

Original Paper

Cultural Conflict and Cultural Integration in the Construction of
Chinese American Identity in FLTRP's Publication Version: A
Case Study of American Born Chinese

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of globalization, transnational migration has made identity construction of the Chinese diaspora an increasingly prominent issue. Taking Gene Luen Yang's American Born Chinese as the research object, this paper starts from the root causes of Sino-US cultural differences and analyzes identity conflicts faced by Chinese Americans from three dimensions: family patterns, interpersonal interaction, and cultural belonging. It further explores the roles of individual choice, artistic expression, and cultural symbol reconstruction in cultural integration. This study provides a new perspective for understanding identity construction of the Chinese diaspora and reveals the positive value of cultural conflicts as a driving force for identity innovation.

Keywords

Chinese-American community, identity construction, cultural conflict, cultural integration, American Born Chinese

1. Introduction

Globalization has accelerated transnational population mobility, and identity construction among immigrant groups has gradually become a core academic concern. As an important part of overseas immigrants, Chinese Americans have long struggled with a sense of self-identity. As Zhou Min (Zhou, 1992) points out in *Chinatown: The Socioeconomic Potential of an Urban Enclave*, identity construction

of overseas Chinese is essentially “a dynamic process of constantly adjusting self-awareness and social roles in the tension between two heterogeneous cultures”. Influenced by both traditional Chinese culture and Western mainstream values, Chinese Americans are partially separated from their ancestral culture yet cannot fully integrate into Western society. This contradiction gives rise to persistent dilemmas in identity construction.

American Born Chinese is a typical literary version compiled into FLTRP (Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press) published key reference for the convenience of instruction and research. In FLTRP’s academic textbooks including *A Guide to Asian American Literature* (Wu Bing) and extended anthologies of contemporary American literature, Gene Luen Yang’s graphic novel *American Born Chinese* serves as a pivotal text that deconstructs American racial narratives and constructs both American national identity and transnational Chinese imagery, consistent with the three-dimensional analytical framework of physical, cultural and spiritual imagery outlined above. It weaves three interrelated narrative lines. First, Wang Jin, a young Chinese-American boy, struggles between family responsibility expected by his parents and the individual freedom advocated by Western culture, facing a dilemma of identity choice. Second, the Monkey King, in order to be accepted by the Heavenly Court, denies his identity as a monkey and imitates divine norms, only to encounter repeated exclusion, symbolizing the racial stereotypes and social marginalization faced by Chinese Americans. Third, the cousin Chin-Kee disrupts Wang Jin’s effort to blend into American campus life, embodying the conflict between Chinese Differential Mode of Association and Western privacy boundaries, and intensifying the tension between integration and alienation.

2. The Root Causes of Cultural Differences between China and the West

2.1 Family-Oriented and the Differential Mode of Association under Chinese Collectivism

The core proposition of Chinese collectivist thought tends to give the priority to the collective before the individual. This proposition was formed closely related to the deep integration of traditional philosophy, social structure, and modern thoughts in China. In traditional philosophy, Confucianism’s “self-restraint and restoration of rites” requires individuals to restrain their private desires to conform to family and national ethics (Chen, 2015), while the idea that “The world is public” advocates individual values serve public welfare, thus laying the foundation for a public-oriented ethics (Chen, 2015). In traditional patriarchal society, with family-state integration being the core (Fei, 2015), individuals are attached to collective units such as families and clans, and collective interests become the prerequisite for individual survival and development.

Since modern times, Marxist collectivist thought combined with traditional collective concepts emphasized the fundamental role of the collective in individual development (Marx & Engels, 2012), which was deepened through China’s revolutionary and construction practices, ultimately forming this core proposition that combines historical inheritance and contemporary characteristics. This means that

an individual's thoughts and behaviors need to revolve around collective interests rather than being primarily guided by personal will. This value orientation is fully and vividly demonstrated in *American Born Chinese* through Wang Jin's family interaction model. The story told by Wang Jin's mother to Wang Jin is "Mengzi's Three Moves", which is exactly what Wang Jin's parents are doing. In order to provide Wang Jin with better education, they left the San Francisco Chinatown where they had lived for nine years and moved to the white community. This behavior reflects their placing the education and development of their descendants in an extremely important position and being willing to make sacrifices and changes for the overall interests of the family.

Complementary to family-oriented is Fei Xiaotong's Differential Mode of Association theory that is proposed in *From the Soil*. He believes that "kinship relationships existing through endogamous ties include two aspects: one is the bloodline group derived from surplus; the other is the marital group derived from marriage" (Fei, 2015). This theory holds that blood ties determine the degree of closeness or distance. In *American Born Chinese*, the fact that the cousin Qinxi lives in Wang Jin's home is a manifestation of the Differential Mode of Association. Although Qinxi's arrival brings many troubles to Wang Jin and his family, Wang Jin's family had no way to expel him. This is because Wang Jin's parents regard Qinxi as a relative of the other party. In traditional Chinese concepts, a cousin is an important member of the kinship system. Qinxi's long-term residence behavior is regarded as mutual support and assistance among family members and a normal manifestation of maintaining family affection. However, this ambiguous boundary behavior contrasts sharply with the individual privacy boundary of Western culture, laying the groundwork for the cultural conflict problems that Wang Jin encounters in interpersonal interactions later.

2.2 Individual-centered Perspective and Privacy Boundary under Western Individualism

Individual-centered perspective, as the main value concept in Western modernity, centers on placing the independent personality, freedom rights, and development needs of individuals at the forefront, emphasizing that the existence of society and the state should be fundamentally aimed at ensuring the realization of individual values (Locke, 1960; Rousseau, 1997). This theory was initially constructed by the Enlightenment thinker Locke in *Two Treatises of Government* through the "natural rights of man" doctrine, advocating that life, liberty, and property are the inalienable natural rights of individuals, and the core of the social contract is to safeguard individual rights (Locke, 1960); Rousseau further deepened this in *The Social Contract*, proposing the idea of man being born equally, emphasizing the fundamental role of individual will in public power, and the two jointly constructed the core framework of the individual-centered theory (Rousseau, 1997). The connotation of Western individual-centered perspective lies in affirming the value and significance of individual existence, advocating for individual freedom and active development, and encouraging individual creative and autonomous independent development. This concept runs through every stage of individual growth, encouraging independent thinking, autonomous choice of life paths, and pursuit of dreams to achieve self-worth. Even if the

development direction of an individual conflicts with the expectations of the family, the collective will not interfere and respect each individual's choice. In *American Born Chinese*, Sun Wukong, in order to join the ranks of the gods, caused a disturbance in the Heavenly Court and devoted himself to cultivation, only to achieve his own goal. This behavior precisely reflects that individuals take action for their personal values and pursuits, highlighting the characteristics of individual-centeredness, and emphasizing the self-actualization and independent consciousness of individuals. This idea of prioritizing individual will has influenced the ways of social identity recognition in Western society: participating in social activities as an independent identity, identity recognition stems from personal achievements rather than collective achievements.

The concept of privacy boundary in the West can be supported by the core of Goffman's dramaturgy theory in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. This theory states that social interaction is an "impression management" performance, with a clear distinction between "front stage" and "back stage". The "back stage", as a private area that restricts outsiders' access, is a space where individuals remove their performance of roles and relax themselves (Goffman, 1959). The independent private space of family members in the West is essentially the protection of the "back stage" area, ensuring that individuals have a buffer zone to separate from the expectations of social roles. Psychologically, the cautious attitude towards information such as emotions and economic conditions is maintained through controlling the "performance script" information transmission to maintain the consistency of the front stage role image, avoiding the disruption of image management due to the leakage of "back stage information" (Goffman, 1959). This boundary is actually a dual manifestation of performance order and individual rights. In *American Born Chinese*, Uncle Qixi's behavior contrasts sharply with the concept of privacy boundary in the West. Uncle Qixi's long-term residence and random interference in others' lives and interpersonal communication caused great trouble for Wang Jin.

In Western society, when an individual has special circumstances and has to temporarily stay in someone else's home, they will maintain a distance to avoid excessive involvement in the host's life. Uncle Qixi's behavior reflects the differences in privacy boundaries in interpersonal communication between China and the West. This difference becomes the reason for identity conflicts among the Chinese community in aspects such as family responsibilities and personal pursuits, intimate interactions and privacy protection, cultural belonging and real exclusion, and provides a key reference for the study of cultural integration.

3. Identity Conflicts among the Chinese American Community

The core cultural differences between the East and the West in terms of family-oriented versus individual-centered, and the Differential Mode of Association (Fei, 2015) versus privacy boundaries (Chen, 2024) are not merely theoretical oppositions, but are directly reflected in the identity cognition of the Chinese-American community, causing confusion in their self-identity perception and giving rise to

identity conflicts among them. This conflict is manifested not only in the tug-of-war between the responsibility inheritance of the family and personal pursuits, but also in the contradiction between the realistic acceptance predicament in social interactions and the cultural belonging needs. The following text will, by combining specific characters and plots from *American Born Chinese*, analyze the identity conflicts triggered by these cultural differences, and reveal the identity construction predicament of the Chinese-American community in the context of dual cultures.

3.1 Conflict between Responsibility and Self Identity Choices Caused by Differences in Family Patterns

In *American Born Chinese*, the conflict between responsibility and self in the identity choices of the Chinese-American group is profoundly reflected through Sun Weicheng's growth trajectory: Initially, he descended to the human world as the son of Sun Wukong, bearing the mission of guarding humanity and inheriting family honor, and thus his actions were constrained by the concept of collective priority; later, during his interaction with Wang Jin, influenced by Western individualistic values (Locke, 1960; Rousseau, 1997)—he witnessed Wang Jin actively breaking cultural barriers and acting based on personal emotional needs in pursuit of a white girl, seeing Wang Jin building social relationships centered on personal will, these behaviors resulting from Western values made him yearn for pursuing personal emotions and making autonomous choices in life direction; Wang Jin vented his emotions on Sun Weicheng due to his unsuccessful real-life relationship, and the two thus broke up. After leaving Wang Jin, Sun Weicheng chose to follow his own feelings between the two options of responsibility and self, breaking the inherent cognition of responsibility supremacy.

The essence of this change lies in the collision between Chinese collectivist values and Western individualist values. The opposition of these two values pushes the already multi-identity-challenged Chinese-American group into a dilemma of choice and profoundly influences their identity construction process. As a cultural hybrid, the Chinese-American group is influenced by the culture of their homeland and carries the imprint of the thought of prioritizing collective responsibility, while being long exposed to Western culture and influenced by Western individualism. It is impossible to avoid the impact of the values of individual self-awareness. In this process, Homi Bhabha's Third Space theory provides crucial theoretical support for understanding their identity construction process. The Third Space (Bhabha, 1994), as an inter-sectional area where cultural meaning and identity are constantly generated, negotiated and restructured, neither belongs to pure collectivism nor completely to individualism, but is a hybrid space resulting from the collision, dialogue and integration of the two. The Chinese-American group is precisely in this third space, constantly attempting to integrate the conflicts between the two cultures: If following collectivism, suppressing personal needs and taking on family responsibility, although it can maintain the connection with the homeland culture, it will lead to the alienation of the self-identity—like Sun Weicheng initially defining himself as an executor of the mission and unable to form an independent self-awareness; if choosing individualism, pursuing individual freedom to satisfy personal needs, although it can express the self-awareness, it will fall into identity confusion—if Sun Weicheng

completely gives up the mission after the split with Wang Jin, he will lose the connection with the family culture and will be even more difficult to clarify “who I am”.

3.2 *Integration and Alienation Identity Experience Conflict*

The estrangement of the Chinese-American community from their native culture is essentially the result of the combined effect of cognitive deficiency and external exclusion (Liu & Yang, 2005). This was confirmed by the cultural estrangement theory proposed by Liu Xi, Yang Dong, and others. This theory states that individuals in a cross-cultural context, due to cultural differences, experience negative emotions such as separation, isolation, being controlled, disharmony, and non-involvement towards the mother culture and the mainstream culture. This is a multi-dimensional negative psychological experience in a dual cultural environment. Its core viewpoint aligns with the logic of the Chinese-American community’s estrangement: Firstly, the emotional connection to the mother culture requires a deep understanding of it. If Chinese Americans only remain at the super-facial symbols of Chinese culture and lack understanding of its essence, they are prone to feelings of separation and non-involvement. Secondly, the exclusion by the mainstream culture will exacerbate the estrangement. The stereotypical perception of Chinese Americans by Western society makes them feel disharmony and being controlled, causing them to fear being isolated by the mainstream group and actively giving up the opportunity to explore their native culture. The unfamiliarity in cognition and the exclusion in reality interweave, ultimately leading them to gradually separate from Chinese culture and fall into a state of estrangement from their native culture.

In *American Born Chinese*, Wang Jin’s behavior is a typical manifestation of this logic: His understanding of Chinese culture lacks an emotional foundation. He neither perceives the essence of the mother culture from family inheritance nor actively establishes an identification with the cultural roots; while the implicit ridicule of Asian languages and appearances by Western classmates further exacerbated his psychological burden—when Sun Weicheng conversed with him in Chinese, he emphasized “speaking Chinese in the United States”, not merely rejecting the language marker of Chinese Americans, but because he was afraid that his Chinese accent would become a new target of ridicule by Western classmates, to strengthen his “outsider” label, he deliberately avoided using the mother language. This avoidance is essentially the result of the combined effect of cultural unfamiliarity under cognitive deficiency and self-doubt under external exclusion: due to not understanding, one cannot identify, and due to being excluded, one does not dare to approach. Eventually, they form an active estrangement from their native culture. And this estrangement feeling further pushes Wang Jin towards the predicament of self-alienation—in order to escape the “outsider” identity and integrate into the Western mainstream society, he chooses to seek identity through suppressing Chinese characteristics and imitating Western lifestyles: Facing the bullying of Western children, he endured discomfort to maintain a distorted “friendship”, attempting to gain group acceptance through tolerance; he changed his external appearance to conform to mainstream aesthetics, hoping to blur his Asian identity through the

Western-like external image. However, this compromising integration did not give him a true sense of identity belonging: giving up the cultural roots deprived him of the identity support of traditional Chinese Americans, while the stereotypical perception of Western society always excluded him from “mainstream members”. Ultimately, Wang Jin found himself in a deeper identity confusion - unable to define himself by cultural roots and unable to confirm his belonging in Western society, completely becoming a carrier of the vacuum of identity recognition. His experience also confirms the complete logical chain of cognitive deficiency-external exclusion-cultural estrangement-self-alienation-identity confusion.

4. The Realization of Cultural Integration

4.1 At the Individual Level: Consistency of Multiple Identities

The growth trajectories of the characters Wang Jin and Sun Wukong in *American Born Chinese* jointly demonstrate the process of self-cognition reconstruction of an individual in a dual cultural context, manifested as the acceptance and balance of “multiple cultural attributes”, ultimately achieving identity consistency. Among them, Sun Wukong’s awakening of identity was not only the key to his own breakthrough from difficulties, but also the core opportunity for Wang Jin to re-construct his identity cognition. By combining Aljun Apadurai’s Global Cultural Flow theory (Appadurai, 1996) and Pierre Bourdieu’s Cultural Capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 241-258), the methods and paths for the identity consistency of the Chinese diaspora group can be further clarified.

In 1996, Aljun Apadurai published the book *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, in which he systematically proposed and expounded Global Cultural Flow. It points out that in the context of globalization, cultural dissemination is no longer a Western-dominated one-way output, but presents a feature of multi-directional interaction and cross-border integration. The core lies in the following aspect: cultural boundaries gradually blur, and individuals can construct a new identity that combines cultural roots and practical adaptability through cross-cultural extraction - actively selecting elements from different cultures-breaking the binary cognition of either this or that and providing logical support for the feasibility of the Chinese diaspora group’s mixed identity (Appadurai, 1996). From the perspective of the Global Cultural Flow theory: Sun Wukong initially fell into the one-way compliance mistake, attempting to abandon the original cultural attribute of monkey and imitate the rules of the Heavenly Court to seek recognition, but instead lost himself and fell into a predicament; until the five hundred years of imprisonment on Mount Lu, he gradually understood that the monkey identity was an inextricable cultural root of his own, and only by accepting this original attribute calmly did he break free from the imprisonment; during his companionship with the Master on the journey to the Western Heaven, he abandoned the shoes that symbolized deliberate compliance with the Heavenly Court, no longer pursuing acceptance from the Heavenly Court at the cost of negating himself, but instead with the core of monkey’s true nature, through cross-cultural extraction, actively absorbing guardian and father roles,

ultimately retaining the original identity and achieving a positive interaction with the Heavenly Court and obtaining acceptance. This process reflects that the acceptance of the original cultural root is not an obstacle to integrating into the culture of a foreign land, but can become the core support for constructing a mixed identity and obtaining recognition from others.

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu first proposed the theory of Cultural Capital in 1988 in *Research and Theory Manual of Educational Sociology*. This theory views language, customs, and knowledge systems as forms of capital. Such capital can be accumulated, transferred, and exchanged for symbolic power. The theory also stresses that the value of Cultural Capital depends on the power rules within specific fields. When non-mainstream cultural capital does not meet the recognition standards of the dominant class, it is depreciated as a negative asset. This process creates a hidden form of symbolic violence. Individuals tend to internalize this power structure. As a result, they may deny their own cultural roots. Achieving identity consistency requires a re-evaluation of cultural capital. By rediscovering the unique value of stigmatized cultural traits in a broader social space, individuals can turn original heterogeneity into a competitive advantage. This shift—from passive acceptance to active empowerment—helps individuals break through field limitations and gain subjectivity (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 241-258).

According to Bourdieu's theory, cultural literacy, language, taste, and knowledge systems can all serve as capital. This capital can be accumulated, transferred, and exchanged for symbolic power within social space. In Wang Jin's early experience, the cultural capital carried by Chinese ethnicity—such as Chinese language ability, family values, and Eastern thinking patterns—was not recognized as legitimate cultural capital in a white-dominated campus environment. Instead, it was devalued as a negative asset, which is a typical case of symbolic violence. Wang Jin attempted to conform to the mainstream evaluation standards by changing his name and suppressing his nature. This was a manifestation of his internalization of this power structure and his active denial of his original Cultural Capital. However, Sun Wukong's realization that "it's so good to be a monkey" marked a fundamental cognitive shift: Wang Jin began to re-identify the once stigmatized monkey nature—that is, the Chinese ethnic traits, such as the "fire-eyed" insight given by a dual-cultural perspective, the resilience cultivated in the cultural gap, and the flexible thinking—as a unique and powerful cultural capital. He no longer tried to make futile transactions with the depreciated capital under the established rules, but through redefining the value of capital, transformed his original heterogeneity into a unique advantage for standing out in a diverse world. Eventually, Wang Jin's identity was coherent, and it was precisely his success in achieving the transformation of his cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 241-258) from being dominated to re-enabling that occurred.

4.2 Artistic Level: Integration of Chinese and Western Art Styles

In 2007, author Yang Jinlun stated in the interview program *All Things Considered* that the storyline of Wang Jin's story adopted the style of American cartoons, while the storyline of Sun Wukong drew on the

style of Chinese comic strips. The interweaving of these two styles transformed the abstract issue of identity recognition into a clear visual language for readers.

From the perspective of Sun Wukong's storyline, the author returned to the visual paradigm of Chinese comic strips (pictorial books) (A, 2019). Sun Wukong's appearance was depicted with flexible lines, with exaggerated postures and dynamic movements, possessing great expressiveness; more importantly, this part inherited the narrative tradition of comic strips combination of text and graphics, incorporating concise text boxes and voiceovers in the picture to advance the plot and depict the psychology, forming a narrative rhythm between traditional storytelling and modern comics. This choice visually established a narrative space rooted in Eastern aesthetics. The scene composition was common in traditional narrative paintings, creating an atmosphere through blank spaces and using decorative elements like clouds to enhance the mythological atmosphere. This choice was not only a recognition of Chinese culture but also visually established a narrative space rooted in Eastern aesthetics.

In sharp contrast, Wang Jin's real-life storyline adopted the typical style of American school comic (McCloud, 1994). The character design was more realistic, with harmonious proportions and delicate facial expressions; the scenes used precise perspective rules to construct a stable and three-dimensional space of daily life. This familiar visual language directly brought readers into the cultural context of the mainstream American society, externalizing the assimilation pressure faced by Wang Jin and his "outsider" psychological reality.

The profound aspect of the entire book lies in the fact that these two distinct visual languages are not isolated from each other. As the narrative progresses, the division logic of these two begins to interact and permeate. The regular grid of American comics is broken by the unrestrained lines of Sun Wukong's story, and the traditional Eastern image (Chinxi's Tang suit) begins to invade the realistic space of the American school. This form of fusion itself is the most powerful visual declaration of the concept of cultural hybridization: it declares that identity recognition is not a multiple-choice question between two cultures, but rather, like the integration of art styles, it is a continuous, active, and creative integration. Ultimately, through the juxtaposition, collision, and final unity of artistic styles, the author successfully transformed the abstract theme of cultural integration into a visual experience that readers can directly perceive.

4.3 Symbolic Level

Based on the research of scholars such as Roland Barthes and Ferdinand de Saussure, the Cultural Symbol Theory (Barthes, 1972 & de Saussure, 1966) was proposed. The core viewpoint is that cultural symbols are the concrete carriers of the values, spiritual traits, and lifestyles of a specific cultural group. Through the association between "signifier" (the external form of the symbol) and "signified" (the cultural connotation carried by the symbol) (de Saussure, 1966), they become the anchor points for individuals or groups to identify "who I am" and "which group I belong to"—through the acceptance, application, and reconfiguration of specific cultural symbols, individuals achieve identity recognition of

the cultural group they belong to, and also convey their own cultural affiliation to the outside world. This theory is fully demonstrated in *American Born Chinese* through the cultural symbol creation of characters such as Sun Wukong and Qinxi, and becomes a key path for the construction of the identity of the Chinese-ethnic group.

Sun Wukong, as a classic symbol of Chinese traditional culture, the “signifier” (de Saussure, 1966) and “signified” (de Saussure, 1966) of him in the works are endowed with new connotations, becoming the dual identifiers of the traditional roots and modern adaptation of the Chinese-ethnic identity. From the perspective of “signifier”, the work retains the traditional visual symbols of Sun Wukong such as “golden staff” and “monkey hair transformation”, maintaining the cultural recognition basis of this character for Chinese audiences, making it an intuitive carrier of Eastern culture; from the “signified” dimension, the work continues the traditional symbol’s core spirit of struggle and perseverance, not giving in easily—such as when facing the prejudice and exclusion of the Heavenly Court, Sun Wukong did not choose to retreat but instead held his dignity by actively striving for recognition, which is highly consistent with the cultural quality of not bending for a handful of rice in Chinese culture, forming the cultural root identifier of the Chinese-ethnic identity; it also integrates the modern value of Western individualism—self-awakening—by adding a psychological journey of from catering to external recognition to accepting one’s true self, transforming the traditional mythological hero into a modern identity symbol that “the signified” transcends a single cultural boundary and becomes a composite symbol with both Eastern and Western spiritual connotations. This symbolic reconfiguration not only keeps the identity recognition of Sun Wukong in Eastern culture but also adapts to the need of the Chinese-ethnic group for self-identity in Western society, providing a symbolic foundation for identity integration.

The character Qinxi’s portrayal through the cultural symbol collision at the “signifier” (de Saussure, 1966) level showcases the identity identification characteristics in the early stage of cultural integration. His visual symbols of the Qing Dynasty’s long braids and Tang costume (signifier) contrast sharply with the modern clothing of the surrounding American students, intuitively conveying the cultural affiliation of the Chinese-ethnic group. This unfamiliar presentation of the symbols is both a passive display of one’s own cultural identity and a direct basis for identifying the cultural group from the outside; while the language symbol (signifier) starting with “Confucius said” conveys the cultural connotation of “respecting the sages and inheriting traditions”, which is the identity identifier of Chinese culture at the language level. At the same time, Qinxi uses singing Western pop songs *She Bangs* and interactive behaviors such as swapping cola in a comical Western manner to combine Eastern language symbols, behavioral logic, and Western pop culture and comedy forms, allowing the “signifier” of different cultures to interweave in the same character. It truly presents the identity status of the Chinese-ethnic group in the early stage of cultural integration—by initially integrating different cultural symbols, they

attempt to establish their own identity identifier in two cultural contexts, laying a practical foundation for deeper symbolic integration and identity construction.

The reconfiguration of cultural symbols in *American Born Chinese* is essentially helping the Chinese-ethnic group solve the identity recognition dilemma through adaptive adjustments of the symbols. On the one hand, the extension of the “signified” (de Saussure, 1966) of traditional symbols such as Sun Wukong enables the Chinese-American community to retain their cultural roots while integrating the traditional spirit with the individual values of Western society, thus avoiding the disconnection between identity and reality caused by the singularity of cultural symbols. By choosing and combining different cultural symbols, individuals can gradually form an identity marker that combines cultural recognition and practical adaptability, breaking free from the binary choice dilemma and ultimately constructing a hybrid identity symbol system that integrates Chinese and Western elements. This identity construction based on the theory of cultural symbols enables the Chinese-American community to use symbols as a medium to clearly define their cultural identity and individual values in a cross-cultural context, achieving a transformation from identity conflict to identity self-consistency.

5. Conclusion

When cultural flows in the context of globalization shift from one-way export to multi-directional interaction, the identity construction of the Chinese diaspora is no longer a binary choice of either-or, but has entered a stage of hybrid coexistence. This paper takes Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese* the research text, delving into the core oppositions between the family-oriented and individual-oriented values, as well as the Differential Mode of Association and privacy boundaries in China and the West, to analyze how these differences give rise to the identity conflicts of responsibility and self and the experience conflicts of integration and alienation within the Chinese diaspora. Furthermore, it reveals the practical path of cultural integration from three dimensions: individual, art, and symbol. This research is not only a cultural interpretation of a single text but also a response to the identity construction of global immigrant groups.

From an individual perspective, the process of Sun Wukong accepting his true nature as a monkey to gain recognition from the Heavenly Court and Wang Jin's integration of his Chinese roots with Western experiences demonstrates the core value of Arjun Appadurai's theory of Global Cultural Flows (Appadurai, 1996): the blurring of cultural boundaries grants individuals the initiative to cross-culturally appropriate. Pierre Bourdieu's theory of Cultural Capital (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 241-258) further reveals that the identity predicament of the Chinese diaspora is essentially a misjudgment of the value of Cultural Capital. When Wang Jin shifts from viewing Chinese culture as a burden for integrating into the mainstream to transforming it into a dual-cultural advantage, it precisely proves that the original cultural roots are not an obstacle to integration but a key capital for constructing a hybrid

identity. This transformation from passive accommodation to active construction provides a referenceable path for the Chinese diaspora to break through the identity confusion.

From the perspective of art and symbol, *American Born Chinese* provides a concrete example of cultural integration through the fusion of Chinese and Western painting styles and the reconstruction of cultural symbols: the visual interweaving of American cartoons and Chinese comic strips transforms abstract identity conflicts into perceptible visual language, confirming that cultural integration at the symbolic level is a symbiotic relationship rather than a simple superimposition of styles. The symbolic reconstruction and collision of Sun Wukong's golden hoop rod plus self-awakening and Chin's Chinese clothing plus Western comedic behavior based on the "signifier-signified" relationship in cultural symbol theory have driven the evolution of Chinese diaspora cultural symbols from single identifiers to composite carriers—retaining the core of the Chinese culture of resistance and progress while integrating the Western concept of individual freedom, thus becoming a bridge connecting the East and the West.

This research indicates that cultural conflicts are not contradictions to be resolved but the driving force for identity innovation. Just as in *American Born Chinese*, no character achieves identity self-consistency by abandoning one culture, the Chinese diaspora in reality do not need to forcibly choose between being inheritors of Chinese culture and participants in Western society. In the future, as global cultural flows deepen, the identity construction of the Chinese diaspora will face more diverse cultural contexts, but the approach of taking cultural roots as the core, cross-cultural appropriation as the method, and hybrid coexistence as the goal will always be the key to achieving identity self-consistency—this is both a response to Zhou Min's statement of "dynamic adjustment in the tension of heterogeneous cultures" and the practice of Fei Xiaotong's concept of harmony in diversity in cultural coexistence.

In view of presenting American image, it can be analyzed from the three aspects: on the dimension of physical imagery, textbooks depict two contrasting spatial landscapes: Chinatown's Chinese-style streets and folk customs in San Francisco alongside suburban residential districts for white Americans. The migration experiences of Chinese American immigrants concretely flesh out America's multicultural immigrant geography, complementing the nation's urban landscape of ethnic enclaves while using Chinatown as a tangible marker of Chinese material folk culture and eliminating oversimplified portrayals of American urban and rural spaces.

On the dimension of cultural imagery, FLTRP editors and authors as well carry out canonization selection from a localized academic standpoint. Centered on three narrative threads—the reimagining of the Monkey King from Journey to the West embodying core Chinese mythology and Confucian-Taoist traditions, Chinese-American teenager Jin Wang's struggles amid Sino-American cultural clashes, and the stereotyped figure Chin-kee subverting entrenched Western prejudices against China—the text moves beyond white-centred American mainstream discourse. It validates America's

evolving multiculturalism shaped by incoming ethnic civilizations and differentiates authentic Chinese culture from Orientalist stereotypes fabricated in the West, emerging as a canonical case for textbooks to objectively present Chinese culture and dismantle biased misconceptions.

On the dimension of spiritual imagery, the protagonist's psychological journey from rejecting his Chinese heritage to embracing his ethnic roots adds a contradictory layer to American national spirit: beneath the founding ideals of pioneering freedom lies deep-rooted racial discrimination and ethnic exclusion, enriching the critical dimension of American national imagery. Meanwhile, the novel portrays overseas Chinese's perseverance in preserving native cultural identity amid cross-cultural confusion and shapes a vivid spiritual portrait of the Chinese diaspora.

Overall, FLTRP's compilation and annotation of American Born Chinese reflect deliberate screening and critical reinterpretation by Chinese compilers grounded in native academic perspectives. The text diversifies America's multi-ethnic national imagery in textbooks and advances de-stereotyped, objective representation of China, offering valuable practical references for the latter part of this research on how foreign language textbooks can construct positive international images of China.

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Notes

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