

Original Paper

Connotation and Value: The Images of China through the Works of Chinese-American Writer Maxine Hong Kingston in a Cross-Cultural Context

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Abstract

The Woman Warrior, China Men and Tripmaster Monkey, three representative works written by contemporary Chinese-American writer Maxine Hong Kingston, are compatible with the historical tradition, value and spiritual pursuit of different culture of China and the United States. These masterpieces have established the author's status in the American literary world. The author looks at traditional Chinese culture from the perspective of American culture, and at the same time deeply reflects on the conflict and integration of Chinese and American cultures in the Chinese community, and runs her perception and imagination of the two culture through her works. The works portray rich images of China, including the patriarchal society, the magical and spectral society, fictional "utopia" society, which show the survival situation of Chinese-American people, and then trigger the reflection on the construction of images of China in Chinese-American literature.

Keywords

Chinese-American literature, Chinese culture, Image of China, Maxine Hong Kingston

1. Introduction

Chinese-American literature responds to the status quo and experience of Chinese-American people, acting as a communication media between Chinese-Americans and the local mainstream society, enriching the American literary landscape, and promoting American readers' deeper understanding of Chinese culture and Sino-American relations, among other things. "American-Chinese literature is a product of the collision and hybridization of the two cultures of China and the United States, but it presents individuality and characteristics." (Cheng, Shao, & Lu, 2010, p. 1) Since the 1970s, Maxine Hong Kingston (1940-) has gradually gained a reputation in the international literary arena and has

been elected a member of the American Academy of Humanities and Natural Sciences. “American-Chinese writers’ creative inspiration often stems from their own bi-cultural identity and cultural vision, and the stimulation of different cultures makes them more culturally sensitive.” (Li, Wang, & Zhang, 2013, pp. 92-96) Kingston captures and reflects the life and spirit of the Chinese community in a specific social context in the United States, as she writes, “We, the first few generations of Chinese immigrants, are burdened with the psychological barriers that our fathers built during our childhood, learning how to integrate and adapt into the real American society.” (Maxine, 2018, pp. 5-6)

At present, the focus of academic research on American-Chinese literature mainly lies in exotic cultures, ethnic relations, and rewriting of immigrant cultures, etc., but the construction and reflection of the images of China in American-Chinese literature need to be further expanded in depth. The images of China in American-Chinese literature is characterized by transnational, trans-temporal and trans-cultural features, which are compatible with the “image of the other country” of political standpoints and the “image of the homeland” of cultural aspirations for American-Chinese writers. Based on Maxine Hong Kingston’s works, this paper explores her multiple interpretations of China’s images and assesses the value and influence of Chinese-American literature in shaping and promoting contemporary China’s images.

2. Impact of the Works

Maxine Hong Kingston, the Chinese-American writer, learned about Chinese culture, history, philosophy and other things from her parents who immigrated to the United States and from the Chinese written works she read, which provided her with creative ideas. “Kingston must sort through often contradictory accounts of her family’s past to create a synthesis that captures the essence of her family’s immigration to and settlement in the United States.” (Carol, 1983) With an skillfully writing in English, she also has drawn on Chinese classical literary works, such as *The Marriage of Flowers in the Mirror* (written by Li Ruzhen in Qing Dynasty of China). She was honored with the U.S. National Medal of Arts and the U.S. National Book Award for Outstanding Literary in 2003 and 2008 respectively, and has been hailed as a leader in Asian American literature, with a growing status in the literary world. She presents the literary classics and historical stories of her native country, showing the diversity of China in the context of globalization, and playing the role of a bridge between mainstream American culture and Chinese culture.

In 1976, Kingston published her debut novel, *The Woman Warrior*. The book won the National Book Awards, was hailed by Time magazine as one of the finest works of the 1970s, and was selected for Yale University’s special subject in Literature program. The work is a first-person narrative of a American-Chinese girl and women’s story in her family. “The article focuses on mother–daughter relationship and its impact on identity formation of the daughter. In the novels of female development, female bonding that is presented by biological mothers, grandmothers, aunts and friends influences the

young protagonists in their development towards maturity and their identity formation.” (Jagdish, 2022, p. 365) Chinese-American women navigate between Chinese and American cultures, facing complexity and diversity in their dual identities and needing to find balance. "They have American ideas, thinking, attitudes, and habits, and despite their Chinese appearance they do not fully accept Chinese behavior. Because of their appearance, they also don't have the opportunity to gain better socioeconomic status in American society." (Sun, 2020, pp. 77-83) Frank Chin, also a Chinese-American writer, objected to Kingston's categorization of her work as "autobiography" or "non-fiction" in order to accommodate the mainstream U.S. publishing market. "The two factions of writers and scholars, represented by Frank Chin and Kingston, had a heated dispute over how Chinese-American literature could authentically reproduce the survival of Chinese-Americans in the United States." (Xiao, 2015, p. 156) This reflects the controversy over the literary categories, political stance and rewriting of Chinese culture in Chinese-American literature.

In 1980, the book *China Men* won the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award. The book combines the author's autobiography and Chinese myths to re-create a positive image of Chinese-Americans in American society and in the minds of the public, while also recounting the cross-cultural conflicts encountered by the descendants of Chinese-Americans as they grew up. "Kingston tells this story in six roughly chronological chapters, which span the mid-nineteenth century (the first wave of Chinese American immigration and their role in the construction of the transcontinental railroad) to the mid-twentieth century (the conscription of soldiers for the Vietnam conflict)." (Helena, 2006, p. 44). The work "not only shows the degradation of traditional family cultural values, but also reveals the maintenance of certain fundamental aspects of the original Confucian ideal, which advocated family unity, economic independence, and mutual assistance among family members." (Chen, 2012) Through the work, the author revisits the critical role of early Chinese workers in the development of the United States, "the suffering experienced and the unjust historical situation of deprivation of voice encountered under the discourse of its colonial power, pulling the group of early Chinese workers from the margins of history back to the mainstream culture, and presenting readers with a brand-new history of the nation." (Zhang & Leng, 2019)

Set in San Francisco and drawing from such multinational literary classics as *Water Margin* and *Hamlet*, *Tripmaster Monkey* "portrays its protagonist as a 1960s hippie figure who is heavily 'Beat Generation' poets and novelists." (Guo, 2019) The author presents in storytelling form the wanderings of Whitman, a young Chinese-American man who abandons traditional ideas in pursuit of radical freedom. Scholarly analyses of *Tripmaster Monkey* focus on Chinese-American writers' construction of ethnic culture and less on Chinese image-making. Through the protagonist, the author attacks the rejection and prejudice of white American society against Chinese and other Asians, expresses his dissatisfaction with the name "Oriental", and advocates the commonality of different ethnic groups and cultural pluralism, "Kingston goes a step further to challenge the possibility of placing exclusive ethnic labels on her work." (Jeanne, 1996)

3. Connotation of the Images of China Portrayed in the Works

The rise of Chinese-American literature is not only a challenge to the power of mainstream narratives, but also an important means of countering cultural marginalization. The emergence and development of Chinese American literature challenges the mainstream's single narrative of the Chinese by providing a diverse and complex image of China. In Chinese-American literature of 20th Century, the image of China is portrayed as positive, negative, and complex and multi-faceted, reflecting the combined influence of different cultural factors, historical backgrounds, and social environments. The imagination and reproduction of China in Chinese-American writers' creative works is not only a fond look back to their motherland's culture, but also an active molding of their own cultural identity, blending the perspectives of "other" and "self". In their works, Chinese-American writers reflect deeply on the traditional Chinese concept of family, revealing the complexity and contradictions of patriarchy and paternalism in modern society. Through their literary works, Chinese-American writers explore the issue of cultural identity, express their respect for their own cultural roots and their adaptation to mainstream American culture, and promote a more comprehensive understanding of Chinese culture in American society.

3.1 The Patriarchal Society - "Discrimination" and "Oppression" of Women

In China's patriarchal society, which has lasted for thousands of years, the idea of male power has always been dominant, and the feudal family ethic centered on the male has led to a very unequal status between men and women. In the ancient time, women should obey the principle of "Three Obediences and Four Virtues", which regulates women's morality. This kind of gender discrimination was particularly serious during the Neo-confucianism period of Cheng Zhu in Song Dynasty. The concept of male hegemony deprived women of their legitimate rights, and oppressed women endured their confinement in silence, carrying the yoke of their destiny.

The Woman Warrior recounts the experiences of her aunt, mother, and others from the point of view of a young Chinese-American girl, "Although the book's structure and narrative style may sound difficult, Kingston's skill as an author and the beauty of her prose help guide the reader to an understanding of her work."^{[13]62} In the first chapter *No Name Woman* of *The Woman Warrior*, the writer begins, "What I am going to say to you, you must not tell anyone. Your father had a younger sister in China who committed suicide by jumping into the family well.Let's pretend she never came into this world."^{[3]3} At the time of my menarche, my mother recounted what happened to my aunt when she was forced to become a "nameless woman", and warned me that I needed to pay attention to my reputation and honor. This long-standing family scandal provoked a strong sense of irritation and depression to me. The narrator's aunt was pregnant, and on the night of her delivery, the villagers attacked her home, "First they threw dirt and stones at our house, and then they started slaughtering animals." (Maxine, 2018, p. 4) The aunt was subjected to cannibalism and family rules, and suffered curses and taunts from the crowd. Eventually, the aunt committed suicide by throwing herself into a well with her baby in her arms. The newborn had just croaked to the ground, not yet realizing that his birth would bring disaster

to his mother and her family, and then rushed to the next cycle of life. What was even more shocking, however, was the fact that her family did not consider her suicide to be enough to atone for their mistake, and punished the aunt by erasing her name from the family genealogy book, erasing any trace of her existence on earth, and making her woman without a name. As a typical female character oppressed by the feudal ideology of male superiority and female inferiority, the narrator's aunt was humiliated before her death and had no place for her soul to return to after her death.

The unnamed and unchaste aunt challenged male authority and violates traditional Chinese ethics. Maxine Hong Kingston sympathizes with the aunt and blames her suffering on the patriarchal society in China. She boldly assumes that the aunt was not forced to commit suicide by other people, but was a brave woman who boldly pursued the freedom of love, a fearless person who dared to defy the idea of male superiority and female inferiority, and a warrior who was willing to sacrifice herself for the love of her heart. Aunt Doe committed suicide to fight against the patriarchal society, reflecting the hardship and sadness of the disadvantaged position of women at that time. The mother secretly told her daughter the family secret, which is also a rebellion against the male domination, because the whole family follows the rituals and wants everyone to forget the aunt, but the narrator in this book still knows her past and remembers her existence. Kingston integrates gender and death into the story, deeply exploring women's loss of freedom and inner despair under the yoke of a patriarchal society.

In the chapter *The Father from China* of *China Men*, the author's father was born at the sametime as his grandfather's neighbor's daughter, and his grandfather loved the baby girl, giving her clothes and food, but her parents emphasized: "Unfortunately, she's just a girl, just a girl".^{[14]12} They believed that their daughter would not be able to carry on the bloodline and would eventually be reduced to a "reproductive tool". When the grandfather offered to exchange his youngest son for their daughter, they thought he was an idiot and agreed the deal. But when the author's grandmother found out, she was furious, "You crazy old man you exchange our son for a girl?"^{[14]14} Although the grandfather explained that the family has only male children, but the grandmother was very opposed to the husband's decision and belittle the daughter as a flunkey instead of treasure. When confronted by a neighbor, the grandmother yelled, "How dare you try to make a fool of my husband trying to trade a girl for a boy."^{[14]15} The grandmother scolded the girl's biological parents as thief, because they also believed that the male offspring or descendants was more valuable to continue the family tradition. The grandmother, as a woman, did not support gender equality. This deeply hurt the grandfather's feeling, and the illusion of raising a daughter in his mind was shattered.

Whitman, the protagonist of *Tripmaster Monkey*, stumbles upon a Chinese family of three and "A Chinese man walks forward, he comes from China, with his hands behind his back followed by his wretch wife who cracks open a melon seed with her golden teeth and then puts it in her son's mouth." (Maxine, 1998, p. 5) This is a true and typical picture of most Chinese family. The husband puts his hands behind his back, very casually, and his pleasant mood can be seen from his walking posture. The wife has to look after the toddler and feed the son herself. The wife, who takes care of the

child, contrasts with the selfish husband. In *The Twisted and the Shouted*, Whitman speaks with Judy Lewis, who observes that “Chinese men dream too much and float in the air. The Chinese women, on the other hand, keeps her feet on the ground and pushes her men to work.” (Maxine, 1998, p. 83) She compares Chinese and Japanese men, who work hard and crave relaxation and comfort from women, to the sky-high Chinese men who believe that Chinese women need to cater to their preferences and that women are devoted to their families. Judy believes that only in China do girls not consider whether their partners love life or not, and that such arranged marriages are extremely unfair to women.

3.2 *The Magical and Spectral Society - the “Cage” of the Real Society*

The Classic of Mountains and Seas, one of Chinese classical history book, records a large number of legends about ghosts. Qu Yuan, a famous writer, used ghosts and gods to express his feelings of loneliness and patriotism in *the Songs of Chu*. *Legends in The Tang Dynasty* and *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* (written by Pu Songling) and other novels are filled with stories of ghosts and spirits as well. “As people continued to imagine, the image of ‘ghosts and gods’ continued to be enriched, forming a more complete system.” (Li, 2019) The portrayal of ghosts and gods is a traditional and rich element in Chinese literature. These elements add mysterious colors and reflect Chinese culture and values. Chinese American literature often deals with this theme when inheriting and expressing Chinese culture. In her works, Kingston depicts different images of ghosts to emphasize her connection with Chinese culture.

Subtitled with *Memoirs of a Young Girl Among Ghosts*, *The Woman Warrior* mentions various kinds of ghosts, such as the ghost of the falling water and the ghost of the photograph. In the chapter of *No Name Woman*, the author writes, “The whole family cursed the aunt: ‘We’re going to die. You’re killing us. You dead ghost!’” (Maxine, 2018, p. 15) The family believed that they were fixed on the pillar of shame because of her, and regarded her as a “ghost” who had harmed people, and punished her eternally by removing her name from the family tree, so that she would starve after death, and there would be no progeny to worship her, so that she could only fight with the other dead souls for the money, clothes, food, and other sacrificial offerings. The nameless aunt chose the stubborn and unjust practice of throwing herself into a well with hatred, so much so that she became a downed ghost after her suicide. “The soul of my deceased aunt is haunting me.....China is always afraid of drowning people, crying and drowned ghosts, with wet hair dripping.....These ghosts are waiting to pull someone into the water so they can be his substitute.” (Maxine, 2018, p. 18) The author was deeply touched by what happened to Aunt Doe and felt that her ghost had been haunting her. The nameless aunt must not have thought that after many years, the character was full of sympathy for her and published her story in spite of the traditional Chinese patriarchal thinking.

In the chapter *The Witch Doctor* of *The Woman Warrior*, the mother, while studying at the Guangzhou Tuijiang Midwifery School, finds a secret study site, a dormitory “where a series of haunting had occurred, and the people who lived in it were scared out of their wits by the ghosts.” (Maxine, 2018, p. 71) People were afraid to go near the dormitory for fear of being haunted by the ghosts and doing

something horrific unconsciously. However, my mother thought that the ghosts were nightmares, and that it would be enough to wake up those who saw them, and that the ghosts might not be the soul of human beings who had died, but might be some other kinds of creature. At one night, the girls heard voices, the mother came to the haunted dormitory, saw nothing. In the middle of the night, the mother felt the pressure of a ghost, “that thing from her body bone crawling through, heavy pressure on her chest she reached out to push that thing, but that force was also sucked away.” (Maxine, 2018, p. 76) The mother dared to fight head-to-head with the ghost, and eventually she stopped paying attention to it and concentrated on memorizing her homework. Mother and her classmates described their experience of defeating the ghost, “This body-pressing ghost has many big black holes with big mouths. It can gain solidity by its magic power, and it can press solidly on a person's body for a whole night.” (Maxine, 2018, pp. 81-82) The mother's decision to burn down the dormitory with her classmates illustrates her resourcefulness and bravery. After graduation, my mother opened a clinic and specialized in using witchcraft to exorcise ghosts and collect spirits. With her tenacity, boldness and self-confidence, Mother subverts the stereotypical image of Chinese women and reveals a new image of the charismatic Oriental woman.

In the chapter *Ghost Companion*, a young man, coincided with rainfall on his way to the imperial competitive examination, saw a mansion courtyard, “At once the fragrance of the flowers hit me The shape and color of the clouds in the sky were also changing rapidly, and gold, silver, and pink mists shrouded the mansion.” (Maxine, 2000, p. 74) The author's detailed description of the environment reveals the mystery of the place, and also lays the groundwork for the plot transformation later. In the courtyard, a beautiful woman opens the door for this man, who can't help but be charmed with her pink cheeks and beautiful lips. The man then accompanies the woman, but does not give up the imperial examinations. The woman seems to be in love with the scholar, so she opens her robe and hugs him nakedly. The man pushes her away and ran out to the street. However, the passers-by were terrified of the scholar, “his body was like a dead body that could be infected with disease and glowed with phosphorescence”, (Maxine, 2000, p. 79) as if they had seen a horrible ghost. With the help of his friend, the scholar realizes that the strange mansion is a tomb, and that the beauty has long since passed away, which turns out to be a real “ghost companion”, and if he chooses to stay in the mansion, he will be imprisoned in the dream woven by the ghost. He has been compelled by the beautiful ghost and is mentally depressed. Only when he returns to the reality of his hometown can he gain true warmth. Some scholars have pointed out that “this story actually insinuates that the affluence and prosperity of the United States is only a fantasy created by the female ghost.” (Cheng, 2023)

Based on *the Legends*, the author created the chapter *On Death*. In this story, Du Zichun, the main character, swallows three white pills given by a Taoist master and begins to hallucinate. He saw his wife, who was tortured by devils, and “the devils poured copper down her throat and pounded her with pestles and mortars.” (Maxine, 2000, p. 151) Du Zichun was unable to save his wife, and had to flee in a rain of swords and knives, and was eventually killed. These demonic “ghosts” symbolize the

injustices suffered by ethnic Chinese in the United States, as most first-generation Chinese relied on selling their labor, and even had to give up their original Chinese habits and ways of thinking in order to gradually integrate into the United States. When Du Zichun dies and is reincarnated as a woman, she forgets her master's instruction not to make a sound when she witnesses her child being thrown out by her husband, and cries out, and the hallucination disappears. Overcoming her fear and pain, Du Zichun fails to become immortal and love keeps her on earth. This shows that fear and anger should not be the attitudes of the Chinese and Native Americans towards each other, and that only love can solve the difficulties faced by the Chinese in the United States and help the whole public to accept the Chinese community.

3.3 The Fictional "Utopia" Society - An Inclusive and Open Shared-Community

Kingston blends Chinese legends, myths and realities in her works, giving full play to her imagination to construct a magical and unreal utopian society. "In any case their imagination is the most important framework for building China, their imagination enters into the flowery Chinese culture, and in the Western context and the American reality, they build the imaginary community of their own ethnic culture." (Gao, 2005) All the frustrations the authors encounter in real life trigger their profound sense of helplessness and loss. Facing the unsatisfactory reality, the authors long to find spiritual solace and peace in the utopian world. The author skillfully combines artistic creation and real life to create an ideal world with artistic beauty and practical significance, and the author shows readers the rich inner world and the desire for an ideal life. Utopia becomes a way for the author to express himself and his emotions, so that he can realize his self-worth in his creation.

In Chapter 2 of *The Woman Warrior*, *The White Tiger*, "My mother's voice is the voice of a warrior woman I also saw extraordinary strength in myself She taught me to sing the Mulan Dictionary. When I grow up, I must become a warrior." (Maxine, 2018, pp. 21-22) This is very similar to the story of "Zhuang Zhou's Dream of Butterfly". "Kingston reinvents and imagines the ancient Chinese heroine, Hua Mulan, through the gendered lens of contemporary Western women and a postcolonial critical racial lens." (Cheng, 2003) The image of Hua Mulan in the work bears the imprint of American individual heroism, which is different from that of the Chinese heroine who joined the army on behalf of her father and defeated the invaders in the Chinese legend. "It is the author's interpretation of the American dream of Chinese women. It is the most direct reflection of the author's ideal image of Chinese-American women." (Lu, 2007) The author chased the bird hovering over the roof, "I was in the clouds - the clouds were the breath of the dragon The fresh trees bent down to me with the mountains, but when I turned back to look for me, I could not find my way out of the clouds. But when I turn back to look for my village, it has long since disappeared beneath the clouds." (Maxine, 2018, p. 23) The author learnt martial arts from an old couple and became a warrior like Mulan. The author also saw African lion dancing, Indian and Native American dances. The author creates a multiracial and egalitarian society and draws a picture of the integration of the world's peoples, bridging the gap between countries, races, cultures and languages.

“My groom was my childhood playmate who was willing to marry a ghost for me.” (Maxine, 2018, p. 34) Parents married a man to me which symbolized the continuation of the flame. This is contrary to the Chinese custom of yin marriage, an illusory utopia that breaks with the tradition that only women reproduce. Later, when the narrator joined the army, her father carves the hatred of the family and the country on her back, a move that emphasizes her responsibility for the Chinese culture. This act emphasizes the Chinese cultural tradition that “I” shoulders. “I” leads the army to fight against the male rulers, subverting the image of women as dependent on men and demonstrating the power of women over men. “By writing the story of Hua Mulan to discover the past, Kingston evokes the memory within Chinese immigrants of the outstanding historical figures in their homeland, which in turn allows them to gain a kind of emotional support and spiritual encouragement in times of trouble.” (Sun & Xu, 2020) In Utopia, women take on the mission of avenging the family's death, which is an assumption of equal status for men and women. The difference with the Chinese folktale is that Hua Mulan takes the initiative to join the army on behalf of her father, a depiction that turns passive into active, which further emphasizes the boldness of Chinese-American women who wish to perfectly demonstrate their value.

Based on *The Marriage of Flowers in the Mirror*, Kingston made major changes to *About Discovery in China Men*. In the chapter *Kingdom of Women*, the main character Tang Ao is required to wear make-up, develop a womb, and especially to have his feet wrapped. According to records, the tradition of foot-binding began in the Northern Song Dynasty, flourished in the Southern Song Dynasty, and was abolished in the People's Republic of China. This is an ancient Chinese outmoded habit that destroys women's well-being. “They wrenched his toes inward as hard as they could.....Then they wrapped his toes tightly into a ginger-like mass.” (Maxine, 2000, p. 14) The prolonged foot-wrapping caused the blood vessels in the feet to atrophy severely, and whenever the foot-wrapping cloth was unwrapped, the rapid return of blood would irritate the nerves, and Tang Ao had to beg the maids of honor to wrap the foot-wrapping cloth again. All these encounters were the preparations Tang Ao had to make in order to meet and serve the queen. At the end of the story, the author writes that some scholars believe that the kingdom of women appeared in the period of Empress Wu. During the Tang Dynasty, which was characterized by a strong feudal economy, Wu Zetian became the first empress in the history of China, and the social status of women was raised to a higher level than ever before. Although the author mentions that there are some people who believe that the kingdom of women is in North America, the fictional kingdom of women is entirely conceived according to the Chinese concept of social structure, except that the social status and division of labor between men and women are counterbalanced to each other. Women represent authority, and women inflict the persecution they suffer in reality on Tang Ao, realizing women's struggle and resistance against male sovereignty. This indicates that the Chinese community wishes to be like these women, to fight against the misunderstanding and oppression they have suffered, to escape from their relatively helpless and exploitative situation, and to actively strive for recognition as they continue to adapt to American society and internalize mainstream values.

4. The Contemporary Value of Chinese-American Literature on the Construction of China's Images from the Cross-Cultural Perspective

The development of Chinese-American literature has been full of challenges and transformations, gradually moving from its initial marginalized status to mainstream literary horizons, which is inextricably linked to China's rising international status. With the rise of Chinese-American writers, they have gained more creative freedom and are able to express their thoughts and feelings more truthfully and deeply. Chinese American literary works express the real life of the Chinese community in the United States, the rich inner world and literary concepts of Chinese writers, the attachment of Chinese culture to American culture, and the portrayal and change of China's image in their works, etc. As Kingston wrote in *Tripmaster Monkey*, "If a Chinese admits that he or she doesn't belong to any organization or comes from the bottom of the ladder or from a small family, then he or she must be a Chinese person. or if a Chinese person admits that he or she does not belong to any organization, or comes from the lower class, or comes from a small family, then he or she must be very miserable", (Maxine, 1998, p. 11) or asks her father in her heart "how did we come to this country where we are regarded as strange people", ((Maxine, 2000, p. 8) shows readers her bitterness and helplessness that she can't forget China's past and can't really become an American.

"Asian/Chinese writers enjoy the space of multiculturalism, emphasize reflection on history and criticism of social reality, expand the discourse space in the field of American literature, and add more artistic expressions." (Sun & Xu, 2020) Chinese-American writers such as Kingston have integrated their unique historical and cultural backgrounds into their creations, giving their works distinctive personalities and depths, and showing the unique perspectives of the Chinese-American community in American society. With their cultural fusion elements, these works have become valuable resources for overseas readers to understand the Chinese-American community and Chinese culture. Chinese-American writers also innovate in their works to show the inheritance and development of culture. The interaction between Chinese-American literature and mainstream American literature enriches the representation of China's image, energizes mainstream literature, and promotes the recognition of cultural diversity.

Chinese-American literature uses English as the language of creation, and the target audience is the western world represented by the United States. Chinese-American writers with the brand of biculturalism want to break away from the fetters and shackles of the two cultures, so that they can portray the image of their "cultural homeland" in the capacity of "the other", and at the same time, they are eager to integrate the two heterogeneous cultures through their works. At the same time, they are eager to incorporate the two heterogeneous cultures through their own works, because their aesthetic interests, creative styles, narrative methods and writing techniques are influenced by American mainstream culture, readers' reading expectations, psychological demands and other factors. "Figurative research intersects with research work conducted by ethnographers, anthropologists, sociologists, and historians of mind and emotion."^[22]

The construction of China's images in Chinese-American literature is related to specific historical backgrounds, contemporary contexts, Sino-American diplomatic relations, race, and gender. Against the backdrop of prevalent racism in the late 19th century, the image of China portrayed in Western culture was often labeled as the yellow scourge and regarded as an alien and out-of-touch being. However, in the 1930s, overseas Chinese began to shift from a marginalized alien identity to a minority identity. No longer satisfied with being merely a marginalized group, they aspired to integrate into mainstream American society. Under the characteristic social and cultural background, Chinese characters seek social identity and self-worth realization in their works, reflecting the process of cross-cultural identity construction. By comparing the real life of the Chinese community and their contributions to American society, the work also reveals the tension between ideals and reality.

On the one hand, despite the cultural differences, the portrayal of China in the works of white native American writers often tries to seek resonance and understanding with the mainstream American values, which also leads to the formation of stereotypical images of China among the American public. There have been prejudices and misunderstandings in the mainstream white American society about the Chinese society as well as the image of ethnic Chinese, and the Chinese community has been marginalized instead due to difficulties in integrating into the white society because of their own skin color, behavioral habits, and ideological concepts. They are in constant fear and anxiety to establish their own cultural identity, longing for the opportunity to express their true demands and speak out for their own group. On the other hand, the image of China in the works of Chinese-American writers is closely related to the writers' cultural identity. Most Chinese-American writers are second-generation Chinese-American immigrants who grew up under the influence of Western civilization represented by American culture. The American education process they received is integrated into the mainstream American culture and values, and the works they create are bound to present these contents. There is a deep connection between the Chinese writers' community and Chinese culture and history, which not only originates from their family roots, but is also deeply rooted in their cultural genes. Chinese-American writers have direct or indirect knowledge and experience of Chinese culture and historical traditions through family stories and memories. Writers of Chinese descent in the U.S. wander on the edge of the two cultures and take Chinese society as their main writing object. Based on their previous understanding and their own imagination, they draw on Chinese culture and literature as their creative nourishment, catering to the curiosity and diversified pursuits of the white American society. At the same time, they add a lot of imagination to their works to form a unique "Chin" story and build up a rich and diversified image of China, and the number of readers interested in their works is increasing day by day.

In the context of "the Belt and Road" Initiative, China has steadily and peacefully risen to power, and its positive role in the world's politics and economy has been recognized and praised by countries all over the world. In November 2023, a meeting between the Chinese and U.S. heads of state further activated exchanges and cooperation in the cultural and economic fields. In the continuous integration

into the American mainstream society, Chinese-Americans are gradually assuming major roles in politics, economy, science and technology. The pursuit of the American dream and the inheritance of Chinese culture have always been present in Kingston's growth and works, which reflects the confusion, struggle, and perplexity of this special group of Chinese-Americans in a heterogeneous culture and society. Kingston straddles two cultures and expresses the hope of getting rid of the prominent "Chinese" identity label in the heterogeneous culture, showing that she is constantly exploring and seeking the establishment of her own subjective position and the identification of her self with the United States, always searching for her true self, recognizing and discovering her own self, and at the same time building up the cultural self-confidence of her country of origin, criticizing the cultures and societies of both countries as well as the cultural and social heritage from both sides. cultures and societies as well as criticizing and drawing from both cultures. In his works, the author expresses his interpretation of the culture of his native country and his earnest hope that the Eastern and Western worlds, led by China and the United States, can respect the differences between the two sides in terms of language, culture, and history, reinterpret and express their own cultural traditions in the modern context, and contribute new perspectives to the world's cultural exchanges, thus contributing to the core proposition of building a community of human destiny.

5. Conclusion

Chinese-American writer Maxine Hong Kingston introduces Chinese culture through her works, which enhances the American public's acceptance of the Chinese race to a certain extent. In future research, Chinese American literature should be further placed in the world literature for observation, in-depth study of cross-cultural translation of Chinese-American literature, cultural interactions and influences of the culture of the ancestral homeland and the place of migration, etc., to explore the level of Chinese American writers' cognition of Chinese and American cultures and their spirituality, and from this, we can find out their recognition of their own cultural identity construction, which is conducive to our understanding of the dissemination and acceptance of Chinese culture in the United States and even in the world in the context of a new era, and to promote the international discourse of Chinese culture. This is conducive to understanding the spread and acceptance of Chinese culture in the United States and even in the world, enhancing China's international discourse, and promoting the blossom of Chinese culture in countries around the world.

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