalty to a place that can't be pursued).

But while this genre of studies tends to focus on Chinese male business nomads, Jasmin, the fierce Indian adventuress, has already expressed this brilliantly (Mukherjee: 2006, 197), but with less stress on the necessity of wearing these or those ethnic clothes unless practical. The descriptions here include a national circle, an ethnic circle, and that that they diverge in certain cases where practically needs it. Jasmin claims to be able to have a much wider range of practical roles, while she never forgets the Indian folkloristic dowry she came with into the world. But that is also related to what we referred to as the cultural lack of depth displayed by Southeast Asian Chinese, with the emphasis being on business contacts.

Liang's statements are backed up by numerous declarations of loyalty to Thailand, all reflecting the opportunities the country gave him, starting with the very the first opportunity, which is to escape hunger and risk of war. Some of these declarations express the basic idea only, some carry more and are detailed: "Grandfather says that he owes a debt of deep gratitude to Thailand, which afforded him the opportunity to be able to earn his living and to raise his children and grandchildren from the beginning, even though grandfather always considered himself Chinese, and did not try to change his ways and to try, too much, to become like a Thai as some of his fiends did…but grandfather believes himself to be a Chinese that knows to whom he owes gratitude, and always bears in mind the goodness of the land which allowed to continuously build himself up" (Prapassorn Sewikul: 2006. 69).

Gratitude is an important Thai value, and the importance of one "rujak boonkun," or, in a translation which is not proper English, "knowing to be grateful", is a term that one often meets in daily life. It's stronger than the English "To be grateful," to be thankful," in the sense that the English form represents a feeling that one has, and feelings are not always to be trusted in the long term. In the Thai formulation, the debt of honor for which one ought to be grateful is an autonomous "entity," it's a noun. It stands, perhaps forever. One is not expected just to "feel grateful," but to always recognize deeply that "entity." The issue of gratitude exists also in "Being with Gong" and "Letters from Thailand." Gong is full of it, Suang U absorbs it, but mainly towards the land a a land of plenty, gratitude towards Thai people come only at the end

And here, with all the gratitude, felt or learnt to be felt, is the issue on which "Through the Scales of the Dragon" keeps a relative silence, in contrast to its two predecessors. Conceded that Thailand is a welcoming land of great opportunities, where doors for advancement of diligent, smart and determined new comers are open,

what about the people of that land, the Thais. On this point, "Through the Scales of the dragon", changes tack. The novel is, speaking generally, and to put it most simply, is not that interested in Thais as people. It is never bitter or antagonistic to Thais like the early Suang U. It is just indifferent.

Not that no bigotry exists. There is the slighting of Thais of higher social strata, the "Poo-Dee": "…after that (my comment: a certain initial administrative process), one has to beseech the son of an aristocratic Thai family which went to England or the United States to study to translate the letter (from Thai-my comment) to English. Grandfather uses the verb "to beseech" because Thai people of higher classes of that time were haughty and considered themselves as being higher up, and even though many of these have lost their assets and were poor, they still considered themselves as aristocrats , and would not lower themselves to be the employees of Chinese people. (Prapassorn Sewikul: 2006, 10). This motif repeats itself a number of times, but not with a sense of bitterness but rather with the victorious look of the winner who looks almost with compassion at losers who are still trying to maintain a proud image that has no more grounds in reality. And reality, needless to say, is money or power.

Going back to biases, even today, in daily life, one hears such biased comments from both ethnic groups, but coming more as practical observations than emotional expressions, and with the difference being also that Thais would also extol the positive sides of pursuing happiness now, especially in recent times, when the pursuit of happiness rather than the mere pursuit of money and capital accumulation is receiving increased legitimacy. Suang U's type of derogatory, angry comments are uncalled for because they are inflammatory, and the fact remains that simply to state the "positive" side of the coin, namely that Chinese and their descendant work harder, are more persevering, have better head for business, think more about the family, and so forth, makes the point clearly enough.

4.4.5 Chinese Women in the Novel

In "Through the Scales of the Dragon," there are plenty of second and third generation Chinese or mixed Chinese women, as befits such a populous family. In that sense, the material is plentiful. However, as mentioned earlier, the fact that the focus of the novel is on the business history of the family, discounts the centrality of emotional issues, which are treated mostly in a laconic fashion.

I will not focus on the women of the first generation except in relations to others because they do not represent personality or adjustment. The third, Mali, is Thai, the first, Meiling is a mainland Chinese woman that arrives at an advanced age with two almost adult sons and who practically locks herself in the house. It is difficult to say whether she is "Chinese woman in Thailand" or "A Chinese Woman in the House of Liang", she immigrated at a late stage of her life; she is enclosed in the family compound with very little interaction with the surroundings, she is in an isolated island. The second one, Niam, who facilitated Liang's entrance and establishment in Thailand, is the most likeable, representing a generic helpful, kind granny, but we know very little about her, such as her ethnicity, which seems to be anything from part Chinese to full Chinese, her upbringing, her roots, and so forth. This lack of details is indicative of the fact that class/work/ contribution are of greater weight here than ethnicity for its own sake.

Female figures in the different generations are:

1) Duang Dao, daughter of Tian, granddaughter of Meiling. Duangdao is the one that attempts to leave the umbrella of the family conglomerate and develop small agricultures ventures of her own, all oriented to life style rather than to commerce. But they still fail commercially; she ends up running a few bungalows for

backpackers in the South (Prapasson Sewikul, 2006: 190).

2) Napa daughter to Nop, a quiet and loyal son who oracrtically lives in the factoryand is the first son of Grany Niam. Nop is the writer or rather chronicler of the family history (Prapasson Sewikul, 2006: 36).

3) Anut, is the third child of Niam, a sharp and clever woman, she is married to Adon, an academic. She participates in major "revolts" against Liang, revolts that involve a few offspring, but always maintains clear logic, and never loses Liang's love and appreciation. These are, in the end, positive revolts and never aim against the Liang in the way Chaichan's are. The revolt of the "Gang of Five" that aims at ensuring the independence of the young generation to decide of furthering their studies or not and on choosing their love mate was led by her. It is also Anut who convinces Liang, in the debate on whether the bankrupt Chaichan, to leave the decision to the next generation. Her logic is sharper than that of her two brothers who argue before her and tips the scales (Prapasson Sewikul, 2006: 279-281). Anut and her husband adon are also the most pleasant conversation partners for the writers and a source of lots of missing pieces of information about the past.

4) Anantana, the last daughter of Niam is also the saddest story of shame in the novel. Through joint partying outside with Chaichan, they develop a sexual relation that leads to pregnancy, illegal and dangerous abortion, continued infatuation with Chaichan which leads to attempts at self immolation, time spent in a mental institute and the result being that Chaichan cancels his engagement, against the bitter protestations of his mother; in fact, we never hear again of his getting married (Prapasson Sewikul, 2006: 245-251).

5) Anongpanga, the elder daughter of Mali, is the ultimate shining star. She is not compared to other successful sons such as Anon and Nat, directly, but it's only with her that we get, indirectly, the sense of a "second Liang." Liang's long sightedness is proven with choosing her as the head of the conglomerate's consumer products division, a major money spinner, and she enters the position decisively, taking sharp decisions, overcoming opposition and succeeding (Prapasson Sweikul, 2006: 263-265). While her business life is stellar, her family life is not. She misses an

opportunity to marry she loves because she is slow and occupied at work (Prapasson Sweikul, 2006: 267), she then falls in love with an army officer, love that is also beneficial to the interests of the company, but an upheaval in the military moves him faraway, and the matter is cancelled. She ends living with a childhood friend of her uncle Nat, Aniran, more than ten years her elder, as a common law wife. The co-habitation is never registered and no ceremonies conducted. Her mother Mali, aware of her inferior status at the house, would never dare to confront her powerful daughter. The co-habitation is comforting to Anongpangna, Aniran gives her the understanding and wisdom of older age (one can assume that being able to share a life with her, he is a man of wisdom and patience), and tames her wild "tigress" youth. He is an architect that did many projects for the family over the years, especially Liang's burial place in Chonburi, which the highest authorities on Chinese Feng Shui consider is being made in a particularly auspicious way, a sign of his real and deep understanding of Chnese culture (Prapasson Sewikul, 2006: 269-271).

Anongpangna is also the only member to address expressedly the issue of Thai Chinese identity. In an interview to a newspaper, she says that "having been born to a family of Chinese people living in Thailand, is a tough call, and particularly for a working woman like her, because not only that her associates or people under her management that will often not believe in knowledge and judgment, but sometimes she herself feels as an outsider, an extra, at work, in society and at meetings.' Anongpangna continues with a sense of hurt that 'Thai society still looks at women as second class citizens which have a limited voice, limited responsibility…etc' " (Prapasson Sewikul, 2006: 262). This last part of the sentence seems to indicate that as a part of the general isolation from Thai, Anongpangna, living in a dense Sino Thai society, takes that mainly Bangkokian society as "Thai Society."

6) Auntie Peggy: Auntie Peggy is the wife of Andy, the favoured of the two elder sons, though the younger (Prapasson Sweikul, 2006: 8). Liang appreciates both of them but sees Tian more as a man of theory and planning, and Andy more of a man of action, but a smart one. (Prapasson Sewikul, 2006: 17). But Liang loses much of his status due to his marrying a Chinese-Thai student while they both study in Hong-Kong. This kind of eloping is reacted to severly, it affects the money he gets from

Liang while studying, a fact that the life of the couple misearable, and he is then received coldly when returns to Bangkok (Prapasson Sewikul, 2006: 18-19). Andy, on the other hand befriends Peggy, the daughter of a rich Hong-Kongnese shipping tycoon. No eloping here, Liang, for the first time since coming to Thailand, flies to Hong-Kong to meet Peggy's father and ask her hand in marriage (Prapasson Sewikul, 2006: 20). They marry in Hong-Kong in a fabulous party. Peggy's father asks Andy to stay in Hong-Kong and help run the shipping business, Andy refuses, and eventually Peggy joins him, but not before, after her father's death, fighting the claim of his concubine for his assets aggressively, wins and dumps the concubine to the street (Prapassorn Sewikul, 2006: 22-23). Peggy gives birth to a son, Chanchai, but decides not to have more children, so as not to damage her looks and lifestyle. The mother in law is furious, and swings from being furious with Tian's elopement to hatred to Peggy and practically excludes her (Prapasson Sewikul, 2006: 24).

I get into all these details for reasons to be now explained: 1) The priority of the first son is adjustable to whom and how he marries. Tian married a respectable woman, probably the daughter of a tycoon, Andy marries by asking permission, but one can be sure that if Tian married a Peggy in secret first and Andy would marry a Thai Chinese student (which means she is at least from a good, well off family.) but with permission, things would be different. In such hypothetical case, Andy might not have been scolded, and the marriage with the only daughter of a great tycoon tips the scales. Tian married "for himself", Andy married for the family, by creating opportunities for further wealth. Arranged marriages are still the thing, but the purpose is to promote the family's interests. 2) The father of Peggy invites Andy to work with him and keep the business. We see here the the cry for a male heir, carrier of the Sae family line and business being compromised. Peggy should be going to Thailand to serve at the feet of Ah-Meiling. Isn't that the place of a daughter since times immemorial? This tradition at least is easily sidelined: have no son, have son in law. 3) Peggy is a fighter; we see that in the episode with the concubine. She is aggressive, domineering, no docile, weakling as women supposedly are. 4) Peggy doesn't act the the selfless daughter in law at all: one sone, enough, now I look after

my self, my looks. What about the value of recreation of the future generations? Not interested. Suang U said: 'Chinese people do not hope for more than to see our children welll married, producing families of their own' (Botan, 1991: 369). Not Peggy, the Chinese from Hong-Kong. She does not hope more than to keep her great looks and ability to party out, and maybe engage in business. 5) The mother in law counts for nothing, who cares about her. In short, Peggy, more than any other female figure here, just doesn't care about of the gender role traditions. For all purposes she is a man. She is Sewikul's Ang Bui, just more aggressing, conniving, lacking in any compassion and love.

Peggy also goes much further. Both Andy and Chaichan, the prime male carriers of the male line rebel again and again against their father. Andy aims at taking over power in Thailand while his father is in refuge in Hong-Kong after the rise of Sarit (Prapasson Sewikul, 2006: 56-58). When Liang returns he unravels Andy's collection of small companies and his staff reshuffles aimed at reorganizing power. Andy is followed by Chiachan, first in opening a competing company to Liang's fashion company (Prapasson Sewikul, 2006: 190) financed by Peggy, then fails and is rescued by Liang, against the will of the other children, by merging the two companies in terms favorite to Chainchan, does is, his bankrupt company received a high share of the "merged" companies. (Prapasson Sewikul, 2006: 196-7). These valuable shares are promptly cashed, and the money goes to set up the pyramid scale (Prapasson Sewikul, 2006: 217-218), which Chanchai builds, and which by its very nature collapses in a huge scandal (Chanchai uses his celebrated famili name to draw victims who trust the name). The pyramid scheme fails with enormous debts, Chaichan, unable to stem the stampede asks for family help, Liang wants to help, but facing harsh resistance from his children relinquishes power and let them decide, and they reject any help, Chiachan flees to Hong-Kong. (Prapasorn Sewikul, 2006: 275-281).

The points behind these details are also rife with meaning. The daughter in

law drives both son and grand to rebel against the patriarch. She is the financier, the supporter and maybe the master mind. She's not just explaining to the father that in today's world men and women are equal, and marriages are not arranged, as Meng Ju, Tiradet and the three Ngiu daughters explain to their fathers. Here we practically have another motif which we didn't saw before: The challenge of: "Who is the real man." And even further: If a father has an impressive son who has a smart son of his own, what needs he more, as he also almost perfectly conforms to Suang U's magic formula, based on tradition, a complete set of 5 sons (in this case, 6 sons) and 2 daughter. Here is the spine of the male succession of the Sae, around which and for the sake of which everything else exists.

But here we have the proverbial servant, the daughter in law, not only only disrupting but turning son and grandson against their father. Again, it's an upside world. Peggy is not just a rebellious Chinese woman; she is a murderer of classic male's succession lines. To cap it all, Chaichan remains unmarried, his future offspring is aborted, an offspring of an incestuous intercourse with his aunt, it's all, when looked at with consideration, a nightmarish scene from hell (Prapasson Sewikul, 2006: 133-146). Peggy and Meiling, former deadly enemies, become great allies in organizing a grand wedding with a new bride for chaichan (Prapasson Sewikul, 2006: 146-147), but Chaichan, observing Anantana's growing melancholia as the wedding approaches, walk out on the very day of the wedding, for the first time disobeying his strong charctered mother (Prapasson Sewikul, 2006: 150). Does Peggy, deep inside, also wished for what Suang U was just quoted as to what his only wish is? We don't go deeper here, the novel offers no clues, but we know the mother and son do not break the relationship. On the contrary, they still go for the two above mentioned direct assults on Liang business and Liang's reputation. The repeated assaults against Liang are the only "children" that the daughter in law and proud first male grandson, can offer the grandfather.

And yet the Anantana affair proves one ancient saying, which Meiling repeats

again and again: "you have a daughter, you have a sewrage in front of the house, and it's getting smellier and smeller. Meiling is right in her way, but what Chaichan, what kind of fragrance does he deliver? That's not a part of what traditional Chinese Mei-Ling looks at. If anything, "Through the Scales of the Dragon" is happy to show that there is complete equality in "who is the sewrage in front of the house."

If we look for a pattern, there is none. On the business side there is the star granddaughter, Anongpangna, the rebellious but helpful daughter, Duang Dao, the drop-outer, disgusted with Capitalism, and the tragic case of the incestuous, half crazed daughter, Anantana. None of them follows classic roles. Incest is the worst. Duangdao's expresses pure revulsion at everything that the clan represents. Anut is the consummate insider, but did not hesitate to confront Liang on key issue and form coalitions against him. She is not an extreme case, but she is her own person.

Anongpangna's stellar business career stands together with anything but a traditional matrimonial life (anyway, some Chinese could say, she will not take her Sae with her), but they are wrong, because the twist is that unofficially married she will take her Sae with her, and she will "have to" because she is Liangs's true "son," in the same way that Meng Ju is Suang U's "true son," two cases where gender flip-up is so complete as to contradict any tradition. In both cases the first son (and grandson), is a shame to all and is the embodiment of lack of gratitude. But as we found suggested in our review of the Indian literature, the offspring carries the blood of both parents, so what right is there for the male line to prevail. The Thai take is more circumspent, and the common law relations allows her to carry the Sae, but this means offcourse none at all of the family traditional structures. There are prices to pay. Such musings are found plentifully in Rushdie's works: "'At least he fell for pushy girl.' Flory (the main protagonist's Jewish mother-my comment) said emptily to the walls'. 'I had that much influence while he was still my son.' 'Better you go now' Sara said to pepper odorous Abraham. 'Maybe when you marry you should take the girl's name, why not? Then we can forget you, and what difference between a

bastard Moor and a bastard Portugee?'"(Rushdie, 1997: 83). And such mockery of traditions is what is still needed with the star of the only locomotif of the family: business.

Another point: The daughters stay home, at least in most cases. The "sewer" never goes away, except for Duangdao. The general tendency is reminiscent of Naipul's Tulsi house, where all the daughters bring their husbands to, all attracted by the supposed wealth of the Tulsi's (none aware of their extreme stinginess). This also breaks a common rule: daughters marry= daughters go to live with their in laws. Here we see Liang's vision of family unity transcending gender conventions. Ironically, it might reflect on reconstructions of identity and culture in Diaspora. The two Tulsi sons, both very tradition Hindi, abhor fresh traditional Indiam immigrant, they liveunder different "Indian Traditions," Naipul is happy to point out.

To sum up, the first (Peggy), second and third generation Chinese women in "Through the Scales of the Dragon" contradict the Chinese traditional conventions on female gender role in extreme and very different ways. But as we hear Anongpangna, we realize that at the end they refuse to associate that change with a diminution of Chinese identity. The Chinese identity rests now on the existence of an ethnic cum class group, the class part is paramount (only one rebels against that, Duangdao), Chinessness is a smorgasbord of different "delicatessen", wisdoms, festivals, language and more. Choose the ones you like.

Liang himself, unlike Suang U, is gender liberal, but the betrayal of his prime son and grandson, which demolishes the unity so important for him, makes him sick, tired, and eventually kills him. Besides, his desire to protect Andy and Chaichan, after every time they betray him shows where his heart is, but their lack of loyalty, especially Chaichan and his anything-but-submissive daughter in law, injure that heart and bleeds it to death. His only other interest: arranged marriages to people of power

and money fails time and again. Rawee is unhappy with his wife, the daughter of the tycoon, Anongpangna's almost marries a Thai military man in a semi arranged marriage, but he is suddenly transferred far due to a military reshuffle where his group is sidelines. Anongpangna will not marry again. Anut marries an academic, a learned man, but not a general or politician, it's her choice. Only the author's father, Nop, is dragged out of an infatuation with a simpleThai factory worker (low class) and married to the daughter of a tycoon, but its an unhappy marriage, and Nop is spending time with other women (Prapasson Sewikul, 2006: 36-37). The only real successful marriage that of Andy was discussed in great details. It is the ultimate Pyrrhic victory.

4.5 "The Last Petal of the Peony" by Kantima

4.5.1 The First Generation

The first generation in the "The Last Petal of the Peony" spans two families, each with a completely different profile. Unlike any other of the novels, members of this generation in this novel arrive from China already as married couples.

In the case of the parents of Ah-Cheng and Ah-Meiling, they arrived with 2 young sons, while the mother Ah-Mei-Ling was pregnant with the third and youngest one, ah-Ju (or Tiradet in Thai) while on the boat to Siam. We do not have background knowledge on their life in China, but we are made to understand that their occupation in Thailand, a Kao-Man-Gai (boiled chicken with oily rice dish) stall (in fact, carried on the shoulder), was quite possibly a continuation of what they did or knew well in China (Kantima, 2007: 94), since we hear of no other jobs taken or trades conducted until then, while we first encounter them it is when Ah-Ju is still very young and Ah-Mei-ling has not recuperated from the birth yet, indicating

perhaps a period of months only.

In the case of the second couple, Ah-Chang and Ah-Sin, they also arrive as a married couple, and we do have information about their background. They were both active, as actors and more, in Chinese Opera (Ngiu), and they even set up their own troupe in China, but that has failed due to political unrest (Kantima, 2007: 15). The dream of setting a Ngiu troupe of their own, with a son and daughters to succeed is what they brought with them to Siam. But unlike the first couple, they did not come by themselves or without local contacts. They came with Ah-Sun, a friend, apparently also a Ngiu veteran, an orphan, and without family, and at a similar age group to them. He came with them and remained their loyal companion, right hand man, part of the family, throughout the novel. Also, they came invited by a childhood friend, Ah-Kuang, who arrived to Siam earlier, established himself in business, and was already wealthy when they arrived, while the reception at the port was brief and relatively cold, he still arranged a house for them at deferred low rent and financed the setting of their initial Ngiu troupe. Ah-Kuang also remains a part of the plot throughout, rising to be a large tycoon (Jao Sua, the highest term of respect for Thai Chinese tycoon).

Both cases therefore had a relative soft landing. No spats of times spent as coolies, no issues related to either a marriage in Tailand, or, as in the case of Liang, "The Chinese Wife" that was left behind, and brought later. None of the families becomes wealthy. The Ngiu family finds itself in more difficulties more due to the declining interest in this traditional art. Kao-Man-Gai sells always, up until this day, and cooks with decades of reputation have loyal followings. It makes the Ah-Cheng & Ah-Meiling better off, but there are still no stories here of rags to riches, with the exception of the old friend of Ah-Chang, Ah-Kuang, later known as "Jao-Sua Kamjon."

As the stories of the first generation are relatively event less in terms of human drama, they connect seamlessly into those of their descendants.

4.5.2 Second Generation

If "Letters from Thailand" was first foremost the story of Suang U, narrated by his own letters, and "Being with Gong" was the story of Gong narrated by his grandson Yok, "The Last Petal of the Peony" is a story of the second generation, with the first generation being a necessary part of the plot but not its main mover.

The mover, the creator, the enabler of the whole story is Ah-Ju, mostly referred to in his Thai name as Tiradet. A son of the "Kao-Man-Gai" family, one which was "blessed" with three male offspring, he is the black sheep, hated by his father for having, through the pang of his birth, weaknesses and ailments to the mother. His father showers love and money on the two elder brothers, who return that affection for escalating demands for money. The father is blind to the fact of Tiradej being the son that always helps his parents and never tires of abusing him. Seeing that contrary convention, having three sons bring no domestic happiness, but actually to a family of discontent where abuse is the key word: the father abuses Tiradej in every possible way, the two elder brothers abusing their father's favor by mercilessly taking advantage of him in every possible way. The dominated, abused in the conventional way, mother sees it all but is practically voiceless.

Seeing the old patriarchal, male offspring oriented in its shambles, the inquisitive Tiradet, who moon lights as a writer of novels published in consecutive chapters in well know publications (a secret he keeps only to himself, and a fact that becomes the "engine" that moves the plot), decides to search for the positive to his own negative case, literally and figuratively. He looks for a family which is son-less,

all girls but which, contrary to his own family, lives in harmony, love, and unity. Not only does he want to find such a family, he also wants to write about it (Kantima, 2007: 150-152).

His searches bring him to the other family mentioned in our section of the first generation, the family that runs the Ngiu troupe. Snooping around, he finds it to have three sisters, and one son. The son however, is an adopted son; he does not represent a true continuation of the blood line of the ancestors, a primary traditional value. From here on, the story runs in two parallel plots, the main being Tiradej "penetration" of the Ngiu house, pretending to be a humble handy man, but in fact, a secret observer who becomes more and more involved with the lives of the characters, while he secretly dispatches the weekly chapters of his novel. In parallel, he keeps in touch and even helps his parents, with a lot of help of a friend. During that time, his adored elder brothers maximize the money they can extract from their father, and take off into marriages where they prefer to keep their parents out of the picture. As they "marry up," they wouldn't want their parents to be revealed, as their lower status as mere "kao Man Gai" restaurant owners, would humiliate them in front of parents of upper class of girls they met in University, or at work at places like banks. Their disdain of their parents is even such that they do not respond later to letters summoning them when their father becomes very ill, exhibiting the most extreme lack of filiety.

The second generation of the Ngiu family presents a lively picture of three young women. The eldest one, Dalla (often referred to as Ah-Lla) has been promised in marriage to the only son of Ah-Kuang , or Jao-Sua kamjorn, as part of the deal around his support, (Kantima, 2007: 23). These are not vain words. The marriage will take place and Dalla will fulfill her father's request, acting as a filial daughter. That is in spite of the fact that the house is a relatively liberal one, and that her sisters would not accept such arranged marriages (and indeed, the middle one broke one that was come to be much later, but in different circumstances). Ah-Chang's vow to Jao-

Sua Kamjorn was the enabler of their life in Thailand, and their ability to fulfill their dream of setting up a Ngiu troupe of their own. It predated her, it was not to be denied. Needless to mention the Ah-Chang, a liberal artist and all, was disappointed at her birth.

After the birth of Dalla, the little family becomes the seat of a drama as an abandoned baby is found at their door step. With a darker skin, he is immediately identified as ethnic Thai. The family decides to adopt him, and he is named Along. He lives as a part of the family (Kantima, 2007: 25-26).

The second daughter, Panaan (nicknamed "ah-Naan"), is born in the early thirties, and the same disappointment occurs (Kantima, 2007: 24). But with all the disappointment, the couple quickly gets over it and moves on with their life, with the two daughters and the adopted Along seen now as the next generation, but not that hopes for a real son of Ah-Chang's blood line are abandoned.

A third opportunity does come, but the hoped for result is not. Again, it's a girl, a third one. Her name is Tanayong. She is the last and with her, further attempts are not pursued.

While Dalla is the most classical feminine of the three, Panaan being the spoilt, rebellious, but exceedingly beautiful, Tanayong challenges the conventions in her particular way. She shies away from her feminine side, we don't hear much on her looks except perhaps that she would actively attempt to disguise any signs of feminine beauty and charms, that she acts like a boy, and that is most starkly expressed in her desire to be a mechanic and open a garage (and she is indeed the "handy man," the mechanic of the troupe.

All in all, the second generation which forms the heart of the narrative is composed of 3 daughters, 4 sons, of whom one is adopted, and the other, Tiradej, is the center point of the narrative, or narratives. There are two narratives: the internal one inside the Ngiu family where Tiradej is pretending to be part of the troupe but is in fact a writer/observer, and the outer one, where Tiradet is the son of a kao Mam Gai restaurant owner, an abused youngest son, and a secret writer who writes the story of the Ngiu family. The actual narrator is a "see all" objective narrator who minutely observes how the internal and external narratives work first in parallel, unconnected, and then slowly start to intertwine.

Tiradet, as the central figure, is not only acting a "role" or, as one might say "minding his own business," while we, the readers, observe his behavior and interpret it, in this case, in relation to ethnic identity and intergenerational negotiations in migrant families. Tiradej is himself a keen observer of these issues, especially in regards to gender preferences as part of the cultural heritage he was born into. But during the course of the novel, we see his thinking developing. Suang U's thinking does not develop until he practically hits a wall which practically takes the beam off from his eyes. Gong is beyond all that, within his immediate environment, he "knows," though we are never privy to his earlier history and how he got to his ideas and opinions.

Tiradet is learning, but not only passively, but actively by live experimentation. It's a radical approach. American Asian novels are crowded with self introspection on ethnic identity issues, but I encountered here no "live experimentation," more musings, discussing, and the telling of stories from the past and from the present. Tiradet is a self anthropologist, and his intervention, born of the desire to know, changes the reality he observes. From our point of view, as a secondary layer of observers, it's impressive to see both the questioning itself (and the

desire to learn), and the bringing in of change. Why is that?

First, the first question for any examination of identity negotiations, especially over generations, is "does anybody care, beyond perhaps, the slight impatience of the young generation with those of the elder ones, and those of the older generation with the new and annoying habits of the younger ones."

These intergenerational frictions exist with or without ethnic identity issues, especially in a fast changing society, where the gaps between generations in terms of technologies, values, behavioral patterns, and so forth, can be sometimes as wide as those ethnic identities we are concerned with. We hear of Generation X, Generation Y, and it sounds like a tribe. In a way, the issue of identities might be moving from being defined in terms space, that is, of geography as the origin place of ethnic groups, to time, where difference in the time you were born determine much more of your identity than the place or ethnic group. This is a wider perspective comment for a subject beyond the confines of this study.

In any case, Tiradet is specifically interested in ethnic derived values, and he therefore shows that "somebody cares" that these are issues that are relevant to people's lives. This by itself is a statement of an unresolved situation. The conclusion, which is a refutation of the validity of the ethnic values gender bias, is stronger than a situation of either ignoring, or resisting parent's demands on different aspects of that issue. This is further strengthened by the revelation that Dalla's husband, the son of Jao-Sua Kamjorn is a gay and the marriage is a façade. She discovers it by herself, starting with suspicions, and then investigating. This episode makes mockery of the concept of arranged marriages, especially such done at early age, or, in Dalla's case, at birth.

4.5.3 China, Memories of China, its Culture, its People

Besides the common smorgasbord of saying, proverbs, and very little else, China appears here on two spots which are tailored to the plot of the narrative: 1) China as a culture, here represented all throughout by the Opera, Ngiu. It's a cultural treasure and the Ah-Chang family is devoted to it and its maintenance. No other novel carries a real Chinese cultural tradition at such a central role. 2) China is the source of male chauvinist gender biases in favour of men, and these biases are expressed numerous times throughout the novel, both from the father of the "lucky" family of three sons, ah-cheng," and the "cursed" father of three daughters, Ah-Chang.

In short, China is a land of contradictions carrying the finest arts and the worst prejudices. This presentation is unique to this novel. Non other gives us the beauty of Chinese traditions so vividly as an essential part of the narrative. Prejudice is everywhere, but here it's distilled to gender issues, and there's no ethnic prejudice, class prejudice, and others. It's a simple Gender Relations-ugly, Artistic Culture-beautifull clean formulation.

4.5.4 Thailand, Thai Culture, Thais

In "The Last Petal of the Peony," there are only two ethnic Thais that are involved at the heart of the plot as individuals. But the nature of their role in is either as a second to the main character, a helper…etc, or it is something much more striking, as we shall shortly see. The "second" is Danai, who lives across the river from Riradet's father's Kao-Man-Guy restaurant. He and Tiradet are friends, but unlike Tiradet, Danai has no education, his parents are small farmers/peddlers (ah-Ju buys their produce for the restaurant). Nevertheless, Danai, being loyal and devoted, plays a major role in facilitating Tiradet's double life: between his parents, whom he

devotedly supports (unlike his greedy and uncaring brothers), and his second life with the Ngiu troupe. Danai is all around the place running errands for Tiradet, helping his parents on his behalf, sending Tiradet's weekly chapters to the magazine and even arranging land next to his parents little garden on the other side of the river, where Tiradej can place his parents in a quiet environment, where his ill father can heal. It all feels as if had Tiradej been an interested and sympathetic British anthropologist in India, Danai would have been his loyal native helper and friend. This is one radical angle to look at it. The other, perhaps even more striking, is Danai is a…."model minority". In a story where all the actors and sub-actors are of Chinese origin, Danai belongs to a…..minority. As absurd as it sounds, "The Last Clip of the Peony" presents, through its narrow angle, a Chinese city. The plot is, as mentioned above, a reconstruction of that Chinese identity. The reconstruction that takes place is not conducted in any relationship to a Thai identity. It is an internal affair.

The second Thai character, Along, is even far more striking in its symbolism. An orphan left at the door of Ah-Chang's house and adopted by him, particularly in view of his desire to have a son, one way or another, Anong is Thai. With no family, no contacts, no, in other, important words, identity, he is taken in by a merciful Chinese family. An identity-less ethnic Thai, he is Sinified to all purposes, with his only Thainess being the color of his skin. In Along, the reductivism of Thai identity in the novel, reaches its apex. Not only is Along "signified," but, more than that, he is taking on the role of the perpetuation of Chinese culture in Thailand, as it is manifested in the Chinese Opera. Again, echoes of colonials adopting offspring of natives that cruelly disposed of them, a common motif are to be heard here, as well as echoes of Indians that have become extremely anglified.

If anything, Along is a Thai Heathcliff. Dark skinned and swarthy, always signifying inferior and suspicious foreignness, an orphan left in the street and adopted by a good hearted person from a good "local" family, (though not, by any means, a member of a rural or other gentry), he grows to fall in love madly with his

benefactor's daughter. Both are dashing, impressive men, bright, but with some personality flaws. Emily Bronte had to bring her Heathcliff to madness and death to resolve her plot, Along, the Thai Heathcliff, improved rather than deteriorated, and consummated his love in happiness. After all, this most important Thai in the plot, though rootless, identity-less, though having adopted the culture of the "majority," at least he deserves to live, and what is even higher than that, to marry to the most beautiful of the Ah-Chang's real offspring, who, to cap the achievement, is a celebrated Chinese Opera performer.

4.5.5 Chinese Women

"The Last Petal of the Peony" is a novel that is dedicated to the issue of Chinese women, and the way they are treated in Chinese tradition. As mentioned, it's an elaborate attempt to disprove the old conventions, by journalistic/anthropological meticulous research.

Before going into the details, and the characters of Chinese women in the novel, it is worthwhile to note that counter intuitively, the initiator of the research, Tiradej, is a male, not a female. Kantima's choice here is odd, not only because it would be more natural for a female figure to that, but also the situation created, where Tiradej is the black sheep in a family of three sons, that he is abused and taken advantage off, does not always sound genuine. It was fine for Suang U to be resentful of Meng Ju, whose birth cut off her mother's reproductive ability, blocking "future sons," but Tiradej is a male, and the fact that his birth was hard, weakened his mother tremendously, probably forestalling more sons, even though that is not spelled out, and Ah-Cheng himself says he would rather not have Tiradet, but have her strong and healthy as before (Kantima, 2007: 94). But this does not sound as justifying such a prejudice, especially not from a Chinese traditional point of view. One would expect Ah-Cheng to be the happiest of men, but being saddened by his wife feeble health. A

normal man of his type would focus more on improving her condition, than on abusing his son, A SON, from his birth to adulthood.

And after all, it was not Tiradet himself that created the situation. It is clearly detailed how the fact that she had to work hard and had no rest during the pregnancy which was the cause (Kantima, 2007: 94). Had Tiradet been a daughter, the pieces would fall into place in a clear manner. Tiradet would then be "Meng Ju 2." One can only wonder whether this was intentional or not, and if intentional, what was the message. It is after all very possible that the author visualized a man as the lead character, and squeezed the more logical choice out in favor of that. Perhaps the desire to have a male in that position was because the author wanted to show man fighting against traditions that delegate women to a secondary, low status, rather than the more obvious choice of a woman in that role.

In fact, initially Ah-Cheng extremely happy, happy at having three sons (Kantima, 2007: 93).

With Tiradet taking the role of the author of the plot, both literally and figuratively, other characters take secondary roles, even though, the more he gets involved, the more do "characters" rise up from the pages and confront him, taking the plot to places he might not have planned it to go.

Chinese women charactrers are the initiators, particularly the three daughters of Ah-Chang and Ah-Sin. Even Dalla, the most docile one who succumbs to her father's vow, made at her birth, to marry his son, and performs her duties to perfection, rises up when she senses oddities in his behavior, spies after him by herself, not through others, riding on Sam-Lor's and walking through deserted alley's (Kantima, 2007: 390) and ends up catching him naked in bed with his boy friend, to

whom she was earlier introduced as a childhood old friend (Kantima, 2007: 392). This takes "guts" and Dalla shows she has plenty of that. After the discovery, Dalla, still keeping it as a secret, reviews the earlier, happier years, when the raised the child. It is stated that: "This episode, if discovered by his parents, would grieve them deeply. Everyday that passes, the grandparents are happy having a grandson and a granddaughter who will succeed them. So it can be said that Pongsak fulfilled his duty as a son according to the old Chinese traditions, by giving his parents a male first to further succeed them, a significant achievement indeed" (Kantima, 2007: 393).

The idea expressed here, that by "producing" a male offspring the father has practically completed his main duty, brings the logic of Chinese traditional take on gender relations to absurdity. It takes it logically to an extreme point which proves its falsity. It practically means that all a son really needs to do is a DNA transfer to a male offspring; a few years of raising the child are helpful, but not logically necessary. Off course this is not the family harmony Confucius envisioned. But when a wider, more humane tradition, is reduced to a bare knuckle desire for a male offspring, then the entire edifice of that tradition loses its bearings. Initially afraid of her and her children being dumped by the in laws she respects and loves, she hesitates what to do. (Kantima, 2007: 399) Pongsak tries to act as if nothing happened, and indeed, in his eyes, what is the significance of that affair compared to his having beget a son. But Dalla cannot bear it anymore and inform him of her decision to divorce, a demand he can hardly grasp, seeing as irrational (Kantima, 2007: 399-401). When both Dalla and Pongsak reveal the state of affairs to his shocked parents, they quickly tend to her side. They detest his offers to have a new wife and produce new sons (Kantima, 2007: 414). Both emphasize that a family is made by a couple, like two chopsticks, they compare. In the end its decided that Pongsak will leave "and Dalla will stay here as the pillar of the family, being both a mother and a father, but also will take his duty of looking after his parent. Dalla will stay as both the son and the daughter in law of the house of Lert Kamjorn" (Kantima, 2007: 416).

These are very strong words. Far from Tiradet's anthropological journalism, a revolution takes place in this traditional wealthy Chinese house. The daughter in law, traditionally a slave of the parent in law, is now also their son. A mother, inferior to the father in traditional terms, is first elevated to equality in the "chopstick simile," but is elevated much further. She is also the son. This is a complete take over, the woman, still feminine and all, just as before, takes the triple roles of the father of her children, the son of her parents in law, and the pillar of the house. In a novel that circles around the desire to prove that females are just as good as males, and daughters just as good as sons, this "side episode" goes further than any other episode.

Pannan, the second daughter, is attracted to continued university studies, which she insists on and gets it (Kantima, 2007: 67), but the success achieved is mostly for the benefit of upward mobility in society, and Pannan discovers that beauty, charm, grades, are not enough. The need for a powerful family name is crucial (Kantima, 2007: 68). The Thai term used (chat-trakul-dee) usually signifies Thai, but as we see later, Chinese tycoons and Chinese merchants with army links, etc, are a part (maybe not exclusively, but her being refered to as "chao-muay-rong-ngiu" or Chinese Opera Girl" is somehow derogatory. (Kantima, 2007: 69). Pannan both studies hard and fulfills her duties to her family's Ngiu, and her parents share her happiness.

As the Ngiu declines in audiences, Pannan strives to strike a relationship with Adithep, a recent graduate from England who is known for his contacts and ambitions in the modern performance world. Aditep is interested, but is not committed. Pannan tries to strike it off with him in order to increase her options, but it doesn't stick. Pannan's further attempts at getting, on the basis of her education and skills a high paying job, such as in a bank, face their own obstacles, because they require the guarantee of a tycoon or a high ranking government official, and she has non (Kantima, 2007: 269). Her final disappointment of the still present, on and off, of Aditep, is, at the same time closed as he makes it clear that he would be able to help

her in this case: "Aditep rushed to ask permission to go home, and Pannan did not feel like sending him, she started to feel thast whenever she needs real help, this friend of hers from years ago, will never be there to help (Kantina, 2007: 290).

Pannan's position as collateral for Ah-Chang high interest loan from Sia-Decha, arranged without her knowledge by her father, infuriates her as she becomes aware of it. She rejects the marriage straight on, ignoring her father's justification s such as the upper class Thai she coped with before, who helped her with nothing, Sia-Dechas's family who adores Pannan's Ngiu performances, and are "of ours" (Chinese). The fury escalates when it comes out that Sia Decha is not only married, but a second widfe. Ah-Chang sees no harm in that, he sees only the convenience and financial support, but Dahlla, the eldest sister, traumatized herself is indignat at her father and even with her sister who went out with Sia Decha knowing that but not taking it seriously as she never entertained thoughts of marriage. Sia Decha, being in on that, is warned sternly by Pannan, that if he pursues this, not only will he not get her as a wife, but his being fond of her will be blocked by a complete refusal to meet or see or talk to him in any manner. Like Dahlla, as described above, Pannan rejects any fake arranged marriage when she sees it is jusy a utilization of her. Dahlla rebelled later, when she found that her husband was considering it as a marriage of convenience, and had very different sexual attractions. The fact that she was not even asked, neither by her father, nor by Sia Decha, seals her total refusal even further. She takes her life into her hands, disdains the decrees and advises the borrower, her own father, to find his own solutions-which can include the help of other siblings, including her, but not as marriageable commodities. Here is another Chinese woman in Thailand that is gutsy, independent, stands on her own rights, but maintains reasonableness and acumen. It's the men, both the father and Sia-Decha that appear awkward, weak, doing things behind the back, maybe not because of excessive self confidence in men's prerogative, but because they are cowards and they prefer to present Pannan with the "done deal", thus procuring her mercy, her commitment to the family above all. The subterfuge does not help them. (Kantima, 2007: 256-264).

The third daughter, Tanayong, takes things a step further than her sisters. She is not a feminine woman, like them, who rebels against impositions of forced marriages, at a late stage, like Dahlla, of from the outset, like Pannan. She is Tomboyish in a manner that contradicts all gender roles. "Tanayong, the third daughter of Ah-Chang and Ah-Sin, is a woman with a businesslike manner and dexterity just like a man in the full sense of the word, shouting In a rough voice from among the spectators…" (Kantima, 2007: 9). Her father asks hers her:" 'And you, Ah-Yong (nick name to Tanayong-my comment), playing Ngiu is not upour thing, you do it so clumsily, I still doubt e\what role you can play. I'll ask you, what would you really want to do?', 'I want to open a garage, I want to be a mechanic', 'Are you crazy, you are a woman' her two elder sisters exclaimed in one voice. Tanayong smiled a hardened smile. And made a gesture of blowing her chest bin pride before continuing: 'it's challenging for a woman's abilities, I want to learn a mechanic profession, car mechanics, in any case I am interested in technical matters every day now, fixing this, fixing that in our Ngiu, even Ah-long is not as good in technical matters as me'" (Kantima, 2007: 45-46). Her suspicions of Tiradet identity are followed by detective work, by confrontations with him, by terse speech. Their coming together as a couple in the end has to overcome lots of lines of barbed wire, all hers. She is the rough and rowdy man of little words, he is the gentle, compassionate, understanding one, and shamelessly so.

While the daughters manifest themselves as unconformist in an escalating order going from the oldest to the youngest, Ah-Chang himself never stops about his misfortune in having only daughters throughout the narrative. When Pannan tells him about a visit of graduates, a year above her, two brothers , that work in construction business, factories and office buildings, the younger, with a foreign bank, Ah Chang bursts out: " 'oh, whose kids, why so successful, the father and mother must be so happy to have such two sons, having such sons,' Ah-Chang is excited by Pannan's story, and turns to look at his wife's face, exclaiming: 'they are really lucky to have

such capable sons to continue their family line.' Pannan, though annoyed at her father speaking in such a manner, as, she herself was not inferior to these brothers, still doesn't reveal her feeling. She then consoles him: I don't see why we have to consider it as good or ba luck , Pop, even though Papa has three daughters, our family still stands, our Ngiu will last as long as we can keep it, , Papa has to understand that girls or boys, all have the same value, everybody does his best, and whatever's bad is taken by ball equally, but as far as the past shows, but as far as things passed, your daughters behaved so well and have done their best' " (Kantima, 2007: 88).

There are no Anantanas or Duangdaos in the narrative. No escapism, to a detached life style or to the beyond.

One more Chinese Woman character of significance is Tiradet's mother. Silent or rather silenced, she see the truth and maintains her love to the despised son, always behind the father's back (Kantima, 2007: 341). Here is the classic example of a suppressed mother that is disgusted with her husband's prejudices, but can't just express it out loud.

The prejudice breaks when the father reads his son chapters in the weekly, and breaks completely when he sees Ah-Changs family, the warmth, the harmony (Kantima, 2007: 454), but in fact, the father is prepared. While in hospital he become avid reader of his novel, following every week's installment, (Kantima, 2007: 305), he later even asks Tiradet, whom he understand works in that magazine, to compliment the writer (off course he doesn't know it's his own son). Tiradet tells that to him mother in secret, she is surprised, she understand him fully warns him not to get to negative about his father. In a way, she sides with him, but pleads to avoid conflict or oben rebuttal. But her set of beliefs is modern, as she tries to explain to her husband that sons or daughter is not the issue, it's who they are that counts (Kantima, 2007: 148), but that only triggers anger and both mother and son are

expelled from the room. Tiradet himself tries to convey the same point to his father but is scolded not to teach his father. (Kantima, 2007: 147).

Like Suang U and his formula of 7 sons, 2 daughters, forming the perfect family (Botan, 1991: 180), Ah-Cheng has his own magic formula, of his own ancestry, of three sons, one daughter. It's that he has three sons, But Tiradet's having weakened his mother at birth, eliminated to possibility of fulfilling the ideal (Kantima, 2007: 145). The comment is interesting because it includes daughters, and Tiradet did not "block" sons, he only "blocked" the daughter. One can wonder why Ah-Cheng is commiserating over that (besides the weakened health of his wife). Suang U, with two daughters and one one son at the time the magic formula is presented, wonder what a disaster it will be to have a third daughter (Meng-Ju), and he is far from his own formula. Ah-Chang misses a daughter (sewer in front of the house), and he also join's Suang U's cmmisertaion.

While this takes place and more, Ah-Chang himself never stop whining about his having daughters, not appreciating the wonderful daughters he has (Kantima, 2007: 252). Ah-Chang is by far the "luckiest" of all the parents/immigrants in the five novels, but he is blinded by tradition. Suang U and Liang have plenty of solid reasons to commiserate about, Ah-Chang has a wonderful family, but its gender composition overpowers him in its deviation from tradition ideals.

His situation is like that of Nguan Tong, Suang U's father in law: "What am I to do with such girls..I have no son, you know. It's a terrible disappointment, I don't pretend otherwise. No one to carry on the business, no son to honor me when I die. Just two ill-mannered, demanding girls with unsuitable ambitions, especial this one (Ang Bui-my comment). The other one (Mui Eng-my comment) isn't so bad-stubborn but at least she acts like a girl" (Botan, 1991: 29). Still, Nguan Tong died a happy father and grandfather. His inability to comply with the gender ideal never hurt

his life except for the commiseration over his gender failure, just like Ah-Chang.

4.6 "A Walk Through Spring" by Judy Chan (pen name for: Yuvadee Tonsakulrungruang)

4.6.1 The First Generation

In "A Walk Through Spring," we have an all women first generation, males are marginalized in various ways, in this case, by being declared as taciturn and uncommunicative. It's a tactic used by increasing numbers of novels that wish to emphasize the female elder generation figure. This tendency is reflected in a number of American-Chinese novels. In the The Eight Promise: An American Son's tribute to his Toisanese Mother," by William Poy Lee, the novel, made of interchanging voices of the son and the mother, the author declares from the start: "Suey Wan Chuen is the name of my ancestral village, a small, unchanged place in the Pearl River Delta in China's semi tropical southeast corner. Well actually, it's my my ancestral village on my mother's side. Father's own village is quite nearby, but I don'y ascribe ancestral village status to it, by far not. For as I look more than fifty years of living, I source my essence, for better, back to Mother's village. I have come to see and accept that it was my mother's earthbound spirituality, that of the Toisan Chinese people, that kept me safe, sound and sane, especially through those tumultuous American decades of the 1960 and 1970s" (Poy Lee, 2007: 7). In fact, female primacy is such a crucial part of such novels that in novels such as Amy Tan's "The Hundred Secret Senses," the Chinese father dies at the beginning, leaving his Caucasian wife and mixed daughter to look for and after his lost daughter in China with whom he lost touch, and whose name is Kwan (Tan, 1995: 4-5). From then on, it's a women's world. Most of Any Tan's other novels follow that track.

In addition to following this "female's world" orientation, in "A Walk through Spring" we find yet another twist on the intergenerational "balance of power." While in all other novel, members of the first generation are, almost by definition, fewer than the those of the first generation, the power balance is maintained, if at all, by the authority of the father, or both parents. The first generation holds a firm upper hand in two very different novels: In "Through the Scales of the Dragon," Liang commands a superior and undisputable position, due to his strong personality, proven success, wealth, and control over the assets. Attempts at rebellion, such as those by Chanachai, are crushed, without malice though, and help is offered to the repentant rebels unless the situation indeed beyond help. In a very different novel, "Being with Gong," Gong's authority is the opposite from that of Liang. It's a moral authority. Also, Yok is too young to dispute, and in their close relationship of interdependence, disputes are extremely undesirable, even if there were differences of opinion.

While in these novels the first generation prevails due to power, of the different kinds mentioned, in "A Walk through Spring," the first generation is authoritative in a different way, a motherly way, it envelopes the single member of the second, fact, third, generation, in a sticky gruel of cooking, love, nostalgic stories and wisdom. It's an authority that surrounds, submerges, rather than one that towers over. And it reiterates the trend, indicated above, of a growing appreciation of the mother figure and marginalization of the male patriarchs.

The novel is particular not only in the multiplicity of representatives of the first generation, but the structuture of two pairs of sisters, one of which pairs is the grandmother of the main second generation protagonist. Their strength lies not only in seniority, life experience, and wisdom. It also lies in sheer numbers. It might also lie in that it's women only. It takes four first generation women to win over one third generation woman. A tribute, one can ironically say, to the "stubbornness" of the third generation. Moreover, we have, like in the case of Gong, a generation leap, a leap that apparently takes the sting of the kind of intergenerational push and pull that

only parents and children have.

The story is a heartwarming one, it features a gathering of four Chinese/Cantones elder women, one of which has a granddaughter (the second, or in fact, the third, generation) who is never named in the story, except by use of the Cantonese familial form of granddaughter which is "Ah Mui Mui." The rest of the four include the elder sister of the real grandmother and the two friends with whom they immigrated to Thailand decades ago. Two of the four live in Thailand, one in Singapore and one in Canada. These two friends are sisters as well. Since the four are referred to both by the names they call each other (their actual real names) and by the titles with which Ah Mui Mui refers to them, alternatively using Thai and Cantonese, identification can become confusing. The elder, unmarried sister of the real grandmother is "Big Grandma", in Chinese, "Ah-Gu-Poh," and her name is Ah-Keng. Her younger sister is "granny" or "Ah-Mah," and her real name is Ah-Geng. She is the real grandmother. The two friends are Ah-Hou, which should be addressed by the granddaughter as "Ah Yi Poh" (meaning "second grandma" and who is married with kids), and Ah-Gwai, her younger sister (who lives in Vancouver) and who has to be addressed as "Ah Sai Poh," meaning "youngest Grandma."

Ong and Noninin theorize that in a world of Chinese transnationlism, "there are several regimes of truth and power to which Diaspora Chinese are subject and whose effects constrains their strategies and …We identify three such regimes: the regime of the Chinese family, the regime of the Capitalist workplace, and the regime of the national state. Each regime disciplines people under its control in different ways to form acceptable and normal subjectivities as, for example, industrious workers, dutiful daughters or providing fathers…." (Ong, and Nonini, 1997: 23).

The first generation is not "first generation living in Thailand", though they all emigrated from China to Thailand, and spent a pivotal period of their lives in

Thailand. Life eventually took two of them away, but it all happened because of events that took place in Thailand during their time together in the Kingdom. Here is another important difference from this first generation to the others. The issue of their identity and possible assimilation is not at the center, because they are not all citizens of Thailand. They leave Thailand for different reasons: Gwai leaves when she realizes she has inherited a fortune from her Japanese secret service master, Yamada. She is afraid that it will be taken from her by Ah-Tai, the fixer that got them through different jobs and with whom they stay when out of job (Chan, 2010: 236).

The relationship between the first generation and the second is loose. We see it in Hou's family relationships: "Second Grandma is a very headstrong person….In fact, all the elderly people that I have ever met are all like second Grandma. They don't want to hear to be asked about their children or grandchildren whom they disapprove of. Second Grandma has a problem with her daughter and son-in-law" (Chan, 2010: 271).

But the problem lies not only between first and second generation. We mentioned that "A Walk through Spring" is a female world. The only man at the center of the plot is more of an object of the plot rather than a subject of it, he is not a mere dummy, but he is more a passive than active participant. This is in spite of the fact of his participation throughout, the fact that he brings well expressed opinions of his own, as a scholar and as a well rounded man. He has no dynamic force to impact events; he cannot stop Ah-Mui-Mui from deciding to embark on her career move to Australia. The most he can do is collaborate with the four grannies in convincing Ah-Mui-Mui to stay and marry him. It's not an "arranged marriage," it is an "orchestrated marriage," and the entire novel is the story of that complex performance of the four grannies, using all the tools they have (including him).

The other men, integral part of the family are not only almost silent

throughout. In fact, they are introduced into the plot only after they are introduced in stories about the earlier years of the grannies in Thailand, the tales of their their relationships with men, those that became marriages and those that didn't. We discover Ah-Mui-Mui's grandfather, Ah-Seng, in the house (Chan, 2010: 303) only after the stories about grand aunt's resistance to his marriage with his younger sister the marriage. The reason for the resistance is due to his being merely a manual worker in the lathe factory (Chan, 2010: 284-287). The distance and the dislike between the in-laws linger, especially after Keng tries to make up her relationship with her sister by bringing the couple discarded things from her master's house (where she is a senior cook) and money. In the end Ah-Seng refuses to receive further donations, insisting they get by by themselves just fine, and rejection creates a new rift that still lingers for many years. (Chan, 2010: 334). We hear of the birth of Ah-Mui-Mui's father, and his initial temporary name, all as a footnote (Chan, 2010: 332). We hear of Ah-Seng again when Keng becomes redundant in her new job as cook in her previous employers children, who are living the modern life, eat outside, eat fast food at home, and have no need for a live-in cook. As it is described: "Geng drags her husband to the Gwan's house to beg and confirm for Keng that she is more than welcome to stay in their house. Although Ah-Seng sas nothing and Keng can see that Geng had forced him to come, his presence is a proof that he does not mind her staying with them." The passivity of the males in this narrative is perhaps most evident in this detail. Ah-Mui-Mui reminiscences of the arrival of Keng, coming in her traditional Chinese attire. She also remembers Keng's inability to communicate directly to her grandfather, and her role as an in-between. She then makes the only observation about her father in the novel, saying "that was the first time that I stopped finding my dad's behavior strange, because Grand Ma and Grand Pa also would not communicate directly with each other. The men in my house don't talk directly to the women……(jumping to a further observation-my comment) That's normal Ah-Gu-Poh. Dad doesn't talk to mum either. I think it is men in this house who are strange, preffering not to talk directly to women" (Chan, 2010: 418).

Thus, Ah-Mui-Mui summary deletes men as active players in family affairs in

one oblique description. But it is not explained anywhere why her mother is excluded too. Why is her mother not part of the action? We can assume she is not Thai because every marriage to a Thai is commented upon. Ah-Mui-Mui is quoted in the next section how she imbued Chinese culture from her grannies. Again, since great attention is paid throughout the novel to dialect groups, one can assume she is Cantonese, and in any case, even Watthanachai, who is half Taechiu, half Thai, can get so easily immersed in the Cantonese special flavor by the grannies (at least the two that are present). Is her mother the one that pulls her towards a modern life of career? We have no answers and no clues are offered. It's therefore not only the men that are skipped, it's also the entire second generation. And after all, the novel is not about the grannies "talking stories" about their lives in Thailand, with the relationship between Ah-Mui-Mui and Watthanachai supplying the background. The novel is about Ah-Mui-Mui's most important decision in life: to go abroad to advance her career in Australia or to stay in Thailand and marry Watthanachai. The parent's complete absence from this critical moment in their only daughter's life does not sound natural. Whether intentionally or not, it declares a complete indifference. In "Being with Gong," the parents were dead, thus making the jump over the second generation natural, here they are not dead, but neither are they alive. They are practically part of the furniture.

The bottom line is that the story moves forward with five voices, Ah Mui Mui's, and the four grandmas, each telling her story and comments on different situations. But it's the telling of the stories that really gives each of them an independent voice. Ah Mui Mui's voice is the central one as it moves the plot in the present forward. The structure of voices or "points of views" is significant because the story would not be imbued with the same warmth and personal touch had it been told by an all knowing objective teller, and what's more, the structure is related to the dynamics of the intergenerational dialogue, it's a weave and as the stories, the soups, the interactions increase, so does this weave gets tighter and tighter. But the exclusions are as mystifying as the inclusions are heartwarming. There are messages in the extreme exclusion of second generation and men.

4.6.2 The Descendants

Ah-Mui-Mui, the grand-daughter is the only descendant. Nameless, as mentioned, throughout the narrative, in contrast to the four grannies. Her namelessness, intentionally or not, depersonalizes her. And indeed, besides her career aspirations, and especially the opportunity to further it by moving abroad, and her relations with Ajarn Watthanachai, and her reluctance to further the relation because of his modest income in academia, we know little about her.

The novels starts with Ah Mui Mui's frustration over her situation in life "I feel quite out of step with my time or maybe, like most single women, I simply fret about my situation too much because I still live with my parents in our family home" (Chan, 2010: 9). Ah Mui Mui plans to go to Australia to further her career and explore new opportunities, and the trip was held by the reunion of the "grandma's." She expresses this frustration to Watthanachai, an old friend, almost a boy friend, whom she is been seeing for year, and whom the grandma's living or visiting Thailand like a lot because he listens attentively to their stories. She expresses her frustration to Watthanachai: "I should have flown to Australia to start my new job this month!" I grumble to Watthanachai (Chan, 2010: 66), to which he calmly replies that "In one's life, there must be time for reflection. Do you really want to join the rat race every day without a break. I think you will enjoy it when all your grandmas arrive" (Botan, 1991: 66).

We obviously know that she lives by materialistic values, measured by wealth, not glitz. As mentioned, the reason that Ah Mui Mui is not inclined the further develop her close relationship with Watthanachi further is purely materialistic: "My grandmas probably do not realize that nowadays there are many eligible, educated

young men out there, but so few wealthy men. A teaching job in a University is an unrewarding profession, with a lot of hard work, low pay, and hardly any prestige in society. Even the students do not pay due respect to their lecturers. Most people care less for knowledge than for social and financial status" (Chan, 2010: 17)……"Frankly I admit that I dream of having a business owner or a high profile manager in an international organization as a boy friend" (Chan, 2010: 67).

She lives with her grandparents, her parents and grand aunt alone, we hear of no other social interactions. We can see there that she clearly sees herself as immersed in the Chinese traditions of her ancestors. As she notes: "My two grannies have patiently thought me many things. They have thought me how to prepare medicinal food, the recipes for seasonal dishes and the Chinese way of life and philosophy that they believe in. Many times I wonder how I am able to remember these things, then I realize that I don't have to try and remember them. I have been listening to both grannies every day and follow their advice. I am immersed in the experience that forms a part of my life already. This is how culture is transferred from one generation to another-in a natural, uncomplicated process of participation" (Chan, 2010: 238), she is enclosed in that world and in the world of modernity and the pursuits of careers. It is only in this later area that she shows herself as active and initiating (the plan to further her career in Australia. We are also never told if the planned move to Australia is a temporary career move, or a move which could be lasting.

She could live anywhere; Thailand doesn't loom large here, not in a negative or a positive way. On the little that there is, see section D of this part.

There is an element here which is reminiscent of the previous section. Ah-Mui-Mui is imbued with Chinese culture from home, and imbued with modern liberal women's careerism from the outside world. The grannies all worked hard to survive,

so there is no demand of her to be a housewife. But in spite of these facts, Ah-Mui-Mui remains relatively passive and indecisive.

4.6.3 China, Memories of China, it's Culture, it's People

There is more "China" in "A Walk through Spring" than other novels surveyed. This fact manifests itself from the very beginning. The descriptions of the life the four girls, two pairs of sisters are lively and presented in detail. Its clear that these descriptions are written merely to "get off the hook." The slow moving description covers the period between the winters, when we meet the protagonists first, till late spring, when the four depart to Siam. It cover relations within the families, important festivals, food habits, the difficulties of the last two years that harmed agricultural produce, the talk of men about the political situation in China, on where to immigrate and which dialect groups immigrate, and it even covers descriptive glimpses of the surrounding, nature and human habitat. Most importantly, it covers their coming of age. They experience the changes in their bodies, their maturing into women, and the elder women in the house instruct the on the ways of women: "You are a woman now and you can be pregnant. You must be careful. Men are like animals" (Chan, 2010: 35). Their coming of age coincides with their embarkation on the trip, and perhaps not accidentally.

The China that emerges is alive, it's a place where real people conduct their lives, and it's much more fleshed out than the description in other novels. It is a China about which one could tell fascinating stories. Even though mentioned later without delving into stories, it is a China that could form the base for stories as those told by Amy Tan numerous female story telling mothers. The foundations are there, Yuwadee lays them, but does not recur to them as the novel goes on, except for sporadic references in cases such receiving letters from China long after they left (Chan, 2010: 268), sending money to help the families and updates on the general

situation there.

There is another China that dominates the novel. It is the Diaspora China of Yowarat. In a paragraph, where sightseeing is discussed for the two visitors, Big Grandma immediately proclaims that: "'we shall visit the old places.' But these 'old places' are not Ayutthaya, Sukhothai, or Si-Satchanalai-the World Heritage Sites in Thailand-but Yowarat Market in Bangkok's Chinatown, Talat Noi or "Little Market," and Sathorn and Trok Chan districts" to which ah Mui Mui adds "In short, all the places that I am not knowledgeable about" (Chan, 2010: 65). The phrasing is important. The prime sites of Thai history are known to ah Mui Mui on account of her schooling, but there is nothing more to them their being "World Heritage Sites," an abstract reference that detaches them not only from sentimental bond, but even from the national setting itself. As already mentioned, they could be any other "World Heritage Sites" in any country. The "old places" are what old places are:" loci of nostalgia and sentiments. The old places are what Jews would have referred to as the Pale, the Shtetl, or, in extreme, the Ghetto. The "old places" are the places where "we, Chinese immigrants, lived in our own separate world."

In that separate world, Chinese traditions are maintained "as is." We are surrounded by Chinese characters throughout the narrative. The four grannies interact with bosses, middlemen, daily workers, shop keepers and their assistants, doctors, their wives, their lovers. All are Chinese, even products. When war break s the supply links with China, "manufacturing Chinese products to mreplace the imported ones has created a new industry among Chinese immigrants in Thailand. The Chinese grocery shop owners who sell imported Chinese productsnow set up factories to manufacture various consumer products needed by the Chinese in Thailand (followed by a long list-my comment) (Chan, 2010: 351).

That Keng's encounter with the Malaysian maids and security guard in the

Chan house, her long and last cooking job, is revealing. She refers to them as "Malaysian ghosts" or "Malai Gway," she is affronted by their physique, their dark coloration, their wearing (of the man) of a lungi. But there is nothing here that should surprise a person that spent years in Thailand. Not the built, the coloration and not even the wearing of a lungi, similar to the Thai "Pa Kao Ma." Off course there are differences between the Malay and Thai looks, but the kind of reaction indicates very little exposure to world outside the Chinese neighborhoods of Bangkok.

I specifically dwelt at length on this point because the scantiness of details on Thailand: individuals, culture, history…etc, is enlightening by itself. In fact, the only non Chinese individual in the novel who plays a major role, and whose personality is not only dwelt upon in great detail, but forms a basis for a life time attachment, is Master Yamada, the Japanese impressive, dignifies (even when utterly drunk) officer at whose house Gwai, the "youngest grandma," serves as a maid. Yamada leaves immediately after the end of the war, and Gwai's highly detailed and emotional description of his departure is captioned by her revelation that "That was the last time I saw Master Yamada…It's a shame…It's a shame….Had I known it was the last time I would see him, I would have asked to accompany him everywhere for life. No Matter how he might become poor or face hardship, I would remain with him" (Chan, 2010: 190).

The story of Gwai and Yamada is by far the most dramatic love affair in the novel, dramatic both on account of the intensity of feelings, the unconventional setting and national identities involved, but, most of all, because it remains completely silent and unexpressed. But there is more to that. It is also the "past story" the revelation of which has the most direct effect on the plot taking place in the present. The treasure which Yamada, or Master Yamada as he is reverently referred to, leaves to Gwai, a hint perhaps of a reciprocal but unuttered love, is so large that unmarried Gwai, who conserved as much of it as she could, gives a large portion of the remaining to Ah Mui Mui and Watthanachai on their wedding. The low income

situation of which Ah Mui Mui is apprehensive about, and which the entire novel revolves around changing her frame of mind towards, is magically addressed, even though she herself have already has been convinced by the concoction of tales and dishes to adopt a revised set of values. Why does a Japanese 2nd World War officer tower over a novel dedicated to Migrant Chinese who live in Thailand, coming back to it (Ah Hou), wanting to leave it (Ah Mui Mui) or living overseas (Gwai). Why couldn't the noble and dramatic figure be, one feels forced to ask, a Thai nobleman, Like Master Yamada, not a man of money, but a man of dignity and strong unexpressed emotional world, a person that imparts the sense of "old world" gentleman.

In any case, as we saw references to Thailand in the novel are scanty and detached. The novel is about overseas Chinese, particularly Cantonese, Thailand is a background, or, to be more clear, a random background. The novel could take place in the Philippines, Indonesia or other countries, and Watthachai would be then a mixed local and Taechiu, Fujianese, Hainanese or Hakka broad minded academic. The streets and districts would have different names, instead of "Tham Kwaan," another local ritual would be mentioned. All these could all be easily replaced except off course the essential Master Yamada.

There are also a few wider encompassing comments on Chinese in Thailand, one comment on the way Chinese immigrants view Thailand: "They see that the country has few middle class people, while the natives have no business vision and are shy of the trade culture. These factors make Thailand heaven for the Chinese since they are skilled traders, with masterly skills in various arts and crafts…changes in Thailand's social and economic structures allow them to rapidly establish themselves in Thailand as a new affluent class" (Chan, 2010: 290). This academically phrased description is followed by comments of the dreams of many Chinese to eventually return to China, at least to be buried. The dating of this comment, namely to the post war, post Communist takeover era, is revealed in a discussion between the

owners of the factory where the the Keng and Geng work: "China has certainly become a Communist country, Big Brother. Let's forget about going back to Tong Shan. Let's settle here in Thailand" (Chan, 2010: 289).

Also, the historical perspective is that this period is already 30 or so years after Chinese women were allowed to start migrating to Thailand (Skinner, 1957: 190), an important development that opened the door to the creation of a Chinese community made of Chinese couples, and their Chinese descendants. It is also the period which encompasses the terrifying anarchic warlordism period in China, succeeded, from the early 1930s by a relentlessly unfolding Japanese invasion (which predated the2nd World War by almost a decade). With the fierce war between the Communists and KMT immediately after the war, and the victory of the Communists, representing a complete anathema to all independent business operators or artisans, a status which was the main aspiration of migrant Chinese. There were therefore strong reasons to avoid China and, at the same time, strong reason to remain in Thailand, now that many migrants established families there and were not lonesome bachelors.

4.6.4 Thailand, Thai Culture, Thais

Where are the Thais?? They are mentioned casually. Ah Mui Mui mentions that Watthanachai "does not look down on our Chinese heritage" (Chan, 2010: 67), but why should he, being half Tae Chiu himself? Perhaps she is concerned with the fact that her household is purely Chinese, ethnically and culturally. He himself is obviously much more exposed. His exposure perhaps is what allows him to recommend that "I think before you go to Australia, you should get to know Thailand better. There are many aspects of Thailand that Thais have not experienced. Maybe these will change your mind about going abroad (Chan, 2010: 72).

Also, the younger daughter of Ah Hou, whom she had to leave in the care of acquaintances who live in the poor Chinese residential areas in Yannawa , due to financial difficulties and the need to go to work for a higher wage as a house maid in Singapore, marries a Thai, And on that Big Grandma notes, in reply to her sister's concern that Ah-Hou will be unhappy when coming back after a long time from Singapore, because her son-in-law Thai, that: "How else would her daughter have found a husband if she didn't marry a Thai Ah Hou is old fashioned" (Chan, 2010: 15). Ah-Hou also mentions that her dececed husband, Ah-Gok, the wealthy grocer who died of cancer only a few years after the marriage, that "it's a pity he didn't live to see his two grandchildren, but then again, he wouldn't allow Ah-Yeng to marry a Thai" (Chan, 2010: 361). But the story of Ah-Hou's children is a sad one, as they are left in a slum like area with people (Ah Son, obviously a Chinese) who abuses them to the extent of burning cigarettes on their hands (Chan, 2010: 379), and taking away the bulk of the money sent by Ah-Hou from Singapore, leaving them with crumbs and neglecting. Growing in such wretched conditions for many years, even though Ah Keng, ah Mui Mui's grand aunt saves them at last and brings them to be with her in the house where she works as the house cook, it is obvious that they belong to the lowest echelons of society. In that sense, marrying a Thai seems a "natural." There is nothing said, but perhaps there is something implied.

Ironically though, this demonstration of "modernity" is almost immediately followed by the two grandmas questioning Ah Mui Mui if Watthanachai, or "The Professor" as they refer to him, has a Chinese ancestor (Chan, 2010: 16). This is odd, and it obviously reflects a sense that having a Chinese ancestor "legitimizes him." Again, nothing is stated to that effect, there is no comment to the effect that not having a Chinese ancestor would delegitimize him, but, there is something implied.

Besides these subtle hints, there is no reference to "mixed" marriages as an issue. Nor can we expect it to be pronounced in a novel the main plot of which is set in the 1st decade of the 20th century. But nevertheless, we can't lose sight of the

comparative fact that while Winyu's pure Thainess was a loud statement in "Letters from Thailand", Watthanachai is implicitly "desired" to be at least a "Luukjin", and his being so, is instrumental at many point at which the grandma wield their words of wisdom, many of which are clearly identified as Chinese lore.

There are a few more scattered references to Thais, such a description of a market scene where both Thai (women) and Chinese peddlers offer their goods (Chan, 2010: 139). This description date to the period of the grandmas early years in Bangkok, when they are still new to the place. A detailed description of Thai women peddlers in the market, the way they dress and their chewing betel nuts which scares Keng, Ah Mui Mui's grand aunt: "Keng is apprehensive at the sight and dares not approach them. When these peddlers smile at her, they seem more like demons with bloody fangs ready to pounce on her and suck her blood" (Chan, 2010: 139). Demon-like or not, there is no prejudice meant for sure. The sight of Southeast Asian women chewing betel nuts, spitting red juice out of mouths lined with blackened teeth has been commented on negatively by countless visitors from all countries of the world. Another paragraph refers to the Thai Tham Kwan ritual (Chan, 2010: 230) aimed at restoring or fortifying the Khwan (or "spirit" in the meaning of "energy," "Vitality") of one month old baby, which is a traditional proceeding in this case (Tham Kwan is always performed on other entities and not usually as a response for a perceived weakness, not as a periodical procedure).

In the end, there is only Watthanachai who actively "promotes" Thailand, while still displaying his cross-dialect-group Chinese comradeship with the four grannies. Exchanging the names of the important places (namely, those in and around Yowarat), for names and places of a Chinese area in Malaysia, Indonesia or the Philippines, would not change a thing in the novel. It could take place there with hardly anyone taking notice. Perhaps the same, in lesser degree, could be said about some of the other novels. It's true that Diaspora is Diaspora; the Chinese that immigrated to different countries in Southeast Asia shared many characteristics, while

there is a certain common denominator to Southeast Asian culture. But still, one would expect more specificity as regards the host country.

4.6.5 Chinese Women in the Novel

"A Walk through Spring" does not confront the gender issue in Chinese tradition directly. I doesn't need to. What it does is practically a marginalization of men. The narrative revolves around five Chinese women. If Tao-Keh Nieh in "Letters from Thailand" intimates that Chinese women should not be dismissed, that their blood flows their descendant as much the father's does, and that they take the real burden in giving birth and raising the children, the four grannies in this novel express this, indirectly, in practically every line of the book. The men are being practically "shut up: When Ah-Mui Mui refers to the general lack of communications between her grandfather (who's being still alive is only revealed in the very beginning and at the very end) and her Aunt, she mentions: "Whenever she wanted to say something to Grandpa, she would have me act as a voicemail service and repeat his messages. That was the first time that stopped my Dad's behavior strange (also mentioned in the very beginning and the very end-my comment), because Big Grandma and Grandpa also would not communicate directly with each other. The men in my house don't talk directly to the women….That's normal Ah-Gu-Poh. Dad doesn't talk directly to mum either. I think it's men in this house who are strange, preferring not talk directly to women" (Chan, 2010: 417-418). The conspiracy of male silence is even wider. Ah-Mui-Mui notes: To me he (Watthanachai-my comment) is not a talker, perhaps because he always talk with reason rather than emotion and therefore talking to him is much less entertaining as when I talk with my girl friends" (Chan, 2010: 65).

This doesn't accord well with earlier description of her grandparents, who supported each other in hard times, and definitively talked with each other. It also

doesn't explain an obvious lack of communication on their side with Watthanachai, a potential in law, and a man. Watthanachai himself seems to be talking, and a lot (in contrast to Ah-Mui-Mui's comment), but he seems to be nothing more than a weak willed, soft academic, a wise person, who still spends the entire length of the story dancing to the music of the four grannies. His desire, to marry Ah-Mui-Mui, is turned to a reality by them, not him, he joins them enthusiastically because, as a paraphrase on the famous pop song would best describe it: "they've got the power." Watthanachai's voice gets firmer as the narrative proceeds, and the impression is that he gets that from the grannies.

The descriptions of the grannies are lively. They are charming, they have great tales to tell, they are caring, they are fighters in the streets of life, they cook fabulously, they are immersed in Chinese folklore, language, proverbs, even though their tales, as mentioned earlier, take place mostly in Thailand, as immigrants, not in China, but it's not really the bigger Thailand, it's the enclosed world of Chinese society. "Shutting up" the mouths of the men, who hardly appear in the narrative, just highlights their liveliness. The men could be excluded in other ways, they could be traveling overseas, they could be spending time in a beach condo in Hua Hin, there was no logic necessity in the plot to officially declare them as voiceless. But they were, and it means it was very intentional. It's more extreme, the daughter and grand daughter is finally getting married, where are they? One can even wonder if they will even attend the wedding, or if they do, might they just assigned to a separate area for "Incommunicando's."

Are they just dull, or are they non interested because it is, after all, just "the sewer in front of the house." "Dull" is probably the answer, after all they do communicate with Ah-Mui-Mui, she is their special "voice message box" to the others. Maybe they are both dull and intimidated by the elder women. All these are merely conjectures. We just know that it's a women's world, with very little place for men, unless necessary to the plot. Women reign here supreme, so there is no need to

argue with Chinese traditions that put men high up, because not only are they never "up" there, they are hardly even "there."

The details are endless; many were mentioned in the above background sections. We can compile lists of proverbs, of dishes, of terms in Chinese that they teach Ah-Mui-Mui and her somehow spineless future groom. Their stories or at least part of these have already been referred to. All these are tiny anecdotes that compose a large mosaic.

The generational relationship is of interest. Like in "Being with Gong," the old generation leads, it is traditional, here much more than with Gong, but with little bias (even though they are somehow relieved that Watthanachai is half Chinese). But then again they are not towering figures of morality and humanism. They are much smaller than Gong, but also much smaller than Ang Bui or Meng Ju in their significance in that arena. Also, they can't be compared to Anongpangna, Liang's bright granddaughter that becomes the successful leader of a large corporation, making his numerous look like dwarfs, not to mention his aufull first grandson, Chayachan. But it exactly in their "smallness" that lies their charm. The world, after all, is not populated mainly by bright business leaders, or impressive women of strong principles, independent, incorruptible characters, and bright minds. The grannies are none of these. They are literally "Goddesses of Small Things" (I use the striking title of Arundhati Roy's novel with no reference to it's story which is highly emotional and tragic, very unlike "A Walk through Spring").

Ah-Mui-Mui, reminds us of Suang U's reference to the Confucian view of decline over generations (corresponding exactly, by the way, to the Jewish view). In the novel she seems quiet, indecisive, without much to say, except perhaps about her career, which is the only part of her life that she looks somehow active about, she is no match to the grannies. She is opinion-less except for her wish to marry a wealthy

businessman (Chan, 2010: 67). We hear that she absorbed, from her real grand mother and her aunt, both living with her, (and the "silents") a great deal of their Chinese heritage, but we don't see it coming out her, she mentions that as her girl friends grow older and get married and have children, she has less and less people to talk to (Chan, 2010: 66). But still, it doesn't seem that she was lively and inspiring even when her girl friends were still unmarried and she had people to talk to.

Her grannies mission is to get her married. Their reasoning is simple: "A woman is nothing without a husband. You might be talented but when you grow old you will be unhappy. A tree must take roots. A woman must have a husband and children to ensure her security in life…how can you worry about your working life without concern for your own personal life?" (Chan, 2010: 68). Even Gwai, settled for life with the money Yamada gave her before killing himself, always wanted a daughter to give it to. The money, the security by itself, was not enough, her ability to give a part to Ah-Mui-Mui, as near to a daughter as she can have, gives her great satisfaction (Chan, 2010: 428-429).

It all sounds like the old traditions coming back, Ang Bui would not depend on having a husband or children, but Suang U did say say that "Chinese people like us do not hope for more than to see our children well married, producing families of their own" (Botan, 1991: 369). Aren't we going back to Suang U here, whose statement, by the way, was so liberal that he mentioned "children," without distinguishing between sons and daughters? And what is more striking, he also says, probably on the force of the Chinese sacred value of diligence at all costs that:" Someone once told me that the purpose of life is the pursuit of happiness. You know better than anyone how hard I have tried to teach Weng Kim the folly of such a view of life" (Botan, 1991: 247). The grannies are talking about marriage only on the force of the pursuit of happiness. There is no mention of the imperative to continue the family line. They are not interested in the fact that Ah-Mui-Mui is not a male, and they don't even Ang Bui's argument that famili lines can be carried by women as well as men. They are

only interested in the pursuit of happiness. This is no harking back to the views of a Suang U.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS AND PROPOSED FINDINGS: CHINESE WOMEN IN THAILAND AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF CHINESE IDENTITY

5.1 Chinese-Thai Families: Background Comments

We reviewed the social manifestations of gender in its dynamic relationships to identity and generational change. Gender, like race, is an inherent physiological feature which has deep social meanings. Unlike race, which is primarily a question of appearances (though there are those that attribute to it much more), gender is linked not only with appearances but also with biological work distribution. The point is that the females birth giving, early life nursing and the males insemination are irreducible facts and not social constructs. There were always wet nurses, and the budding industry of womb's rental, has been in fact been exercised among the higher classes for thousands of years through the institution of concubines. Besides a number of technological aids, we have still no clear concept of what a society where all these functions are practiced by a large number of people will function. In any case, we will not expand further on this background topic.

Gender is therefore a biological feature with social significance and roles that were created by society. Different societies created different significations and roles. While often related to religions, the issue of gender has increasingly been affected by laws and regulations of states. The nation-state is a recent phemonon that started to take shape through the rise of nationalist movementhas in the mid 19th century (Anderson, 1983: 67). While nationalism rose on the wave of modernization, especially commerce facilitating advances in transportations and communications (Anderson, 1983: 46), so did commercialization and the urbanization that accompanied it create favorable conditions for women to review their roles and standing in this new social and political environment and therefore to demand

equalization of rights, while in the past they occupied a lower rung, with a lower and inferior status in most societies, both in the West and in the East.

Let us first recap the Chinese family structure, as practiced in Thailand, as summed up by Coughlin. Coughlin observes that: “The Overseas Chinese family is patriarchal--the husband is unquestionably its head. Descent is traced along the male line and marriages within the kin group are prohibited.

The preferred pattern of residence after marriage is with the bridegroom's family, although conditions sometimes force the newly wed to establish a separate residence. Within the family, a person's responsibilities, rights and expectations are clear-cut and depend on generation, age and sex, as indeed they were traditionally in China. Older persons whether relatives or not are treated deferentially by those younger. Parents are especially respected and honored throughout their lives. On the other hand, women as compared to men hold a definitely inferior position in the family and are restricted in the activities they may engage in outside the home. The overseas Chinese community is a man's world, and few women care to question male superiority. Perhaps the outstanding feature of this family is that the traditional values mentioned above have persisted so well in an alien environment, a tribute not only to the intensity with which these are held, but also to the insula- tion of the home from influences which might engender radical changes. (Coughlin, 1960: 67).

We will focus here on analyzing how this “insulation” is broken, and how gender values are indeed renegotiated in the case of Chinese-Thai women. Our case brings together women of ethnic Chinese origin over a few generations, starting with immigration and the way they negotiate their status as women within the boundaries of a large Chinese Thai community-Thai community which attempts to maintain at least some unique identity in Thailand. In that process, Thailand plays a critical role both as a state that had various and vastly differing policies towards that community over the years, and as a culture which is different than the Chinese one in many aspects. All these factors are important and have to be taken into account.

We study these processes here through literature, but there are many other ways to approach it. For example, in a dissertation towards a Master degree by Teuanpit Chaiprahomprasit, titled "Status and Role of Women in the Chinese family in contemporary Thailand: case Studies A conservative Group in Bangkok Metroplois", the topic is approached anthropologically through in depth interviews, and cover a sample population of 20 Taechiu families (31 women) in various areas of Bangkok (Teuanpit Chaiprahomprasit, 1988: 48). The study, dated 1988, focuses on Chinese-Thai women's role and status, not on identity issues, but it clearly shows that that the issues raised in the literature that we reviewed are relevant and real, and that changes in the status and role of Chinese-Thai occured over time. For example, when women under the age of 40 and women over the age of 40 are compared, differences in role and status are found (Teuanpit Chaiprahomprasit, 1988: 123). Education, wealth, work and ability to generate income, are shown to raise the status of women and their power in the family, but the fact that the study goes in depth into the lives of these families shows the nuances and the lack of simple formulas. Namely, with the wife being the bread-maker, we still sometimes see the husband in a vastly superior position. The inferior position of daughters in law, the preference for sons, ideas on how far should a woman advance her studies, attempts to select a groom by the parents, all these issues are still there, and are still being a center of contention. Leaving the household after a marriage (especially marriage based on selection on bride and groom) seems to be the most clear cut method of breaking with traditions, or at least making a big change. All these issues are to be found in the novels we study. What I found especially useful in the work mentioned above is the level of details it went into. Novels also present stories of families and people in great detail, and allow us to see, through the narratives, the complexity and the numerous exceptions and variations that exist.

We reviewed the roots of the Chinese traditions of the family in Chinese historical writings. There we could see that while these traditions are indeed well established in history, they do not reflect the full range of what has been practiced in different periods. Also, as we saw in Judy Chan's novel, there could be more region

or dialect variation than we can see in Thailand because the majority of the Chinese-Thai are Tae-Chiu. In any case, what is practiced in Thailand is rooted enough that one can hardly say that these are reconstructed or imagined traditions that were recently formed as a reaction to certain threats (as many scholars contend, for example, that Jewish Orthodoxy is not a reflection of a ancient past, but a defensive reaction to Jewish assimilation in Europe. Here we have an opposite case where female opposition to these "orthodox" norms, rises either as part of an assimilation, or as part of being in an environment, meaning Thailand, where such opposition can be tolerated, or, rather, is much harder to suppress.

5.2 Gender and Generational Change

First, I would like to emphasize that our interest in generational change is not due to the fact of generational change itself, which is a natural phenomenon, but but rather due to the fact that we live in a society going through rapid and accelerating changes in all facets of life, children face a very world than the one thir parents grew on, and transmitting to them old traditions becomes more difficult. This issue when we study Diaspora societies that go through a multi generational process of interaction with the host societies, an complex interaction that can have results that range from complete isolation to complete assimilation, and any number of variations in between.

We reviewed five prominent novels covering a period that spans almost four decades. All the novels dealt with the ethnic Chinese community in Thailand in different periods, different types of locations (rural and urban), different social classes, and even, in the case of "A Walk through Spring," with a relatively small dialect group. In that sense, the picture as a whole is quite comprehensive.

We have encountered numerous, and different women characters. At the same time, we saw various perspectives on women, both from a male's point of view and from women point of view. There were:

In "Letters from Thailand" we have three generations. Nuang Tong's wife,

Tao- Geh Nieh, and the mother of Suang U, the silent addresse of his letters, are the eldest generation, with Tao-Geh Nieh being a first generation in Thailand. Mui Eng, Suang U's wife, and her sister, Ang Bui, who plays an important role, are both second generation. Chuey Gim, Bak Li and Meng Ju, Suang U's daughters are third generation in the matrilineal line, and second in the patrilineal line.

In "Being with Gong," there are no females as the main characters. There is, however, an instructive case of intergenerational interaction between a grandfather and a grandson, and commentary about women's position in traditional Chinese families, as well as some cases where such bigotry is confronted.

In "Through the Scales of the Dragon," the first of Liang's three wives, Mei-Ling, the "China Wife" is a late first generation immigrant; late because she arrives, or brought over, when she already has two grown up sons. The second wife, Niam, is not identified ethnically, but she is almost certainly of Chinese descent (pure or mixed is unknown), because of her ability to bridge the Chinese and Thai world for Liang and facilitate his rise. The third wife, a comfort wife for his later days, is Thai.

In "The Last Petal of the Peony," there are two generations. Ah-Chang and Ah-Sin of the Ngiu family, are first generation immigrants and the parents of Dalla, Pannan, and Tanayong, all girls, and one adopted Thai orphan son, Along. Ah-Cheng and Ah-Meiling, first generation immigrants, are the parents to the main character and the creator of the plot, Tiradet or Ah-Ju, and his elder brothers, Tirachai or Ah-Jo and Tirachat or Ah-Jiu.

We saw in the previous chapter that emphasis on third generation women occurs mainly in "A Walk through Spring", where the second generation, i.e, the mother, does not have any role and is not described or introduced. In "Through the Scales of the Dragon", the narrator is a third generation ethnic Chinese, but as she acts as an "objective narrator", with little insertion of her own thoughts and opinions, she remains passive in the plot. The only caveat to that is that an important second

generation female character, Anongpangna, is the daughter of the Patriarch, Liang, third and youngest wife, and is therefore equivalent in age to other third generation characters (offspring of the first wife). The age differences between the three wives ages twist the generational categories. An exception is "Letters from Thailand" where the mother, Mui-Eng (and the aunt, her sister) are second generation, and her daughters are third generation.

We have seen female challenges to the traditional norms, or even, surprisingly, men extending help to the women, and doing so throughout the five novels. What we shall be looking at is how opposition to tradition is constructed.

The first point I would like to make is that the five novels were written in different periods. The first two novels were written at a period in which assimilation was a key notion. This has been pointed out by scholars both through analyzing the novels, but also directly through interview with the writers. In a dissertation towards a master degree titled "Chinese Main Characters' Moral Behavior in Thai Novels" by Nitta Janpanyasin, Supa Sirisingh, (the real name of "Botan") is said, based on interviews, to support assimilation, though she notes that it does not have to mean a complete annihilation of any former tradition. In that sense, Botan supports a mild assimilation or what is sometimes referred to as"integration." She sees that allowance as enabling a more harmonious national community than other countries with significant Chinese descended minorities (Nitta Janpanyasin, 1998: 127-128). Chalermsak Ronkplin (the real name of Yok Burapha) declares more modest objectives, namely "to be a bridge between that will go across conflicts, contradictions and misunderstandings between Chinese and Thais, if such exist or will arise oin the future" (Nitta Janpanyasin, 1998: 133). On the other hand, Prapason Sewikul, having written his "Through the Scales of the Dragon" at a much later period, laments the slow disappearance of moral values held by first generation of entrepreneurs, who were not only interested on money, but who carried with them

Chinese values of Morality and Gratefulness (Nitta Janpanyasin, 1998: 152), and sees it as his goal to remind the public of these.

While the differences between the first two and the later one are clear, it should be noted that scholars who studied the texts in detail find much clearer assimilationist orientation in the first two. I agree with that view. In any case, in an environment in which assimilation is the declared policy, the meaning of generational change becomes linked to that. The change between generations acquires the meaning of moving from an original Chinese identity towards a Thai identity. This is especially obvious in "Being with Gong," but is also evident in "Letters from Thailand."

In "Being with Gong," the social circumstances are of an isolated rural setting with a small strip of Chinese shop houses, connecting to a market, where the most active traders are Chinese, but which is surrounded by vast agricultural areas where a much larger number of Thais live. This setting shields the narrative from the impact of modernization, which is significant in "Letters from Thailand". It leaves the narrative of generational change with only two poles: Chinese and Thai. As Natthanai Prasanam, in his article "Yoo Kab Kong by Yok Burapha: The Pursuit of Integration Ideology in the Thai Social Context" notes, Gong drives Yok away from his Chinese roots: "instead of transferring to Yok a Chinese identity, it's worthwhile noting that Chineseness in "Being with Gong" barely appears compared to other novels that depict the life of Chinese-Thais in Thailand. Gong never longs for China or seeks to be Chinese, and it appears that he is pushing Yok to severe any connections with a Chinese past in order to prepare him for in integration in Thailand" (Natthanai Prasanam, 2007: 105). So while the author himself refers to goals of integration, the severing of all ties to a Chinese heritage cannot result in becoming a Thai with a certain Chinese unique cultural heritage, but rather means the oblivion of any Chinese traces. In fact, as Natthanai also notes, China is never mentioned in a positive reference. It's a land of hardship, suffering, a place to be forgotten, rather than remembered (Natthanai Prasanam, 2007: 114). A significant character, mentioned earlier in the review of the novel, is the teacher Banyong, who offers a model of

complete assimilation, and can be easily mistaken for a "model Thai," and it is only the link to his parents' long standing acquaintance with Gong and their occupation as growers of vegetables that hint, very subtly, at Chinese origins. Gong often refers to the Chinese as being merely guests in the country, that should respect and try to adjust to the "owners of the land," even when they feel that they are treated badly (Yok Burapha, 1991: 94). This is repeated throughout and seems to point not towards assimilation, but rather towards a permanent status of a minority that simply needs to become a "model minority," a term that Natthanai refers to often. But these are two very different situations. Assimilation is aimed at eradicating minority status, while Integration is often understood as allowing residual traditions to exist, as long as they remain marginal. The American-Chinese writers, as we saw earlier, are extremely negative towards a model minority status. They see it as demeaning. They also reject assimilation, most probably because they see it as unattainable due to race (and this, as we saw, changes with more contemporary writers). Their slogan is "To Claim America," namely to be full-fledged Americans, but with a unique cultural contribution of their own. Gong's humility as a member of a minority, and his maintaining Chinese traditions, is "allowed" for Gong and his generation. Natthanai however, finds an interesting point that I have not seen mentioned before and which requires minute concentration to detect. That point is linked strongly to the issue of generational change. While Gong attracts most of the attention as the assimilator, Yok often disagrees with Gong, in certain episodes viewing assimilation with skepticism. This is expressed in silences, and certain comments to himself (Natthanai Prasanam, 2007: 107). As Natthanai points out, Yok has a much greater tendency to feel suppressed by Thais, especially by government officials, such as his fight with Somkiat, the son of the Head of Education in the district, and tends to often feel sorry for himself as a helpless member of a powerless minority. This observation puts a dint in the view of the novel as a non-ambivalent call for wholesale assimilation through intergenerational change.

While intergenerational change is an important theme in "Being with Gong," it is devoid of the gender issue. That issue is prominent in "Letters from Thailand." Yok has no reason not to be a "Chinese man" gender wise. But in "Letters from

Thailand," important characters such as Suang U's daughter Meng Ju and his sister in law, Ang Bui, have plenty of reasons. Since the novel was also written in the period when assimilation was an important stated goal, their options are open to bolt out of Chinese-Thai society. In other words, assimilation (or integration) offers an instant refuge from the burden of being a woman in a traditional cultural Chinese environment.

The urban setting of "Letters from Thailand" makes it different from the dual-polar world of Gong and Yok. We have a third pole here, and that is Western influences, a third culture. Suang U recognizes it throughout, but he ascribes to the Thais and their acceptance of it. But it definitely widens the space. Negotiating one's status as a woman is not necessarily an assimilation into Thainess, as traditionally defined. It can also be achieved by becoming a modern woman in Thai society. It is true that since the early adaptors were Thais, it implies increased integration into Thai society, but this does not exclude modern Chinese-Thais. Ang Bui represents the seizing of that option from early on in the narrative. She assimilates into a modern Society, regardless of the ethnic background of its members. She has no children (yet), but as second generation Chinese-Thai who strives to be released of the gender biases of her parents, she finds her place here.

Meng-Ju on the other hand, goes towards assimilation, as she marries Winyu. But we have to bear in mind that Winyu is a proud Thai, but not a bigot or a blind nationalist. He possesses a great degree of tolerance and openness, and would not push for oblivion of any Chinese cultural heritage. But what marks him, and his mother, is that they are not only Thais, but they are the best there is, I would even say they would be model citizens anywhere. They are a "model majority" as much as Gong is a "model minority". Meng-Ju could not find a better place and better people to learn the best there is of Thailand. So even though both her and her husband are far from enmity towards everything Chinese, her bitter memories from home, will lead her away from that heritage, especially when her new family is so wonderful. Unlike the mothers in Amy Tan's novels, in Kingston novels, and the grannies in "A Walk through Spring," Mui Eng, her mother, never gifted her with the richness of Chinese

heritage embedded in tales and personal histories to remember. Mui Eng read the classics of Chinese literature when she was young, tutored in fact by Suang U. But neither her mother's tutor, nor her mother, seem to have transferred any of that forward. We find stories from these novels playing roles in intergenerational giving in American-Chinese novels. The trandgenerational giving in the American novels is never that of dry texts but of imaginative activities.

Another interesting point in the novel is that there is only one active first generation female character in this novel, Tao Geh Nie, the mother of the two sisters. She plays a minor and brief role in the total plot, but she still expresses, quietly, opinions that contradict the male centered dogma. Even though traditional, she does have her point of view. When Mui Eng is near to her first birth, Nguan Tong "looked bewildered for a moment; then he began to grin as he realized the truth. 'Good for her, boy, and good for you'! he said, gripping my shoulder. 'Yes, sir. If it's a boy, I'm going to call him Weng Kim'. My Mother-in-law raised a hand to her breast nervously. 'Suang U, remember that we are not given to choose-', 'Quiet, woman!' her husband snapped, glaring at her. 'Mui Eng may not be as inefficient as her mother at producing son. Why, if I had had any sense I'd have taken another wife long ago and kept on trying. But I've always been to busy' he grumbled, 'and now I'm too sick. So it's up to Little Cat to put my blood into sons.' 'You have a daughter who runs your business as well as any man's son' she said, undaunted, 'and still you carry on with this silly talk. You'd better start considering her feelings!'. Of course I consider her feelings,' he muttered irritably. But it isn't the same. She does the work, yes, but can she leave her alone, or go anywhere at night? And how does it look to my friends-'Nguan Tong and Daughter'-bah!'" (Botan, 1991: 88-89). Tao Geh Nie shows here that regardless of the quiet acceptance of the traditional male dominant family structure, the earlier generations retain silent opposition to many of its tenets, though they are inhibited by never having interacted enough with the outside world to know that resistance is a possibility. It is Thailand as a new home and a different culture which opens up these opportunities. In the intergenerational interaction between them and their daughters, there could be many more "silences," as Natthanai refers to it, which convey a message that contradicts the traditions, especially as they

see their daughters growing in a much more open environment than that in which they grew.

There is one prominent feature of the literary method used to raise the female status in "Letter from Thailand" and that is that simultaneously with the rise in prestige and value of the youngest daughter, comes the humiliation of the older son. Weng Kim, the celebrated first son, does everything wrong. From the affair with Phani, to the practically forced marriage to Rose, his being dominated by her, his acceptance of her incitement against his father (who allowed Phani into their house earlier), and in his joining her in seeing his father as nothing but a source of money, and the disregard towards him otherwise. The rise of the daughter is the fall of the son.

It is, in the final count, a brutal competition. Meng-Ju's attacks on Phani while she is in the house are in fact attacks against Weng Kim. The struggle is not only intergenerational; it takes its most violent form within the same generation, between daughter and son. The father is in fact simply left to make his choice between loser and winner.

The same scenario takes place in "Through the Scales of the Dragon". The early signs are of Andy, the preferred son (second to Tian, but smarter in gaining favor, especially by marrying Peggy, the daughter of a Hong-Kong tycoon with all the formalities of an arranged marriage). Andy tries to wrest control of Liang's empire while he is in exile during the Sarit regime, but what is worst, his son, Chaichan, the first son of the de-facto first son, tries to compete directly with his grandfather Liang instead of joining the united family, perhaps Liang's highest wish and value. Failing, Chaichan extracts a rescue from his betrayed, but loving grandfather. The rescue is on extremely favorable terms that enrich Chaichan as a reward for his betrayal. After that he cashes in the reward and starts the money pyramid that brings his fall, with no rescue this time, and a great shame to the family name. In between all that he manages to get into an incestual relation with his half sister, gets her pregnant and forces her into life-risking abortion and then a miserable life of mental illness and self

isolation. He never marries and doesn't present his grandfather with sons. One can wonder whether such would be welcome. His mother, Peggy, makes a mockery of the institution of a "daughter in law." All she does is scheme against her father in law. The other children, mostly sons, are either mediocre or pathetic. That includes Anon, the PhD graduate from the US, who starts in a promising manner by introducing new management concepts but ends up in bitter enmity with his married brother over a pretty secretary they both chase obsessively.

Some of the other second generation daughters act in other ways. In the case of Duangdao, she opts out to farming or other occupations in nature. Anantana commits the unspoken act of engaging sexually with her half brother, Chaichan, leading themselves, perhaps knowingly, into a psychological trauma and seclusion. Both these forms of silent protests are also conducted by action, not by conversation. The Liang household is complex. It is not heavily gender biased, and a daughter like Anut can find a comfortable place for herself without becoming a business achiever like Anongpangna, whom we shall discuss shortly. But perhaps it is an ambivalent situation in which different women characters react differently.

Salvation comes from the youngest daughter, Anongpangna (daughter of the third, comfort wife, an ethnic Thai from the north, proof that ethnicity is not a core issue here). Anongpangna is a brilliant student and a sharp manager. Upon returning from studies in the US, Liang, and his close advisors are impressed, they let her her run of his conglomerates largest and she does so brilliantly. She is definitely the one to carry the torch of the family's enterprise forward. She will also carry the name, as she is divorced (married and divorced while in the US), she also has a son, and he will carry to succeed Liang, who meanwhile deteriorates in health as he sees his son and grandson betraying him again and again. These betrayals eventually lead to his death.

These are different settings from "Letters from Thailand," but there are similar patterns. Without ever clashing directly like Weng Kim and Meng-Ju, Aongpangna

rises to the top over, symbolically speaking, the bodies of the designated male inheritors.

Both Meng-Ju and Anongpangna negotiate not only a much higher status, but a status equivalent to that of a first son, by replacing the males.

There are similar traits to that in "The Last Petal of the Peony." On the one hand, the whole plot is built on Tiradet's attempt to prove to his parents that having daughters is as good as having sons. He finds the Ngiu family, with three daughters to be much happier and harmonious than his family with three sons. In that sense, status negotiations are done through education and examples.

But there is more than that in the plot. The imperative to supplement, destroy or humiliate the male are also present here in profusion. For example, Dalla, the eldest daughter, who was married by arrangement to the son of her father's village and financial supporter in Thailand, discovers that her husband is engaged in a passionate affair with another man. The affair appears to be a continuation of a childhood relationship. The marriage, the kids, the family, is a façade, (though the husband feels he did his duty by "giving his father a son." The conservative parents are disgusted and cut him away. Dalla remains, as it is declared as both the father and the mother. Though Dalla was never humiliated before, she still gains, symbolically, the high status of a father, by the elimination of the actual father, who is not seen by his parents as a full male anymore.

The youngest sister of Dalla, Tanayong, is a "manly" woman, who is attracted to male occupations such as mechanics. She dreams of opening a garage. The main character, Tiradet falls in love with her, and they end up marrying. Tiradet is the abused and suppressed youngest out three sons, because his birth brought bad health to his mother, and he is never forgiven for that. There is something odd about the sense of enmity with which he is suppressed. His two elder and admired brothers only take advantage of the father, take his money in every occasion, are ashamed to introduce him to their parents-in- law when they marry women from higher standing

they met in university, and do not bother to help him in any way during his life threatening sickness. Tiradet is loyal to him regardless of the abuse he gets. He works with a friend to maintain the father's restaurant when he is in hospital or in recovery; he never relinquishes his filial duties.

There are elements in the narrative that are reminiscent of how Meng-Ju was treated with disdain when very young and how she ended up as her father's savior with her husband. When one looks at it carefully, Tiradet carries all the characteristics of an abused youngest daughter. Though male, he is nevertheless a "sewer in front of the house" for his father. One can almost say that the fact that Tiradet is a male is an oddity, and is perhaps designed to show that gender bias is a form of bias in a more general sense, and when bias is the guiding principle or an important element of how a family is run, one cannot count on being a son to escape it. If that is the message, it is a strong one. It also shows the convulsed application of the Confucian emphasis on family harmony. Hierarchies degenerate into biases, prejudices and malice. The principle that is supposed to keep the family in an orderly state is completely misunderstood and leads instead to complete lack of harmony characterized by character spoiling favoritism on the one hand, and animosity breeding suppression and abuse on the other.

Tiradet is falling in love with a young woman that is a bit of what is colloquially referred to as "Tomboy." These observations lead again to a sense of gender switch, though Tiradet is in no sense effeminate. Also here, we learn of the demise of Tiradet's elder brothers, who treated their own father in such a disgraceful manner.

Pannan, the middle daughter, puts to shame a suitor, Sia Decha, a rich Chinese-Thai who tries to secure a marriage to her by giving a loan at usurious rates to her father in exchange for the father's promise to give her to him as a bride, if payments fail. She is collateral. It is found that the Sia Decha already has a wife and minor wife. Hearing about it Pannan, with the support of her sisters, clearly declares she will not follow the deal. Sia Decha is put to shame and agrees to cancel the whole

scheme in exchange of just being allowed to be her occasional friend. Pannan is shown here as robust and result, the males, her father and the suitor are shown as sneaky and spineless. Pannan only has to put her foot down to bring the rich suitor, Sia Decha, under her control. Pannan marries the family's adopted son Along, an ethnic Thai orphan left at their gate, and which they raise as a son. Along is handsome, manly, and an important part of the family's Ngiu troupe. The marriage is legitimate because there are no blood relations. But the fact that she marries an orphan of unknown parenthood, who was raised by her family, potentially puts these husband-wife future relations as far from the traditional Chinese pattern as could be. The only name there is to be carried is hers. Handsome and manly he is still doomed to be her inferior by the nature of his relations to her family. He looks up at her, and the impression is that he will always do.

In "The Last Petal of the Peony", we also find an episode which is a reminder of the comments of Tao Geh Nie in "Letters from Thailand", another example of hints or silences: Ah-Chang caresses Ah-Sin's belly as she is pregnant: "I am very happy Ah-Sin…we must have a son as a first child. He will be the big brother that looks after his younger siblings. The ancient said that a house that has a boy as the first child, is like having a representative of the father and when he grows up I have nothing to worry about if I need to go far to look for additional income. 'Girl or boy, they all are children, Ah-Chang' Ah-Sin retorted. Ah-chang, with an upset face answered: 'Yes, they are all our children, but if the first is a boy it's better because in case you can't have more children, at least we got a son to continue our family line.' 'Ah-Chang, you think too much' she retorted with a smile, but deep inside, she was worried about her husband's wishes" (Kantima, 2007: 20).

In the fifth novel, "A Walk through Spring," both generations, grandmothers and granddaughter, join in establishing essentially maleless families, with Watthanachai brought in as a groom who is practically adopted in. Watthanachai is almost rejected by a career, business oriented Ah-Mui-Mui, a woman of the world who plans to further her career abroad. Venturing abroad for the purpose of income was, we should bear in mind, the preserve of men, not women. But let us not forget

the the fur grannies themselves ventures to Thailand on their own, which I understand is rare. We don't read of single women travelling to Thailand alone often. Again, it might hint at their freedom as women, their independence, from their early years. Like them, Ah-Mui-Mui is therefore taking a role representing the venture out, while Watthanachai represents the more domestic orientation. This is a reversal of one of the classical gender dichotomies. Watthanachai is also passive, he is not forceful enough to convince her to marry him, and he is a quiet, gentle academic, not a man of action, compared to her being a woman of action. That hints at a possible reversal of the second classic dichotomy, yin-yang. The grannies are all "yang," sunny, positive, active, forcefull, assertive. Yang resides in a group of four fragile elderly women. The other men in the house are silent, passive, introverted, giving further proof of who is yin and who is yang.

"A Walk Through Spring" also introduces new dimensions, some of which are related to the fact that the main characters are Cantonese and not Tae Chiu, as the main characters in all other novel. The Tae-Chiu are the majority in the population of Chinese-Thais compared to other dialect groups. The Cantonese are a relatively small group in Thailand, but are the majority among Chinese Americans. The literature of Chinese Americans is mainly that of Cantonese. As Natthanai points out, the literature about Chinese-Thais is mostly focused on the Tae-Chiu males who come to Thailand with "one mat, and one pillow", as the situation of starting from nothing is often referred to and build their fortunes or at least a respectable living, or a "Malestream history" (Natthanai Prasannam, 2010: 129-132). In a literature centered around males, intergenerational struggles for a reconstruction of the status of women reflect this fact. Natthanai compares "A Walk Through Spring" to the works of American Chinese novels, some of which we reviewed earlier, with a focus on Amy Tan, where the stories are those of women and relations between women, particularly mothers and daughters (Natthanai Prasannam, 2010: 136). I understand the focus on Tan and not on Kingston, is the higher degree of similarity to "Walking Through Spring," and the fact that Kingston, who practically created the mother-daughter dialogue Cantonese literature, goes much further and in a much more complex manner in its psychological exploration of the soul of a Diaspora person than do either

Tan or Chan.

It is not clear whether Chan uses what she strongly feels to be the different cultural identity of the Cantonese to justify a narrative based primarily on female characters, or whether she aims to show the different identity of the Cantonese by emphasizing "histories of Diaspora women….through cooking, work in the kitchen and an atmosphere of feminine subtle and complex emotions" (Natthanai Prasannam, 2010: 127). In a way she does both. The emphasis on the kitchen as the center of the house, the family as a whole, while being also a "gendered space" belonging to women (Natthanai Prasannam, 2010: 145), and still more, with cooking being an important profession of the Cantonese, for which they are known for all over the world (Natthanai Prasannam, 2010: 150), creates, all together, a sense of a very different identity-gender relations than what we saw until now. We will continue this strand in the next section, but what we can see here is that Chan opens a wide space for female-only interaction. And that space allows the four grandmothers to pull Ah-Mui-Mui, not assimilated, but modernized, back to a more traditional world, but where the traditions are not harsh suppression and bias, but are love, warmth, and truly harmonious sense of family.

This is the only novel where we see not only retention and preservation of tradition (as with the tradition of Ngiu, Chinese Opera in "The Last Petal of the Peony"), but a return to it as home-coming. But with the emphasize of the separate Cantonese identity, it is difficult to conclude whether the conclusion is that female centered Chinese tradition is wonderful and worth going back to for future generations, or is it only the Cantonese and their own separate identity, that can enjoy that benefit.

To sum up, our analysis shows that is perhaps a need to rephrase the terms of the topic. It is not an intergenerational negotiation only. It is both an intergenerational and intra-gender negotiations. The struggle with a dominant, traditional father figure always remains. But added to it is sibling struggle among males and females, even if only symbolic and not direct. The daughters are replacing

the sons. The parents are both actors and spectators, almost always starting as supporters of the sons and changing their minds later. This dual struggle is uniquely characterized by numerous symbolic gender reversals that come in a plethora of shapes, but which seem to be almost a signature of these narratives (not counting "A Walk through Spring"). All the gender reversals are, in the final count, movements around the yin/yang, wai/nei dichotomies, and they involve, as mentioned briefly, raising the status of daughters, empowering them in the world outside the home, and showing to be the real grateful children, whole pushing down sons, showing them as failures, as egotistic and lacking in gratitude to parents. In a way, then, these are not just negotiations but substitution. "A Walk through Spring" differs in its redefinition of the core identity, empowering women as they are, rather than turning them into "better males." In such conditions, warm and supportive general transition can take place, one without struggles but with cooperation.

5.3 Identity and Gender

We called this section "Identity and Gender." The terms are different, but for many women today, especially those that are in women's affairs, not only feminists that act in the political scene, the differentiation is odd. Gender, for them, is a core part, maybe the main part, of their identities. And if we think about it, the fact that identity became a practical possession of political, nationalistic and ethnic discourse is not self explanatory. People's lives are far more complex that their sense of "identity" will be usurped by one dimension, important as it seems to be, of life.

Identity is a relatively modern term, and it's often used as substitute to numerous other terms that referred to a "self." Proceeding along these lines, considering one's gender as a primary part of one's identity is only sensible. So gender cannot be denied to be a primary component of identity in its own right. A woman is a woman before she is French, Catholic, Socialist, a wine aficionado, a member of the local charity club, or a business owner.

It is important to make this clear, because in our topic which concerns

"identity" and "gender," "gender" also appears not for itself, but as one of the facets of a socio cultural heritage. It is based on the primal gender, but it a top layer social construct which determines the standing in social hierarchy, the role in society, and the appropriate behavior norms that are decreed to apply to her. These are decrees that gender is subjected to, and the culture, which includes many other "decrees" besides those that relate to gender, and the group of people that stand by this culture, all together, are another manifestation of her identity. The culture and the people, who imagine themselves as a group, are human constructs, gender is natural.

As we read before, Chinese traditions, predating Confucius but reaffirmed and canonized by him, see the stability, continuity and solidity of the family institution as the key to the stability, continuity and solidity of society as a whole. Families are the cells of which society is made, and as good as the cells are, so will be society at large. Chinese culture takes the family institution very seriously, and individuality is always at the command of the needs for family prosperity, and, most important, continuity.

The primary role of the male as the carrier of the family's name and heritage dictates automatically a preference for males. We saw Suang U elaborating the "magic formula of "five sons, two daughters." We saw formulas of first four sons, then one daughter to dot on with Ah-Cheng. Obviously these formulas are statistically unachievable and if achieved, they are unsustainable demographically.

The base of the tradition, the desire to conserve the family's continuity and stability is unbiased by itself. The fact that males have the supremacy (or females in the opposite case) is most probably a reflection of a primordial power struggle. Mythologies are often constructs which explains the results of power struggles as a given coming from higher authorities. The negative way females are treated in this system is less explainable or rational. After all, males could have the primacy but females could be accommodated in a more positive manner. The fact that they are raised only to be rushed to be marries off and serve the other family, taking with them a dowry, is not beneficial for their own family.

The women were simultaneously the intergenerational transferor of the traditions, and at the same time the victims of them. Their role in transferring is obvious in their roles as mothers. The desire to have sons has become part of what they want. Teaching women how to behave or conduct themselves is exclusively their job. They are stakeholders within their households (even if their status is endangered by not producing sons), a mother is still, relatively, a higher status than a daughter, the Mother is part of the patrilineal chain, and she is committed to it.

The five Thai novels we examined all contain these issues, in numerous manifestations. The focus on gender issues is not always explicit, such as in "Through the scales of the Dragon," and is, in the case of "Being with Gong," more of a phenomenon in the environment to observe (and for Gong, to intervene in, such as the case of Ngek Ju, whose grievance is towards a marriage enforced on her by her son, instead of being arrange, and the fact he marries a Thai, what she fears will eventually mean assimilation and discontinuation of the line). But we have an array of strong willed women that refuse to accept the tradition and to subject themselves to inferiority. The fact of being in Thailand, both more matrilineal, as Chan & Tong note, and more modern, Western influenced, as Ang Bui is happy to show at every turn, gives their rising up a relative accepting environment. Cases of having a child out of wedlock, as the case of Bak-Li, are quickly sorted out.

In Thailand, it is possible to opt out of Chinese-Thai society, but one still lives as part of a middle class of the Luuk Jin, which Tejapira described enthusiastically, forgetting to identify what are the Thai element of their hybridity, or whether the hybridity is not a real new cultural edifice, but a case of the Luuk Jin identity being a part of multiple identities (Cushman, and Wang, 1988: 10), where the Thai identity is a useful one in certain, what Wang also calls "situational identity" (Wang, and Wang, 2003: 53), or whether being Luukjin, is the core, the expressive identity, while the more Thaified identity is outside the core, is situational (Tong, and Chan, 2001: 12). From the description of their enthusiastic imagined community hymn, it felt very expressive and core, and at the same time, being the mass of the middle class, it is

expectable that most of their situational identity will not differ from the expressive, core ones, as they mostly transact with their own. From my own familiarity with many ethnic Chinese factory owners, and from personal observations of these in their factories, I notice that that the Ah-Sia and the Thai labor are very clearly separated. The Ah-Sia dresses often in a power projecting way, talks authoritatively and often has his second in command to deal with labor. He is usually not very good in that. They are too distant.

Coming back to our female protagonists, they continue to live in a Luuk-Jin society, albeit a far more liberal one. That means that they are in a certain need of cunning in negotiating their position women. Oregon is too far, and to end up as Duangdao, running a few backpackers bungalows, is less appealing. Remaining within the community, which is practically, in fact, the bulk of the middle class requires more subtlety. In addition, being situated in Asia, where the ancestral land, China, is becoming a major source of influence, there is a strong incentive to *re-sinify*. All the articles I read were packed with statistics of Chinese schools, but lately, there has been a tremendous growth in the number of these, and the fact that Chinese is entered in the very national curriculum, and in the growing of an educated middle class of the depth and enormity of Chinese literal tradition, and mostly its practical usefulness for anything ranging from health, diet, exercise to strategic thinking, no inferior of the Western MBA, in its cleverness.

The dilemma is that the ancestral heritage, now again glorious and full of prospects, still contains that male total superiority, female total inferiority foundation. If in post Communist China pre birth gender selection is such a gigantic phenomenon that it threatens society by unleashing millions of males that statistically will not have females available as wives. In fact, these people are following dictations of male preference but are forgetting that the doctrine is not only about the existence of Yin and Yang, but of the crucial balance between them.

The challenge in “Letters from Thailand” and “Being with Gong,” was to liberate oneself as a woman (Meng Ju, Ang Bui), or defy prejudices where ethnic and

family old traditions intertwine (Ngek Ju), and, at the same time to accept Thailand with love as a new home, not just a physical loci, but a cultural, linguistic center of identity. This path is comparatively easy because assimilation brings these women into a culture that leans towards matrilinealism and has much more space for women. It is also a culture which, as we see in "Letter from Thailand" again and again, is more open to modern ideas, including ideas of women liberation and equality. Assimilation and the loss of the Chinese identity is an instant solution to the oppression of Chinese gender related traditions.

In the consecutive novels, at the period of the 1980s and onward, the negotiation of gender status continues, but this time, it is detached from an ethnic agenda, or to be more specific, the Chinese-Thai versus ethnic Thai agenda. Unlike "Letters from Thailand" where negotiating for female equality or even primacy was closely linked to a general vote against Chinese identity and in favor of adopting Thai identity, now, the Thai agenda of identity become marginal, and the matter remains within the confines of the Chinese-Thai community, now a self confident community as symbolically having been triumphantly proclaimed in "Through the Scales of the Dragon" which includes Liang as the symbolic "founding father" of the Luukjin, and even possesses anthem of this proud "imagined community," as Tejapira refers to it.

Accepting a place within this community, and therefore an ethnic Chinese identity, but still unrelenting in their drive to overturn their gender culturally imposed inferiority, the women protagonists of these three novels have to find ways to be able to have or achieve both. This means a renegotiation of values within the Chinese (in Thailand) systems of norms and world view. The creation of the new construct moves now to literate, modern women. This is highly reminiscent of the previously reviewed contemporary trend in China itself. To recall: The goal is "to answer…what it means to be a Chinese Confucian woman," that is, to resolve "the tension between being a feminist and being a Chinese" (Li-Hsiang, 2006: 159).

We see two ways in which main female characters in the five novels pursue:

1) Competition: By competition I mean that the women outshine the men and take their place as the favored inheritors. Within the scope of the powers of the characters themselves this is achieved by excelling in studies, in work, and, at the same time, by proving the real dedicated and devoted offspring who truly follow the important cultural value of selfless filiety. The narrators add the other side of the coin, which is manifested in the failures of sons as business successors, and particularly in their being found to be selfish, lacking in gratitude and devotion to their parents, often taking rather than giving.

We can see that kind of positive-negative pairing in "Letters from Thailand", "Through the Scales of the Dragon" and in the "The Last Petal of the Peony." For example, in "Letters from Thailand," Suang U notes: "Meng-Ju treats me as she always has, with exasperated affection, even though she knows I have given great sums of money to her sisters and brother, and does not suspect that there is a share left for her" (Botan, 1991: 502). Against her lack of interest in taking money or possessions from him, and her constant giving of affection, stands the memorable dialogue between Suang U and Weng Kim, when the later discovers that his father, of no use anymore, actually still has money: "'I am not destitute, you know,' 'but you can't make more than thirty baht a day in this dump,' 'Weng Kim, you do not know that 'this dump' is my only source of income.' His eyes widened. 'How much is left? If you're just stashing away somewhere.' 'I have no intention of discussing it with you.' 'But if you don't want to start a new business, why don't you put more money into the bakery? Rose and I are thinking of adding a new line of ….''. '…aren't you interested in the business anymore?' 'No.' 'But if we just had a few extra pieces of machinery, we could do it.' 'You can afford to buy a few extra pieces cf machinery without coming to me.' 'No, I can't!! Bank rates are high, the cost of living is high…And the money we got from you is almost gone.' I said nothing. 'Well, at least think it over,' he said angrily and was gone" (Botan, 1991: 509). It is no wonder therefore that he write to his mother, on another unhappy occasion, that: "I am deeply

ashamed that my son has brought dishonor upon our family…I humbly apologize to you and and to the memory of my father and our ancestors" (Botan, 1991: 389).

In "Through the Scales of the Dragon," the contrast between the shameful collapse of Liang's first grandson, Chainchan' shady pyramid scheme "Union Charter and Commodities," a business that it's very nature stands against all of Liang's values, and Chaichan's escape to Hong-Kong from his debts (Prapason Sewikul, 1989: 275-278), and the earlier collapse of the business he set up to compete with his grandfather, "Sintong Corporation", a collapse from which Liang rescued him in a way which favored rather than penalized him (Prapason Sewikul, 1989: 275-278), stands Anongpangna, Chaichan's aunt's (but of similar age) efficiency and brilliance and her success in managing and revitalizing one of Liang's conglomerate's main enterprises, "Sahanatakit" after just having returned from studies abroad (Prapason Sewikul, 1989: 263-266). Chaichan demonstrates all the negatives: a serial betrayer of his grandfather, a fraudster that runs an unethical pyramid scheme that is based on lies, and, to top it all, just a bad businessman with bad judgment. The contrast to Anongpangna could not be bigger.

In "The Last Petal of the Peony," the comparison is family to family rather than person to person. A family with three daughters is compared to a family with three sons. The comparison is initiated by the youngest of the sons, the suppressed one, secretly being a writer. Unlike the other two novels, this one is all centered on this comparison, and the suppressed son, Tiradet's, attempt to draw conclusions. He succeeds, and his father and life time oppressor, whom he always helps with full devotion, finally realizes his mistakes, both about his youngest son, and the good side of having daughters, and even only daughters (Kantima, 2008: 454).

2) What the Women Offer:

We saw "competition" with the men as one way to increase women status. But "replacing" the men is only one part. If we look it again as "negotiations," we look then for a value added.

The "value added" is best demonstrated in "A Walk through Spring," even though it declares itself as being Cantonese. In a way, the marriage of Ah-Mui-Mui with Watthananachai, who is half Tae-Chiu, and his full participation in the activities of the four grandmothers, shows that these life lessons can cross dialect borders.

The grandmothers offer a Chinese tradition with the warm and emphatic touch of women. Chinese cultural identity is not discarded in favor of assimilation or modernization. Neither is there a need for a "zero-sum-game" competition with men over the possession of limited status and power. Harmony of the family, the main objective of Confucian family related philosophy is achieved without discarding the respect one should have to his elders, one of the important requirements of Confucianism to maintain orderliness in the way the family manages itself. But the hierarchy between genders can be taken out of this edifice without compromising its stability and durability. Gender hierarchy is replaced by womanly warmth. Of course, this is one interpretation of the novel, and it could that I appropriate it to a concept for which it was not intended.

However, the offers of warmth and maintenance of tradition exist in the other novels as well; they are just not being offered as a package.

In "The Last Petal of the Peony," the Chinese traditional opera is carried forward to prosper in spite of changing cultural habits by an enthusiastic Chinese-Thai extended family that went through a process of reconstructing the place of women in the house and outside, and accepted that gender hierarchy is not a precondition for family harmony.

Suang U experiences an early sense of that, when he comments about Meng-Ju: "This is the child whose birth deprived me other sons, and whom I tried to hate. Now, when a day goes by without a moment free to chat with Meng-Ju, without time to laugh at one of her stories or share a cup of tea…..that day is without warmth for Papa" (Botan, 1991: 507). Her warm attitude and love for him never changed, with

all its teasing, it's his recognition of it which did.

But that momentary recognition becomes a revelation at the end of the novel: when Suang U arrives to Winyu and Meng-Ju's residence, he exclaims: "This place has given me all that I asked of it, peace and time" (Botan, 1991: 507). He misses the word "warmth" in this comment, but he revisits that comment later: "I wrote earlier in this letter that I came to their house for peace and time, but I found much, much more. Winyu's mother, a poor old Thai lady who sells candy in the streets, feels sorry for me. My bakery produced in an hour ten times the candy she sells in a month, and she feels sorry for me! That is something to think about, and when I have thought about it long enough, I believe that I shall be ready to live the rest of my life" (Botan, 1991: 507). Khun Surang felt sorry for him, she felt compassion, an emotion of deep warmth. Not many others did.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions of this dissertation are that the negotiations of gender and identity within the Chinese-Thai community are alive and are a part of everyday life in families in this community. These are not issues that have become irrelevant as a result of either modernization or the integration within the Thai state. The issues are related to Chinese traditions concerning the family institution which place women in an inferior position, and these traditions still exist in forms that have obviously evolved over time. While changes in these traditions occurred and continue to occur as a result of both interaction with Thai culture and influences of modernization and the West, they still remain relevant.

We also found that Chinese-Thai women want to improve their status and be released of the Chinese traditional gender bias. This desire is consistent throughout the period during which the five novels we studied have been written. It continues regardless of the fact that during that period there has been a switch from assimilation to maintenance as the key words for ethnic-cultural identity, and the fact that a large and distinct Chinese-Thai urban population can be clearly identified. These developments did not create any desire to continue or revive the traditions of gender bias.

The two earlier novels of the five, “Letters from Thailand” and “Being with Gong, were written at a time during which assimilation has been a key policy, and assimilation is considered, especially in “Letters from Thailand”, as a way to avoid the gender bias of Chinese traditions.

The later three novels: "Through the scales of the dragon", "The Last Petal of the Peony" and "A Walk Through spring" were written starting from the 1980s and onwards and they reflect the change from assimilation to acceptance of the persistence of a Chinese-Thai cultural identity adopted by a distinct community.

For Chinese-Thai women in these later three novels, the main part of their social interactions are with fellow middle class Chinese-Thais, which means that while they still they feel an imperative to change their status as women, they conduct it within the Chinese-Thai community. In other words, they wish to maintain their ethnic-cultural Chinese identity but renegotiate its terms as regards to gender status.

The process that takes place, according to these novels, is therefore a renegotiation of gender status within the cultural sphere of the Chinese-Thai community, namely that there is a need felt to maintain that identity. We saw both "competition" scenarios, where women attempt to prove their ability to provide all that is expected of a man, particularly daughters that demonstrate that they are as good as sons or even better, both in terms of achievement in the world outside the house, and even more so, in terms of their ability to offer devotion, gratitude and affection to their parents. It is interesting that in the novels, the rise of these daughters is seen as a mirror image of the failure of sons, both as successful actors in the outside world, as they are led astray by excessive greed, and the pursuits of pleasures, particularly in the area of sexuality, but even more so, in their ability to be loyal, devoted sons. The fifth novel, "A Walk Through spring", offers another path, one that doesn't dwell on competition, but on embracing the great benefits that women can offer to a harmonious society based on harmonious families. The female-centered family presented in that novel draws on Cantonese traditions, famously reflected in Amy Tan's novels. It carries forward Chinese traditions, but integrates the genders, rather than setting them in harsh hierarchical relations. We see some similar phenomenon in some of the other novels, though they do not form the center of the narrative, as in "A Walk Through Spring".

As we saw, these trends are not unique to Chinese-Thais. We found them expressed both in American-Chinese and Indian Diaspora novels. We found that the assimilation option, meaning going into another, less gender-biased culture, also appears in American-Chinese novels. The narrative tactic of elevating women while degrading men appears in Indian Diaspora novels, but not between siblings, as is the case in the Thai novels. Also, since Indian culture has stronger traditions of respect to feminine powers, there is less need to resort to flights of fantasy, as in the novels of Kingston. The Indian literature also resorts to the "erotic capital" of women as a tool to attain supremacy and power. This last negotiating tactic never appears, neither in Thai novels nor in American-Chinese novels. Also, Thai novels do not dig deep into Chinese lore to find inspiring female figures, as Kingston does. On the one end, there is more comfort in a Chinese-Thai identity, as it exists in practice in a large and concentrated community, while American-Chinese identity is ephemeral, with earlier calls to "claim America" only reflecting its weakness. This weakness and lower level of comfort compared to the Chinese-Thais led to more studious attempts to search for cultural roots. The latest Thai novel we reviewed, "A Walk Through Spring" harks back to American-Chinese literature such as that written by Amy Tan, which emphasizes a female-space where daughters interact with their mothers (in the Thai novel, grandmother, her sister and old friends), with the elder generations offering Chinese traditions that are imbued with warmth and wisdom of life, and stand at the center of the family. American-Chinese are mostly of Cantonese extract, but in the Thai case, the majority of Chinese-Thais are of Tae-Chiu extract, both being completely different dialect groups. In the Thai context, "A Walk through Spring" is therefore seen as introducing a different approach. This approach relies not on competition between the genders, but on extolling female virtues as transmitters of warmer, more humane Chinese traditions and as serving as the ultimate upholders of the family institution. This new approach is seen in the context of differences between the cultures of different dialect groups. Though doors are opens for members of other dialect groups to join, as indeed happens in the novel, it also points at different

Chinese identities. This suggestion of fragmentation is not emphasized in the American-Chinese novels I read.

Being a part of the Chinese-Thai community, and mostly wishing to remain so, Chinese-Thai attempt reconstruct that identity either by gender switches, expressed in daughters ending up as the favorite offspring at the expense of sons, or by offering positive contributions to the culture, while refusing to accept gender bias

What the women offer is significant. They offer a preservation of Chinese values. They do not offer to rule and establish fixed matrilineal lines. They offer to preserve families without being inferiors, they offer to transform exclusive patrilineal lines, not into exclusive matrilineal lines, but to more flexible arrangements in which ancestors (as, the four grannies in "Walking Through Spring" will sadly be in a few years) are both male and female, and where daughters are as appreciated as boys. This is demonstrated best in the hard work which Tiradet, the main character in "The Last Petal of the Peony", puts into proving the only-daughters families can be even better families than only-sons families. The women offer to carry traditions of culture (Ngiu-as one example-as well we as the whole assortment of Chinese folklore that the grannies heap upon their granddaughter, which in that case is rich in cooking and food. They are committed to continue the traditions of hard work and persistence which the grand ant at the entrance to Liang's house symbolizes. Not alone, but as equals, as his daughter, Anongpangna does. They will also continue the Chinese traditions (not of the coastal areas but of the great capital cities) of scholarship, as Meng Ju does, in her harmonious household, assimilated fully to a Thai version of Confucian ideals of harmony, scholarship, thrift, mutual respect, everything in fact, except the poisonous venom of the suppression of women.

In this last sense one can also detect latent influences of Thai culture, where families are much less hierarchical, and where mutual respect, compassion and

warmth are higher values than the harsh and strict norms which many Chinese families, especially men, understood Confucian values to demand.

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