UC Santa Barbara
Journal of Transnational American Studies

Title
“Call Me an Innocent Criminal”: Dual Discourse, Gender, and “Chinese” America in Nie Hualing’s Sangqing yu Taohong / Mulberry and Peach

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/86v6f64g

Journal
Journal of Transnational American Studies, 4(1)

Author
Fusco, Serena

Publication Date
2012

DOI
10.5070/T841012831

Copyright Information
Copyright 2012 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at https://escholarship.org/terms

Peer reviewed

eScholarship.org Powered by the California Digital Library
University of California

"Call Me an Innocent Criminal": Dual Discourse, Gender, and "Chinese" America in Nie Hualing's *Sangqing yu Taohong/ Mulberry and Peach*

SERENA FUSCO

Nie Hualing's[1] novel *Sangqing yu Taohong*, written in Chinese after its Chinese-born author had moved to Iowa, was originally serialized in Taiwan's *United Daily News* in the early 1970s, and initially published in book form (divided into four parts and introduced by a prologue) in 1976 by *Youlian Chubanshe* of Hong Kong.[2] The novel was first translated into English in 1981 with the title *Mulberry and Peach: Two Women of China*. The English title translates the two female given names in the Chinese title, attempting to make them meaningful to an English-reading public, and is (inevitably) misleading in its insertion of the explicatory *Two Women of China* subtitle. As the prologue of the novel immediately reveals, the two first names of the title refer to the protagonist of the work, a Chinese woman named Sangqing (a combination of the two characters *sang* and *qing*, meaning, respectively, "mulberry" and "green", whose name is translated into English as "Mulberry") who is repeatedly dislocated, in the span of about twenty-five years (from WWII to 1970), from her native southern China to Beijing, to Taiwan, finally arriving in the US where she applies for permanent residency and where she undergoes a schizophrenic breakdown. A second personality emerges named "Taohong"—a combination of the two characters *tao* and *hong*, meaning "peach" and "red" respectively, rendered as "Peach" in the English translation.[3]

Written in the US by a writer who was already an established literary figure before leaving the Chinese-speaking world,[4] and initially published in Taiwan, *Sangqing yu Taohong* is, as noted by Bai Xianyong,[5] concerned with many recurring themes of post-1949 Chinese literature such as dislocation, exile, historical and political anxiety, and an anxiety about the fate of "China" in an age of upheaval and political rivalry among different state powers. These concerns

constantly inform the protagonist's journey and the novel's powerful investigation and interrogation of the meaning of being Chinese in the twentieth century. In terms of literary categorization within the broad cultural universe of "Chinese (language) literature", Nie's literary production—especially *Sangqing yu Taohong*—are potentially controversial. In the words of contemporary Chinese literature scholar Kirk Denton, "[t]he genesis of *Mulberry and Peach* raises some questions about literary hermeneutics . . . is Nie Hualing a Chinese writer, a Taiwanese writer, or an overseas Chinese writer? Drawing from such diverse literary traditions as she does, based on which tradition are we to view her novel?"[6] This controversial status is highlighted by its troubled publication history, with the novel undergoing several adaptations as well rounds of censorship due to its (both overt and covert) political satirical commentary and unconventional, daring treatment of sex and gender.[7]

It is through novels such as Nie's—one so preoccupied with Chinese identity, politics, and history—that interesting unresolved (political) contradictions of Asian American discourse often emerge. The "politicized Asian American discourse" of the novel signifies a complicated network that has been created and reproduced since the 1970s, with the emergence of Asian American identity as a US-based collective formation suspended between cultural vindication and political activism. This network is constituted, on the one hand, by "primary" Asian American cultural and artistic production (with special reference to literature) and, on the other hand, by "secondary" Asian American cultural production. The latter refers to the intellectual debate and cultural criticism around primary, "creative" production. As noted by Viet Thanh Nguyen, it is a historically constitutive trait of Asian American cultural criticism to represent its objects of investigation, or Asian American "texts" in general, as tools of political and social intervention.[8] Among the "unresolved contradictions" of Asian American politicized discourse in this novel is a polarization between the two representations of Asian American identity as isolated and discussed by Nguyen: the "model minority" aspirant and the "bad subject." The novel casts a "double" protagonist, who impersonates, on the one hand, a Chinese immigrant aspiring to permanent residency in the US, guilt-ridden, striving to adjust to behavioral standards; and who, on the other hand, plays the role of a dysfunctional, rebellious, deviant, "bad" subject, sketched as a cross between a "dragon lady" and a sexually liberated hippy, challenging the path towards American citizenship through radical marginalization and self-exile.

In presenting these personas as two sides of the same personality, the novel seems to suggest that the two figures are fundamentally related. As I shall demonstrate, the novel plays out this polarization between the "model minority aspirant" and the "bad subject" on a number of levels. These levels include both the private and public spheres of agency and representation. At the level of the individual—a level which, according to liberal assumptions, concerns the private sphere rather than a public one—the novel dramatizes, with an increasing narrative use of internal focalization and interior monologue, the conflict taking place in the torn psyche of the protagonist. Framed by public discourses,

Sangqing/Taohong's conflict also becomes one that speaks to national anxieties and international relations: the protagonist is caught, and struggles, within a complicated triangulation that binds three State entities (the "Mainland"/People's Republic of China, Taiwan/Republic of China, and the US) all potentially laying claims of control and loyalty upon her. In this sense, Sangqing/Taohong's predicament is an eminently transnational one. Reading *Sangqing yu Taohong* as a narrative of dislocation from China and attempted relocation in America, I argue that Nie constructs the movement from China to America as incomplete, as an oscillation between "Chineseness" and an (im)possible translation and absorption within a "Chinese American" identity label, which generates, as political responses, both the model minority aspirant *and* the bad subject. This ultimate non-resolution paradoxically leads to repeated attempts at assimilating that "uncontainable Chineseness." "Chineseness" becomes uncontainable in the US because of its inevitable *public value*, and Nie seems to make a point about the impossibility to privatize it or reduce it to a specific community. The novel allegorizes this non-resolution through the schizophrenic duplication of the protagonist's personality. Moreover, the fact that the very control of the narration is assumed, as the novel progresses, by the voice of Taohong, the second personality and "bad subject," conveys that one cannot simply dismiss Taohong as the pathological byproduct of a failed experience of assimilation. Rather, Taohong's seizure of control suggests avoiding a hasty pathologization or "privatization" of the protagonist's conflict. One should instead attempt to make sense of "uncontainable Chineseness" in a *public* framework of interpretation.

The tension between the "model minority" aspirant and the "bad subject" in the novel is especially significant in the construction of a controversial *female* Chinese American identity. Published in the 1970s in Chinese, Nie's novel is coeval with the emergence of the rebellious, emphatically male Asian American identity advocated by Frank Chin and the other *Aiiieeeee!* editors, as well as with the groundbreaking feminist version of it created by Maxine Hong Kingston in *The Woman Warrior*. The historical ground covered as Asian American identity became increasingly visible, recognizable, and marketable between the late 1980s and the early 1990s is represented by a growing investment in, especially, female Chineseness and Asianness, both in the public sphere and in literature. In my view, *Sangqing yu Taohong* anticipates a split in the representation of "Chinese" female subjectivity in America: namely, a split between the different versions of "Chinese female identity" staged in public, increasingly visible, and suspended among conflicting spheres of politicized representation.

This essay is thus an intervention within Asian American discourse that attempts to focus its residual, inassimilable, and "rebellious" components as constitutive ones, and that simultaneously positions itself, as Leo Ou-fan Lee would say, "on the margins of Chinese discourse,"[9] to analyze, albeit tentatively and partially, how extraterritorial Chineseness and the discourse of "Greater China"[10] confront and overlap with a post-1965 American discourse of increasing confrontation with Asia, both inside and outside American borders.[11] In this sense,

my essay engages Sau-ling Wong's seminal work on Sinophone Chinese American literature, as well as her analysis of the stakes involved in "denationalizing" and "transnationalizing" Asian American literature. In doing this, it attempts to reflect on the potential of reading a "China-obsessed" Chinese-language text within Asian American critical practices in order to illuminate those practices in their discursive history. Here, I am also attempting to highlight "local" historical articulations of transnational, global concerns, such as engagement with "China" in the public sphere, as a cultural and complex political entity. As I contend, Chinese migration to the US, as described in *Sangqing yu Taohong/Mulberry and Peach*, simultaneously illustrates how this engagement with "China" further historicizes established Asian American critical concerns.

The Dialogue between Cultural and Political Systems

Sangqing yu Taohong/Mulberry and Peach fictionally recreates the political upheavals of twentieth-century Chinese history and the "centrifugal" character of Chineseness in the face of traumas such as war, political unrest, and the rise of repressive state apparatuses. The novel is framed by a prologue that narrates an initial confrontation between Taohong/Peach—the protagonist's newly emerged second identity—and an American immigration officer who has been appointed to investigate Sangqing/Mulberry in order to determine whether she is suitable for permanent residency in the US or should be deported. The immigration officer immediately claims that the two women are "the same person," which is emphatically denied by Taohong, who claims that Sangqing is "dead."[12] In the prologue, as well as in the letters that introduce the four parts of the novel, Taohong, pregnant, divides her time between an unfurnished apartment and roaming across America, hitchhiking, spending time with hippies, and living an extremely "sexually liberated" life. The four parts of the novel are also framed by Taohong's explicit addresses, in the form of letters, to the immigration officer who is "chasing" her, and to whom she send pieces of information about Sangqing, including excerpts from her diary. The four parts of the novel are thus composed of excerpts from the diary, interspersed with heterogeneous materials such as newspaper clippings, maps, cartoons, and folk rhymes. They are separated by substantial time gaps and maintain a relatively high degree of diegetic and stylistic independence.

Chronologically, the story (told in the first person) begins, in Part One, during the summer of 1945 with the sixteen-year-old protagonist's attempt to escape from her native Enshi to Chongqing, the wartime capital. Sangqing's escape from a dysfunctional family (an absent and impotent father and a domineering and violent mother) in the company of Lao-shih (a young girlfriend who is erotically attracted to her) turns into a nightmarish, life-threatening experience of isolation. On the eve of the Japanese surrender, Sangqing and a heterogeneous group of refugees are stranded for six days in a Yangtze River gorge. This part of the novel powerfully allegorizes "Chinese history," intertwining it with images of both decay and primitivism. The river rocks are

likened to bones,[13] and at other moments, to jaws and teeth,[14] that resemble fossils. Before the two girls board the boat that will eventually be stranded, they are coaxed by another passenger, a young refugee student, into crossing a swaying bridge suspended over the river. Refugee Student, who has already crossed once, describes the experience as follows: "[y]ou're completely cut off from the world, as if you've been dangling there since creation. And you ask yourself: where am I? Who am I?"[15]

The passage sets the stage for a recurring theme: spatial isolation and temporal suspension, or being "stranded in the midst of history."[16] Part Two is set in Beijing, with Sangqing joining, in a city besieged by the People's Liberation Army, her betrothed, Shen Chia-kang (Shen Jiagang in pinyin Romanization), whom she marries before fleeing to the South again. Part Three begins after an eight-year gap, with the couple in Taiwan, hiding with their daughter in an attic because Chia-kang has embezzled public funds and is under threat of arrest. This part ends with the fugitive family being discovered by the police. This centrifugal movement concludes, of all places, in the US—a nation preoccupied with the increasing afflux of Asians (especially from Communist countries) following the new Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. Instead of finding a safe harbor from the troubled history of China, in the US, the fugitive encounters further movement. In Part Four, Sangqing is living alone in Iowa, earning a living as a Chinese language teacher while under investigation by the Immigration Service. Pregnant from a liaison with a married Chinese professor, she must decide whether to abort, and, in the meantime, entertains a parallel liaison with Teng, a young Chinese graduate student. This last part makes increasingly clear the reasons behind the emergence of Taohong, personality number two, who seizes control of the narrative and "plunges Mulberry into a life of promiscuity and adventure,"[17] making her commit acts she later disowns. After deciding to keep the child, personality number two seizes more and more control, and finally departs to explore a country (the US) and a world that is "weirder . . . but more interesting."[18]

The novel is, in many ways, orchestrated around the protagonist's transgressions, and on a growing impossibility to draw recognizable boundaries according to ethical standards, an impossibility that leads to several acts of self-censoring. In Part One, Sangqing expresses, for the first time, her sense of guilt in having transgressed and fled from her family, rendering herself a scapegoat for broader events: "[a]fter going through all this, what is there to be afraid of? Now, I know what I did wrong. This disaster is my own doing. I've been thinking of all the bad things I did to people" (34). Nie creates, throughout the novel, a tension between "innocence" and "guilt," as well as a "public" form of this very opposition—namely, an opposition between institutional recognition and illegal status. The tension between the public and private spheres is suggested through the repeated entrance of State power into (apparently) depoliticized spaces. Palumbo-Liu has pointed out that the novel's temporal and spatial structure is orchestrated by repeated political intromissions into "private" secluded spheres. These intromissions set time, which has been symbolically suspended, in motion

again.[19] All four parts of *Sangqing yu Taohong/Mulberry and Peach* constitute a paranoia-inducing structure of control, confinement, and legal/moral sentencing for the protagonist(s). A spatiality that increasingly blurs the inside/outside distinction and a temporal structure that oscillates between rarefaction and historical symbolism again relate, in my view, to the impossibility of referring to solid ethical boundaries. Part Three is, in this sense, particularly significant. Time is symbolically suspended: the clock in the attic where Sangqing and her family hide always reads "twelve thirteen,"[20] and the narrative style of this section of the novel is obsessive in its use of iteration and repetition. While Part Three constructs a separation between public and private spaces, with the family hiding in the attic for protection, it also begins to overlap public and private in a system of obsessive state surveillance. Sangqing explains the pervasiveness of this surveillance to her daughter, Sang-wa, through the striking image of a completely domesticized space:

> Why can those people in the courtyard come and go as they please, Sang-wa asks me. . . .
>
> I explain. They can't go wherever they want, either. There's a wall around the yard. Beyond the wall is the sea. Beyond the sea is the edge of the earth. The earth is a huge attic. . . . I want Sang-wa to understand that the other people in this world live just like us.[21]

The overlapping between public and private spaces, in turn, blurs ethical accountability:

> I tell Uncle Ts'ai that I would like to live a normal life: going out during the day, coming home at night. Coming home to the attic.
>
> He says it's not feasible. If I go out during the day, I am a threat to everyone I meet. I'm the wife of a criminal.
>
> But it's only fair, I tell him. I live all my days threatened like that. They should feel threatened, too.
>
> He asks me, am I innocent or guilty?
>
> Both, I say. And neither. You could call me an innocent criminal.[22]

This paranoia-inducing structure of domesticized state surveillance paradoxically receives its utmost realization in Part Four. In the portions of the novel set in the US, this public, institutional presence is incarnated in the figure of the immigration officer working on the protagonist's case. Few literary Asian American texts have so explicitly represented the institutionalized threat of rejection involved in the immigrant experience. "The Man from the USA Immigration Service," or INS agent, is almost parodic in his anonymous de-humanization: "dark lenses disguise

the only distinguishing part of his face. . . . Only the anonymous parts are visible."[23]

From the Mainland, to Taiwan, to the US, Nie places her protagonist(s) in the middle of a complex and inescapably transnational political web. Historian L. Ling-chi Wang has commented on "the structure of dual domination" around Chinese Americans. Wang remarks that Chinese-born people and/or people of Chinese ancestry in the US are interpellated as (potential or actual) citizens of (at least) one of the political entities, the PRC or Taiwan, identified with "Chineseness." Simultaneously, they are interpellated as (potential or actual) citizens of the US nation-State.[24] In *Mulberry and Peach*, this inevitable double request of political loyalty emerges in the following exchange with the INS agent: "'Are you loyal to the American Government?' 'I'm Chinese.' 'But you're applying for permanent residency in America. Are you loyal to the American government?' 'Yes.'"[25] When Sangqing asks about the outcome of the investigation process, the INS agent replies: "[y]ou'll have to await the final decision. . . . The investigative process must go through related Chinese and American channels."[26] These passages convey the overlapping pressure of (at least) two cultural and/or political "nations" on the protagonist's mind and body. Ben R. Tong, Frank Chin, and the editors of *Aiiieeeee!* have commented on the cultural and psychic dimension of the aforementioned double pressure, remarking that "the Chinese-American is either to be 'Chinese' or 'American' or, in some fashion, the best of both."[27] As early as 1971 (one year after the original serialization of *Sangqing yu Taohong*), Tong responded to an essay written by psychologists Derald and Stanley Sue, who had, in his view, essentialized and de-historicized the psychology of Asian Americans, assuming "an unbroken continuity between Chinese America and certain 'cultural values' of ancient Cathay."[28] Attempting to move beyond the concept of "dual personality" (and its pitfalls), and anticipating a vindication that would be made in the seminal preface to *Aiiieeeee!*, Tong highlights the necessity to historicize the putative "pathologies" of Asian America. Tong urges us to read the guilt experienced by Sangqing as an instance of internalization/privatization of a conflict that is actually a historic and public one.

Expanding, among else, Tong's argument, David Palumbo-Liu has discussed extensively the cultural and political ramifications of the model minority stereotype remarking, among else, how the "model minority myth" fundamentally *privatizes* the "social trauma" undergone by the minority subject. According to Palumbo-Liu, this privatization is acquired by representing a social trauma as an individual pathology that needs to be cured, working it into a "discourse of *healing*," "assigning the ways that minority subjects are to 'mature' through achieving a specifically prescribed understanding of their place in the national community."[29] The "narcotic" sociopolitical effect of this stereotype was initially attacked by the Asian American movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Palumbo-Liu has argued that the stereotype casting Asians in the US as the "model minority"—hardworking, law-abiding, and fundamentally non-rebellious—has created political consensus and subdued Asian American rebellion against institutionalized discrimination. Pairing a transnational, public, political

framework with the private individual, *Mulberry and Peach* illuminates this internalization process through a structure of repeated interpellations. The INS agent's interrogation on the one hand and Sangqing/Taohong's polarized responses on the other form an incomplete, reiterated dialectical movement between guilt and atonement, public sanctioning and individual rebellion, and acceptance and rejection on the part of the national collectivity. In order to abandon the political and social condition of being an "alien" (a process reflected in the application for permanent residency), Sangqing is required to internalize her border status, to "bring within herself," in Tong's terms, "the best" of China, to match it with "the best" of America. She needs to be morally sound and faithful to the putative values of both cultural systems: in other words, she needs to adhere to mainstream American standards of "Chinese American," and to be read as a Chinese American woman. After all, the female immigrant subject is expected to perpetuate various forms of tradition, creating a social cordon that can be negotiated between cultures.

Nie's novel has been repeatedly read as an allegory of the "political schizophrenia" of China in the twentieth century, divided into two distinct and antagonist political entities both with totalitarian tendencies. Accordingly, Nie's protagonist has been read as an incarnation of (to use Bai Xianyong's term) the "wandering Chinese": those Chinese who find it impossible to live on Chinese soil because of political dispossession and State repression, and end up as deracinated "wanderers." For Bai, Taohong symbolizes the extreme (and most tragic) aspects of this deracination: "[t]his is the tragic story of the fragmentation of a personality set against the background of the turbulent history of contemporary China . . . [Nie] has the . . . ambition to design this novel as a fable of the tragic state of modern China, whose political schizophrenia is analogous to the chaotic world of the insane."[30] Because of the historical traumas of modernity, the Cold War, and the totalitarian intrusion of the Chinese nation-States in their citizens' lives, deracination has allegedly become a distinctive (and almost inescapable) "Chinese" trait. The status of the Chinese as "perpetual outsiders" is an interpretive key for *Sangqing yu Taohong* and has been proposed, among others, by Li Li,[31] who focuses especially on Part Four of the novel, reading the wanderings of the protagonist in America as the outcome of a twenty-year long experience of (Chinese) dislocation.

In order to make sense of Sangqing and Taohong's radically different responses to the contingencies of living as immigrant alien in the US, one must consider how Sangqing's attempt at rooting herself in the US, as well as Taohong's "birth," are staged against a broader history of Chinese migration to the US. Chiang I-po,[32] the protagonist's adulterous lover, is a Catholic Chinese university professor married to a white American woman, who becomes concerned about the threat posed to his respectability—and his teaching position—when the protagonist becomes pregnant with his child. The other Chinese immigrant with whom the protagonist entertains a liaison, Teng, is a PhD student who is about to graduate and face the anxieties of a job search in a market that (he claims) does not favor Asians: "Stay here? I'm nobody!"[33] The

novel also portrays a gap between Chinese immigrants and American-born Chinese (ABC) through the figure of Jerry in Part Four. Jerry, married to Teng's sister, Tan-hung (Danhong), is a second-generation Chinese American, and as allegedly the most successful ethnic Chinese in the novel, is "quite well off."[34] While Jerry represents dehumanization (he is "in love" with machines), he is the only character who is socially functional and economically successful, symbolizing the technology-driven Asian nerd.[35] His wife Tan-hung apparently lives an aimless existence in the shadow of her husband's economic success. I-po's anxiety over his teaching position, Jerry's story of second-generation economic success, Tan-hung's upper-middle-class ennui, and Teng's concern for his future all offer a broad panorama of "Asianness" and "Chineseness." In this respect, the novel highlights—and, in a sense, anticipates—the fragmentation of the Asian American community as created by the 1965 immigration laws— a moment of potential dispersion that has come to be recognized as a founding moment of Asian American "transnational diasporic" identity.

The Chinese in My Womb: Innocence and Guilt as Written on the Body

In order to be considered for permanent residency, Sangqing must "behave" in the double sense of behaving property and making herself properly visible. The INS agent remarks on the importance of her public attitude: "we want to investigate your behavior. And that can be observed by anybody."[36] This investigation of behavior includes sexuality, while fully acknowledging recognizable, "proper" boundaries. The (first, in chronological order) interview with the INS agent is revealing in this sense. After asking "bland" identification questions, such as her name and date of birth, the investigation almost immediately turns to the adulterous relationship in which Sangqing is participating:

> "Define the words 'commit adultery.'"
>
> "When a woman and a married man or a man and a married woman sleep together, that's adultery."
>
> "You should change 'sleep together' to 'have sexual intercourse.' Please say it again."
>
> "When a woman and a married man or a man and a married woman have sexual intercourse, that's adultery."[37]

Through this vocabulary exercise the INS agent forces Sangqing to enter his discursive framework, transferring the language of sexuality into a public sphere of discourse *he* controls. In another scene, the "power-gaze" exercised by the "Man from the Immigration Service" is suddenly voyeuristic and eroticized: "He pulls a pile of papers from the file. . . . [O]n the evening of 20 July . . . Chiang I-po entered my apartment by way of the fire escape. He stares at me asks on the evening of July 20th did he or did he not have sexual intercourse with me I say yes, he asks how long did it last I say I can't say for sure, we weren't in bed we were in

the bathtub, the small mustache below the two large dark lenses twitches he asks how do you have sexual intercourse in a bathtub?"[38]

The prologue is the only section of the novel that is narrated in the third person. One might conceive of the prologue as a dramatization of conflicting narratives and voices, with the two contenders attempting to set their own tone for the exchange. Taohong's behavior in the prologue involves exposing her breasts to enjoy a breeze coming from the open window, and rolling on the floor in the breeze. Moreover as the reader discovers, the unfurnished apartment where she lives is decorated with phallic objects,[39] and speaks to a (castrating) eroticism that the agent attempts to recompose within the frame of a proper professional exchange: "Mulberry, please behave yourself."[40] Significantly, the private sexuality of the protagonist seems to matter only within the public, political discursive boundaries set by the INS agent, and he seems to be the only one entitled to transgress and play with them.

Sangqing must "behave" in the US and her sexual behavior becomes the most observable touchstone for assessing her eligibility (or ineligibility) for "Chinese Americanness." However, virtually all male characters of the novel invest in the preservation of Sangqing's innocence and on their own exclusivity, so to speak, in bartering it and turning it into *value,* only to find themselves disappointed by her bodily transgressions. This pattern recurs throughout the novel. As noted by Wong, the most striking example of this can be found in Part Two. Sangqing's husband-to-be, Shen Chia-kang, dreams of Sangqing lying naked on the "shrine of the Altar of Heaven" in Beijing, the only "pure" thing in the midst of ruin and defilement, and of making love to her.[41] This dream sequence also bespeaks Chia-kang's desire to invest in the purity of a space loaded with cultural significance. This investment is totally misplaced, because Sangqing is not a virgin. Chia-kang becomes obsessed with that fact that he was not the man who "deflowered" her: "[h]e asks if Refugee Student touched me like that . . . he is obsessed."[42] In Part Three, Chia-kang re-directs the guilt and responsibility of embezzlement onto Sangqing, who is simultaneously the guardian *and* the betrayer of a universal moral order. Chia-kang renders women in general, and Sangqing in particular, as the scapegoats for the traumas experimented by the (male) subjects of history: "[h]e blames me for destroying his whole life. I wasn't a virgin, he married 'a broken jar.' His illusions about me have been shattered. His illusions about everyone in the world have been shattered."[43] In the first part of the novel, Sangqing's innocence (both in terms of family roots and in terms of physical virginity) is symbolized by a jade griffin, a "family heirloom" that she stole before running away. On the boat, Sangqing loses her virginity to an attractive and manly "Refugee Student," and bets the jade griffin in a game of dice. When she loses to Refugee student, he claims he "owes her" and attempts to give the griffin back to her, but it slips to the floor and breaks in two. While the destruction of the jade griffin almost prefigures the shattering of the protagonist's subjectivity, its use to "pay her off" suggests the ways in which innocence can be a valuable token of exchange.

The novel enacts various strategies and interpretive frames that relate to different male-centered discourses of cultural authenticity, power, and institutional control. In Monica Chiu's words, "*public* divisions are *somatized*"[44] in the protagonist's character(s) as well as in the novel itself. The ultimate effort to solve the mystery is enacted by the enigmatic Man from the Immigration Service, who is located in the ultimate narrative (and temporal) frame, and constitutes the most evident incarnation of the institutionalized, public imperative of making sense of a complicated (private *and* political) past. While Chinese nationalist and culturalist discourses invest in Sangqing's putative innocence and capitalize on Sangqing's Chineseness, these attempts at reconstructing an already distant and lost "wholesome" Chineseness are, most significantly, reproduced within a politically institutionalized "multiculturalist" American frame that attempts to translate a "Chinese woman" into a "Chinese American woman." The erotically charged, repeated interpellation on part of state- and family-controlled apparatuses is what makes the transition from a "Chinese" into a "Chinese American" an unfinished, perpetually deferred process: "Asianness" remains always partly separated by "Americanness" and under eternal scrutiny.

The *pregnancy* in Part Four is the epicenter of the immigration investigation and the cause of Sangqing's split personalities. While Sangqing is undecided about the abortion, Taohong uncompromisingly decides to keep the child in order to "preserve a new life."[45] The fetus also becomes the center of a number of investments: I-po urges her to abort; Betty, I-po's drug-addicted American wife, offers to raise the baby for company; and Teng's sister, Tan-hung, seems to find the baby a distraction from the meaningless of her life. Significantly, the pregnancy is also seen as a source for a new, transformed Chinese identity: "I only went to see Dr. Beasley out of curiosity. . . . 'With my own eyes I saw . . . so many Chinese die.' 'I want to keep the Chinese in my womb!' I say, smiling. . . . 'Good luck to China!'"[46]

She Speaks Back, Above the Din

Bai Xianyong describes Sangqing's personality split as follows: "[the] heroine starts as Mulberry Green, an *innocent girl* from inland China, and ends as Peach Red, a *sexual monster* who sleeps her way from the Midwest to New York."[47] Other scholars also interpret, like Bai, the personality split as a polarization between innocence and corruption/nymphomania to the point of monstrosity. According to Yu Shiao-ling, "by the end of the novel, Peach's transformation is complete. Not only has she cut herself off from traditional Chinese values, but she is no longer bound by any ethical standards. As an amoral person, she becomes permanently exiled from human society."[48] As noted by Wong, Sangqing is envisioned as an innocent girl; however, the text does not offer any evidence of an original "blessed" status (it is merely assumed). Wong remarks that this patronizing reading creates an unbridgeable moral rift between Sangqing and Taohong. Moreover, this discrimination serves to reconstruct a putative "unblemished" Chineseness in order to reconstruct, in turn, the story of

dislocation from China as a *Sinocentric*—a "coherent story of the fall . . . projecting innocence and health onto Mulberry (The Virgin) while assigning sin and anguish to Peach (The Whore)."[49] This innocence, in Bai's and Yu's readings, is also associated with an ideal "prelapsarian" state of pre-diasporic Chineseness.

Taohong displays a number of "bad subject" traits: she is sexually outspoken and domineering; she does not experience guilt over her pregnancy or sexual liaisons; she does not abide by conventional moral imperatives; and she becomes a street-wise, nature-loving hippy (she even participates in an anti-Vietnam war demonstration).[50] While Taohong's lifestyle certainly contributes to constructing her as an unconventional, rebellious character, she is particularly "bad" because she embraces, appropriates, and re-directs the threat embodied by the INS agent. In the letter introducing Part Four, Taohong conveys that she lived with a lumberjack for a while in an old water tower.[51] Before leaving the tower, she makes her historical presence known by hanging a "wooden plaque . . . imitating . . . the plaque that the astronauts left on the moon."[52] She thus refuses to be assimilated and obliterated by a public power, the American, state-endorsed discourse of immigration.

Translating Asia *within* America while keeping the two at least partly separated is also a strategic move that serves both mainstream exclusion and antagonistic politics against such exclusion. This perpetual oscillation between the extremely polarized positions of accommodation and rebellion, model minority and bad subject, Asianness and Asian Americanness, is what I call Asian American "*dual discourse.*" Sheng-mei Ma has been among the early proponents of an "Asian American contextualization" for Nie's novel. However, in the end, Ma rejects the possibility of reading *Sangqing yu Taohong* as a positive affirmation of Asian American identity, due to its "nihilist" character, as well as its "sketchy" representation of the immigrant experience (experience he identifies with Taohong) versus the "thick" representation of Chinese roots (roots he identifies with Sangqing): "The sketchy delineation of Peach Red as opposed to the 'thickness of description' devoted to Mulberry Green betrays the weightlessness of immigrant subjectivities in Nie's mind. The immigrant self is assumed to be one of voidness. . . . Nie's ethnocentric view resulting in the lopsided presentation of the Chinese self and the immigrant other invalidates the possibility of fashioning a new immigrant identity."[53]

Instead of subscribing to Ma's reading of the novel as "nihilist," I would suggest reading Taohong's "birth" as the emergence of the "bad," rebellious Asian American subject. On one level, Taohong can be read as a character that "idealizes" (as Nguyen would say) the "bad subject"—as the oppositional counterpoint to the productive, hardworking, and functional Asian American "model minority." Using Wong's term, Taohong represents "extravagance."[54] However, Taohong's rebellion as a "bad subject" ultimately illuminates the privatizing logic that attempts to make Sangqing *pathological*, sealing off her public, political claim in the medically recognizable (and nihilist) illness schizophrenia. Moreover, the "obsession with China" and Chineseness displayed in the text can also be read as a "return of the repressed" within Asian American

discourse. Published during the early years of the emergence of Asian American discourse, *Sangqing yu Taohong* represents Chinese ethnicity in America as both publicly valuable and difficult to manage because of the pressure of competing public interests. This, in turn, questions what Nguyen has called "the idealization" of Asian American identity.

Mainstream perception on Asian America traditionally focuses on gender, and the deployment of female identity and sexuality, as one of the signs for determining the successful, or the failure, of assimilation into America and its multicultural liberalism. In terms of gender politics, the problematic oscillation between Sangqing and Taohong underlines how "female identity" is not an ahistorical quid to be liberated in the passage from "China" to "America"—but, instead, a flexible cultural construct deployed by conflicting or allied cultural discourses according to a number of different political agendas.

Due to the intervention of Wong and other scholars, *Sangqing yu Taohong*/*Mulberry and Peach* is now a *de facto* work of *transnational* Asian American literature. In her 2001 essay, "The Stakes of Textual Border-Crossing," Wong creates an Asian American reading space for Nie's novel—a successful attempt, as proven by the flourishing of Asian American readings of the novel, especially during the first decade of the new millennium. Inspired by Wong, other Asian American studies scholars have examined the work's uncontainable character—namely, its capacity to accommodate and (I would emphasize) *produce* multiple possible interpretations, preventing any attempts to read the novel with a totalizing attitude.[55] Nie's novel is completely relevant to Asian American politicized discourse because it stages some of its unsolved—and unsolvable—contradictions. Among these contradictions is a long-term necessity to historicize America from ex-centric, non-mainstream positions. While the transnational phase of Asian American studies has created the possibility to take into account "Asia" as a serious site of cultural production and reception, my reversed attempt at localizing some transnational concerns within the local concerns of Asian American studies might also ideally reconnect to a reflection on the transnational implications of American literature and culture.[56]

Notes

[1] The author's name can be alternatively transliterated as "Nieh Hualing" or "Nieh Hua-ling." Some English-language studies do not follow the Chinese-language word order—the last name preceding the first or given name—and refer to the author as "Hualing Nieh" or "Hua-ling Nieh."

[2] Nie Hualing, *Sangqing yu Taohong* (Hong Kong: Youlian Chubanshe, 1976).

[3] I shall use the pinyin transliteration system in this essay. While my quotes from the text will be taken from the English translation, I shall also refer to the protagonist using her Chinese name(s), pairing them, in most cases, with the English renditions.

[4] See note 1.

[5] Bai Xianyong, "Shiji de piaobozhe: zhongdu Sangqing yu Taohong." *Jiushi Niandai Yuekan* 12 (1989): 93-95.

[6] Kirk A. Denton, "Review of *Mulberry and Peach: Two Women of China* by Hualing Nie." *Journal of the Chinese Language Teachers Association* 24.2 (1989): 135-138, 137.

[7] The story of the novel's publication is summarized by Sau-ling Wong in her afterword to a 1998 English-language edition—Nie Hualing, *Mulberry and Peach: Two Women of China*, trans. Jane Parish Young and Linda Lappin (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York), 199—as well as in her 2001 essay "The Stakes of Textual Border-Crossing: Hualing Nieh's *Mulberry and Peach* in Sinocentric, Asian American, and Feminist Critical Practices." *Orientations: Mapping Studies in the Asian Diaspora*, eds. Kandice Chuh and Karen Shimakawa (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

[8] Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Race and Resistance: Literature and Politics in Asian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[9] This formula reproduces the title of Leo Ou-fan Lee's essay, "On the Margins of the Chinese Discourse: Some Personal Thoughts on the Cultural Meaning of the Periphery." *Daedalus* 120.2 (1991): 207-226.

[10] Tu Wei-Ming, "Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center." *Daedalus* 120.2 (1991): 1-32.

[11] For a discussion of the "suspension" of Chinese Americans between the American and Chinese nation-states, see L. Ling-chi Wang, "The Structure of Dual Domination: Toward a Paradigm for the Study of the Chinese Diaspora in the United States." *Amerasia Journal* 21.1/2 (1995): 149-169.

[12] Nie, *Mulberry and Peach*, 6.

[13] Ibid., 24.

[14] Ibid., 25.

[15] Ibid., 22.

[16] Ibid., 40.

[17] Ibid., 160.

[18] Ibid., 13.

[19] David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 347-348.

[20] Nie, *Mulberry and Peach*, 154.

[21] Ibid., 129.

[22] Ibid., 144.

[23] Ibid., 3.

[24] L. Ling-chi Wang, "The Structure of Dual Domination."

[25] The inquisition of loyalty here is at least double, if not triple: to the US, China and maybe even Taiwan.

[26] Nie, *Mulberry and Peach*, 165.

[27] Ben R. Tong, "The Ghetto of the Mind: Notes on the Historical Psychology of Chinese America." *Amerasia Journal* 1.3 (1971): 1-31, 18.

[28] Ben R. Tong, "A Living Death Defended as the Legacy of a Superior Culture." *Amerasia Journal* 2 (1974): 178-202, 183.

[29] Palumbo-Liu, *Asian / American*, 398.

[30] Bai Xianyong, "The Wandering Chinese: The Theme of Exile in Taiwan Fiction." *Iowa Review* 7.2/3 (1976): 205-212, 210.

[31] Li Li, "Qianji" [Preface], in *Haiwai huaren zuojia xiaoshuo xuan* [An Anthology of Narrative by Overseas Chinese Authors], ed. Li Li (Hong Kong: Sanlian, 1983), 2. Also see Yu Shiao-ling, "The Themes of Exile and Identity Crisis in Nie Hualing's Fiction." *Nativism Overseas: Contemporary Chinese Women Writers*, ed. Hsin-sheng C. Kao (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993).

[32] Here I use the Wade-Giles transliteration system that is used in Parish's and Lappin's English translation.

[33] Nie, *Mulberry and Peach*, 172.

[34] Ibid., 180.

[35] David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American*.

[36] Nie, *Mulberry and Peach*, 165.

[37] Ibid., 164.

[38] Ibid., 182.

[39] "A gigantic, swollen penis stands like a pillar in the middle of the floor." Nie, *Mulberry and Peach*, 5.

[40] Nie, *Mulberry and Peach*, 7.

[41] Ibid., 72.

[42] Ibid., 94.

[43] Ibid., 141.

[44] Monica Chiu, "Trauma and Multiplicity in Nieh's *Mulberry and Peach.*" *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 36.3 (2003): 18-35, 24; my emphasis.

[45] Nie, *Mulberry and Peach*, 183.

[46] Ibid., 199.

[47] Bai, "The Wandering Chinese," 210; my emphasis.

[48] Yu, "The Themes of Exile and Identity Crisis in Nie Hualing's Fiction," 143.

[49] Wong, "The Stakes of Textual Border-Crossing," 145.

[50] Nie, *Mulberry and Peach*, 11-13.

[51] Ibid., 157-159.

[52] Ibid., 159.

[53] Sheng-Mei Ma, *Immigrant Subjectivities in Asian American and Asian Diaspora Literatures* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), 51.

[54] Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, *Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[55] Among such interventions are: Jean Amato, "Relocating Notions of National and Ethnic Authenticity in Chinese American and Chinese Literary Theory Through Nieh Hualing's Overseas Chinese Novel, 'Mulberry and Peach.'" *Pacific Coast Philology* 34.1 (1999): 32-52; Monica Chiu, "Trauma and Multiplicity"; Yu-fang Cho, "Rewriting Exile, Remapping Empire, Re-membering Home: Hualing Nieh's *Mulberry and Peach.*" *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 5.1 (2004): 157-200; Tina Chen, "Bodily Negotiations: The Politics of Performance in Hualing Nieh's *Mulberry and Peach*." *Double Agency: Acts of Impersonation in Asian American Literature and Culture* (Stanford, CA : Stanford University Press, 2005).

[56] For two collections that tackle, respectively, Asian American literature as a transnational phenomenon, and American culture as a phenomenon that needs to be read globally, see *Transnational Asian American Literature: Sites and Transits*, ed. Shirley Geok-Lin Lim, et al. (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2006), and *Globalizing American Studies*, eds. Brian T. Edwards and Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2010).