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**FOOD AS A SIGN OF INTERGENERATIONAL
FAMILY CONFLICTS AND A MARKER OF
IDENTITY IN CHINESE AMERICAN FICTION**

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ABSTRACT

FOOD AS A SIGN OF INTERGENERATIONAL FAMILY CONFLICTS AND A MARKER OF IDENTITY IN CHINESE AMERICAN FICTION

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This study explores the dynamics of the identity construction process in two works of Chinese American fiction - Mei Ng's **Eating Chinese Food Naked** (1998) and David Wong Louie's **The Barbarians Are Coming** (2000) - in the light of cultural food theories, focusing specifically on the views of Claude Fischler and Deborah Lupton. The thesis discusses the contrasting food choices and eating habits of the first and second generation Chinese Americans reporting the intergenerational conflicts born by the adherence to the American and/or ethnic dietary regimen and their disruptive effect on the family unit. The study argues that the food and foodways of Chinese Americans guard the culturally defined Chinese culinary regime against the workings of white dietary practices, but the interaction with social variables such as class and sexuality challenges this reserved attitude towards the white palate. The analyses of the two novels demonstrate that once the desire for eating is no more tempered by the natural tendencies of the ethnic culinary culture, the appetite gets personalized through nonconforming food practices based on the changing socio-economic position and sexual orientation of the characters.

KEYWORDS: Food, Identity, Family, Chinese American Literature, Chinese American Novel

ÖZ

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ELİF AYDIN

Bu çalışma, kültürel yemek teorileri ışığında, kimlik inşa etme süreci dinamiklerini Çin Amerikan yazınından iki eserde – Mei Ng’nin **Eating Chinese Food Naked** (1998) ve David Wong Louie’nin **The Barbarians Are Coming** (2000) – incelemektedir. Bu çalışma, özellikle Claude Fischler ve Deborah Lupton’un görüşlerine odaklanmaktadır. Bu tez, birinci ve ikinci kuşak Çin kökenli Amerikalıların çelişen yiyecek seçimlerini ve yemek yeme alışkanlıklarını, onların Amerikan ve/veya etnik beslenme düzenine olan bağlılıklarını ve bunun aile birimi üzerindeki yıkıcı etkisinin sebep olduğu kuşaklararası kavgaları göstermesiyle ele almaktadır. Bu çalışma, Çin kökenli Amerikalıların yiyeceklerinin ve yemek kültürünün, Çin mutfak düzenini beyaz ırkın besidüzeninin etkilerine karşı koruduğunu göstermektedir; fakat beyaz ırkın damak zevkine karşı olan bu savunmacı tutumun, sınıf ve cinsellik gibi sosyal değişkenlerle etkileşimi sonucunda sarsıldığını öne sürmektedir. Romanların analizi, yemek yeme isteğinin etnik mutfak kültürünün dayattığı düzgüsellikten kurtulması sonucunda, iştahın, karakterlerin değişen sosyoekonomik durumuna ve cinsel yönelimine bağlı olan aykırı yemek yeme eylemleri ile kişiselleştiğini göstermektedir.

ANAHTAR KELİMELEER: Yiyecek, Kimlik, Aile, Çin Amerikan Edebiyatı, Çin Amerikan Romanı

PREFACE

The purpose of this dissertation is to read food as an epistemological sign of identity and intergenerational family conflicts in Mei Ng's **Eating Chinese Food Naked** and David W. Louie's **The Barbarians Are Coming**. The study will show how the different food choices and eating habits of the first and second generation Chinese Americans produce contrasting identities and thereby give rise to serious family conflicts. In line with the purpose of the study, I will mainly resort to cultural food theorists Claude Fischler's and Deborah Lupton's reflections to elaborate on the relationship between food, body and identity. I will show how food not only nourishes but also identifies and moves apart Chinese American immigrant parents and their American-born offspring.

This study has been a culinary expedition through which I have encountered many difficulties and challenges. I would like to express my gratitude to some people who have always been with me throughout this demanding expedition. In times of my crises and deficiencies, my thesis advisor Prof. Hasine Şen Karadeniz was always there to point at the cataclysmic stones on the road that fettered me down and blurred my vision. Her guidance kept me on the track and helped me to discipline my writing. I would like to thank her for her guidance, patience and support. I have learned a lot from her knowledge, insights and work discipline. I am really thankful that she has been my mentor during this journey of mine.

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ABBREVIATIONS LIST

ABC : American-born Chinese

Barbarians : The Barbarians Are Coming

CIA : Culinary Institute of America

Eating : Eating Chinese Food Naked

TWLF : Third World Liberation Front



INTRODUCTION

Food has always been an indispensable aspect of human life. It is necessary for our physical as well as psychological sustenance. Besides nourishing our body food also confirms our sense of identity since it always shows to us and others our conception of our selves. Our food choices, cooking styles and table manners are significant for our identity construction. As Wenying Xu states in **Eating Identities**, “[w]ho we think we are has everything to do with what and how we eat” (2008: 4). We therefore open our mouths to *become* continuously. According to Claude Fischler, our eating shows our “incorporation” (279) of the other into our bodies. Since food is a liminal object (it can be both outside and inside our bodies), it becomes the other to us and its ingestion is therefore significant for our sense of self. The consumption of the other constructs us continuously either by affirming or challenging/disrupting our identity. Our food choices are extremely important to steer the course of this process of construction either toward affirmation or disruption. If we eat what is defined as good for us by our culinary culture, we affirm our identity. However, if we consume what is bad (or forbidden) for us, we disrupt our identity by contaminating it. We therefore eat the appropriate (clean and pure) food to *become* in accordance with our cultural norms.

Not surprisingly, the definition of appropriate food changes from one community to another. What we accept as good/appropriate food can be dismissed as bad by the others. Our food choices and eating habits therefore distinguish us from the others whose food practices are foreign to us. They also re-affirm our in-group position in our community while marking the others as the out-group members. To put it another way, our distinct food and foodways identify who we are, and they also signify our separation, disconnection and estrangement (sometimes to the point of animosity) from the others.

Food can also work as a disruptive mechanism against the family unity. The different food preferences and eating habits of the members of the same family can keep them from eating together. The lack of commensality in the family unit

damages the bonds between its members since eating together reinforces the sense of togetherness in the family. Also, since food consumption is highly important for the identity construction, the incompatible dietary regimens of the family members can give rise to conflicting identities and family disagreements. These food-based conflicts can destroy the family cohesion and thus result in the disintegration of the family unit.

This dissertation aims to employ food as an epistemological device to analyze the contrasting identity positions and the family conflicts in Chinese American Literature. The focus on Chinese American literary works is especially important given that food holds a particular place in Chinese American history. Throughout their history, Chinese Americans have always been racialized through their food and foodways. Food-based accusations such as “[t]hey eat dogs and cats” (Xu 8) work to stigmatize them in and ostracize them from American society. In Anita Mannur’s words, “[f]ood provides a language through which to imagine [sic] Asian alterity in the American imagination (2010: 13). Chinese Americans are therefore always identified through their food choices and eating habits.

One present-day event proves this kind of identification of Chinese Americans. The recent Covid-19 outbreak has dropped a bomb especially in the lives of Americans of Chinese descent. The day (February 26, 2020) the Center for Disease Control and Prevention announced to the public that the new coronavirus peril arrived in America and that it was spreading very rapidly, the public attention immediately shifted to Chinese Americans and their food and foodways. For some Chinese Americans, eating dog meat, bats, pangolins and/or other wild animals is a delicacy since it is a part of their ethnic culinary culture. There is nothing wrong with the consumption of such animals because they are deemed appropriate by the Chinese culinary order. Eating them is a way of confirming their ethnic identity. However, when the virus outbreak started to occupy the minds of white Americans, they were immediately terrified by the possibility that some Chinese Americans’ dietary regimen could include the wild animals. White Americans therefore started to racialize Chinese Americans by casting off their American nationality. According to the white racist discourse, Chinese Americans are not American, but Chinese, or

‘better’ the bat-eaters/pangolin-eaters. Their practices of stigmatization are supported by their justification that the virus originated in and spread from Central China’s Hubei province, specifically its capital Wuhan. They also rely on the speculations that point at the Huanan seafood market as the place where the coronavirus has mutated. The white hegemony readily accepts the hypothesis in regards to the origination of the virus which propounds that it first showed up in bats and then transferred to humans via pangolins (Campbell and Park 2020). Since the Huanan wet market is well-known by its various wild animals such as squirrel snakes, king cobras and pangolins, and at the market, many exotic or wild animals get slaughtered upon the customers’ request and then cooked at the nearby restaurants, the white nation came to define this virus as the “Wuhan virus” (ibid.). The white America has associated its citizens of Chinese descent with this virus particularly because their diet includes the wild animals (it is important to note that not every Chinese American eats these wild animals). As a result of it, Chinese Americans are now identified as the wild animal-eaters who are also the *kung-flu* carriers. The white nation now cautiously eyes them because they are seen as a threat to the white order and health.

Since “[m]any Asians dine on delicacies that would disgust most Anglos” (221), they are defined as “the filthy yellow devil” (Wu 217) who must be banished from the country. Chinese Americans’ history recounts their exoticization and marginalization through their ethnic culinary culture. Their food and foodways therefore constitute a distinct aspect of their collective memory. This core memory shows itself on the realm of imagination, too. Chinese Americans’ identification through their food and foodways has an undeniable effect on their literature. Chinese Americans’ association with them has resulted in the production of a literature which is highly rich in food tropes and culinary motifs. The master narratives of Chinese American literature are therefore, among many other definitions, great culinary works. In many fictional and non-fictional works in Chinese American literature, the Chinese American experience is recounted through food references and images. Even its most recurrent themes such as coming-of-age and intergenerational family conflicts are almost always portrayed by the use of food tropes.

Maxine Hong Kingston's **The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts** (1976) is one of the most popular Chinese American books which explores the concept of identity through the theme of family conflicts and explicit food imagery. It is a revolutionary work in the Chinese American canon because it transgresses the strict generic classifications by blending fiction and autobiography together with Chinese folk tales. In the book, the main conflict between the protagonist and her mother is always conveyed through the description of the clash between the American culinary center and the ethnic Chinese culinary culture. The "Shaman" chapter (43-81) specifically depicts this conflict via abundant food references. In this chapter, the protagonist (Maxine) recounts her mother's dishes which include a wide range of animals from "city pigeons" to "garden snails" (68). Maxine's childhood memories are certainly vivid when she describes her escape from her mother's terrifying kitchen by shutting out her ears to the screams of animals boiling on the stove. Maxine's American identity keeps her from eating Brave Orchid's (her mother) Chinese food. Her escape from it compels her to comfort herself by eating American candies. They become a palliative against her mother's wild foods. Throughout the book, the family conflicts are perpetuated by the mother-daughter dialogues on food: Brave Orchid dismisses American food as "bad for [her daughter]" (69) and urges her to eat her homemade food. In response to her mother, Maxine rejects eating her mother's "hairy beasts" (ibid.) and indulges in the consumption of the wrong food.

Published in 1989, Amy Tan's **The Joy Luck Club** is another prominent Chinese American literary work that brings together the food motifs and intergenerational family conflicts. Tan's novel explores the problematic relationships between Chinese American mothers and their daughters in four different families. In the novel, there are many scenes where food functions as a destroying mechanism of the mother-daughter bond. In the chapter "Best Quality" (151-162) which focuses on Jing-Mei Woo's (one of the daughters in the novel) part, we see how food becomes a sign of the disconnection of the daughter from her mother. The daughter protagonist (Jing-Mei Woo) here narrates the crab dinner her mother prepared for her eighth birthday. Jing-Mei Woo loves the crab her mother bought for her. However, she

loves it as a pet not as a comestible. She therefore gets terrified when her mother brutally kills it by cooking it. Though she knows that she cannot refuse her mother's food, she is repulsed by the crab dinner which features her pet "boiled alive" (155). Her mother's insistence compels her to eat it eventually. Eating it, however, drives her apart from her mother. The crab incident gets engraved in Jing-Mei Woo's memory so she refrains from eating it in her adult life despite her mother's nagging.

Another literary work that explores the concepts of identity and family through food metaphors is **Donald Duk** (1991) by Frank Chin. The novel has a particularly significant position in the Chinese American canon because it is Chin's own response to the description of the Chinese American experience in Kingston's and Tan's novels – and in David Henry Hwang's plays **FOB** (1979) and **M. Butterfly** (1988). In his article "Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake" (1991), Chin writes about the works of these writers, "[t]hese works are held up before us as icons of our pride, symbols of our freedom from the icky-gooey evil of [...] Chinese culture" (2). He specifically criticizes Kingston's revision of the Chinese American experience by accusing it of "restating a white racist stereotype" (29). Accordingly, in the introduction of the anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American literature **The Big Aiiieeeee!** (1991), he dismisses Kingston's and Tan's novels (he lists other well-known names such as Jade Snow Wong, David Henry Hwang, and Lin Yutang) as "fake" and "not hard to find" (xv). Chin propounds **Donald Duk** as "the real" (ibid.) writing. In the novel, Chin depicts the coming-of-age story of an 11-year-old protagonist (Donald Duk) through the mixture of food motifs and the dream sequences in regards to the history of the Chinese railroad laborers in the nineteenth century. In accordance with Chin's comments on Kingston's and Tan's novels, not surprisingly, his novel reaches its climax by Donald Duk's re-adoption of Chinese history and culinary culture. Ironically, however, Chin repeats Kingston and Tan's pattern of the relationship between food and intergenerational family conflicts to reach the climax of the narrative. Donald Duk dismisses the Chinese clam dish his father offers him by saying "[i]t looks like the sole of my Reeboks sliced real real thin!" (46). The narrative is filled with similar scenes where Donald Duk rejects his ethnic history

and food and thereby clashes with his father. This food-based pattern forms and fuels the narrative conflict. Therefore, despite his criticisms of Kingston and Tan, Chin also reinforces the identification of Chinese Americans with their food and foodways in the same manner seen in **The Woman Warrior** and **The Joy Luck Club**.

Chinese American Literature is a vast ocean that undulates itself on the themes of identity and family conflicts from its culinary and alimentary lighthouses. From poetry to prose, the Chinese American experience offers an extensive field of study. For the scope of the thesis, this extensive field is narrowed down to two significant literary works in Chinese American fiction: Mei Ng's **Eating Chinese Food Naked** (1998) and David Wong Louie's **The Barbarians Are Coming** (2000). They are read in the light of cultural food theories, specifically in line with Claude Fischler's reflections in "Food, Self and Identity" (1988) and Deborah Lupton's ideas in **Food, the Body and the Self** (1996). In this study, the dynamics of the identity construction process are explored from a food-centered perspective. Reading contrasting food choices and eating habits in the selected literary works unearths the intergenerational conflicts in the Chinese American family. I argue in this study that the food and foodways of Chinese Americans guard the culturally defined Chinese appetite against the workings of the white culinary core, but the interaction of this appetite with social variables such as class and sexuality challenges this reserved attitude against the white palate. Once the desire of eating is no more tempered by the natural tendencies of the ethnic culinary culture, the appetite gets personalized through the nonconforming food practices based on the changing socio-economic position and sexual orientation of the characters. This personal appetite is extremely recalcitrant against bowing down to the normativity of the ethnic culture and cuisine. Its refractory nature therefore disrupts the systematic formation and preservation of the social relations in Chinese American families.

The first chapter of the study is composed of three main parts which hold a great importance for the analyses of the selected novels in the following chapters. It firstly focuses on Chinese American history from 1800s to the present by exploring the concepts of immigration, racist discrimination, family and racialization through ethnic food and foodways. Chinese people's first experience of America shows their

exoticization by the white hegemony. Afong May, the first recorded Chinese woman in the U.S., was an exotic specimen for the hungry eyes of the white men (Chang 2004:38). The Chinese experience in the country continued as the spectacle of the exotic other later gave its place to the immigration of the Chinese laborers between 1848 and 1855 during the California Gold Rush. These laborers worked hard to support their families in China. Their cheap labor turned them into the enemy of the other immigrants and white workers. They were therefore exposed to racist practices and hate crimes. The discriminatory immigrant laws such as the Exclusion Act of 1882 and The Geary Act of 1892 were legislated in order to block the new waves of Chinese immigration which would ensure the access to their cheap labor. Even when the restrictions before their immigration were lifted, Chinese people still faced discrimination in their daily lives. Because of the racist order, they had certain job opportunities limited to the service sector: they could become cooks, waiters, restaurant owners or laundry owners but nothing more than these. The fact that they became cooks or restaurant owners undergirded their identification with their food and foodways. Throughout their history, Chinese people continued to be defined as “the coolie in the kitchen” (Ho 2005: 44). Even after the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which opened the way to the following waves of Chinese immigration and so provided the chance for the formation of Chinese American families, the image of the Chinese was still the “cook” (Ku et al. 5) which corresponded with their “inassimilable alien” (Wu 79) status in the white nation. When the first Chinese American families were formed with the birth of the second generation, the association of the Chinese with their food and foodways became a much more serious problem. American borns dismissed their immigrant parents’ ethnic food and foodways just to assimilate into the white American culture. Their desire to become ‘normal’ Americans was fueled by their strong refusal to be identified through Chinese food and culinary practices. The first generation Chinese Americans, however, preserved their ties to their ethnic culinary culture despite their marginalization. The conflicts over food choices and eating habits continued in the Chinese American families to the extent of the destruction of their family unity. As this part of the chapter demonstrates, today, Chinese Americans’ ostracization from American society still continues through their identification with their *wild* food. The

recent Covid-19 outbreak has traumatized every Chinese American regardless of his/her birth in America or China. Chinese Americans have become the scapegoat to the numerous coronavirus related deaths just because of their ethnic dietary regimen. Their history therefore continues to be written by their incontrovertible relationship with their food and foodways.

The first chapter furthermore focuses on the theories of food and foodways. This part constitutes the pillar of the study. I explore here the strong relationship between food, body and identity. Food theories demonstrate that our food intake affects our body (by sustaining our health or deranging it) as well as our identity construction (by reaffirming it or disrupting it). They furthermore show that eating is a way of *becoming*. Our sense of self affects our food choices and in return, our identity is constantly reproduced by these choices. In order to have a comprehensive knowledge of the relationship between food, body and identity, this section focuses on structuralist and cultural theories on food and foodways.

The structuralists' essentialist approach offers a food reading that resonates the methods of linguistics. They view food and foodways as the definite signs of their eaters/performers. According to Roland Barthes, for instance, food signifies the situation in which it is consumed. The situational value of food distinguishes eating a hamburger, which always corresponds with a casual occasion, from eating a proper meal which always symbolizes an important event. Similarly, Claude Lévi-Strauss defines food practices, cooking specifically, as a sign language through which each society reveals its own distinct working mechanism. Another structuralist Mary Douglas views food as a code, and she propounds that its meaning is revealed in the specific social context it is consumed in. She also argues that the type of food we share with others signifies our intimacy level with them. Sharing a proper meal is a sign of closeness while sharing drinks indicates unfamiliarity or distance. Pierre Bourdieu also reads food consumption as a static act pre-determined by social classes. According to his deterministic approach, our food choices are shaped by our socio-economic position so that every one of us has a "class taste" (Bourdieu 34) pre-inscribed into our system. These structuralist approaches are important for the field of food studies, but their common insufficiency is due to their dismissal of the human

factor in their studies. Since these structuralists overlook the dynamism of each and every culture, they fail to produce the food language necessary for the purpose of this study.

Since the structuralist approaches to food and foodways are found insufficient, this section later focuses on the cultural food theorists Claude Fischler's reflections in "Food, self and identity" (1988) and Deborah Lupton's ideas in **Food, the Body and the Self** (1996). As opposed to the structuralists, Fischler's and Lupton's food theories include the cultural variables such as race and ethnicity. Their works therefore offer a much extensive analysis of food and foodways. According to these cultural food theorists, our changing wants and needs undeniably shape our food choices. Since our eating is a way of *becoming*, our changing food choices therefore constantly re-produce us. Fischler explains it through her concepts of "incorporation" and "contamination" (279). We eat, or incorporate, food by absorbing its properties into our body and so we *become* what we eat. Our food consumption can affirm or disrupt our sense of self based on our choices of food. Eating the culturally appropriate food confirms our identity whereas eating the unfamiliar (culturally unapproved/forbidden) food challenges it by contaminating it. Her reflections are important to understand why Chinese food stirs panic in America. Its unknown nature gets associated with impurity and danger. White Americans are therefore afraid of contaminating their bodies by eating it. They consequently label this food as smelly or impure and refrain from eating it in order to preserve their white identity. Lupton's reflections on Mikhail Bakhtin's terms "civilized body" and "grotesque body" (19) are also significant to understand this food labeling in its association with the racialization of Chinese Americans. The "civilized body" denotes the controlled, culturally appropriate body whereas the "grotesque body" connotes the uncontained, culturally defiant body. The "civilized *American* body" dismisses Chinese food as dirty and (sometimes) inedible. White Americans otherize Chinese Americans because of their culturally defiant body which embraces this impure food. Fischler's and Lupton's works show that food not only constructs the self and establishes relationships among individuals but it also builds borders among them by marking their differences. In the analyses of the selected novels, their reflections will be

significant to explore how food comes to mark the conflicting identities of the first and second generation Chinese Americans and thereby gives rise to family conflicts.

The last part of the first chapter is concerned with the critical exploration of food in Chinese American Literature. The examples of food reading are illustrated with Wong's **Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance** (1993), Xu's **Eating Identities: Reading Food in Asian American Literature** (2008) and Ho's **Consumption and Identity in Asian American Coming-of-Age Novels** (2005). The three works are presented in detail as contributing greatly to the contextual and theoretical framework of this study. I firstly focus on Wong's reading of food based on the thematic opposites "*Necessity*" versus "*Extravagance*" (13) which she respectively associates with the first generation Chinese Americans' cultural and culinary practices and the second generation's assimilated behavior and their American diet. Her analysis shows that the immigrant parents' survival-driven mentality shapes their diet and daily life which conform to the Chinese culinary and cultural norms. It, on the other hand, points at American borns' indulgence in freedom and whitening their diet and life style. On the contrasting thematic paradigms, Wong's study shows how food marks the difference in the identities of the first and second generation Chinese Americans. In order to elaborate on the relationship between food and identity, I secondly focus on Xu's idea of 'ethnification as construction' (81). Her reading of food shows that ethnic identity (ethnification) is continuously constructed through the performance of culinary practices. Her reading shows that the fragmented identity of American borns is caused by their deracination. Xu offers ethnification as a resolution to American borns' fragmented identity. According to her, it helps them build their self-integrity. Lastly, I touch on Ho's reading of food – specifically her concept of "yellow sensibility" (2005: 25) which she defines as an ever-becoming identity. Her concept works on an inclusive system (negotiation). She therefore offers it as a resolution to American borns' conflicted (American and Chinese) selves. Wong's, Xu's and Ho's readings of food and identity are important for our understanding of subjectivity and intergenerational family conflicts in Chinese American Literature. The literature

review here is, however, the appetizer before the main dishes in the second and third chapters.

The second chapter focuses on Mei Ng's **Eating Chinese Food Naked** (1998) on the nexus of food, identity, ethnicity and sexuality. The novel holds an exemplary position in Chinese American fiction by its portrayal of the intergenerational identity conflicts on the dynamic parameters of food, sexuality and queerness. Its narrative offers a glimpse of the everyday life of a Chinese American family by delineating its members' problematic relationships. Throughout the narrative, the changing food motifs work to reinforce the understanding of identity as an active entity. The description of the inconstant food choices therefore corresponds to the formation of an inclusive (cultural, ethnic and sexual) identity. It shows that eating indiscriminately is a way of rejecting the understanding of identity as a static ethnic formation. In the narrative, the interrelationship between food and sexuality, especially, fosters the idea of an ever-becoming identity which is free of the constraints of the ethnic norms and values. In this chapter, I argue that the changing food choices of the protagonist (Ruby) function as a disruptive agent that enables her to subvert the rigid understanding of a static (cultural, ethnic and sexual) identity imposed by her ethnic culture.

The analysis of the novel demonstrates that Ruby's *personal* diet, which is constantly updated according to her changing wants and needs, is born out of the demands of her insatiable appetite. Its inclusive mechanism works against the wishes of the ethnic dietary regimen which delimits its practitioners' appetite based on the ethnic culinary norms and values. Ruby's insatiable appetite forces her to transgress the rigid lines between American and Chinese cultures, and so it helps her deconstruct the dietary and sexual normativities of her ethnic culture. By indulging in a rich (and nonconforming) diet, Ruby constructs her fluid identity which corresponds to multiculturalism and bisexuality. Her inclusive identity, however, threatens her parents' normative dietary and sexual practices enforced by their static ethnic identity. The chapter shows that Ruby's and her parents' incompatible diets constantly reinforce their differing identities (fluid versus static), and they are therefore the symptoms of the intergenerational identity conflicts in the narrative.

The last chapter views David Wong Louie's **The Barbarians Are Coming** (2000) at the intersection point of food and class to explore the intergenerational identity and family conflicts. Louie's novel can be defined as the best testimony to the paramount function of food in Chinese American literature and its undeniable effect on intergenerational relationships. **Barbarians** is loaded with numerous food references and images. What is more, its narrative conflict is built upon and perpetuated by the differing approaches to the comestibles. The novel also features the themes of class and social mobility. It fuels the narrative drive in the story. All the food images and references in the narrative are swathed in these themes. The argument of this chapter is therefore based on the interrelationship between food and class.

This chapter demonstrates that American culinary culture defines the ethnic (Chinese) food as the wrong food and associates it with the lower class. Chinese food is foreign to the white culinary system so the consumption of this unfamiliar object is presumed to be dangerous for the American body. As eating it threatens the white identity, the white culinary culture compels its loyal followers to restrain their appetite against it. I therefore argue that the protagonist's (Sterling) desire to climb the social ladder impels him to reject the consumption of Chinese food as its ingestion affiliates him with the lower class and so constitutes an impediment before his identification with the white middle class Americans. Once Sterling disciplines his appetite and culinary practices in accordance with the norms and values of the white culinary culture, he becomes able to construct his white identity. However, because his racial qualities continue to mark him as the ethnic other, his culinary membership to the white culture does not improve his socio-economic position or bring him acceptance in American society. It only alienates him from his parents who reinforce their identity through the consumption of ethnic food. This chapter illustrates that Sterling's and his parents' contrasting approaches to ethnic and white food therefore result in the disintegration of their family.

CHAPTER ONE

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

1.1. The Historical Mapping of Chinese American Experience: Family, Ethnicity and Politics of Chinese Americans from 1800s to the Present

The history of Chinese Americans offers a transatlantic journey whose last destination has not been determined yet. The journey goes way back to the 1830s when Afong May, the first recorded Chinese woman in the United States, was brought on a stage as an exotic specimen to be consumed by the curious white gaze (Chang 2004: 38). Before the first wave of immigration, Chinese people served only as exotic showpieces in the curious eyes of white people. The Bunker Siamese twins are the most prominent example for this. Their exotic look earned them their fame and acceptance in American society. This initial acceptance shaped white Americans' perception of the Chinese as the exotic other. The journey continued with the first block of immigrants from the Middle Kingdom (China) to America between 1848 and 1855 that marked the California Gold Rush era. Motivated by a Chinese proverb 千里之行，始於足下 (A journey of a thousand miles begins with one step)¹, Gold Mountain laborers left their families in China and went to America to work hard to support them.

The first flow of immigrants was during the reign of the Qing dynasty which corresponded to the time of the California Gold Rush. It was triggered by the political oppression of the Manchu government, economic depression and the dreamy tales of wealth and prosperity. Many Chinese men set sail for America or the “mei guo” (beautiful country in Mandarin) (Wu 302) in order to give a better life to their families in China. Even after the sojourner mentality of Chinese immigrants

¹ It means that the initial step in a journey will take its travelers a thousand miles away from the point of departure. In the case of Chinese immigrants, their journey is triggered by their desire for wealth, prosperity and success. Once they are achieved, Chinese people aimed to return to their homeland. However, economic, social and political turbulences between America and China kept them from going back.

gave its place to a resident mentality in later flows of immigration, their primary objective to provide a better life for their family members remained as their reason of leaving their homeland. It is Confucian values, which prioritize keeping the family institution alive and upright, that shape people's life in China. From the Qing dynasty to the communist Mao regime (and to the present time), family always came first for Chinese people (Chang 2004: 68). It continues to hold its importance for them in America, too.

Leaving China either in legal or illegal ways, "Chinese crimps"/ "coolies" (laborers) (ibid. 42-43) settled mostly in the West Coast, especially in California due to the Gold Rush. These coolies worked at the *Gam Saan* (Gold Mountain) under harsh circumstances. Later, they worked at the transcontinental railroad project of 1860s. Wherever they worked, whoever employed them, they were exploited by means of cheap labor and unhealthy, harsh and even fatal conditions of living and working. Many of the Chinese coolies lost their lives while working. For the ones who survived, the double wage system, whereby whites earned more than them, put them in a very disadvantaged position compared to other immigrants such as the Irish. Even though they were exploited and exposed to racist ostracism, the Chinese coolies kept on working because they were the breadwinners of their families. The family factor forced them to close their eyes to racist discrimination and to bear the hardships they faced in the land of freedom. California Senator John F. Miller brought up their determination in one of his racist speeches by describing them as "automatic engines of flesh and blood". In his speech, he marked them as tenacious and emotionally numb "beasts" (Miller qt. in Chang 2004: 124).

While the Chinese coolies were consolidated by the memories of their "Gold Mountain families" in China (Chang 2004: 68), their absence disrupted the order in the family institution. During the first wave of immigration, the immigration laws were not as restrictive as in the late 1870s when the law amendments were to the detriment of the Chinese (especially Chinese women). However, during the first wave, the emigration rates of women and infants were much lower (almost none) compared to men's. Many "Gold Mountain widows" (ibid. 109) were left behind with their children. It was because Chinese customs and Confucian values obliged

them to take care of their in-laws and their household in the absence of their husbands. Due to their separation, a split-family structure came out. It challenged time and space restriction by enabling a transpacific bond among family members. This bond would later form a transnational consciousness which was to be embraced by Chinese Americans.

During the transcontinental railroad project of 1860s, the United States was in a desperate need of the Chinese work force because Chinese immigrants worked hard and demanded less than the others. The government therefore signed with China the Burlingame Treaty of 1868. The agreement resulted in great numbers of Chinese males leaving their country during the first wave of immigration. They formed the basis of the Chinese American community. These men worked hard to ensure the cash flow from the United States to China.

The first Chinese Americans, “American Chinese”² in Chen’s words (174), were a “bachelor society” (Yin 211). The fact that they were without their families resulted in women trafficking organized by tongs (Chinese secret organizations) in order to serve the sexual needs of these single men. Many women were brought to America either after getting tricked or kidnapped. Prostitution therefore became a serious problem in this society later. Because of it, “American Chinese” were seen “as lustful and immoral non-Christian[s]” (Avakian 45) and therefore called by the white Christians as “the heathen Chinese” (Harte qt. in Avakian 46). It also gave rise to the Page Act of 1875 which prohibited the entry of Chinese women with the intention of prostitution. In practice however, it applied to almost all Chinese women. This first restrictive immigration law affected the Chinese population negatively. Because of it, Chinese bachelors were restrained from forming families in their new homeland.

During the Panic of 1873, America was in an industrial depression, and so the scarcity of job opportunities hit both immigrants and Americans. The era marked the great rivalry between Chinese immigrants and other white immigrants and

² Throughout this thesis, the term “American Chinese” refers to the first generation Chinese Americans while “Chinese American” alludes to the American-born second generation. However, the term “Chinese American” applies to both when they are addressed as an ethnic group.

Americans. The cheap labor of Chinese people turned them to the enemy of the unemployed whites. The government wanted to cool down the angry masses. The Angell Treaty of 1879, the Exclusion Act of 1882 and The Geary Act of 1892 were therefore signed to prevent the easy access to Chinese cheap labor. The 1892 Act even obliged the resident Chinese to carry their residence certificates always with them. Ng Poon Chew (the founder of *Chung Sai Yat Po*, the first Chinese language daily newspaper in America) described the situation in the following terms: “whether they are merchants or officials, teachers, students or tourists, [Chinese people] are reduced to the status of dogs in America. The dogs must have with them necklaces [...] which attest to their legal status before they are allowed to go out. Otherwise they would be arrested as unregistered, unowned dogs and would be herded into a detention camp” (qt. in Chang 2004: 133).

Hate crimes and racist discriminations continued against Chinese people. Chinese immigrants were found ineligible for naturalization because they were thought to be “inassimilable alien[s]” and “perpetual foreigner[s]” (Wu 79). The Scott Act of 1888 kept the resident Chinese from re-entering America upon their return from a visit to China. It therefore worked to eliminate the unwanted foreigners in the country. Another blockage was the immigration facility in Angel Island. Chinese immigrants were interrogated there in horrific ways before they were let into the country. They lived under poor conditions, and they were exposed to brutal racist treatment. Most of them could not survive these harsh conditions, and many of them were not admitted into the country. The U.S. government’s attitude toward them was partly due to the weakness of the Chinese government whose political and economic instability handicapped it from protecting its overseas citizens.

Chinese people who were admitted into the country did not have better lives either. Chinatowns and Chinese businesses overflowed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. However, finding a job did not mean the end of the discriminatory laws. Because of racism and unequal job opportunities, a limited number of jobs were available for the Chinese immigrants. They were mainly in the service sector. Working as a cook, waiter or a laundry worker, “American Chinese” were imprisoned in a subservient position for a long time. Because they had mostly

domestic jobs, which were called as women's work, they were also seen as effeminate. The perception that the "Chinese men could be cooks and laundresses and maids because they were *sexless*" was taken up seriously by whites so that they did not see the yellow race as a threat in the house (Ho 2005: 28, italics mine). 1871 *Scribner's Monthly* headline "A Plea for Chinese Labor: by an American Housewife" was a proof of it. The plea was for Chinese men to be admitted in the United States and to be allowed for working in the service sector both in the private and public realms (Richardson in Ho 2005: 28). It was indeed prophetic as "the image of the Chinese as domestic worker" (ibid. 40) became a common sight in the nineteenth century. Ho describes Chinese immigrants as "the coolie in the kitchen" (44). It is because they worked mostly in the food service sector. They were perfect servants for Americans. As a result of the jobs they worked at, they were labeled as "the cook", "the dishwasher" and "the busboy" (Ku et al. 5).

The "bachelor society" (Yin 211) of the first Chinese immigrants started to change into a "family society" (Lowe 34) in the early twentieth century. During the Exclusion Era, only merchants were allowed to bring their wives and families to America. The 1906 earthquake and fire in San Francisco brought on the chance for the formation of the first Chinese American families. During the fire, the resident certificates of Chinese immigrants were destroyed. Because Chinese immigrants could not be identified without their resident certificates, the incident opened up the way for new flows of immigrants from the Mainland China. One could assume to be a resident even if he/she was not. Many Chinese males therefore resorted to an illegal way to enter into the country. They came to be known as paper sons of the time. These paper sons were granted citizenship upon their arrival, and owing to it, they were able to bring their wives to the country. Also, some Chinese immigrants took advantage of the incident and got married to women whom they came to know in letters and pictures. These picture brides arrived in the country after the legalization of their marriage. According to Avakian, "between 1907 and 1924, approximately 10,000 Chinese females arrived in America" (102). The number of Chinese couples increased by means of it. Despite the Immigration Act of 1924 which banned the

entry of women of Asian descent, the number of Chinese American families continued to increase in illegal ways.

The political upheavals in the mid twentieth century also affected the course of the Chinese American population. During World War II, Japan's call for *Asia for Asiatics* disturbed the U.S. Congress because the possibility of an Asian coalition would threaten the well-being of the country. In order to prevent such coalition, the U.S. government took action to improve the Sino-American relations and thereby to convince China to side with them against the Japanese. The Congress therefore repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act with the Magnuson Act of 1943. It enabled "American Chinese" the American citizenry and eliminated the impediment before Chinese immigration. The Chinese American population continued to increase as a result of it. It opened up the way for the second wave of Chinese immigration. Many intellectuals and well-educated, wealthy people with good English skills immigrated to America. They were the first circle in the second wave immigration. Their background distinguished them from the first wave immigrants who were poor and uneducated. They therefore worked at better jobs compared to the first immigrants. However, similar to the Chinese coolies, they dreamed of going back to their homeland once they achieved their "gold-plated"³ diplomas from American universities. Yet, they could not return to China, too. Unlike the financial difficulties fettering the Chinese coolies, their reason of stay was due to the Red Scare.

During the second half of 1940s, the U.S. government was up against the Red Peril. America took precautions against a possible communist attack. The Displaced Persons Act of 1948 was put in effect to protect the intellectuals who arrived in America during the second wave immigration. Due to their relation with America and their Western education, these intellectuals felt threatened by the communist rule of the People's Republic of China. They therefore did not want to go back to their homeland. The Act allowed them to remain in America. Also, the Refugee Relief Act of 1953 provided shelter to the immigrants (mostly to the rich and educated stratum)

³ The term was used for the successful Chinese students who left their country to pursue higher education in the Western institutions. Upon their return, their Western diplomas functioned as "gold-plated" tickets which granted them privileged positions (Yang qt. in Chang 2004: 221).

who were running away from their communist countries. They constituted the second circle of the second wave immigration.

The Chinese found a relative relief owing to the amendments in the immigration laws. Their entry to the country became much easier, and their right to become an American citizen was being protected by the laws. Once they obtained their citizenship, they could bring their family members to the country. It was very common that it came to be known as “chain migration” (Avakian 184). As a result of the population growth, a society of Chinese American families was formed. The first generation immigrant parents welcomed their American-born offspring. American borns were the second generation Chinese Americans. Many of them did not visit their parents’ homeland. They learned about it through their parents’ stories. They therefore could not connect to their roots easily. They were always in a cultural limbo as the desire to assimilate into American culture and the necessity to accept their ethnic heritage haunted them every day. Their identity conflict made their lives difficult. On the one hand, they had to meet their parents’ expectations in a white-coded society. The first generation parents expected filial piety, success, demureness and thriftiness from their children. Their life goals were “to live in [their] own house, to be [their] own boss and send [their] children to the Ivy League” (Zhou 193). They thought education was the only way for their children to realize the American Dream. Chinese mothers literally forced their children to succeed in school, in language schools and in sports. They therefore earned the nickname of tiger moms. On top of all, the parents demanded an unfaltering commitment to their roots through reverence for their ethnic history and cuisine. On the other hand, the pressure to assimilate into the white American culture drove American borns into a corner. It was because assimilation meant deracination. It advocated freedom instead of ethnic pride. It was therefore strongly rejected by their parents. These binary ends caused ABCs (American-born Chinese) to have an in between state of mind.

The Chinese American family structure played a role in ABCs’ in between status too. Chinese American families differed from the traditional American families. The first generation parents’ experiences formed the basis of their family unit. As immigrants, they endured discrimination, worked hard to live on and spent a

life in thriftiness. Their survival-driven mentality caused hardening their emotions and ultimately resulted in their emotional numbness. Their failure to express their emotions combined with Confucian values (such as demureness and self-restraint) in shaping their family structure. Owing to it, Chinese American family members learned to restrain themselves from showing their emotions. It was troublesome for American borns because what they learned at home was in a stark contrast with what they experienced with their white American friends and their families. As opposed to the Chinese, Americans were comfortable showing their emotions. American parents displayed their affection to each other and to their children overtly. Seeing it confused American borns. They therefore started to question the nature of their attitudes and behaviors. Moreover, the immigrant parents' poor English skills made them dependent on their children. This dependency reduced their parental authority. Even though American borns enjoyed taking advantage of this dependence, it made them see their parents inadequate compared to their white friends' parents. They were therefore at loss in between two different life styles most of the time.

Some American borns gave in to the seduction of American popular culture. They went to ball games, ate hamburgers and fries, and did whatever they wanted to do under the name of freedom. Specifically, eating white food was their way of escape from their parents' ethnic table. Their flight from ethnic food also showed their desire to get free of the racist labels attached by white Americans. The first generation parents did not approve their frivolous behavior and cautioned them to stay away from these extravagances. They wanted to raise their children according to the Confucian values and see them become "*guai* (obedient)" and "*you-chu-xi* (promising)" (Zhou 190). However, their dreams came to naught because their children rejected complete submission to their authority as it threatened their freedom. The second generation did not want to live a life similar to their parents'. They therefore chose American freedom and individualism instead of Chinese self-discipline and family honor. They dismissed their ethnic history and cuisine.

Their deviation turned them to cultural traitors, and so they were labeled as *bananas* to point at the discrepancy between their racial quality (yellow skin color) and their cultural allegiance (white American culture). The first generation saw their

assimilation as a family shame. They frowned upon the life style of their American-born progeny as it caused them to become “*bai-jia-zi* (family failure)” and “*mei-chu-xi* (good-for-nothing)” (ibid.). They cried over their children whom they called as *juk-sing* (assimilated American-born Chinese or Chinese born overseas in Cantonese). In return, the second generation saw their parents as “*lao-wan-gu* (old stick in the mud)” (ibid. 187). The parents’ repressive mindset caused ABCs’ alienation from their parents and their ethnic (culinary and cultural) heritage. They did not want to get entangled in a shame-or-honor dilemma. They saw assimilation as the only way out of it.

The white coded society encouraged Chinese Americans to assimilate even though it did not guarantee their acceptance. Many American-born Chinese forsook their ethnic heritage with the hope to find a place in the WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) society. However, the white hegemony did not see them as Americans and discriminated against them. It was evident in the doctrine of *separate but equal* accepted during *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896. During that period, ABCs could not be admitted to the schools attended by white Americans. Until *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 which found the practice of the segregated schools unconstitutional, the doctrine was used against Chinese Americans and other ethnic groups.

Racist discriminations were not limited to American borns or their education. Their parents had already been marked as “aliens from oriental countries” (Chang 2004: 138), and being one of the sub-ethnic groups of the Asian American community, the first generation Chinese Americans were furthermore exposed to racism on a wide scale as “Asians were the only immigrant group in the United States barred from obtaining naturalized citizenship” (Avakian 114). Moreover, even their children were questioned regarding their eligibility for American citizenship even though they were born in the United States. American borns therefore realized that they were just strangers in their home country.

Chinese Americans wanted to blend into the white mainstream culture. Therefore, they got jobs outside the Chinatowns. In 1950s, they started moving out

of the Chinatowns to settle in the white neighborhoods. They also started participating in the U.S. politics (Hiram Fong became the first Asian American Senator serving from 1959 to 1977). Many other amendments were also being discussed for their inclusion into the American body politic. However, these improvements did not terminate the racist discriminations and stereotyping. The anti-Chinese sentiments continued and became much more destructive from 1940s to the late 1960s.

The U.S. politics has always been shaped according to the interests of the white race. The unwanted Chinaman became the ally of the government during WWII. However, the political allegiance came to an end when the communists took control of China (renamed as People's Republic of China) in 1949. The change of regime alarmed the American government especially because of its kinship with the Soviet Union and North Korea. The growing hostility between the United States and the People's Republic of China affected Chinese Americans very negatively. During the Second Red Scare, Americans were paranoid about the possibility of the Communists infiltrating into the government and the society⁴. The "*san yi man*" ("new immigrants") (Avakian 187) who arrived between 1940s and 1960s were therefore exposed to racist accusations based on the speculation that they were communists. Likewise, "*lo wa kiu*" ("old overseas Chinese") (ibid.) were marked due to their racial traits despite their American citizenship. The negative attitude towards these Chinese Americans was based on the belief that they were part of the Red Menace. Those who could not prove their innocence were also subjected to internment by the U.S. government.

Chinese Americans managed to achieve great success, wealth and notable academic degrees throughout time. Despite these attainments, they were still haunted by racist slurs such as "wicked Orient" (Chang 2004: 187) and "space invaders" (Wu

⁴ The Second Red Scare (from 1947 to 1957) started due to the tension between America and the Soviet Union. The fear of the expansion of Communism inflamed the tension. American internal affairs were disturbed highly by it. Nationals and foreigners were being accused of treason even though there was no evidence against them. The practice was known as McCarthyism. It was such a time when Americans doubted Americans. The First Red Scare, on the other hand, occurred in between 1917 and 1920. The WWI nationalism and the Russian Revolution formed the basis of it. The U.S. government was disturbed by the far-left extremism. The possibility of the communist impact in the American labor movement and the political upheavals in the society alarmed the government.

118). Americans continued to see Chinese American men as coolies and houseboys from the nineteenth century. They were also marked as dangerous predators of white women or as emasculated underdogs before virile American men. On the other hand, Chinese American women were seen as “China dolls, compliant and sexually available to white men, or villainesses, dragon ladies, cunning and dangerous seductresses” (Chang 2004: 190). No matter how much time passes, people of Chinese descent are still exposed to racist discrimination and labeling. It is not surprising that the discourse of the exotic yet dangerous Orient still resides in the collective memory of Americans.

Another racist discourse emerged in the late 1960s. The concept of model minority came out for the first time when William Petersen’s article “Success Story, Japanese-American Style” was published in 1966 in *New York Times Magazine*. It praised Japanese Americans for their reverence for education and family values and a lesser tendency to commit crimes. The *U.S. News & World Report* staff members published another article “Success of One Minority Group in U.S.” in the same year and extended the concept to Chinese Americans. It was due to the straight A-Plus generation in the Chinese American community. They were American borns who struggled to live up to their parents’ and their community’s demands for academic excellence. Their hard work, success and economic progress proved their assimilation and earned them praises from the white society. They were promoted from “inassimilable Orientals” (Zhang 23) to “honorary Whites” (Suzuki qt. in Zhang 24).

Chinese Americans’ model minority status later functioned as a self-made trap for their ostracization. The society perceived every Chinese American as the top student in the class. They were thought to be the intelligent, well-off and privileged ones. The “honorary White” status was not limited to them though. All slant-eyed individuals were perceived as model minorities. It was the way the WASP society accepted the yellow race. Actually, this misconception functioned as a general judgement against them. According to Avakian, “this label misrepresent[ed] the many diverse peoples of Asian ancestry in the United States as a monolithic group” (192). The success myth therefore worked subtly to otherize all Asians.

Most of the ABCs felt compelled to meet the ideal Asian image. Their cultural whitening caused them to dismiss who they really were (Wong and Halgin 47-48). It resulted in their intra-group marginalization. However, despite their expectations, their deracination did not bring them full acceptance by the white hegemony. It was because “whitening [had] more to do with the belief of white America than with the actual situation of Asian Americans. [...] New stereotypes can emerge and [whiten or] [...] un-whiten Asian Americans anytime and anywhere” (Zhou 234). Their assimilation therefore did not mean that they could become one of the whites. Their position (friend or enemy) always depends on the interests of the hegemony.

The white society’s false acceptance rhetoric caused animosity between Asian Americans and other minority groups. Since Asian Americans were exposed to subtler forms of racism they were seen as more advantaged compared to the blacks and other minorities. Their academic and economic success rendered them privileged, and the white hegemony used their exemplary status to deny the allegations of racism and inequality in the society. Their success was the proof that America was the land of freedom, equality and opportunities, and it was the blacks’ and other ethnic groups’ fault that they had no job, no social security and had lower standard of living. Their economic and social distress enraged them against Asian Americans. Asian Americans therefore found themselves in the middle of intergroup conflicts which ended up in hate crimes. Ironically, the “recurring, episodic, and perennial fears of Asians... taking over” also terrified white Americans (Ono and Pham qt. in Zhang 24), so they too mobilized against Asian Americans.

The fight against institutionalized racism started during the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. Asians’ model minority image and their apolitical stance concealed the continuous racist attacks (verbal and physical) against them. In order to stand up against the discriminations and violence, they finally decided to fight together. They therefore formed the Yellow Power coalition. As it consisted of many different groups, there was a need for a collective identity. In 1968, Yuji Ichioka, historian and activist, came up with an umbrella term to fulfill the need: *Asian American*. It was suggested against the Western label known as Oriental. The new

term was a collective political identity. It was empowering and consolidating peoples of various Asian ethnicities in their fight against the inequality in the white order.

African Americans' powerful fight for equal rights and opportunities affected Asian Americans too. Their Yellow Power coalition was therefore modeled after the Black Panthers' (the black Civil Rights activists) diction and style. African Americans' achievements (such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights of 1965 and the Civil Rights Act of 1968) motivated Asian Americans to fight for their own case. Asian Americans' first collective action against the white hegemony was taken in 1968 by the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) which was comprised of three organizations named Intercollegiate Chinese for Social Action, Philippine-American College Endeavor and Asian American Political Alliance. Asian American students protested against the lack of Ethnic Studies programs at the University of California, Berkeley. The months-long strike gave birth to Ethnic Studies programs both in the University of California and in the San Francisco State University. This achievement marked the beginning of the Asian American movement. The student strikes organized by the TWLF continued to be the most important acts of the movement. It demonstrated that Asian Americans had finally pulled away from their apolitical stance and had organized to fight together against the common enemy.

The Asian American movement was a turning point in Chinese Americans' life. It became the grounds for the redefinition of their ethnic affinity. The first generation had never lost their connection to their homeland. The movement strengthened their loyalty to their ethnic identity. The second generation, on the other hand, found an opportunity to connect to their roots. This awareness ignited in them the spirit to fight for their case and re-define their cultural affiliation. They accepted their Chinese heritage and continued to experience American culture at the same time. Their redefinition was based on inclusion. They therefore brought their conflicting selves (American and Chinese selves) into a coherent unity. Their new identity can be explained best with Schiller's (et al.) definition of "transmigrant". In "From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration", it is explained as "immigrants whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are

configured in relationship to more than one nation-state” (48). Even though American borns are not immigrants literally, their multi-dimensional experience of life renders them as such figuratively. Their new identity therefore corresponds to the everlasting process of *becoming*.

The last two decades of the twentieth century witnessed the third wave of Chinese immigration. In the wake of the Civil Rights Movement and the warming Sino-American relations (because People’s Republic of China was not strictly against Capitalism as before), new immigrants started to arrive in America. There were two different groups in this wave. One of them was the “high-tech” (Chang 2004: 313) group comprised of the educated nouveau rich. They were mostly doctors, intellectuals and scientists who moved in the white suburbs. The other one was the “low-tech” (ibid.) group which consisted of menial workers accompanied by their wives. They arrived in the country through illegal ways and mostly lived under bad conditions.

The Digital Revolution, which started around 1980s, opened a new page in Chinese American history. Chinese Americans, especially the “high-tech” group, started to get interested in the stock market before the industry of technology marked a change in the century. They accumulated great wealth thanks to their investments. The change in their socio-economic status did not bring an end to racism however. Questions such as “where are you *really* from?” (Wu 79) and dictations such as “go back where you came from” (Chang 2004: 347) continued to haunt them because they became the “Yellow high-tech peril” (Lane qt. in Chang 2004: 319) at that time. It reminded them again that they would always be strangers in the country they called home.

Even if “race is – and has always been – a set of arbitrary dividing lines on a wide spectrum of color” (Chang 2004: 356), it still functions as the determining factor of one’s value. Because the whiteness is still the standard, the ostracization of Chinese Americans continues even in today’s world. Chinese Americans are denied the “unalienable rights” guaranteed by the Declaration of Independence. The recent

Covid-19 outbreak shows vividly that their lives are instead shaped by the changing American politics.

Some Chinese Americans prefer to eat traditional Chinese food, and meat is an important part of their diet. Depending on their hometown, their dietary regimen can include wild animals. They are stigmatized for eating animals which are marked as inedible in the white culinary culture. However, in China, people are accustomed to buying and selling wild animals in wet markets. Eating fresh meat from the live market is a part of their daily lives, and it is even considered traditional as opposed to the consumption of the packaged meat from the supermarkets. Some Chinese Americans try to continue this tradition as much as they can. Even if there are no American wet markets selling wild animals, they can still eat the special meat dishes at the Chinese restaurants in Chinatowns, a practice that disgusts most Americans. The new coronavirus outbreak maximizes their repulsion because speculations view the wet market wild animals as its origin.

On February 26, 2020, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention warned Americans about the spread of the new coronavirus, and soon after, the public perception of Chinese Americans changed for the negative. They transformed from being a model minority to a yellow peril. People started to call them as bat-eaters or pangolin-eaters and accused them of transmitting the disease. Their accusations were based on the fact that the virus first showed up in Wuhan, China, and that Chinese Americans were essentially Chinese, not Americans. Chinese Americans' ethnic affinity turned them to the potential carriers of *kung-flu*. The growing hostility against them was inflamed by President Trump's bigotry. During a press conference, he named Covid-19 as "Chinese Virus" and accused all people of Chinese descent of the plight of Americans after the outbreak. He justified his remarks by pointing out that he was actually packing off a conspiracy theory against the U.S. military. He said, "China was putting out information, which was false, that our military gave this [virus] to them. That was false. And rather than having an argument, I said I had to call it where it came from. It did come from China. So I think it's ["Chinese Virus"] a very accurate term" (qt. in Bardella 2020).

His judgement was clouded by his racist misconception. Instead of calming and informing the public, he helped spreading another virus that caused Americans to turn against each other. Chinese Americans have now become the new threat against the white order and health. They are therefore exposed to hostilities by the xenophobic and racist masses with racist virus questions like, “Where’s your corona mask – you Asian?” (Bardella 2020). Also, similar to the model minority myth, the virus rhetoric has homogenized all Asian ethnic groups and thereby subjected them to the same racist treatment. Today, the yellow peril narrative continues to victimize innocent crowds of people. At this point, it seems very difficult to deconstruct it as white Americans’ fear perpetuates it. The new coronavirus therefore functions as the latest form of the institutionalized racism even though the House denounces it. The virus rhetoric is certainly neither the beginning nor the end of racism. Living in the land of freedom, Chinese Americans keep on fighting against it nourishing the hope they will overcome it one day.

1.2. Theories of Food and Foodways

Food and eating have always been indispensable to our life. Food does not only serve for satisfying our physiological needs but it also plays a great role in determining who we are. Food consumption habits communicate a lot about one’s identity and the social group the person belongs to. Taste for certain foodstuffs and distaste for others encode information of the individual’s intra-group “habitus” (Bourdieu 34) which socially marks him/her distinct from the people with different food consumption habits. The borders drawn among the social groups by food and eating practices activate a centripetal force in constructing one’s sense of identity. What we eat, where and with whom we prefer to eat affect the process of our identity formation. Furthermore, because food holds a liminal position (as it is both outside the individual before its consumption and inside the body after its consumption), its consumption naturally affects the body. The substance outside is ingested, and as a result, it becomes a part of its eater. We become what we eat and we prefer to form connections with people who prefer to eat what we eat. Functioning as a language, food (and foodways) encodes messages about the formation of the self and displays

the close relationship between its embodiment (eating and/or cooking), identity and the body of the consumer at stake.

In this part, I explore the effect of food consumption on identity construction. Race is a significant factor in this process. The structuralist and cultural perspectives are explored to create a polyphonic atmosphere and also to highlight the progress of food studies. Food and foodways function as an ethnic sign which confirms our intra-group acceptance but also renders us vulnerable to the racist attacks by the members of the external groups. Eating and identity formation are processes of continuity. The changes in one affect the other reciprocally. Our identity is therefore constantly reproduced by our food consumption. Also, our (re)produced identity is always subjected to society's judgment based on the parameter of race. Eating ethnic and so becoming ethnic happen to be problematic in white America because the white culinary standard rejects them overtly and/or covertly.

Although food has always been a significant aspect of our daily life, the sociology of food and eating is a relatively new field in literary studies. The initial approaches toward food have been offered by structuralists whose perspective on the study of food and dietary habits is analogous to that of linguistics. Having designated food as a coded system, structuralists such as Roland Barthes, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Mary Douglas and Pierre Bourdieu try to decode the language of culture viewing food as one of its most vital elements. According to the structuralists, food and cooking are the universal signs of their consumers/performers. Their ideas are useful for the evaluation of the interconnection between food, cooking and society but their essentialist perspective does not allow them to grasp the dynamism of each and every culture. Thus, the structuralists' deterministic approach comes short of understanding the human factor in it.

In "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption" (1961), Barthes explores food as a sign system that points at the continuous changes in the ideological mechanisms of society. It furthermore communicates differences among social groups on the basis of divergent approaches to food, its stages of preparation and the codes that regulate its consumption. For Barthes, food has a double function:

the first one is its nutritional value whereas the other is its situational position. After one's hunger is appeased, food comes to signify more than the physical consumption of lunch or coffee (or any other foodstuff); food now signifies the situation in which it is consumed. Grabbing fast food for lunch only to satiate one's hunger surely differs in its designated meaning from a proper meal organized for business lunch for a group of people eating together with a common goal to realize. Although Barthes's contemplation on the symbolic function of food is useful, it is still inadequate to correspond fully to the changing elements of culture expressed in different dietary habits.

Similar to Barthes, Lévi-Strauss views cooking as a sort of language and analyzes it in linguistic terms in "The Culinary Triangle" (1966). Just like the linguistic principles that differentiate between consonants and vowels, the interplay of the different stages and elements of the cooking process has the power to communicate different messages about human activities. Languages vary from one country to another. Cooking styles likewise change from one country to another, even from one region to another. In this light, cooking, which is a process of "culturing" (41), tells us a lot about the social ties in a community under specific categories Lévi-Strauss determined as "raw", "cooked" (which is itself divided into categories such as "the roasted and the boiled" and "smoking") and "rotted" (41,44). The "*unelaborated*" material (food) taken from "*nature*" is cooked/ "cultured" in a certain style to be transformed into an "*elaborated*" meal ready for consumption (41). A specific style of cooking peculiar to a group conveys valuable information about the social and familial ties in that community. In this manner, according to Lévi-Strauss, the cooking process enacted in the elementary form of boiling comes to signify a tightening of social ties whereas proceeding with roasting indicates a loosening of these relationships. Under this logic, the cooking style of each society offers its own language. Varying from one society to another, this language communicates the structure, the relationships and the working mechanism of that society. In other words, when we "culture" the "raw" material (ibid.), it brings society's hidden norms to surface.

In “Deciphering a Meal” (1972) Douglas approaches the issue from a similar perspective. Viewing food as a code, she defines eating as a “patterned activity” (62) and argues that when food is seen as a code and deciphered as such, the meaning it carries is to be found in the specific social context it is consumed in and in the specific social relations (intimacy and distantness) it purports. According to Douglas, each meal we ingest encodes a message as it is a socially structured occasion. The meal itself is an ordered entity and its inner cohesion is open to modification depending on the culture factor. This is evident in the way how meals as patterned entities differ from one culture to another. The fact that steak and French fries may be seen decent at the dinner table in an American household falls foul to the Chinese understanding of a proper meal which obviously never forsakes the boiled rice. The order observed in serving hot and cold food, drinks and desserts lays bare how a meal is actually “a structured social event” (69). Because meals are ordered, they sustain the order in human life and relationships. As Douglas highlights, we share meals with people whom we accept as close friends in contrast to our tendency to grab some drinks with strangers and people whom we are not really intimate with. Food here signals the level of intimacy among individuals who share meals or drinks together. Food as a coded system then unearths the social order embedded in the cultural structure of society. Even though determining the level of intimacy in human relations on the basis of sharing food and drinks may be easily dismissed as too fatalist, Douglas’ ideas on the relationship between social ties and food are insightful and thus worthy of note.

Bourdieu’s article “Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste” (1979) establishes another structuralist perspective through the idea that food consumption is specific to each social class and that it is based on its normative preferences. Thus he presents another deterministic approach that dismisses the changing influx and dynamism of the culture at stake. Bourdieu dismisses the human factor in class stratifications seen in society. This eliminates the source of occasional contradictions and deviations in the system. Thus, his analysis on the dietary regimens of the distinct social classes remains insufficient to offer a language to account for the distinct culinary and alimentary experiences of dissimilar subjects.

His reflections on the concurrent relationship between eating habits and life style provide an insight into the expected behavior and preference of social classes in a given society. In other words, according to Bourdieu, what we incorporate into our body is shaped by our social position. Tastes and distastes are determined by the class we belong to. In this perspective, the body and its cravings comply with the “class taste” (34) already pre-inscribed in the individual or rather, in the interpellated subject.

Bourdieu accepts gender as another detriment in shaping one’s diet. In line with his views, a man of the working class background is to opt for food high in protein and carbohydrate to fill up his energy and strength to work more whereas a woman from the upper class tends to be cautious of her diet in order to control her food intake for the presentable body shape imposed to her by the social standards, so she may opt for vegetables and/or fish instead of meat and food that is rich in carbohydrate. Because our culinary performances and alimentary choices are open to modification regardless of our class position and gender roles, Bourdieu’s decipherment of the culinary/alimentary language remains very static. His deciphering of the language of food surely fails when one thinks of the contemporary post-modern subjects and their growing and changing needs in today’s chaotic world.

Despite the fact that the structuralist perspectives on food formulated by the theorists mentioned above provide considerable information in the field of food studies, their views are still incomplete. Dismissing the fact that culture is a dynamic entity in the process of constant (re)formation, the structuralists have failed to incorporate the most basic variable (the human factor) in their analyses. Consequently, their reflections on food remain one-dimensional and thus seem incomplete for the scope of my thesis. To express it in the language of food, what they have offered are the *starters* to what comes next – namely, the main course itself.

Our dietary regimen, which dictates the normal way of eating and determines what is edible and inedible, shapes our identity and marks our position in society. It also determines insiders and outsiders to our group solidarity. By practicing our

foodways, we reinforce our normality as opposed to others' abnormal and unacceptable eating habits. We consume specific types of food and reject others as impure and taboo. We practice a certain dietary regimen while we dismiss others. Our performance does not, however, depend on a scripted message. Eating is an unending process of self-assertion. When we abide by the particular culinary rules determined by a social group, we confirm our collective identity and also determine our particular position in the society based on it. When we reject them, we reconstruct our identity based on what we decide to incorporate into our system. As opposed to the structuralists' essentialism, identity construction is therefore an ongoing process. It includes cultural variables such as race and ethnicity. It is open to modifications by means of "incorporation" (Fischler 279) and "excretion" (Xu 169). We do not eat what we are told to eat. We instead choose to incorporate certain foodstuff into our body because we want to form our group solidarity with the eaters similar to us. Food consumption is therefore significant to our identity construction process. Our identity is not determined by pre-determined positions in society. We reproduce our self based on our changing needs and choices on the dynamic ground of culture. We should now turn our attention to cultural food theorists Claude Fischler's and Deborah Lupton's reflections on food, body and identity in "Food, self and identity" (1988) and **Food, the Body and the Self** (1996) respectively.

In her article "Food, self and identity" (1988) Fischler defines food as an indispensable factor in the construction of identity. How each and every group eats communicates about its sense of self by asserting its differences and specificities. Eating habits distinct to each social/ethnic group convey the organization principles specific to that group. Therefore, food and foodways specific to a community display the internal hierarchy in its relationships, prohibitions on its food consumption and limitations on the body based on extreme dieting and bounded sexuality. The cuisine, the specific style and manner of cookery and edible foodstuff become social markers of identity not only for a group but also for an individual because food and foodways are also the building blocks in the formation of an individual's sense of self. In order to clarify the relationship between food, body and identity, Fischler introduces the "incorporation" (279). In line with this theory, when we eat, we incorporate the

properties of ingested food into our system wholly or partially. We therefore become what we eat echoing one of the famous aphorisms by Brillat-Savarin, “Tell me what you eat, and I shall tell you what you are” (69). In his book **The Physiology of Taste** (1825) Jean A. Brillat-Savarin points at the strong relationship between human body and food intake. According to him, every foodstuff affects our body differently. He explains this by relating it to the animal nature. He tells that carnivorous animals never get fat and similarly herbivorous animals do not gain weight easily. Eating greens do not fatten herbivorous animals. On the other hand, eating the farinaceous food fattens them quickly. He remarks that the human body works similar to this mechanism. Eating vegetables do not make us fat, but the farinaceous food intake causes us to pack on pounds. He therefore concludes that what we eat has a great impact on our body (208-209).

The incorporation of food sustains the body and reinforces the identity at the same time. When we literally open our mouth, which is one of the orifices watching over the borderline between inside and outside the body, and ingest foodstuff, we permit the foreign object (something outside the body) to be incorporated into our own system. Now that the food is ingested, it literally becomes a part of its eater. The consumption of food charges one’s energy and it maintains the individual’s composition. Thus, the food absorbed affects the biological state of a person, but it also acts on the formation of his/her sense of self because the regular intake of the same foodstuffs transmits their specific qualities to its eater (Fischler 279). Fischler exemplifies this through the consumption of meat: eating meat, which is rich in protein and which she claims is generally preferred by men gives strength to its eater, but it is also said to be stirring aggression in the consumer due to its connection with slaughtering living animals and the blood following it. The incorporation of food makes sure that the physiological need of the body is answered. Also, it affects the system of an organism because ingestion brings about integration.

The edible foodstuff and particular foodways, which are distinctly determined by societies, are central to the formation of collective identity. It is not surprising that certain ethnic groups continue practicing their foodways even after migration. Practicing one’s ethnic foodways (it becomes ethnic when one assumes the status of

an immigrant in his/her host country) becomes a way for an immigrant to reinforce his/her ethnic identity in the host country. By re-enacting the culinary rituals and dietary rules, the immigrant assures his/her group identity on a foreign land. We display our feeling of belonging to a culture or a group by following a set of particular rules, by practicing foodways specific to that community. In this way, we define who we are and determine cautiously who the others and what their differences are. While the practice of any culinary system ties its practitioner to the worldview that it is attached to and so makes sure to confirm the identity of that individual, this marking of the self and the others brings forth the problem of racial labeling. This causes inter-group slurs and intra-group insults. To exemplify this, one can think about how white Americans address Chinese Americans by using food they think Chinese people always eat. For them, the Chinese have an exotic cuisine; they eat snakes, pangolins and monkeys alive or dead. Following this logic, Chinese Americans are imprisoned with the kind of hailing addressing them as *snakes* or any other animal that the outer-groups believe Chinese people eat all the time. This type of inter-group slurs is observed on intra-group level as well. The examination of the relationship between the first generation immigrant parents and their American-born offspring will be of use to illustrate intra-group insults. While the parents agonize over the assimilated eating habits of their children and call them as *bananas*, the American-born second generation, on the other hand, see their parents as *pet-eaters*. In this logic, the eater becomes the subject of a culinary system which determines his/her place in society by defining the self as opposed to the others whose culinary systems differ from his/hers. Our culinary system gives meaning to our life and also sustains order in it by regulating our relationships with intra-group members and outsiders.

To elaborate on the durability of the ethnic groups' dietary habits (specifically Chinese Americans') we may focus on Fischler's reflections on "incorporation" (279) and "contamination" (ibid.). According to her, every time we attempt to eat, we risk our health and identity since the incorporation of the liminal object (food) may cause pollution. When we are confronted with the unfamiliar and/or forbidden foodstuff, we put our body and self into a possible danger because the consumption of what is

taboo and/or unknown (depending on the rules laid out by our group) results in breaking the intra-group rules and so disturbs our sense of self. The incorporation of the foreign or forbidden food may evoke suspicion and revulsion in eaters. The consumption of this *wrong* food brings the risk of “contamination” which poses danger to the consumer’s health and challenges his/her essence. Thus, being in fear of losing our sense of self, we strongly avoid ingesting what has been denied to us by the particular (ethnic/social) group we belong to. The first generation parents’ flat rejection of the “*lo-fahn* food” (foreign food) (Louie 103) gains relevance here. Any attempt for eating it poses the danger of erasing their Chinese identity; therefore, they avoid American food as much as possible. In order to reinforce their Chinese identity, they abide by the rule of “making of the eater by his[/her] food” (Fischler 282). Hence, they practice their authentic culinary rituals and consume their edible food even if they are in their new home, America. The first generation Chinese parents try to spare themselves from “contamination” by incorporating only their own-food into their body. In this way, they secure their essence because as Fischler says “[f]ood makes the eater” (282). Their firm dietary regimen denies any tolerance for American borns’ choice of food which is mainly American. The discrepancy begets conflicts among family members. However, what is more destructive in American society is the priority of the white race and its othering mechanism.

Because the unknown food stirs panic due to the possibility of impurity and impermissibility, Chinese Americans mostly face racist backlash in America. White Americans label Chinese food as cannibalistic, smelly and sticky/oily (Wong 1993: 31; Mannur 2010: 206,185). They display their suspicion of it through their psychological and biological reactions such as anxiety, disgust and nausea. Chinese food belongs to a different (sometimes unknown and/or undefined) category compared to American food which is accepted as the standard in the WASP society. American food is the edible food for them. As every cuisine is different and offers its own rules to its practitioners, white Americans fear the system posed by the Chinese diet because its sole existence poses danger to their essence by means of pollution. They therefore derogate Chinese cuisine to the status of the other.

Paradoxically, this status has a bilateral essence which causes avoidance or experimentation of Chinese food. Opting for the former, Americans stigmatize Chinese food as stinking, unclean and most brutally cannibalistic (In his book chapter “The Best “Chink” Food”, Frank H. Wu explores the marginalization of Asian Americans through their food and foodways. He demythologizes in it the common belief, “[e]verybody knows that Asians eat dogs” (2002: 218). Similarly, Anita Mannur examines the process of Asian American stigmatization in **Culinary Fictions** (2010). Her remarks on the palatable and odorless Asian cuisine are significant for the Chinese American experience). The fact that every cuisine establishes its own kingdom and determines its own rules brings forth dozens of culinary systems which come up with their own classifications. The use of certain spices and the practice of distinct cooking styles in Chinese cuisine render it smelly in American society while American hamburger/hot dog and fries duo is classified as unhealthy and/or oily by the Chinese. The classification performed by each culture is a healthy way of asserting the essence of that community. However, what is unhealthy is that institutionalized racism is not satisfied alone by derogating the Chinese American culinary system; what it obliges is the complete disavowal of the Chinese diet and eating habits and the complete assimilation of these “inassimilable alien[s]” (Wu 79) into the white American diet. Americans reject eating dogs because they classify them as pets, and so they can get horrified by seeing dogs being eaten cannibalistically in other cultures. This is due to Americans’ internalized culinary system which shapes and reinforces their sense of self. Yet, the unacceptability of eating dogs is completely different from calling people (who eat dogs) as dog-eaters. The diversity in cuisines is normal, but here it transforms to an unordinary one dimensional racist attack. Because of their culinary system, the Chinese are stigmatized as the dog-eaters by the white hegemony who practices another dietary system. Therefore, the avoidance of the other’s food does not mean a simple dismissal of it but rather, it becomes an othering mechanism that exposes the disadvantaged group to racist slurs and incarcerates it in the status of the “perpetual foreigner” (ibid.).

The experimentation of the other's food is a double-edged experience. On the one hand, it entails the incorporation of the foreign foodstuff into the body and poses danger to one's integrity; On the other hand, it exposes another form of racism under the concept of "boutique multiculturalism" (Fish 378) or in other words, fake multiculturalism. When an individual, who already belongs to a culinary system, tries out new, exotic food of the minority groups, his/her adventurous behavior initially seems like a big step taken to acknowledge other cuisines. While this try poses danger to the individual's essence, which has already been shaped and continually reinforced by his/her dietary habits, it also presents him/her as a multiculturalist. However, incorporating the exotic food of the other is not an inclusive act as it seems. Actually, it is a sinister mechanism which furthers the otherness of the disadvantaged groups.

In order to understand this sinister mechanism and the concept of "boutique multiculturalism" (ibid.), we should focus on Rozin's "omnivore's paradox" in the first place (qt. in Fischler 277). As the practitioners of a culinary system, we naturally prefer the familiar and edible foodstuff pre-determined for us. The inscribed system obliges us to abide by its distinct rules and practices. We bow down to them in order to confirm our sense of self as well as our collective identity. However, humans are "omnivore" (ibid.) by nature. Rozin explains it as the conflict between our need for a rigid culinary system and our desire for novelty. Our acceptance of any culinary system does not shut off our desire for new ones. Yet, this desire threatens our culinary system and risks our essence which is based on it. According to Rozin, the oscillation between rigid culinary rules and new tastes imprisons us in "the omnivore's paradox" (ibid.). Conservatism has always been a great friend of ours, but our adventurous soul is not satisfied by it. We can never give up exploring the unknown. Therefore, our dilemma between our need for the edible food and our search for the unknown (mostly exotic) food continues to haunt us.

The motion between "neophobia", which asks for the familiar and secures one's identity, and "neophilia", which opts for the unknown and risks one's essence, sheds light on the paradoxical attitude toward the other and its food (Fischler 278). Even though our inclination to the exotic food originally stems from our omnivorous

nature, racism complicates this simplification in America. No subject wants to endanger his/her individual or collective identity. The individual's interest in the exotic food does not mean his/her acceptance of the other as dictated by multiculturalism. Rather, the "radical chic" (Wolfe qt. in Fish 378), who pretends to be a multiculturalist, only entertains the idea of consuming the other through his/her exotic food. This kind of "[f]ood adventuring" turns its practitioner into an exploiter of culture (Heldke 2001: 78). His/her consumption of the exotic food reinforces the otherness of the minority groups because their food is tasted by their oppressor and judged according to the standards of his/her culinary culture. In light of this, Americans' consumption of Chinese food does not mean their unconditional acceptance of Chinese Americans. They have no intention to form a mosaic American consolidation by accepting the Chinese ethnic identity. Americans' consumption of Chinese food is therefore a sinister mechanism that works to alienate the ethnic other from the mainstream culture. The consumption of the exotic food reveals itself as a racist game played by the "boutique multiculturalists" (Fish 378). Their experimentation of the exotic food is a display of their fake multiculturalism. Fish defines them as such:

Boutique multiculturalism is characterized by its superficial or cosmetic relationship to the objects of its affection. Boutique multiculturalists admire or appreciate or enjoy or sympathize with or (at the very least) "recognize the legitimacy of" the traditions of cultures other than their own; but boutique multiculturalists will always stop short of approving other cultures at a point where some value at their center generates an act that offends against the canons of civilized decency as they have been either declared or assumed. (378)

The "boutique multiculturalists'" exploration of ethnic food may stem from their omnivorous nature. As this paradoxical nature continues to produce "neophilia" in them, they tend to eat new, exotic food in order to appease it. Satiating neophilic urge also portrays them as multiculturalists who seemingly refute racism in the WASP society. They make a show of their acceptance of the ethnic other by tasting the palatable version of their ethnic food. However, they stop their act when culinary, social and/or moral system of the ethnic other poses a risk to their integrity. Their

omnivorous nature keeps them from disturbing their identities reproduced by their culinary culture. The consumption of the other can never be to the extent of “contamination”. The fake multiculturalists therefore disregard the legitimacy of the ethnic other completely when their identities are threatened by them.

The stigmatization of Chinese food and the practice of “boutique multiculturalism” both reproduce racism in American society. While the former is an overt act of racism, the latter is a subtle performance of it. Some Americans call Chinese Americans as dog-eaters while others become the “mere consumer[s]” of this ethnic other (Fischler 289). The WASP society does not accept Chinese Americans and their foodways in both cases. Besides the institutionalized racism in American society, another reason keeps whites from this acceptance. Because each social group practices its own dietary regimen and determines its own social, cultural and moral boundaries, the white standard cannot accept the Chinese system which is different from itself. Lupton’s reflection on food, body and identity can help us understand this better.

Lupton’s book **Food, the Body and the Self** (1996) provides an extensive insight on the interrelation among food, body and identity. Her reflections share a common ground with Fischler’s. Similar to her, Lupton stresses the significance of food and foodways in the construction of both personal and collective identity. Eating becomes a way of self-assertion, and practicing a particular dietary regimen fortifies the social boundaries determined for its practitioners. Food sustains the body and also marks its eater socially. In this way, the eater, who is marked as a member of a social group, is differentiated from other eaters who are marked as the members of other social groups. Individuals classify foodstuff, and in return, they get classified by the food they prefer to consume. While eating the same kind of food begets affinity among social groups, different practices of dissimilar culinary cultures mostly cause alienation (even revulsion) among communities. The consumption of the foreign food can disintegrate what is strongly consolidated. If it forms a crack in group solidarity, collectivity is likely to fall apart and individuals would be in danger of losing their integrity. Each culinary culture therefore protects itself from the destructive force of the unfamiliar.

The white culinary culture protects itself too. The WASP society declared its cuisine and moral system as the standard. Yet, the white man is still in fear of the other's system which can contaminate his essence. Therefore, his "culinary citizenship", a term used by Anita Mannur to point to "the ability [of an individual] to articulate national identity via food" (2010: 20), blocks the other's foreign system from entering into American society. Americans marginalize Chinese Americans (and other minority groups) by labeling their food as smelly or inedible. They furthermore derogate them to their foodways and exploit them as food colonialists. The white man's protection of his (culinary, moral, social etc.) system turns to a racist hunting of the ethnic other. His overt and covert actions against the other are not defensive but murderous.

Lupton delves into the protection mechanism of communities by focusing on Bakhtin's concepts of the "civilized body" and "grotesque body" (qt. in Lupton 19). In light of Bakhtin's thoughts, Lupton states that the "civilized body" is the controlled body which abides by the rules of the dominant group in the society. The "grotesque body", on the other hand, is the uncontained body which does not conform to the norms and standards determined by the ones in power. The white middle-class values are accepted as the standard in American society. The classification of food (as edible and inedible) and eating habits are shaped according to this standard which is known as the "civilized *American* body". As opposed to it, Chinese Americans have their own culinary system and they practice a different kind of a dietary regimen. Their food can be ethnic or it can be the fusion of American and Chinese cuisines. They therefore deviate from the "civilized *American* body" and turn into the "grotesque bodies". Their grotesqueness marks them as the other, and they are always exposed to racism to the extent of anti-Chinese sentiments. However, even when they align with the "civilized *American* body", they still continue to face ostracism because their assimilation into American culture never guarantees their acceptance by the white hegemony.

The second generation Chinese Americans' assimilationist attitudes are exemplary of it. They disown their Chinese self by rejecting Chinese food and foodways. They try to find acceptance in the mainstream culture by adopting the

American culinary (and cultural) standard. They believe that their preference for American food and life style reflects their pure American identity. As Lupton states, “[t]he food is chosen to reflect to oneself and others how individuals perceive themselves, or would like to be perceived” (23). The second generation Chinese Americans therefore eat American food to confirm their white identity. American food is desirable for them because it symbolizes what America is for them: happiness, prosperity and success. For the second generation, consuming American food is a way of consuming/realizing the American Dream. Under the illusion of this dream, they differentiate themselves from their immigrant parents by disdaining their smelly food. Frightened by the stigma it will bring on them, the second generation performs “culinary passing” (Cauti defines it as practicing the foodways of a social group one does not belong for finding acceptance in it) (qt. in Dalessio 422) in order to adopt the American culinary standard and thereby to become one of white Americans. However, they do not consider the fact that the racial anxieties govern over the culinary borders. The established white order keeps racially and culturally misfit individuals outside their borders so as to protect itself. Even if the second generation Chinese Americans eat American food and adopt the American way, they are never seen as one of white Americans. They will never be granted full acceptance because the white borders make sure to keep American society intact.

Werner Sollors’s doctrines of “consent” and “descent” (151) are essential to the paradoxical relationship between assimilation and unacceptance. According to him, a right obtained by birth or a relationship sustained by blood is a “descent” based formation while a volitional alignment of an individual to a right or any other individual is a “consent” based relationship. In this context, whites are accepted as *true* Americans by nature whereas the others (people of the Chinese descent, for instance) whose value systems or racial appearances do not match with that of the American standard are American only on a “consent” based relationship. The validity and the degree of this volitional affiliation is determined according to the interests of *true* Americans. Even if the second generation Chinese Americans align with the standard American culinary culture (and the value system it presents), their Americanness is always susceptible for interrogation and open to cancellation by the

ones who own Americanness on a “descent” based relationship. Practicing American foodways therefore does not guarantee full acceptance on behalf of them. Despite their adoption of the “civilized *American* body”, they can be marked as the ethnic other simply because of their racial qualities. Race and ethnicity are cultural infections in American society. The acceptance becomes the unattainable American Dream because the solid walls built on the white descent qualities do not permit for their entry into its terrain. Assimilation does not bring recognition or acceptance, but rather it results in misrecognition. The second generation Chinese Americans’ racial and ethnic features do not let them become *true* Americans even if they incorporate white food into their bodies. Even so, they continue to embrace the “civilized *American* body” and deceive themselves. Their misrecognition troubles the formation of their identity and their position in society. It also causes conflicts between them and their immigrant parents.

Food constructs the self, establishes relationships and sustains them. However, it also builds borders and causes estrangement among individuals. It determines our position in society and even affects our attitude toward our family members. Food does not only satiate our hunger; it marks our difference from others and brings order into our lives. Lupton’s reflection on the relationship between food, body and identity will be useful when we focus on the intergenerational family conflicts in the literary analyses of the chosen novels in the following chapters.

1.3. Literature Review: Critical Exploration of Food in Chinese American Literature

Before the analyses of the selected novels, we should have a slight taste of the “food literature” (Mintz and Du Bois 111) by focusing on some critical works which include the analyses of the Chinese American literary texts from a food-focused perspective. There have been numerous critical attempts to explore the Asian American experience through the study of the representation of food in literature. Even though few of them focus mainly on Chinese American literary texts, studies such as **You Are What You Eat: Literary Probes into the Palate** (2008) edited by Annette M. Magid, Anita Mannur’s **Culinary Fictions: Food in South Asian**

Diasporic Culture (2010) and **Eating Asian America: A Food Studies Reader** (2013) edited by Robert Ji-Song Ku, Martin F. Manalansan IV and Anita Mannur are worth mentioning to illustrate the diversity and depth of food studies. In Annette M. Magid's collection we see how food becomes a symbolic discourse through which social relations and identity positions are enunciated. For instance, in Ya-Hui I. Chang's article "Food, Food Consumption and the Troubled Self in Kingston's **The Woman Warrior**, Walker's **The Color Purple**, Tan's **The Joy Luck Club** and Erdrich's **Love Medicine**", the problematic identity construction processes are explored through the food consumption habits of the characters. Chang shows here how the characters take on the properties of the food they eat, and she therefore propounds that food consumption has an undeniable effect on the characters' identity in these literary works. According to her, food consumption becomes "a way of self-representation" (346). Focusing on South Asian experience, Anita Mannur's study demonstrates how the racist discourse of "Indianness" (3) works on the diasporic Indian Americans' consumption of their ethnic Indian food. Mannur explores the unpalatableness and odorousness of Indian ethnic food in the mainstream American culture. She concludes her study by showing how the white hegemony uses South Asians' ethnic food and foodways against them through constant exoticization and/or otherization which results in their banishment from the white American society. The scholarly essays in **Eating Asian America: A Food Studies Reader** explore the cultural and historical experiences of Asian Americans through a wide spectrum of subjects varying from transnationalism to queerness. These works describe the transnational movement of Asian Americans by placing their food and foodways on the nexus of class, race, ethnicity and gender. The book offers an insightful reading of works that scrutinize the instantaneous association of Asian Americans with their food and foodways.

In this part, our focus will be on Sau-ling C. Wong's **Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity To Extravagance** (1993), Wenying Xu's **Eating Identities: Reading Food in Asian American Literature** (2008) and Jennifer A. Ho's **Consumption and Identity in Asian American Coming-of-Age Novels** (2005). Providing an extensive study of Asian American literature, these

works explore the interconnection between food, family and identity. They are of one mind about the fact that the incompatible food choices and eating habits are the source of intergenerational identity and family conflicts. However, they also agree that the healing quality of food ensures the symbolic resolution to these conflicts in the narrative. These three works deserve a more detailed presentation as they have been instrumental in shaping my perspective on food and identity and some of the concepts (such as Wong's "*necessity*" and "*extravagance*") have been applied to the study of the two Chinese American novels.

Wong's **Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity To Extravagance** (1993) is an important work in the field of Asian American food studies. Her reading displays the strong relationship between food and living experiences of Asian American ethnic groups. Her study includes experiences of Japanese Americans and Chinese Americans. Wong's extensive reading of food in Asian American literature requires a chapter dedicated to itself. We will therefore only focus on the specific concepts and terms in it for the scope of my thesis. They will help us understand the source of intergenerational conflicts in Chinese American families.

Wong analyzes the familiar image of troubled self and the recurrent theme of intergenerational family conflicts in Asian American literature. Her critical reading of **The Woman Warrior** (1976) by Maxine Kingston is especially worthy of note. She analyzes it under rhetorical opposites "*Necessity*" and "*Extravagance*" (13). These terms originally come from Kingston's novel. Wong earns them to Asian American literature by re-interpreting them as recurrent motifs in Asian American literary works. According to her, they function like archetypes, and they are mostly seen in literary texts which focus mainly on family and intergenerational relationships. She defines them as "two contrasting modes of existence and operation, one [*Necessity*] contained, survival-driven and conservation-minded, the other [*Extravagance*] attracted to freedom, excess, emotional expressiveness, and autotelism" (ibid.). These terms correspond with the specific experiences of the immigrant parents and their American-born offspring. While the first one indicates the lifestyle of the first generation Chinese American parents, the latter points to the

frivolous actions, the freedom of choice and the comfy life of the American-born second generation.

The foreign-born first generation's state of mind and their attitude to life are shaped by hardships and challenges in their lives. Their ability to overcome difficulties such as poverty, war and immigration has toughened their emotional as well as physical state of being. Poverty and famine compelled them to ingest anything edible regardless of its acceptability. As Jacques Gernet states, "undernourishment, drought and famines" force people to "make judicious use of every possible kind of edible vegetable and insect, as well as offal" (qt. in Wong 68). The consumption of the inedible animals (in the Western standards) such as dogs, bats and monkeys emerged so as to combat with the death caused by undernourishment. As Wong highlights in her analysis of Japanese American novel **Obasan** (1981), the first generation had to have "strong teeth" and "tough digestion" in order to survive hardships in life (Kogawa qt. in Wong 19). Immigrant parents ate anything that could be cooked. They swallowed every stony moment in their lives. They overcame a great deal of hardships before arriving in America. Their bitter experiences shaped their outlook on life in their new home. Their previous life earned them survival-driven mentality and emotional numbness. These qualities forced them to live their life according to the principle of "*necessity*". It resulted in a lifestyle which is based on "no waste" philosophy (Kingston 336). Chinese immigrant parents have therefore eaten anything they found, never wasted any food or any other substances and learned to live by frugality. As Wong says, they have become "big eaters" (18).

American borns, on the other hand, incline toward the American value system and adopt the American foodways. Their internalization of the American culinary and cultural standard is the natural result of their desire to fit in the white mainstream society. The second generation's American Dream is to become one of *true* (white) Americans. In order to realize this, they become "treat lovers" (ibid.) instead of shouldering the legacy of the "big eaters" (ibid.). They reject Chinese culinary culture because they are aware of its stigma in American society. Chinese food is dangerous because it is seen as unclean and foreign in the white culture. Eating it is

likewise dangerous because its eater is singled out among *true* Americans. Chinese Americans therefore feel ashamed by the food their parents cook at home. According to them, the homemade food (ethnic food) stinks, and it causes nausea in them. Chinese Americans' preference for white food signifies their deviation from Chinese culture and traditions, and it also points at their wish to distance themselves from their foreign-born parents. Chinese Americans' rejection of their parents' lifestyle and foodways create cracks in their relationship with their parents. Despite their deteriorating relationship, American borns maintain their assimilationist attitudes. However, their efforts do not pay off. The WASP society does not accept them. Their rejection by the white hegemony results in a troubled self. Even so, as the "cultural brokers" (Mannur 2010: 23) who are in search of the American candy, they continue dismissing their parents' "quasi-cannibalistic" (Wong 32) eating habits.

Wong analyzes the candy lover personality of the deracinated American borns. Firstly, she points at different lifestyles of the first and second generation Asian Americans. She reads these differences mostly by resorting to alimentary images. She concludes that alimentary images change for each generation. According to Wong, "*necessity*" guided parents live on thriftiness and modesty while the American-born followers of "*extravagance*" embrace prodigality and consumption of sweets. The second generation's love for sweets (their parents see them as trashy food) and their reckless behaviors render them whimsical and frivolous in the eyes of their parents. Wong explains their different attitudes to life by focusing on the differences in their life conditions. The first generation parents survived economic and social frustrations and famine. On the other hand, the second generation had better life conditions in terms of food and medical sufficiency, education opportunities and economic stability (It does not mean that American borns live their life without any problem. The institutionalized racism ostracizes them from the society they were born in). American borns' better life conditions let them answer the society's call for assimilation. They therefore adopt the American way which is the standard way. As opposed to the parental-sacrifices and frugality of the first generation immigrants, deracination, devotion to freedom, having fun and

wastefulness define their actions. Their lifestyle causes their alienation from their parents. It results in intergenerational conflicts in Chinese American families.

Wong analyzes one of these conflicts between good-for-nothing children and stone-like parents in her reading of “A Red Sweater” (1986) by Fae M. Ng. The short story tells about the different lifestyles of the immigrant parents and their American-born daughters and their inevitable conflicts. According to Wong, their conflicts stem from the clash between the principles of “*necessity*” and “*extravagance*”. In the story, the “*necessity*” driven parents see the pigeons their daughters cherish as the edible foodstuff. Their daughters, on the other hand, see them as a part of their family and think that they should be loved and petted. The “*necessity*” eventually guides the parents to make use of these pigeons. Their only purpose is sustaining their family so they cook the pigeons to feed themselves. When their daughters see their pets on the dinner table, they cannot cope with this “quasi-cannibalistic” (Wong 32) act perpetrated by their parents. The “*extravagance*” governs over the daughters’ life. They therefore become terrified and upset by their parents’ actions which are always directed by usefulness and frugality. The American-born daughters’ allegiance with American culinary culture consequently severs their ties with their “*necessity*” guided parents.

In her reading, Wong also underlines that both the foreign-born parents and their American-born offspring resort to food to survive in the white society. The immigrant parents’ “big eating” (ibid. 55) is their survival method. They eat literally everything cooked and swallow metaphorically any hardship. The American-born second generation, on the other hand, adopts “food prostitution” (ibid.) and/or “food pornography” (Chin qt. in Wong 58) as their way of survival. In exchange for treats or acceptance, American-borns become cultural traitors by performing “food prostitution”. Wong describes the concept as selling out one’s culture so as to find acceptance by the hegemony. American borns disown their Chinese culture, but they nonetheless do not find acceptance in the white society. Therefore, American borns try “food pornography” to maintain their lives in the racist society. According to Frank Chin’s definition of the term, “food pornographers” earn their living by

making use of the exoticness of their ethnic food (qt. in Wong 56). They prostitute their ethnic image and exotic food to appeal to whites' curious gaze and appetite.

Wong explores Chin's concept of "food pornography" in his play **The Year of the Dragon** (1974). The protagonist, Fred Eng, makes his living by showing the white tourists the Chinatown life. The white visitors are always curious about the exotic Chinese food. Fred Eng takes advantage of their curious gaze and earns a lot of money by introducing them to Chinese food. According to Wong, Fred Eng's performance of "food pornography" sustains his life economically, but on the other hand, it opens up the way for the white hegemony's practice of food colonialism (59). Whites' consumption of the exotic food corresponds with their exploitation of the ethnic other. The visitors are the exploiters who are in search of the exotic fun. Their consumption therefore accounts for cultural colonialism.

According to Wong, the immigrant parents and their American-born offspring survive in American society by the help of food. Yet, we should remember here that food is a sign of ethnicity. Their constant association with their ethnic culinary culture reduces them to their foodways. Their 'exotic' food gives rise to their marginalization by the white hegemony. Food therefore functions as a survival mechanism as well as an otherizing agent. Food is an important trope indeed. It denotes the conflicts in the narrative and also becomes the driving force of it. It furthermore offers what we all need: the symbolic resolution to these conflicts in the narrative.

Xu's **Eating Identities** (2008) explores a large spectrum of literary texts from Japanese American to Chinese American literature. Her reflections are really helpful to see the dialectic between food and intergenerational conflicts of identity in Chinese American families. She explores the conflicted identity of American borns by focusing on Okada's Japanese American novel **No-No Boy** (1957). She quotes its American-born protagonist Ichiro, "I don't understand you who were the half of me that is no more and because I don't understand what it was about that half that made me destroy the half of me which was American" (23). Ichiro's restlessness is due to his intermediary position. He deviates from the maternal (Japanese culture) and he

cannot participate in the symbolic (the white mainstream society) completely. As a result of it, a fragmented self meets us. His neither-subject-nor-object position troubles his interaction with his intra-group members and also with the members of the mainstream culture (Kristeva's concept of abjection is useful to understand the ethnic others' conflicted identity in the white culture. Her book **Power of Horror** (1982) explores this concept extensively). Ichiro's intermediary position corresponds with the situation of many other Asian Americans including the second generation Chinese Americans.

Xu points out the need for resolution. Ichiro must negotiate his conflicted selves. Similarly, the second generation Chinese Americans should negotiate their Chinese and American selves. They need to embrace their disowned self (Chinese self) while keeping their American self. Their success is guaranteed when they accept completely what altogether makes them who they are. As Xu states, "[a] healthy and secure community [or an individual] does not agonize over its [ethnic] cuisine and rituals. On the contrary, by celebrating them a community [or an individual] fortifies its unity and identification" (18). Chinese Americans' loss (their deracination) caused fragmentation in their identity. The retrieval of the loss will offer a chance for resolution. According to Xu, the incorporation of the ethnic self is through practicing the ethnic culinary culture. Performing it will start the healing process of the restless second generation.

Performing the ethnic shows that ethnicity is a process of construction. It is activated by the reproduction of its material properties such as its cuisine. Family history and traditions also fortify it. In this logic, Xu writes in her reading of a second generation Chinese American's ethnic performance, "[he] is Chinese insofar as he recognizes himself as [such]" and practices his Chinese ethnicity (81). Xu proposes a process of ethnification and identification which rejects fixedness. Instead of a static formation, she advocates for an ever-becoming identity (and ethnicity). Stuart Hall's thoughts on identity support her approach:

Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a “production”, which is ever complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. This view problematises the very authority and authenticity to which the term “cultural identity” lays claim. (1990: 222)

Hall’s concept of “production” corresponds with Xu’s understanding of identity and ethnicity. Similar to her, Hall is also against the idea of a static selfhood. According to him, the construction of identity is an unending process. Their understanding of identity suggests a way out for Chinese Americans. Because “production” ensures a new formation, the second generation can negotiate their ethnic and American selves into a new self. The negotiation will end their inner conflict, and it will ensure their integrity. Their new self will neither be ethnic nor American: it will be both and more than that. They will embrace a “transmigrant” identity (Schiller et al. 48) which works on inclusion. Since identity is classed, racialized and gendered momentarily, American borns who adapt to changes will participate in an everlasting process of *becoming*.

Ho explores the concepts of negotiation and ever-becoming identity in her analyses of the Japanese and Chinese American coming-of-age novels in **Consumption and Identity in Asian American Coming-of-Age Novels** (2005). She acknowledges Hall’s and Schiller’s (et al.) definitions of identity. In addition to them, she proposes her concept of “yellow sensibility” (2005: 25). She coins it based on Chin and Chan’s concept of “yellow”. They define it as “an organic, whole identity, a personality not explicable in either the terms of China or white America” (“Racist Love” 76). The concept therefore corresponds with the understanding of identity as an inclusive entity. Ho’s concept likewise embarks on a coherent and an inclusive identity. It works on a system which favors constant additions. According to her, this continuous process of becoming can bring resolution to American borns’ restlessness (2005: 25).

In her analyses of the chosen novels, Ho observes the resolution attained by means of “yellow sensibility”. Her reading of the protagonist (Donald Duk) in Chin’s

novel **Donald Duk** (1991) becomes a good example for it. Donald Duk is an American born who disowns his Chinese ethnic heritage only to become *normal* American. His rejection of his ethnic culture places him in a restless limbo. He needs to heal his fragmented self. It is only when he restores Chinese history by way of dreams and when he consumes Chinese food in fusion with other cuisines does he finally realize and accept who he really is. His “yellow sensibility” begets an inclusive identity which welcomes his American as well as Chinese selves. According to Ho, his acquisition of the yellow consciousness (negotiation in other words) therefore corresponds with the construction of a coherent Chinese American identity which is always in the process of *becoming* (ibid.).

Food is an indispensable part of the process of *becoming*. It is seen that this process is similar to the act of eating. It is because eating is a continuum. We constantly eat some food and reject others. What we choose to incorporate into our system changes from time to time. Similarly, our identity is in a process of reconstruction(s). Our identity changes depending on what we decide to take in. We hold on to an identity for some time and disown it another time. As Xu states, “as we eat/consume identities so do we excrete/trash identities. What goes in must come out” (169). The relationship between food and body is also important for the identity construction process. The consumption of any food affects the body by transmitting certain properties of it into the eater’s subjectivity. The eating subject is associated with what he/she eats. Even though the threat of essentialism arises here, it is true that the ingestion of food affects the eater physically and psychologically. It is because food becomes a part of him/her once it passes the protective gateway (mouth) and gets incorporated into his/her system.

The food theories and food readings in this chapter will be useful for my re-reading of Mei Ng’s **Eating Chinese Food Naked** and David W. Louie’s **The Barbarians Are Coming** in the following chapters. I will explore the themes of identity and intergenerational family conflicts in these novels from a food based approach. We will see how food functions as a disruptive agent to the family unity and thus serves as the driving force of the narratives. Now, let us chew on the

dialectic between eating and *becoming*. A slow-paced digestion promises the great spices of the Chinese American experience.



CHAPTER TWO

FOOD AS A SIGN OF NONCONFORMITY: DISSIMILAR DIETS AND INTERGENERATIONAL IDENTITY CONFLICTS IN MEI NG'S EATING CHINESE FOOD NAKED

Published in 1998, Mei Ng's **Eating Chinese Food Naked** continues to hold its intriguing position in the literary world even though the amount of the critical works on it are still insufficient. Ng's novel, her only work to date, explores the themes of family, intergenerational identity conflicts, sexuality and queerness. It tells the life story of a Chinese American family and portrays its members' twisted-up relationships through food images. Its narrative displays the dynamics of the interrelationship between food and sexuality. The erratic pattern of the food references corresponds with the varying cultural, ethnic and sexual identity formation. Throughout the narrative, the portrayal of the inconstant food choices and eating habits works on the parameter of sexuality which is based on inclusiveness. It comes to show that eating indiscriminately produces a subjectivity which is free of sexual and cultural normativities. The correlation between food and sexuality therefore comes to propose an ever-becoming identity which does not conform to the ethnic norms that value constancy and regularity.

In this chapter, I argue that the varying food choices of the protagonist (Ruby) signify the deconstruction of the rigid definition of (cultural, ethnic and sexual) identity imposed by the normativities of her ethnic culture. The American-born protagonist's insatiable appetite keeps her from practicing any favoritism on one singular cuisine and its worldview that shapes its practitioners' lives. In spite of her ethnic and parental acculturation, Ruby transgresses the borders between American and Chinese cultures, and so, she invalidates the rigid classifications on comestibles as well as on sexual orientation enforced by her ethnic culture. Her rich diet shows that she rejects being confined by Chinese culture which advocates the notion of identity as a static entity. Ruby's nonconforming alimentary and culinary practices therefore function as a liberating mechanism that ensures the construction of her

fluid identity (multiculturality and bisexuality). Her inclusive identity, however, comes to challenge her parents' ethnic norms and values which shape their normative approach to food consumption, sexuality and identity. Ruby's and her parents' incompatible food choices show their differing identities (fluid versus static) and so they stir up intergenerational identity conflicts in their family.

The novel starts with Ruby Lee's return to her family home in the ghetto of Queens upon her graduation from women's studies at Colombia University. Having no money and no place to stay, Ruby is forced to live with her parents whose emotionally estranged bodies inhabit the four rooms behind the Lee laundry that they call home. Foucault's term "heterotopia", which he uses to describe the spaces "of crisis and [...] of deviation" (25), can be adopted to depict this laundry-home that deviates from the image of a real home in the Western standards. Ruby is ashamed by her lack of a proper home, and she therefore detests being at home again. Besides her parents' (Bell and Franklin) social class, Ruby is mostly disturbed by their strict adherence to Chinese culinary culture and their firm stance on heterosexuality. For Ruby, the Lee family home therefore becomes a confining space where she has to follow her parents' ethnic foodways and disguise her sexual identity. During her stay here, she is confronted with problems in her family, in her love life and in her construction of her cultural, ethnic and sexual identity. She has to resolve her bitter-sweet relationship with her parents, and she also has to accept her varying sexual (hetero and homo), cultural (American and Chinese) and culinary (ethnic and American/Western) appetite.

Ng tells Ruby's coming-of-age story in the language of food. She resorts to food tropes to point at conflicts as well as their resolution. Her writing style corresponds to Ruby's restless journey. It changes from prosaic to lyrical. It is sometimes didactic and emotionless, and other times, it is groundswell of stream-of-consciousness. The omniscient narrative point of view provides her the ease and flexibility to sustain these shifts based on the protagonist's back-and-forth movements in her search for who she really is. As Miller states in his review in *Queens Chronicle*, the narrative is therefore "full of quiet despair, everyday revelations and deeply human insights" in restless fluctuations.

2.1. The Unconstrained Personal Diet and Identity

The Lees' conflict stems from their divergent appetites and the different worldviews represented by them. Since individuals make themselves by eating certain foodstuffs and rejecting others, Bell and Franklin construct and secure their identities by ingesting Chinese food and performing Chinese foodways. They perform Chinese culinary practices to express their sense of self to themselves as well as to the others. Among other cultural and culinary habits, their food preference marks their difference from their daughter the most. Their rigid ethnic dietary regimen contrasts with Ruby's food consumption. It is because Ruby does not want to abide by the confining list of culturally appropriate edibles and food taboos in Chinese culinary culture. She instead adopts an unsystematic diet which is based on the consumption of any foodstuff irrespective of its culinary origin and cultural residence. Ruby constructs her sense of self through her inconsistent food choices and flexible culinary practices. She therefore does not present her parents and her in-group peers a culturally normal persona. Her unruly diet renders her grotesque in the eyes of her parents and her community members. She is marked as the "stupid American" (96) who is ignorant of her roots.

Ruby's construction of her fluid identity is ensured by her voracious appetite for food and sex. Her acceptance of her varying appetite takes time, however. She starts her journey toward an inclusive and active identity by her initial rejection of the food and the culinary norms of her ethnic culture. Her first step seems exclusionist at first. However, her refusal to bow down to the rigid definition of the appropriate food imposed by Chinese culinary culture will later enrich her restrained appetite to the extent that the consumption of any food (including Chinese food) will be welcomed. Ruby's initial rejection of ethnic food causes her deviation from her ethnic origin. Her self differentiation starts at a young age despite the fact that her parents make great effort to acculturate her into Chinese (culinary) culture.

She [Bell] dumped the crabs into the pot and poked them with a chopstick when they tried to climb out. The clacking of their bodies was terrible. [...] He [Franklin] picked a crab from the pot, holding it from behind so its claws

couldn't snap his fingers. Ruby watched the claws opening and closing, watched her father gather five legs in one hand and then push the shell away from the body. There was a cracking noise as the shell ripped away from the soft insides. The clear jelly heart still pulsed. [...] Bell chopped the crab into four pieces and still the heart pulsed. Ruby stirred garlic and scallion into the hot oil, then left the kitchen and practically ran around the corner to Jack's. She stood in front and ate a handful of Sno-Caps. (40-41)

Food choices are practically shaped by individuals' hereditary tendencies and cultural heritages. In Ruby's case, however, her parents' ethnic dietary regimen fails at controlling her appetite, and therefore, her body and her identity too. Ruby's distaste of her parents' tastes places her in a different social category of which culinary norms deviate from the Chinese model. Young Ruby's hate against killing for one's own food alienates her from her parents and her roots. She feels guilty as she partakes in this killing-cooking process. She rejects eating the crab dish on the dinner table against her father's scolding that "she didn't know *good eating*" (emphasis mine, 41). Ruby's hesitation of eating it arises from her belief that its absorption could contaminate her body. Its affiliation with killing and blood makes it cannibalistic and so inedible according to American culinary culture. Ruby's initial rejection of her ethnic culture gravitates her into accepting this white judgement over the crab dish. She therefore restrains her appetite against it in order to secure her identity from its threat of pollution. Her fear of cannibalism supersedes the binding nature of commensality. Since she views her parents' eating habits as barbaric because of her "orientalist perception" (in her book chapter "Coming Home and Coming Out", Schultermandl uses it to explain Ruby's Americanized life view and especially her sympathizing/pitying look at her oppressed mother) (107), she refuses to partake in her family dinner. Her rejection of the crab dish indicates her rejection of Bell and Franklin's strict understanding of the nutritious food. Her initial rejection therefore comes to signify her difference from her parents.

Ruby's guilt (because of her participation in the act of killing/cooking) impels her to react against her parents' unappetizing dinner invitation. She is not satisfied solely by not eating the crab dish. To counteract her parents' authority, she resorts to the consumption of food which is deemed wrong or unhealthy by adults. Ruby runs

to the store to buy chocolate candies in order to compensate for her feelings of shame and dejection. For her, the quick escape to the grocery and the consumption of the forbidden food in such a short time indicate her victory over her parents, and they therefore bring relief to her. Ng's use of sugary products is highly allegorical throughout the narrative. They represent more than their edibility. The consumption of sugar (candies, chocolates and other sweets) is normally associated with autonomy, gratification and comfort. Yet, it also offers guilt since its unhealthy components threaten the health of the body. Ng uses these accepted norms around the sugary products to point out the conflict between the immigrant parents and their American-born offspring.

Lupton's reading of sugar in the context of family is also important to understand this conflict. According to her, sugar can be seen as a sign of family conflicts. It is because parents and children have differing approaches to it. Parents do not approve their children's sugar intake because it is unhealthy for their bodies. Since sweets are not proper meals, they prohibit their consumption. Children, however, show indulgence in eating sweets because of their pleasurable tastes. Their consumption of sweets therefore comes to mean that they disobey their parents' authority (53). Bell and Franklin do not accept Sno-Caps or pies or French crullers (Ruby's favorite of all times) as a proper meal. They simply regard all sweets as the rubbish food. Ruby instead finds them pleasurable because of their taste and especially because of their 'rubbish' nature which enrages her parents. Her preference of Sno-Caps over the homemade food thus indicates that she refuses to take her seat around the dinner table at home. She chooses to express her autonomy instead of strengthening her family bonds.

Ruby's addiction to sweets is partly due to her desire to fit in the white society. Sweets are identified with the white American society and its promises of freedom, the middle-class city life and prosperity. For Ruby, eating sweets and other American food offers a temporary escape from the Lees' ordinary life shaped by the Chinese cultural and culinary rules. Young Ruby's incomplete ethnic consciousness enables her American perspective to shape her diet. She therefore comes to believe in Kurosawa's Westernized depiction of the Chinese diet: "The Chinese are renowned

for their pragmatic approach to food. The basic tenet appears to be if it's not poisonous, eat it [no matter what it is]" (qt. in Lupton 35). The internalization of this negative view affects Ruby's bodily responses to Chinese food and foodways. She is repulsed by the chicken her parents buy from the wet market and kill for their dinner (53). Killing the chicken by hand and eating it at the dinner correspond with "flesh-eating" (Plutarch qt. in Lupton 117). Even if a chicken is accepted as edible in many communities, it does not mean that their culinary cultures approve their members' killing of their own food regularly. Chinese culinary culture, however, approves its consumption (as well as the consumption of any food free of poison) no matter what course of action brings it on the table. It therefore normalizes the association of food and food intake with cannibalism. As a result of it, since appetite is psychologically and emotionally guided, Ruby deliberately steers hers to white food which is clean of live and wild animals.

Eating American food to become American is a recurrent pattern in the coming-of-age stories of the second generation Chinese Americans. Ho explains it by borrowing a line from Morrison's **The Bluest Eye** (1970): "To eat the [American] candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane" (2005: 143). In other words, eating it means obtaining the desired properties of Americanness. Ruby is clearly one of those Chinese Americans who consume American food to confirm their white identities. For her, the consumption of American food is the easiest way to differentiate herself from her parents. It gives her the chance to taste the food which is not known in her parents' ethnic culinary culture. Tasting it ensures her relative escape from the normativity of the ethnic diet. Hence, she continuously craves for American food. She therefore gets mad at her mother who always brings her homemade Chinese food to their family picnic "when all Ruby wanted was a Nathan's hot dog and some french fries" (69). Ruby's food preference makes her a "hippie" (51) as Bell calls her to point at her Americanization. Bell does not understand Ruby's desire to consume American food because her dietary regimen, which is strictly Chinese, excludes the foodstuff foreign to itself.

Bell and Franklin do not share the same feelings with their daughter about killing one's own food. They prefer fresh food as opposed to American "franken-

food” (preserved food) (Morse qt. in Lupton 92). They therefore distinguish themselves from their daughter by their food choices and culinary beliefs. Ruby’s fuss-free consumption of American food contrasts sharply with her parents’ reserve about it. In a scene by which the narrative takes us to a past memory of Bell on her flight to America, she is introduced to American food for the first time by “*the thick orange slab between slices of white bread*” (packaged cheese) (30). Bell’s initial reaction to this foreign food is suspicion which is eventually followed by rejection. Bell’s cautiousness stems from her fear of contaminating herself. As Lupton states, “to take in food – any kind of food – is to risk the integrity of the self by threatening pollution” (114). Individuals therefore restrain their appetite against the unfamiliar food because its ingestion may affect their identities by dispossessing them of the qualities that describe who they are. Naturally, Bell is reserved against white food because it is unfamiliar to her system. She avoids eating this alien food as its absorption can change who she is. Because individuals reinforce their sense of self via their food consumption, Bell stays loyal to her Chinese diet and thus avoids the danger posed against her ethnic identity.

The immigrant parents’ appetite and eating habits are shaped by their acculturation into the norms and values of their home country. Their civilizing process inscribes the Chinese culinary codes upon their body. Even when they leave their country and have a new home country, they still perform their ethnic foodways. They find the foreign food and foodways as abnormal, and most of the time, they get repulsed by them. It explains why Bell dismisses the cheese sandwich offered on the plane and ponders whether or not “they have rice in this country [America]” (30). For Bell and Franklin, the only way to sustain their sense of self is through continuing practicing what is inscribed upon their Chinese body. They therefore keep their appetite for the culturally appropriate food (Chinese food). They dismiss other comestibles automatically. Their culinary practices are always shaped by their memories of their lost home. Their diet is therefore strictly selective. It works on exclusion for most of the time.

Bell and Franklin’s self-preservation is maintained by means of their dietary regimen. Lupton defines dietary regimen as “a system of regulation and rules that

dictate which foods should be eaten” (68). Bell and Franklin’s diet is practical and economical because their difficult life back home and their compelling immigrant experience in the U.S. form the basis of it. It is not a problem for Franklin to eat the half-baked bread Ruby makes (167) and for Bell to make alligator soup (99). Their dietary regimen assures them about the edibility of any foodstuff (including insects and wild animals) so long as it is harmless to the human body. It always polices over what goes into their mouths and thus controls what they become. Fischler’s description of “the traditional culinary system” is worthy of note here for understanding this systematic controlling mechanism. According to her, this system shapes its practitioners’ daily life, food choices and culinary practices based on its pre-determined norms and values (290). The rules of the Chinese dietary regimen create a life pattern so that Bell and Franklin know what, when and with whom to eat. Most importantly, it lets them know who they are and reveals to them who their in-group members are. It, however, favors the understanding of identity as a static being. It is because it advocates normativity. By strictly adhering to the norms and values of Chinese culinary culture, Bell and Franklin subjugate themselves to this understanding of identity. Their unchanging culinary practices therefore come to confirm and reinforce their static identity which is only contingent upon the parameter of ethnicity.

The Lee family gathers around the dinner table, but in their case, eating together does not indicate group cohesion either in the private or the public sphere. It is because they do not come to a mutual understanding about the definition of the appropriate food and foodways. Because Ruby’s appetite does not reside behind the walls her parents built based on the Chinese cultural and culinary norms, a crack forms in the family preventing its members from (re)affirming their identities by the act of food sharing. Their conflicting food choices and eating habits continue to weaken their family bonds even after Ruby grows up. After Ruby returns from college, she is still adamant on not bowing down to the normativity of her parents’ ethnic diet and their static identity. She therefore always feels the need “to defend herself against” her parents (13). Ng once again resorts to food tropes to describe the cultural conflict between Ruby and her parents. Her narrative play maintains the

conflict by pitting an American born's nonconforming diet against her parents' strict dietary regimen. In the scene where the Lees eat their first dinner after Ruby's return, Ng carefully weaves a food dialogue between Ruby and her mother to point at the daughter's "uneasiness" (14) within the family. Bell questions her daughter's loyalty to her roots by reminding her the fact that she "used to love salty fish" before (13). She expects her daughter to confirm her unchanged appetite for the fish and thereby to make sure that she preserves her ties (even if faltering) to her ethnic heritage. Ruby assures her mother rather in a defensive way by saying that she "still likes it" (ibid.). She also asks her mother about how she makes her salty fish even though she has no intention to make it (ibid.). By asking about the recipe, Ruby wants to convince her mother that she is the same old Ruby who loved and cooked for her mother despite her palatal rebellion from time to time. Against Ruby's tries for saving the day, Ng uses another food image to point out Ruby's different taste buds from her mother's (as well as her father's). In response to Bell's memory of cooking "salty duck" (ibid.), Ruby bursts out her own version of the duck meal she prepared with her special berry sauce. Ng suddenly cuts the dialogue by Bell's surprise at the use of berries. Bell's duck recipe does not have a space for the berry sauce because the Chinese culinary norms do not see it fit to the dish. The sudden end of the dialogue here therefore indicates the disunity between Ruby and her mother.

By putting an emphasis on the palatal disparity between the American-born daughter and her immigrant parents, Ng tries to show that the Lee family deviates from the ideal image of Chinese family. They do not fit into the Chinese social norms which define the family institution through the concepts of solidarity and collectivity. Ruby and her parents share neither the same appetite nor the same interests. Their conflicting choices and behaviors negate this ideal image of family because they disrupt their family unity. They show that the Lee family members have differing understandings of the concept of identity as well as contrasting views on the life. The clash between Ruby and her parents also indicates that none of them favors compromising for tightening of their family bonds as it entails their self-denial. Ng's readers may find her realistic depiction of the family as bothersome. Ng gives an explanation about her realistic style in one interview: "That's the kind of aesthetic I

relate to. I don't like a happy Hollywood ending. I'm more interested in that sick world, that twisted-up stuff that's underneath family relations" (Cryer). Her realistic writing therefore deconstructs social norms by fictionalizing everyday normalities.

Ruby's return from the college after her graduation is an important point in the narrative. The narrative now focuses on adult Ruby's perspective on her parents' daily life habits as well as their culinary practices. It depicts the change in her appetite which previously worked on the exclusion of Chinese food to ensure its master the chance to escape from the constraints of the Chinese norms and values. In the narrative, her (physical) growth comes to indicate her cultivation of her appetite(s) as well as her enrichment of her identity. As opposed to young Ruby's finicky diet which excludes Chinese food for most of the time, adult Ruby's diet works on the inclusion of all cuisines (including Chinese). Ruby always (re)constructs her diet based on the idea that eating indiscriminately ensures the unending process of becoming. Her changing rich diet therefore enables her to produce an active and a fluid cultural identity which is completely opposite of her parents' static ethnic identity. Ruby's insatiable appetite marks the difference between her current self (or selves) and her younger self. It also works to reinforce her fluid identity.

Ruby's appetite can be explained by Fischler's understanding of "omnivorousness" (277). Her concept is expressed in the idea that people need a certain variety of food in their diets in order to maintain their physical health. In Ruby's case, however, the concept is used to refer to her nonconforming diet which ensures her *becoming* process. Ruby is an "omnivore" (ibid.) by nature. In other words, she has to include a changing variety of food into her diet. By incorporating various foodstuffs into her body, she accepts the worldviews represented by them. Every time she eats, she transforms her sense of self because the ingestion of the dissimilar foodstuffs incorporates their novel and contrasting qualities into her system. Ruby's need for variety therefore indicates her openness toward changes and inclusiveness. Her fluid nature prevents her from having "a core diet" (Passin and Bennett qt. in Kalčík 40-41) which corresponds with a strict dietary regimen like her parents'. She instead opts for "secondary core[s]" and "peripheral foods" which Passin and Bennett define as the replaceable foodstuff (ibid.). Ruby changes her food

preference based on her wants and needs at the moment. Hence, every time she eats, she adopts novel tastes. Her indiscriminating food consumption therefore secures her changing identity against the normativity of the Chinese dietary regimen which obliges its practitioners to accept their fixed identity by eating selectively. Since “every food is believed to have an effect on the body” (Fischler 280), Ruby’s non-selective eating constantly (re)shapes her physical, psychological and emotional state. It also works to distinguish her from her parents who stick to a single (ethnic) dietary regimen.

By adopting Cauti’s term, it can be said that Ruby performs “culinary passing” with no halt. Cauti defines it as seeking of acceptance in the white society by continuously practicing its cuisine (qt. in Dalessio 422). However, her definition of the term does not apply entirely to Ruby’s situation as her performance is not motivated by a desire to find acceptance in the white society but rather by her need of variety. Ruby is not restricted by one dietary regimen and the worldview it represents directly and indirectly. She is in charge of her appetite instead. She eats anything she desires, and she affiliates herself with any culture whose culinary practices she wants to perform. Her varying culinary performances liberate her from the confinement of her parents’ tyrannical dietary regimen and the unilateral worldview it advocates. However, her nonconforming diet does not eradicate its existence completely. It is flexible enough so that Ruby “could eat Chinese food” (206) or “a grilled veggie sandwich with smoked mozzarella, and a side of rosemary potato salad” (225) or “a French cruller” (62). In other words, Ruby is free to incorporate not only American and Chinese food but any food she desires into her system. By means of her constantly changing diet, she comes to ‘pass’ as a member of a number of cultures.

Ng’s characterization of the protagonist’s insatiable appetite deconstructs the “simple reduction of Asian versus American consumption” which Ho introduces as the recurrent pattern in most Asian American works (2005: 141). Besides the food references (Ruby’s changing food choices), Ng describes this appetite through the protagonist’s symbolic movement(s) from the domestic space (the Lee laundry-home) to the urban space (Manhattan) and vice versa. These spaces are respectively, as Xu

defines in her reading of the novel in **Eating Identities**, symbolic of ethnic Chinese food and food from all world cuisines (152). On the one hand, Ruby eats ethnic food as she takes her place around the dinner table at home. On the other hand, she devours any food from any cuisine (American, Italian, Thai and many others) while she is in downtown Manhattan. Her constant movement between the home and the city implies her non-stop incorporation of the variety into her system and thus points at her becoming more than what she already is. Her identity construction process can therefore be explained by Mouffe's argument that "no identity is ever definitively established, there always being a certain degree of openness..." for difference and change (qt. in Lupton 13).

Ng allegorizes Ruby's appetite to point at the possibility of one's taking charge of his/her (cultural, ethnic and sexual) identity. Ruby can suddenly crave for "the sweet spare ribs and egg rolls and wonton soup" (206) and also entertain the idea of having a barbecue at her brother's house (181) at the same time. It is because Ruby has a "modern body" as opposed to her parents' "group-self" existence. Falk explains the first one as the personal being who is free to incorporate any comestible into his/her body and who shapes his/her sense of self based on his/her own taste buds. He defines the latter as the identity which is aligned with the community (qt. in Lupton 17-18). Unlike her parents who follow the instructions for the edibility of any foodstuff to secure their Chinese body, Ruby comes up with her own instructions for food consumption based on her changing needs. Her diet therefore includes what Abarca calls "original" foodstuff (qt. in Schultermandl 118). It corresponds with the food choices that are shaped by the *personal* wants and needs of the individual. Depending on the individual's decision, it can align with his/her personal self, or it can be closely tied to his/her collective self. Ruby's diet is surely fluxional since she constantly renews her list of the "original" foodstuff (ibid.). Every time she makes her list, she also re-constructs her identity. It is because each act of eating brings her physical satiation as well as cultural enrichment. Ruby's unsystematic food consumption consistently favors changes, and as a result, her sense of self always opts for the addition of new selves.

Her identity can therefore be likened to Butler's "open coalition" which she describes as an inclusive entity that welcomes any possible change without adhering to the rigid norms and values that promise a certain confinement (qt. in Dalessio 426). Since Ruby devours Chinese, American and other cuisines' food, her experience of acculturation is multifarious. Her cultural identity consequently transgresses the rigid fragmentation of Chinese versus American. Adopting from Schiller (et al.), Ruby can therefore be seen as a "transmigrant" (48). In line with Schiller's (et al.) definition, it applies to immigrants who establish affiliations with two countries at least. Since Ruby's rich diet ensures the changes in her sense of self, she comes to establish connections to many cultures irrespective of her non-immigrant identity. Her identity therefore rejects being defined by the normativity of a single cultural system. Precisely because of it, Ruby marks her difference from her parents whose static identities are solely confirmed by Chinese culture.

2.2. Ethnic Identification through Food and Eating Habits

Ruby's *personal* food choices shape her "performance of ethnic identity" which Kalčík defines as the process of identification through ethnic foodways (56). Ruby performs her ethnic identity through her eating habits and table manners which are taught by her parents. She joins her parents at dinner and gulps down their homemade Chinese food. At that specific time, she abides by the Chinese dining etiquette with no second thought. Her performance is timely since it is contextual. Wong explains the relationship between food and contextuality by asserting that "food is not inherently or statically "ethnic". Rather, food may be *used* either ethnically or nonethnically, as the participants see fit and the nature of the social relationship dictates" (70). Brown and Mussell, on the other hand, define ethnic food and foodways as communal practices which unite its practitioners and thereby distinguish in-group members from others (5). In contrast to this traditional approach, Ruby's performance resonates with Wong's idea because her personal understanding of ethnicity determines her behaviors instead of a strict definition of it imposed by her ethnic culture. Adult Ruby's conflict with her parents does not stem from her rejection of Chinese food and foodways as before. Rather, her nonconforming 'ethnic' diet triggers it. Her individuality and her rich diet create tension in the family

because Bell and Franklin do not comprehend their “daughter’s behavior [as] she had gone off to school and become one of those hippies” (deracinated ones) (51). Ruby refuses to be confined by the rigid norms and values of Chinese culinary culture, so she fails at making peace with her parents. Even though Ruby occasionally chooses to perform her ethnic identity, her deviation from the Chinese norms perpetuates intergenerational identity conflicts in her family.

Ruby’s performance is shaped by her domestication into Chinese eating habits and manners which are surely redefined by her fluid identity. According to Fraser’s thoughts on the acquisition of the proper eating habits and manners, “meal tables are the training grounds of a family” (qt. in Lupton 38). Ruby acquires her share from Chinese culinary culture around the dinner table at home. She is taught the proper way of eating and the standard of edibility by her parents. In Lupton’s words on acculturation into appropriate dining etiquette, Ruby learns to read the “rules around food [...] [to] mark the boundary between acceptable and non-acceptable behaviour” (52). She knows that Chinese food is the only appropriate food at home. Likewise, she is aware that the traditional Chinese eating habits are the unquestionable norms in her family. Ruby learns to perform her ethnic identity through her acquired skills when it is necessary. In her momentary ethnification, she opens her mouth to Chinese food and lets her body perform the Chinese culinary norms. To put it another way, to ethnicize her fluid identity temporally, Ruby quickly aligns with Chinese culinary culture when she sits around the dinner table with her parents.

Ruby is raised with her parents’ self-sacrificing eating habits. They give the best part of food to their daughter. It shows Ruby the proper way of eating which also corresponds with the proper way of loving.

Bell picked out a choice morsel of chicken and placed it in her daughter’s bowl. Ruby was so used to fending for herself that when the sweet white meat appeared in front of her, she nearly broke down and cried right there at the table. It didn’t matter that she liked dark meat better. Her mother was chewing on a chicken foot. “You eat,” Ruby said and tried to put some meat in her mother’s bowl. Bell waved the foot in the air. “More sweet near the bone,” she said. (11-12)

Eating manners tell a lot about its performer's personality. Bell's table manners reveal that she is the master of self-sacrificing since she cooks for her daughter and feeds her the best parts of her dishes. Bell does not mind that all the bony parts of the meat are in her bowl. She is satisfied so long as "Ruby's bowl is piled high with all the good bits" (14). Her homemade food becomes the medium of showing her love and care to her daughter because cooking for other people is a sign of love and affection (Xu 155). Ruby knows that her mother loves her "through sacrifice and worry" (14) so she wants to pay her back through her momentary ethnic culinary performance that enables her to eat and love selflessly. Ruby's ethnic domestication can therefore be described as a training process which is based on the acquisition of the Chinese norms of eating as well as loving.

Ng portrays the protagonist's performance of ethnicity by using food metaphors and by interrelating it to the concept of love. Ruby follows her parents' self-sacrificing eating habits to perform her ethnic identity. Interestingly, she resorts to them especially in her relationship with her white boyfriend (Nick). Ruby's ethnic identity sticks out the most when the narrative brings Ruby and her boyfriend together around the dinner table. Ng creates a narrative tension here by pitting Ruby's acquired ethnic eating habits against her boyfriend's selfish eating habits.

Ruby had forgotten to tell Nick not to start eating until her father picked up his chopsticks. Nick reached across the table and helped himself to a plump morsel of chicken from the far side of the plate, the side right in front of her father. Ruby half waited for her father to rap Nick across the knuckles. No, no, Nick, Ruby said to him in her head, only pick in front of you, no matter what it is, even if it's the chicken head or chicken butt. (129)

Nick is not familiar with the Chinese culinary norms and values so his eating habits differ from Ruby's and her parents'. His American body can neither relate to giving the best parts of the food to his loved ones nor appreciating the food by eating slowly and thoughtfully. It is also not welcoming toward learning Chinese table manners so as to fit in the Lee family. Unlike Nick's eating habits that show his

consistent affiliation with American culinary culture and his static white identity, Ruby's ability to move from one culinary culture to another indicates her wide perspective on food consumption and eating manners and so points at her inclusive identity. Hence, Ruby's "cultural capital", which Bourdieu defines as an individual's knowledge that shows him/her the right way to manifest himself/herself (qt. in Lupton 95), can be described as dynamic and all-embracing. Among many cultural teachings, it includes the American culinary value system too. However, Ruby cannot tolerate Nick's selfish eating habits when she performs her ethnic self through her internalized self-sacrificing eating habits. His habits seem wrong and almost vulgar to her. Later at night after the dinner, Ruby therefore feels the need to warn him by saying "you can't pick from the far side of the plate" (134). Ruby's momentary performance of ethnicity affiliates her with Chinese culinary culture. She cannot help but criticize Nick's American eating habits from her Chinese perspective at the moment. Nick's inability to perform transgressions between the American and Chinese culinary borders results in Ruby's estrangement from him.

Ruby is taught to love through cooking and sharing food. When she asks Nick whether the broccoli is good enough for his taste (234), she means to show her love and care for him. Food becomes the language of love for her. In contrast, Nick responds to her selfless eating by "eating all the good meaty bits and leaving the bony parts for her" (ibid.). His selfish eating becomes like a slap in Ruby's face as she realizes that "he doesn't know how to eat" (241) and how to love. The omniscient narrator now suddenly reminds Ruby her Chinese culinary domestication which equates food sharing with love and care: "She had been taught to give the good bits to the other person and that the other person would give her the good bits, and in this way, they would take care of each other" (234). The ethnic stimulation here affects Ruby's body and orients her to perform her ethnic self. Accordingly, Ruby's Chinese self compels her to stop sharing her food with her boyfriend. Her refusal to continue eating with Nick signifies her rejection of him. Ruby ends her relationship with him the moment she realizes that she cannot bear his selfish eating habits anymore.

Ruby's performance of ethnicity does not confine her to the Chinese dietary regimen and eating habits. Ruby breaks up with her boyfriend because of it, but her appetite is not tamed by it. Ruby's ethnification, or in Boelhower's words, her "spatio-temporal moment of ethnic semiosis" (qt. in Wong 70), is a temporary performance of one of her many selves. Ruby stands out among the practitioners of Chinese culinary culture because of her *personal* foodways. For instance, as the firm followers of Chinese culinary culture, Bell and Franklin never eat take-out Chinese food. Since restaurants always offer the Americanized Chinese food, they stick to their homemade Chinese food. However, Ruby gets take-out whenever she feels like doing it. Ruby's desire for "the gringo food" (the Americanized, palatable Chinese food) (206) does not comply with her parents' strict dietary regimen which is adamant on the consumption of the authentic Chinese food. Ruby's appetite varies from one context to another. In Schultersmandl's words, food therefore becomes "a parameter of individuality" (116) for the protagonist. Ruby's changing wants and needs determine momentarily what is next to eat. Her unsystematic culinary performances always pit her against her parents. It is because nonconforming food choices and eating habits of individuals threaten to destroy the borders of their social groups. Bell and Franklin are therefore strongly reserved against Ruby's nonconforming foodways. They do not welcome it as it threatens their static identities by challenging the boundaries of Chinese culinary culture. By continuing eating indiscriminately, Ruby loosens her ties with her parents. The Lees' conflicts never come to an end because of Ruby's insistence on her insatiable appetite and varying eating habits.

2.3. Food, Sexuality and Queerness

Ruby's changing appetite, which enables her constant movement from one culinary culture to another, ensures her freedom from the confinement of the sexual normativity imposed by her ethnic culture especially in the domestic space. Ruby does not bow down to the rigid understanding of sexuality which corresponds with heterosexuality. Her homosexual desire for her mother triggers her movement from the restrictive monosexuality (hetero or homo) to fluid bisexuality. The narrative displays her refusal of a static sexual identity by means of her rejection of a static

dietary regimen. The food metaphors once again play an important role in delineating Ruby's journey toward a fluid sexual identity.

The interrelation between space (domestic and urban) and food holds the key to understanding Ruby's sexual identity. To allegorize Ruby's bisexuality, Ng uses specific food images which are bound up with certain spaces. Ng portrays the domestic space as a confining place where one is expected to bow down to the ethnic diet and the sexual normativity (heterosexuality). In contrast, she depicts the urban space as a place of freedom and autonomy where one can perform his/her cultural, ethnic and sexual identity and indulge in his/her favorite cuisine(s) freely. The protagonist's identity works on the inclusion of all offered by both spaces. Her appetite for Chinese cuisine and other cuisines (such as American and Thai cuisines) define who she is. Similarly, her hetero and homo sexual desires are a part of who she is. She does not therefore choose one space over the other. She instead shuffles between them. Her constant movement indicates her refusal to be tied down to a single diet and monosexuality. It clearly points at her rich diet as well as her fluid sexuality.

Ruby's journey toward a fluid sexual identity starts at home after she returns from college. Before and after her return, her parents' Chinese enculturation enforces the sexual normativity in the domestic space. Ruby has to hide her sexual orientation while she is at home. Ng explains Ruby's restlessness with her heterosexual relationships through food references: "Day after day, croissants and omelettes and pancakes with cream on top. One day the butteriness was too much for her stomach. No one could hold her down long enough to keep her from running" (24). For Ruby, restraining her sexual appetite for one guy equals to torturing herself. Ruby therefore runs from settling down with her boyfriend or any random guy she hooks up with. Her countless sexual intercours with random guys do not appease her insatiable sexual appetite. It is because they conform to the heterosexual normativity in her ethnic community. The more Ruby engages solely in heterosexual relationships, the more she comes to suppress her homosexual side. To alleviate her sexual appetite, she needs to give in to her inner desires. Ruby's subconscious desire for Bell constantly reminds her that she loves her mother and that it is her mother that she

really wants to “touch” (58). Her desire compels her to free herself from the firm chains of heterosexuality enforced at home as well as in her ethnic community.

In the narrative, Ruby’s homosexual fantasies for Bell meet with her Americanized perspective. According to Li and Zhao, Ruby’s Americanized perspective compels her to see her mother “as the weak “third-world woman”” (oppressed and silenced by the patriarchal sexual normativity) who awaits to be saved by her (542). Ng again resorts to food tropes to describe Ruby’s efforts to save her mother from Franklin’s tyrannical and insensible behavior. At the time of Bell’s operation, Ruby learns to cook Chinese food just to feed and take care of her mother. Ruby knows her “way with ginger and black beans and garlic” (48) to please her mother. Her cooking bespeaks her love for her mother. She cannot overtly express her homoerotic desire for her mother, but her food, as Xu states in her reading of the novel, becomes a “medium of communication” (157) to convey her feelings to Bell in a safe way. Every time Bell eats her daughter’s food, she therefore comes to incorporate Ruby’s love into her body as it is inscribed into her dishes.

Ruby’s sexual identity is unacceptable in her ethnic home. The sexual normativity in the domestic realm keeps her from performing her varying (hetero and homo) sexuality actively. Her heterosexual indoctrination causes her to become timid around women and so prevents her from engaging even in a full conversation with them. Ruby always feels overwhelmed around the women she takes an interest in. She cannot therefore bring herself to confess her true feelings ever. On the other hand, against the sexual normativity in her ethnic home and community, Ruby’s homosexual desires interfere in her relationship with Nick. Ng interconnects the concepts of love and homosexuality with food motifs to point out their incompatibility. Ruby imagines “if he [Nick] were a woman. [...] Or if he could just learn to cook a good pot of rice” (160). However, she knows that he cannot cook at all. Nick’s incompetence in cooking for Ruby contrasts with Ruby’s skillfulness in cooking for her mother. In Ruby’s language of love, Nick therefore fails to convey his love for her. Even so, Ruby keeps on having sex with him because she is afraid of facing with her true desires. As a result of it, she continues to feel entrapped by the normativity of her heterosexual relationship(s). Ng plays with the idea of entrapment

as she goes on describing Ruby's suppressed homosexual inclination through food metaphors.

She dreamed she was eating dog. [...] Later, she dreamed she was having sex with her mother. [...] Ruby [...] found a book on food rituals. She read about a tribe of people who grew yams and piled them up in the yard. When you visited your neighbor, you brought along a basket of yams that you had piled up, and when you left, they gave you some of their yams that they had piled up. You weren't supposed to eat your own yams. Or your own dog. Or your own sister or mother. [...] Other people's sisters, other people's mothers, you may eat. (168-169)

The narrative displays the discord between the Chinese sexual normativity and the homoerotic fantasies of the protagonist. Ng brings up the controversy about the Chinese diet to tackle the issue of the nonconforming sexuality. As a ventriloquist, she uses Franklin's voice to remind us that "“Chinese restaurants cook dog meat all the time”" (168). Ng here uses a food taboo (eating dogs) in the Western context to talk about a sexual taboo (homosexuality and incest) in Chinese culture. The edibility of the dog meat is determined by the fixed culinary rules of a culture; While American culture forbids it, Chinese culture does not put the lid on it. It points out that individuals' cultural as well as culinary affiliations determine whether or not the dog meat is an appropriate food for the body. Likewise, Ng suggests, the acceptability of homosexuality (and also bisexuality) is determined by the social norms enforced by cultures. While Chinese culture does not approve it, American culture takes a hands off approach toward it. By correlating the nonobjectivity of a food taboo with a sexual taboo, Ng invalidates the Chinese sexual normativity that shuts out homosexuality (as well as bisexuality) from the Chinese body. In other words, she deconstructs the rigid system which does not acknowledge Ruby's homoerotic desires for her mother. Ng's writing thus works to disturb the restrictiveness of the pre-determined social norms and values on food and sexuality.

Ruby takes one step ahead in her journey when she realizes that Bell's Chinese body stands firm on her heterosexual marriage with Franklin. Ruby consequently projects her desire for her mother to other women. The food references

in the narrative play along with this projection. At one of her friends' parties, Ruby meets a potential lover (Hazel), and she falls in love with her at first sight.

[Ruby] was afraid she'd blurt out that she was dying to cook for her [Hazel], that she was seized with a sudden desire to shop at open markets for her, to buy only the most beautiful string beans and patty-pan squash and red bliss potatoes and herbs from Amish farmers. She also wanted to run out and buy some phyllo dough and wrap up something fancy in it and bake the whole thing until it was golden brown. (230)

Ruby's homosexual appetite finds articulation in her desire to cook for Hazel. Ng draws parallels between the protagonist's desire for her mother and her potential lover. Ruby wants to show her love to both of them through her masterly cooking of her special dishes. Because of her parental acculturation, Ruby always chooses to communicate her love by feeding her loved ones. However, in this scene, Ruby's homoerotic desire is unfulfilled once again since she feels too shy around Hazel and so runs away from her. Her escape shows the extent of her confinement by the heterosexual normativity in her ethnic home. Ruby continues to suppress her homosexual desire by performing the sexual normativity enforced by the Chinese order.

Ruby only succeeds at overcoming her suppression of her homosexual inclination when she moves out from her parents' place to her own apartment at the all-women's building in the city. Her decision of moving points at her desire to free herself from the confinement of heterosexuality at her parents' place as well as in her ethnic community. At her new home, in the city, Ruby can freely perform her sexuality in accordance with her varying sexual appetite. Her moving out does not bring an end to her momentary performances of ethnicity though. She continues visiting her parents in the (ethnic) domestic space, and she still eats her parents' ethnic food as she sits around their dinner table. Ruby's actions therefore show that her contrasting sexual and ethnic identities can coexist in her fluid self.

Ng allegorizes Ruby's bisexuality by using food metaphors that coincide with her spatial movement. Ruby's appetite for ethnic food and American sweets

symbolizes her changing sexual appetite. At her parents' place, Ruby has to eat Chinese food and bow down to the normativity of heterosexuality. On the other hand, in downtown Manhattan, she is free to indulge in her favorite sweets (as well as any food she wants to eat) and her varying sexual choices that her parents strongly disapprove. Having "apple turnovers for dessert" (19), which corresponds with casual sex, is only possible in the city. Ruby's movement to the city therefore signifies her palatal as well as sexual freedom. In Manhattan, Ruby can eat Chinese food with "the sight of [Nick's] soft penis" (233). She can also eat American sweets and get touched by a woman who can "make her so wet" (231). Ruby does not put an end to her casual heterosexual relationships after she breaks up with her boyfriend. She always gets wet when she sees a woman she likes, but she also enjoys having sex with men as "in bed it felt good" (123). In the city, Ruby performs her hetero and homo sexual choices alternately. She also consumes the Eastern and the Western food flexibly. Ruby's experience in the city therefore points at her bisexuality and her nonconforming diet. With its various offerings (in sex and in food), Manhattan becomes the perfect place for Ruby to act out her true self. The interrelationship between Ruby's spatial orientation into the city and her changing sexual and culinary appetite is highly symbolic in the narrative. It is because through the images of the city and food, Ng comes to deconstruct the social and sexual norms that stigmatize bisexuality in the society.

Ruby's varying alimentary and sexual choices invalidate the rigid definitions of identity, ethnicity and sexuality. The narrative brings together the concepts of love and ethnicity together with the food motifs once again at the end of the narrative. Ng underscores that it is Ruby who defines these concepts based on her own wants and needs.

On the machine, her mother was speaking slowly. "First, pick a sea bass with clear eyes, not cloudy. When you get home, wash it in cold water, inside and out. Make sure there's no more scales left. Soak the black beans in some warm water. Put the fish in a bowl, chop garlic, scallion and ginger. Pour a little soy sauce on it, not too much. Then steam it until it's done, maybe twenty minutes. Heat some oil in a pan. Make sure it's hot, but not smoky. Pour it over the top. Watch out for small bones. (252)

Bell's recipe functions as a medium of re-enlivening the ethnic history. She re-affirms her static identity by re-telling the recipe to her daughter. It secures her connection to Chinese culture. Her (re)telling offers an invitation to Ruby to identify herself with it. Ruby's eagerness to listen to her mother's traditional recipe indicates her affiliation with her ethnic culture. However, it does not show her acceptance of it as the sole guiding force in her life. Bell's sea bass recipe closes the narrative in an open-ended way because the readers are not provided with Ruby's response to her mother's calling. Yet, the narrative clues help us figure out her reply to it. During the course of the story, Ruby decides to enroll in a cooking school and become a professional chef. Her decision points at her desire to continue performing her fluid (cultural, ethnic and sexual) identity by engaging in different cuisines. Since every cuisine represents "a [different] manner of interpreting the world and integrating oneself with it" (Tucker qt. in Wong 71), Ruby therefore shows her adamancy on transgressing the rigid boundaries of her ethnic culture by affiliating herself with various culinary cultures. Ruby's fluid identity makes her believe in the idea of "one extra pot" (149). She can serve any kind of concoction in it. She likes the idea of mixing endless possibilities. Her mother's call is therefore responded by her inclination toward never-ending possibilities and novelties. Ruby's *personal* foodways shapes her actions. She will therefore re-define her mother's ethnic sea bass recipe based on her personal understanding of ethnicity which is shaped by her changing wants and needs.

The non-interactive dialogue at the end also shows (once again) how food functions as a significant medium for the mother-daughter communication. Food becomes Bell and Ruby's language to convey their love for each other. By the acts of reciting and conceiving the sea bass recipe, Bell and Ruby let each other know about their love for one another. Ng here propounds that food is a sign of loving and caring. According to her, cooking and feeding are therefore the effective ways of displaying/communicating one's love and trust for the others.

On the other hand, the novel's end indicates that Ruby's deviation from the Chinese norms perpetuates the intergenerational identity conflicts in the Lee family.

Ruby's fluid identity and her unconfined appetite pose a threat against the cultural and sexual normativity of her parents. The clash between their worldviews inflames their conflicts. So long as Ruby refuses to settle on the Chinese lifestyle and to embrace the rigid ethnic identity, she will always have to face off against her immigrant parents. Ruby's actions show that she feels satisfied with her rich diet and bisexuality. As a result of Ruby's insistence on her nonconforming behaviors, the Lee family is not able to put an end to their conflicts.

Ruby's nature is welcoming toward the changing contextual configurations. Her identity therefore rejects a definite closure. It works on the parameters of change and inclusion. Ruby's erratic self refuses to bow down to the rigid norms imposed on her. Her (cultural, ethnic and sexual) transgressions work to reaffirm her fluid identity which lives on novelty. Ruby's constant *becoming* makes her a queer. It is because queerness corresponds with openness, change and inclusion (Hall, 2003: 15; Xu, 2008: 158) and so it accounts for Ruby's understanding of identity which denies normativity and fixedness. Ruby's queerness challenges the rigid sexual and cultural categorizations. Because she does not conform to the either/or binary (straight/gay and Chinese/American), she becomes the trouble maker in her family. Ruby's constant movements from one culture to another disrupt the Chinese order maintained by her parents.

Eating can be accepted as queer, too. Ng's writing style favors shifts from the present to the past and from prose to lyric. It is therefore never static. Her description of a nonconformist character indicates change and novelty. Ruby's "restlessness" (115) is witnessed through the restlessness of the narrative itself. The narrative is not founded on restriction or exclusion. It favors inclusion instead. The open-endedness of it points at its invitation to any possible (distinct) interpretation. Just like Ruby, **Eating** refuses to be defined by the either/or system. It welcomes any change on its plate.

CHAPTER THREE

WHITE FOOD VERSUS ETHNIC FOOD: CONTRASTING FOOD CHOICES AND INTERGENERATIONAL FAMILY CONFLICTS IN DAVID WONG LOUIE'S *THE BARBARIANS ARE COMING*

David Wong Louie's novel *The Barbarians Are Coming* was published in 2000. The culinary novel explores the themes of class, family and identity conflicts through food references. It focuses on the everyday life of a typical Chinese American family. The food-related events abound in the narrative. They constitute the recurrent family conflicts which function as the driving force of the narrative. These conflicts subvert the stereotypical image of the successful and peaceful Asian American family. This chapter shows that ethnic Chinese food does not comply with the requisites of the pre-determined white taste. Its unfamiliar and impure nature, which is associated with the lower class palate, poses a threat to the integrity of the upper and middle class white American bodies. Its consumption marginalizes its eater by identifying him with the lower class. I therefore argue that the protagonist's desire for social mobility fuels him to dismiss ethnic Chinese food, which affiliates him with the lower class, and compels him to discipline his food choices and practices based on the workings of the white culinary core. Once the protagonist's cravings are fixated on the consumption of white food, he succeeds in constructing his white identity at the expense of his ethnic culture. However, his compliance with the norms of the white culinary culture does not bring him the satisfaction of his full access to the middle strata or his acceptance since he is a racially and ethnically marked subject in American society. It only destroys his relationship with his immigrant parents who remain loyal to their ethnic culinary culture to confirm their identity.

The novel opens with the protagonist's internal monologue on the two striking opposites – “Feast or Famine” (3) – to draw attention to the strong interconnection between class and food in the narrative. The protagonist, Sterling Lung, welcomes us as a French cuisine chef, a CIA (the Culinary Institute of

America) graduate, at the “Richfield’s Ladies’ Club” (ibid.). Even though Sterling lives in “the servant’s quarters” (29) of Libby Drake’s (the club president) mansion and earns his living by serving the white ladies there, he thinks that his position distinguishes him from his immigrant parents whom he deems as “bottom feeders” (154) because of their laundry-business/home. From the beginning, the narrative displays the binary spatial references that foreshadow the food and class based family conflicts continuing throughout the story. These references have their basis in the common trope in Asian American literature which Wong calls as the “immigrant parent/American-born children configuration” (1993: 35).

Throughout the narrative, Sterling’s assimilationist tendencies correspond with his class aspirations. They are most visible in the organization of his diet and eating habits based on the white culinary standards. Sterling carefully whitens his appetite because he associates the white diet and eating habits with the middle class life which has all the privileges he desires. Sterling’s strict white diet and cookery trick him into believing that he has achieved the American Dream. His illusion compels him to consider his parents as the prototypes of the “forever foreign stereotype” which Cacho explains in her review of **Barbarians** as the inevitable plight of Asian Americans in the racist white society (378). Sterling’s parents’ socio-economic position (the working class) is the reason why Sterling alienates from them and why he abhors their ethnic diet and eating habits.

Louie resorts to class-based food tropes to expose an American-born Chinese’s inner conflicts as well as his conflicts with his immigrant parents. His novel abstains from one-dimensional representation of these conflicts. The novel is therefore divided into four chapters. The first two chapters provide the first person narration of Sterling’s deracination and his conflicts with his parents from Sterling’s point of view. These chapters are thus highly intense in displaying the protagonist’s justification of his white appetite in face of his immigrant parents’ “barbarian” (74) food choices. The third chapter, however, brings a halt to this impetuous self-identification. An omniscient narrator here takes the readers to the past and reveals to them Genius’s (Sterling’s father) struggles as an immigrant in America. The narrative thus discloses how the racist white hegemony determines Genius’s socio-

economic position in the society. The narrator later returns to the present time of the story and focuses on the father-son conflict from Genius's perspective. In this chapter, the omniscient narrator neither tolerates Sterling's deviation nor overlooks his slurs against his parents' Chinese appetite and eating habits. He instead shows how the retention of ethnic foodways becomes a way to protect Genius and Zsa Zsa's (Sterling's mother) ethnic identity. The narrator also presents Genius's counter-claim against his son's degrading labels on Chinese foodways. The narrative here sides with Genius's perspective which does not associate Chinese culinary culture with the lower class status. The contradicting perspectives help readers to see the family conflicts from different angles and thereby have a better understanding of them. They are also significant for understanding Sterling's strong persistence on his mastery over white food and foodways in the last chapter.

Louie's style is also important in delineating the food-based family conflicts between the first and second generations of the Lungs. His down-to-earth realism unveils the restlessness and frustrations lying underneath the experiences of Chinese Americans as a minority group in the white society. His straightforward and quick paced writing style is in harmony with the serious and (mostly) hot-headed tone of the novel. It corresponds to Sterling's class frustration that jeopardizes his relationship with his parents as well as his connection to his roots. Louie's plain language becomes descriptive with food images when the narrative focuses on the dialogues between Sterling and his parents or on Sterling's monologues regarding his disdainfulness of his parents' life style. The Lungs' conflicts are most visible in these scenes.

3.1. The "Feast": Identification through White Food and Foodways

Sterling's desire for upward social mobility starts at a young age. He feels ashamed of his parents' socio-economic status which is symbolized by their "peasant" (222) eating habits. His class anxiety compels him to determine the course of his life by rejecting what seemingly drags him down. In order to achieve his class aspirations, he dispenses with his parents' foodways which he constantly deems as un-American.

After my sister and I visited the nice homes of our American friends, we were shamed and mesmerized by their table manners, by their glasses for cold drinks, cups and saucers for hot, dishes of different sizes for different purposes, the dizzying array of utensils, big and small, the beautiful gilt-edged platters on which food was served. I quickly learned to cut, then transfer the fork to the right hand, then eat. By increments we imported these customs of the table into the laundry, even though they seemed strange, foreign and had made us [...] feel dumb, cloddish, inadequate, like dogs trained to walk on their hind legs, but *mimicry, even coarse mimicry* – what did we own in the way of dishes, flatware, serving sets, anyway? – *was belonging*. (emphasis mine, 367)

Sterling identifies American foodways with civility and prosperity. According to him, how and what “real people” (white Americans) (76) eat constitute the norm in the society. Adopting their taste buds and copying their eating habits function as the practical ways of becoming one of them and thereby affiliating with their socio-economic position. Sterling’s desire for the middle class life standards gravitates him toward a palatal training process which corresponds with Lupton’s contemplation on the tempering of the appetite.

In **Food, the Body and the Self**, Lupton writes about the concept of “self-mastery” (19) from a food based perspective. She re-interprets Taylor’s portrayal of the modern identity as “neo-stoic” (the “rational” self whose behaviors conform to the accepted norm) (19) on the nexus of food and identity. In line with this, she defines “self-mastery” as an individual’s ability to discipline his/her food preferences and eating habits based on the accepted norms in the society (19-20). In other words, it is a training process whereby one civilizes his/her appetite and behaviors in accordance with the core values of the hegemony. Sterling’s training process starts with his adoption of American table manners. His ethnic acculturation resists against them at first because they differ from what his parents inscribed upon his body before. Sterling, however, continues practicing the American way and succeeds at its mimicry soon after. Yet, his civilization process is still not complete since he has to master over his appetite too.

Sterling soon teaches the white middle “class taste” (Bourdieu 34) to his palate because it signifies the riches of Americans. In his structuralist reading on tastes and distastes of different social classes, Bourdieu explains his term “class taste”

as the categorization of any culinary and alimentary practices based on the values and norms of the social group at stake. The body of the member of the related social group becomes the most prominent sign of it (2012: 34). Sterling's practicing of American table manners forms the basis of the changes in his body. These changes continue through his palatal training. His adoption of the American (read white middle class) "class taste" disciplines his appetite based on the rules of the white culinary culture and controls his body through policing over what is incorporated into it. His mastery over his dietary regimen chips away his appetite for Chinese food. His self-discipline is therefore significant not only for displaying his palatal change but also for marking his deracination.

Sterling's civilized appetite compels him to re-organize his diet based on the workings of the binary classification between white food and ethnic food. This rigid boundary is reinforced by the culinary norms which are defined and (constantly) shaped by the white hegemony. As practitioners of these norms, Americans define white food as the familiar and thus clean food. For them, eating it symbolizes normality and acceptability in the society. They therefore name it as the "'good' food" (pure food) (Lupton 154). It comes to correspond with concepts such as civilization and wealth in the white nation. On the other hand, Americans do not find ethnic Chinese food familiar because it does not meet the prerequisites of the appropriate food determined by American culinary culture. Since most of Chinese dishes are composed of unfamiliar combinations of various vegetables and animals (including the wild ones), the white culinary standard cannot define their ingredients clearly. Their unknown constituents do not comply with the pre-determined white taste. Ethnic Chinese food is therefore defined as impure and undesirable (its exotic nature attracts many Americans but it is never to the extent of its acceptability). Because food consumption affects identity (either by confirming or disrupting it), eating ethnic Chinese food poses a threat to the self-integrity of Americans. The white nation therefore labels it as the "'bad' food" (the lower class and dirty food) (ibid.) and cautions its people not to eat it. In this sense, the otherization of ethnic food is ensured by the exclusionary working mechanism of the white culinary core.

In her reading of the novel in **Eating Identities**, Xu quotes from Chiu on this matter, “[f]ood’s status as either disgusting or delectable has always pivoted in the space of the slash (/), based on human classification by one (dominant) subset of people for their own finicky and fluctuating tastes in a manner that shapes its meanings for other groups of people” (65). In other words, American culinary culture determines what is normal and what can be incorporated into the white American body.

In Sterling’s eyes, white food is also the appropriate food because its symbolic value corresponds with the socio-economic status he aspires to achieve. Because eating is a way of becoming and re-affirming one’s identity, Sterling feasts on white food to confirm his American self and thereby to affiliate himself with the middle class Americans. His appetite therefore naturally craves for “Drake’s Cake and Hostess Twinkies” (64) which are the signs of civilization and prosperity. His food choices are always politically-guided to sustain and advocate the systematic workings of the white culinary center and so the white social order which brings on the classification of its subjects in the first place.

As a strong practitioner of the white diet, Sterling gives his ear to the norms that define ethnic Chinese food as impure and even barbaric. It is embedded in his mind that this food poses a threat to his white identity by means of pollution. In order to preserve his whiteness, Sterling vows to stay loyal to his disciplined appetite and eating manners by turning against his ethnic culinary culture. He therefore comes to abhor his parents’ Chinese dishes which he defines as “barefoot food, eat-with-stick food” (75).

Sterling’s commitment to his palatal training clearly puts a rigid boundary line between American food and Chinese food. His food classification is found upon his personal class aspirations. It certainly helps him reinforce his white identity, but on the other hand, it results in the marginalization of his ethnic foodways in particular and the otherization of Chinese people in general. Sterling is blind to the fact that his otherization of his parents and their ethnic food actually marginalizes

him too. Since he is not one of white Americans but only a replica of them, his deracination will lead to his self-entrapment/victimization.

Sterling's appetite for white food persists because his class envy outweighs his commitment to his roots. In "Food, Food consumption and the Troubled Self" (2008), Chang explains the relationship between food, body and desire on the selected works from Asian American literature. The part where Chang focuses on the act of eating corresponds to Sterling's persistence: "decisions of eating or not eating certain food, as well as how to eat it, reflect [...] [one's] psychological stat[e] and sense of self: food not only meets the need of [his/her] bod[y], it also feeds [his/her] wants and desires" (361). Sterling fills his stomach by incorporating white food into his system. His food consumption, however, does not only sustain his body. By eating the food of white Americans and copying their eating habits, Sterling also projects a self that marks its difference from the ethnic other.

One refrigerator, then the next, opening the doors and looking, but knowing there's nothing in there that I'd want to eat. [...] On a good day, if I'm lucky, I might find a bottle of Coke stuffed among paper bags of oranges, greens, and roots; bundles of medicinal herbs, twigs, bark, berries, and what look like worms bound with pink cellophane ribbon; see-through boxes of black mushrooms and funky salted fish; cloudy plastic wrappers of duck sausage and waxy pork bellies; takeout cartons with scraps of roast pig, roast liver, roast ribs; jars of oysters, shrimp, wood ears, lily buds; and dishes and bowls [...] stacked one on top of the other, teeming with leftovers [...] Under harvest moons, rinse off the maggots, slice, and steam. It is squatting-in-still-water food [...], hooves-in-the-house food. (75-76)

Each act of food consumption is significant because it directly affects our identity. Eating the right food incorporates its desired properties into our system and thus confirms our sense of self. On the other hand, the consumption of the wrong food pollutes our system by its unfamiliar nature and so challenges our identity. Who we think we are is therefore reinforced by our food choices as well as our eating habits. Sterling rummages through in the refrigerator for something like "a bottle of Coke" instead of considering eating the ethnic dishes there because he does not want to pollute his system. He refuses to eat from his parents' refrigerator precisely

because it is the potent sign of their “base cuisine” (220). Eating any food from this cuisine would threaten Sterling’s identity. His whitened appetite therefore compels him to put a slash between the coke and the ethnic food in the refrigerator. It guards over his mouth against the wrong food.

Sterling’s adamancy on his food classification associates him with Colanzi’s description of the marginalized person at the kitchen. In her article “The Politics of Food in the Kitchen and at the Dining Table” (2008), Colanzi defines the kitchen “as the place where the disenfranchised attempt to remake themselves into the image of those who reject them” (32). Sterling’s envy of the white American lifestyle forces him to dismiss ethnic food and table manners as wrong and inferior. He fits in the image of “the disenfranchised” precisely because his palatal training causes his deviation from his ethnic cuisine and history and leads him to build a white persona for himself.

The most prominent sign of the protagonist’s culinary discipline is his profession. Sterling’s decision to become a French cuisine chef signifies his rejection of his natural “habitus”. According to Bourdieu, an individual’s “habitus” is shaped by his/her parental acculturation and socio-economic environment (34). Because Sterling re-constructs it based on his learnings of the white culture and reinforces it through his practice of white foodways, he distinguishes himself from his parents and their socio-economic status. In Sterling’s schema, Chinese food corresponds to the concoctions of the wild animals such as tigers and alligators. His internalized whiteness is judgmental against cooking and eating these types of food. The rules exerted by the American culinary center command Sterling to restrain his appetite against ethnic food. He therefore dismisses it as repulsive and inedible. He likewise avoids cooking this wrong food.

Sterling’s rejection of eating and cooking Chinese food shows that he conforms to, what Genius calls, the “America way” (88). Interestingly, Sterling’s American “habitus” (Bourdieu 34) does not gravitate him toward becoming an American cuisine chef. He instead specializes in French cuisine because his Western education has taught him that it is the father of all the civilized cuisines. It is

associated with aristocracy, wealth and prosperity. It is therefore much superior to American cuisine. Sterling describes it as “the hautest of haute cuisines” (39). Eating and cooking the dishes of French haute cuisine signify its practitioners’ higher socio-economic status in the society. Lupton likewise describes the performers of this cuisine as the epitome of the upper strata who knows what the upscale food really is (21). Since Sterling’s culinary discipline is based on civilizing his food choices and practices, he loves to cook French food through which he presents himself as civilized and progressive. By cooking it, he shows that he is neither a practitioner of the uncivilized Chinese cuisine nor simply a follower of the civilized American cuisine.

The kitchen indeed becomes a place where Sterling disciplines himself and confirms his sense of self. According to Fischler, cookery “construct[s] or sanction[s] [...] the subject’s identity” (289). By cooking French food, Sterling identifies himself with the qualities of the haute cuisine. He believes that cooking French food makes him the possessor of the good taste in the eyes of Americans. Sterling therefore distinguishes himself from the image of “those Chinese people [...] [who] [p]ut cats in chow mein” (58) via his superior culinary art. His identification process always works on the binary between white food and ethnic food. Since French food is accepted as appropriate in American culinary culture, Sterling secures his white identity by cooking it. His cooking, however, culminates in his alienation from his ethnic culinary culture.

Sterling reinforces his civilized/white identity by cooking for the white ladies at the club. The ladies devour what he cooks for them. In “The Unexamined Meal is Not Worth Eating” (2006), Heldke comments on the interrelationship between the ingestion of the liminal object (food) and identity. She writes that “in eating, the “not-me” [...] becomes me” (215). The ladies’ ingestion incorporates the other (Sterling’s dishes) into their bodies literally as well as figuratively. They fill their stomachs literally. They also absorb the qualities of the dishes into their identities since each act of ingestion promises to affect the self either by securing it through the familiar foodstuff or challenging it through the unknown foodstuff. Sterling’s identification with his own cookery becomes a way for him to be one of these whites.

He becomes what he cooks, and the white ladies enjoy devouring him by incorporating his familiar dishes into their bodies. Sterling feels that with “every morsel they’ve ingested molecules of [him] borne on each bite: [He is] bonded to their insides (44). Because the white ladies open their mouths to his dishes, Sterling feels accepted in the social group (the white upper class) they belong to. He thinks that he has finally realized his American Dream through his culinary performances – especially by feeding white Americans. Ironically, Sterling’s class envy blinds him to the fact that he has to cook for these white ladies since he is their chef and servant. Unaware of his unacceptance, Sterling’s own (class) hunger commands him to continue feeding the white people.

In order to find acceptance in the white society, Sterling continues eating white food and cooking upscale dishes. The protagonist’s identification through cooking and eating affiliates him with Mannur’s term “culinary citizenship” which is first explained in her article “Culinary Nostalgia: Authenticity, Nationalism, and Diaspora” in 2007. According to her, it is “a form of affective citizenship which grants subjects the ability to claim and inhabit certain subject positions via their relationship to food” (13). Sterling comes to align himself with white Americans because his culinary practices conform to the norms of American culinary culture. Sterling’s ingestion of white food clears his system from the undesired properties of ethnic food. Sterling therefore establishes a culinary affiliation with the white middle class by means of discipline and mimicry.

Sterling’s culinary connection with American culture disavows his “descent” based relationship (Sollors defines it as the affiliations based on consanguinity) (151) with Chinese culture. His whitened appetite and practices (eating habits and cookery) point at his volitional affiliation, or his “consent” based relationship in Sollors’ words (ibid.), with American culture. Sterling’s volitional affiliation reconstructs his cultural identity based on the white ethnic core. His alimentary and culinary practices function as the agents of reinforcement of it. They however negate his ethnic identity which reveres Chinese food and foodways. The more Sterling eats and cooks white food, the more he alienates from his roots. The incorporation of the whiteness

transforms him within. Sterling's parents are troubled by this transformation. His deracination eventually becomes the source of his parents' pain.

Sterling's palatal training compels him to incorporate solely white food into his body. According to Fischler's "incorporation principle", each act of ingestion encodes a message to the self as well as to the others (277). The protagonist's consumption of white food tells him that he is an in-group member of the middle class America. On the other hand, it tells his parents that he is a "*juk-sing*" (assimilated American-born Chinese) (115) who is ignorant of Chinese culture and cuisine.

Sterling's diet gives rise to conflicts in the Lung family. It is because Sterling transgresses the boundaries of Chinese culinary culture by incorporating American food into his system. His predisposition toward whitening his palate reveals itself from a young age. It becomes the most prominent determinant of his distinction from his parents who are the members of Chinese culinary culture. Louie depicts a Thanksgiving dinner at the Lungs' place to show this distinction by pointing at the incompatibility between the two generations' understandings of this American tradition.

It just never was in their bones. No turkeys in China. [...] But for all the years of elementary school, my teachers inculcated me with the holiday. [...] Thanksgiving meals he [Genius] cooked were [...] Chinese. Served in grand Chinese style, on makeshift plywood tables, the brown paper used to package customers' laundry doubling as tablecloths. Rice bowls and chopsticks. The turkey, chopped into each-by-two-inch chunks, was parked next to bird's-nest soup, mung bean threads, sautéed abalone. The spread looked nothing like it was supposed to, nothing like Thanksgiving on TV, the turkey brought whole to the table, drumsticks wearing paper crowns, keeping company with stuffing, canned yams, celery sticks, cranberry sauce, pumpkin pie. In the end, I blamed my father for ruining Thanksgiving. (134-135)

Sterling's white indoctrination earns him a different value system than his parents'. He therefore looks at his father's version of the Thanksgiving dinner from a different perspective that conforms to the American culinary standard. From

Sterling's perspective, his parents do not know the norm for the occasion. According to the white culinary order, eating turkey is the norm of the Thanksgiving dinner. Eating red meat or seafood would mean deviation from the Thanksgiving normativity. Sterling abhors his parents' food choices for the occasion and abstains from eating their dishes because incorporating them into his body would pose a threat to his white identity.

Lupton's remarks about the relationship between food, revulsion and identity can be borrowed to explain Sterling's behavior: "revulsion for the food eaten by another is [...] a means of distinguishing between social groups" (35). By detesting and dismissing his parents' understanding of the Thanksgiving dinner, Sterling distinguishes himself from "the Chinese peasants" (he calls his parents as such) (179) and their lower class cuisine.

The differing culinary value systems of Sterling and his parents present two different views on the turkey meat. While the white culinary order defines it as good and nutritious, Chinese culinary culture does not revere it as much as the red meat or seafood. The turkey is served as the main dish on the dinner table of white Americans, but it becomes one of the side dishes on the dinner menu of Chinese people. Sterling's whitened palate naturally craves for the turkey meat, but for his parents, it is "bad-eating" (134) since it is "coarse and dry" (ibid.). According to them, "[o]nly stupid Americans eat turkey" (ibid.). Genius knows that his son is one of them so he buys the turkey meat only because of it. Genius and Zsa Zsa's full blast refusal of Sterling's understanding of the Thanksgiving dinner signifies their loyalty to their ethnic cuisine. It points at their culinary efforts to police the borders of Chinese culinary culture. Genius and Zsa Zsa preserve their ethnic acculturation because their identities are defined by it. Practicing Chinese culinary culture becomes a way of self-assertion for them. Also, in line with Mannur's remarks about the meaning of ethnic food practices to the immigrant generations, Genius and Zsa Zsa hold onto Chinese foodways because it functions as a "palliative for [their] dislocation" (2007: 13).

The concept of ethnicity presents a set of pre-determined values to its followers. Culinary practices (such as cooking and table manners) function as agents of their reinforcement. The systematic consumption of ethnic food also validates these values. By eating and practicing the ethnic, individuals continuously affirm their ethnic identity and community membership. The Lung family, however, fails to form a consolidation based on their ethnic values. The Lungs' non-stop quarrels are always rooted in the two generations' differing approaches to their ethnicity that result in the incompatibility of their dietary regimen.

According to Kalčík's classification of the three different types of performers of ethnicity, Sterling and his parents fall into different categories. Sterling fits in the first category of the performers who chooses "Americanism" (56) over an unconditional commitment to the roots. His parents are, on the other hand, the members of the second category which Kalčík defines as the community of persons who prefer to stay loyal to their ethnic origin. Neither Sterling nor his parents come up to the third category which applies to the people who can negotiate their ethnic and American identities with a pluralistic perspective. Sterling clearly internalizes the American values and thus breaks off his relation with his roots. His (Chinese) food loathing becomes the most apparent sign of his rejection of the ethnic values and norms. As a result of it, he comes to see his parents as alien immigrants who eat weird foodstuff.

Genius and Zsa Zsa likewise disregard the idea of negotiation. Unlike their son, however, they hold onto their ethnic culture and reinforce their identity by means of it. Their cultural conservatism impels them to turn down the white food their son desperately craves for. Their consumption of ethnic food indicates their strong resistance to assimilation. Genius and Zsa Zsa's ethnic shield comes to define their son as the "crazy *juk-sing*" (crazy American) (181) who is an outsider to their community.

Sterling's white-centered value system works on a class-based comparison of food choices. Louie depicts two significant scenes where Sterling's palatal training evaluates two different spaces on the nexus of class and food in order to distinguish

him from his parents through a volitional relationship. In the first one, Sterling goes through his mother's kitchen to spot her Chinese food stocking over the years. From his perspective, Zsa Zsa's kitchen is the spatial as well as the culinary sign of her Chineseness. Her refrigerator and cabinets are full of "[i]ngredients from mountain, forest, jungle, and sea. Squab, quail, black hen, beef shank; seaweed, seahorse, shark's fin; deer antler, bear gall, snake gland floating in rice wine; countless twigs, roots, berries, and leaves" (119). To the protagonist, they represent his mother's lower class taste buds and so her lower class status in white America. Adopting Masuoka's description of immigrant parents, Zsa Zsa becomes one of the "oldheads" (qt. in Kalčík 57) in the family because her maladjusted diet (represented by her ethnic dishes in the refrigerator) confirms her commitment to Chineseness and therefore threatens her son's white identity. In face of the danger posed against his sense of self, Sterling's internalization of the white judgement forces him to dismiss his mother's dishes as innutritious and thereby inedible. He relentlessly judges his mother's kitchen to secure his in-group membership of the white culture.

In the second scene, Sterling enters into the kitchen of Selma Sass (his mother-in-law). Upon his first step into it, he falls in love with the wealth and prosperity her kitchen comes to symbolize. Sterling's description of Selma's kitchen contrasts with his description of his mother's kitchen. Also, in terms of the narration, the protagonist's inspection of the kitchen in this scene is much more descriptive, so the paragraph here is longer than the previous one.

I look at Selma Sass in her apron, her liberalism reflected in the riches of the kitchen she keeps: the bulging bowls of fruit, Golden Delicious, Red Delicious, Granny Smith, Pippin, Empire, Jonathan, McIntosh, Cortland apples; Bartlett, Bosc, Anjou, Comice pears; expensive out-of-season peaches, cherries, plums and nectarines; crystal dishes brimming with walnuts, pecans, almonds, hazelnuts, brazil nuts, chestnuts; pumpkin, spaghetti, hubbard, acorn, turban squash for show; [...] the best ingredients money can buy for sides, blue oysters, Iowa pork sausage, Idaho russets, Carolina yams, Long Island corn, Cape Cod cranberries, Florida oranges. I can hardly recognize myself, an emergent madness surfaces on my face, lost as I am in such a magnificent jungle of goodness. (147)

From the protagonist's perspective, Selma's kitchen becomes the miniature version of white America. It is rich, classy and beautiful. All kinds of good quality food here show the Sassses' (Sterling's in-laws) power to buy and consume the upscale goods. It consequently points at their upper class status and palate. In this kitchen, Sterling therefore wants to incorporate each and every bit of the food into his body. His food consumption here indicates his determination to climb the social ladder. Since the regular intake of any food brings the eater its properties, Sterling grabs his chance to eat Selma's food to ensure the sustenance of his palatal training.

Sterling's desire to eat echoes Kalčik's words on the correlation between eating and identification: "people tend to eat as they would like to be perceived, so that it is as much a matter of 'you eat what you wish to be' as of 'you are what you eat'" (54). In other words, Sterling eats from Selma's kitchen wholeheartedly because he wants to become one of them by means of ingesting her white food which comes to symbolize purity and the upper class. His volitional relationship with the white kitchen shows that he confirms his cultural (American) identity and his affiliation with white Americans. In his case, therefore, food functions as a medium of becoming, or better, of whitening his identity.

Sterling's white middle class palate secures his mouth against ethnic food to reassure his white identity and socio-economic position which he finds superior to his parents'. For him, eating (or not-eating in this case) serves as an agent of differentiation. Sterling's dietary regimen as well as his cooking spark off intergenerational conflicts among the Lung family members. His profession particularly becomes the primary cause of his conflict with his parents – especially with his father. From Sterling's perspective (in his illusion), his white culinary practices (eating American food and cooking French food) symbolize his progression and therefore earn him respect and acceptance in American society.

From Genius and Zsa Zsa's perspective, however, these practices indicate their son's betrayal to their ethnic culture. Sterling's affiliation with "*fahn gee lo*" (white Americans) (348) troubles them to a great extent. When Genius and Zsa Zsa

learn their son's profession for the first time, their ethnic culinary acculturation shapes their reaction to it. They believe that Sterling cannot cook; white Americans just bewitched him into thinking that he could. Their astonishment finds articulation in the form of a question: "Who'd eat your cooking?" (28). Genius and Zsa Zsa's contention rests upon their ethnic culinary culture which defines what is edible and what is not. The white food Sterling cooks is not accepted as a healthy proper meal according to the Chinese food classification system. Because the taste and the nutritional quality of white food do not meet the standard set by Chinese culinary culture, Genius and Zsa Zsa dismiss it as the unhealthy and so the unappetizing food. Their ethnic culinary membership ensures that they lose their appetite for it. Since Genius and Zsa Zsa's ethnic dietary regimen sustains their bodies, they wonder if there would be anyone who could eat their son's innutritious food which is bad for the body. Genius and Zsa Zsa therefore disapprove their son's cooking and dismiss his food as "*lo-fahn*" (foreign) (103).

Genius especially shows his dislike and disapproval of Sterling's white food in a very overt manner. According to Chinese culinary culture, white food does not provide the correct essentials for the proper functioning of the Chinese body. Because Genius's culinary culture defines this food as unhealthy and wrong, his Chinese body reacts to it by showing signs of disgust and resistance against it. The most prominent sign of his resistance is his rejection of incorporating it into his body. The impurity and inedibility of the food keeps Genius from eating it. Genius therefore staves off his appetite for it. He does not open his mouth to it because even the tasting of it would mean transgressing the Chinese culinary borders. Genius's neophobic approach to white food signifies his commitment to the familiarity and safety of the Chinese diet.

Wong's remarks on the relationship between the mouth and identity is worthy of note here: "Opening the mouth to eat is essential to keeping alive, but the act also brings with it the threat of unwelcome intrusion" (1993: 26). Genius chooses to guard over his mouth so as to save his identity from pollution posed by the properties of white food. The resistance against the food consumption stems from the fear of the unknown.

Fischler's "contamination" theory (279) explains the restraint against the intake of the liminal object which cannot be identified by the individual's culinary culture. According to it, individuals experience fear or anxiety each time they open their mouths to eat. It is because the ingestion of the unfamiliar food entails a great risk to their self-integrity (ibid.). Since Genius's culinary membership impels him to bow down to the Chinese food classification system, he internalizes the fact that white food is the unfamiliar food. His son's white food evokes fear and revulsion in him precisely because of its unknown nature. Fearing that it can contaminate his Chinese self, Genius rejects eating it.

Sterling identifies himself by what he does: cooking white food and feeding people. He finds his father's rejection very offensive because the refusal of food indicates the denial of the feeder. Moore writes on food rejection: "refusing food is a concomitant of basic distrust and resentment of those who feed him" (qt. in Chang 2008: 360). The narrative displays Sterling's response to his father through food tropes. Since food serves as a medium of communication, Sterling shows his anger in the same way his father does: he closes his mouth against the intake of certain food. Sterling defies his father's authority by restraining his appetite against Zsa Zsa's homemade food. He degrades his mother's ethnic food and rejects eating it as a response to his father's behavior. His food rejection also indicates that Sterling's white appetite polices over his mouth so that he will not accept any criticism from his parents against his adoption of the American way. By not eating Zsa Zsa's ethnic food, Sterling gives a clear message to his immigrant parents: Genius and Zsa Zsa's ethnic food is the lower class food; Since eating it marginalizes its eater in the society, one must stay away from it. Sterling's message comes like a slap in his parents' faces as it signifies his deracination.

Louie resorts to food references and images to sustain the narrative drive which is based on the family conflicts. Throughout the narrative, food is always used as a sign of difference between the first and second generation Chinese Americans. The different dietary regimens of Sterling and his parents come to signify their differing worldviews – especially on assimilating into American society. Their

contrasting approaches to ethnic and white food give rise to serious conflicts in their family.

The Lungs' conflicts always work on the parameter of good taste. From Sterling's perspective, Genius and Zsa Zsa's immigrant origin shapes their taste buds. Therefore, they are not acquainted with white food. They consequently do not know what good taste really means. Sterling associates good taste with refinement which is symbolized by American and (mostly) French food. Hence, he even turns down his mother's offer for a cup of traditional Chinese tea saying "I don't want any of that" (84). His rejection of ethnic food and/or drink signifies his rejection of the Chinese palate which denotes the lower class. Most importantly, it indicates his rejection of his parents and his deviation from his roots.

On the other hand, Genius and Zsa Zsa do not waver in face of their son's rejection. They do not adopt Sterling's definition of good taste. They instead stay loyal to their ethnic domestication that defines good taste as the homemade Chinese food. Sterling's and his parents' contrasting definitions of good taste perpetuate their conflicts. Food therefore works as a disruptive parameter against the cohesion in the family. In Sahlin's words on the relationship between food and social relations, "food is employed instrumentally as [...] a destroying mechanism of sociability" (qt. in Lupton 37). The different food choices and eating habits of the Lungs keep them from communicating and understanding one another.

The narrative unveils scenes that delineate the family conflicts based on the discordant understandings of good taste. In these scenes, the notion of good taste is extended to food presentation. Sterling's and Zsa Zsa's different perspectives on food presentation inflame the conflicts in the family. Sterling's white identity highly reveres food presentation. According to the white culinary culture, if food is appealing to the eye, it would be more appetizing. It affiliates visual satisfaction with good taste. Sterling's loyalty to the white culinary center turns him to a master who prepares visually satisfying dishes for his diners. He "douse[s] the tarte Tatin with Grand Marnier and cognac, [...] ignite[s] one of the cakes, then exits the kitchen, a crown of blue flames in [his] hands" (46) for the sole purpose of satiating white

Americans who are ready to eat with their eyes. Sterling accomplishes his mission since his diners let out their satisfaction through their ecstatic exclamations.

Genius and Zsa Zsa's understanding of food presentation highly differs from their son's. According to their culinary culture, the availability or accessibility of food is more important than its presentation. If there is a home-cooked Chinese meal (no matter how modest it is) on the dinner table, it surely possesses the requisite qualities of good taste. Genius and Zsa Zsa therefore do not understand their son's insistence on glamorizing the objects which are only needed for satisfying the physiological needs of the body. For them, the sustenance of the body is more important than pleasing the eye.

Genius and Zsa Zsa's prioritization of the body is due to their immigrant life conditions. These conditions determine their socio-economic position in the society by affiliating them with the working class. Since their position enables them to work only at menial jobs, Genius and Zsa Zsa work at the laundry. They use their bodies because the job requires a great amount of physical work. Physical durability is therefore significant for them. Their approach to food is consequently shaped by a mindset that focuses on the restoration of the body. They do not care "how food is served, just as long as there is food to serve" (367). For Genius and Zsa Zsa, food serves as an instrument of survival. They do not have the luxury of getting entertained by the appearance of food.

The differing views on food presentation give rise to bitter arguments between Sterling and his parents. Since Sterling's disciplined appetite craves for white food and his white culinary indoctrination values the civilized dining etiquette, he grows bitter at his mother's ethnic dishes served in the communal pots and pans. He hates that "Zsa Zsa rarely bothered to transfer [her food] from the steam pan to a serving dish" (367). For Sterling, Zsa Zsa's unconcernedness to food service/presentation becomes a sign of her lower class status and thereby her uncivilized nature. He therefore abstains from sitting around his mother's dinner table and eating her dishes. He comes to detest Chinese culinary culture which only reveres the physical satiety of its practitioners almost in a barbaric manner. Sterling

shows his disapproval of his mother's (as well as his father's) uncivilized food presentation by paying extra attention on the appearance of his dishes. He denigrates his parents' definition of good taste by calling it "medieval" (105). As a result of his internalization of the American culinary norms, Sterling becomes an "odd person" (234) in his parents' eyes. His persistence on food presentation/glamorization enrages them to a great extent.

3.2. The "Famine": Rejection by the White Hegemony

In the narrative, Sterling's realization of his socio-economic position (a cook/servant in the white society) is a pivotal point that comes to affect the course of the family conflicts sharply. Once Sterling understands that he does not belong to the white middle class America and that it is his illusion that affiliates him with *true* Americans, he becomes desperate to realize his American Dream. He understands that his self-discipline is not enough for him to become one of white Americans. His whitened appetite and table manners point at his mimicry of the world he is not a part of. In order to realize his class aspiration and thereby distinguish himself from his parents and their lower class status, Sterling resorts to another type of (food-centered) mimicry – acting like "a goofy bucktoothed immigrant [Chinese chef] who is humbled and grateful" (348) for having been let into America. In line with Cacho's review of the book, Sterling "compl[ies] with culturally racist dominant narratives of Asians in order to achieve socioeconomic "success"" (378). To put it another way, in order to climb the social ladder, Sterling establishes a culinary relationship with his ethnic culture by means of his exploitation of it.

White Americans associate the exotic food (ethnic food) with visual satisfaction/satiation. It is their way to exploit ethnic cuisines (and cultures). In his article "Boutique Multiculturalism" (1997), Fish defines cultural colonizers as "boutique multiculturalists" (378). According to him, they exploit the foreign cultures by trying out their foods, clothing and any other cultural practices while posing as multiculturalists. Their adventures satiate their stomachs and their eyes. Their openness to different ethnicities/cultures appears as an act of charity. Despite its inclusive approach toward the other on the external level, it actually works on

his/her exclusion by means of his/her (further) marginalization. In line with Fish's definition, **Barbarians'** white characters can be seen as "boutique multiculturalists" because they literally push Sterling to cook (exotic) Chinese food for them. They desperately crave for it just to appease their eyes. Their hungry gaze is an invitation to Sterling. Knowing this, Sterling grabs his chance to appease their hunger in order to find acceptance in the white society.

Upon his father-in-law's demand (a white upper class Jewish man), Sterling starts his TV show to prepare exotic Chinese dishes for the white fake multiculturalists. He becomes an insider of Chinese culinary culture by cooking Chinese food. Adopting Browder's words, Sterling's "ethnic impersonation" (qt. in Dalessio 422) of a Chinese chef gives him an access to his ethnic culture. However, his insider position does not make him a real practitioner of Chinese culinary culture. His affiliation with it is not based on his sincere feelings, but rather, it is motivated by his objective to satisfy his white viewers' appetite for the exotic (and most importantly palatable) Chinese food and to obtain their love and affection. Sterling therefore manipulates his insider position and gives his white exploiters what they want to see: a humble and timid (and most importantly foolish) immigrant who cooks mysterious dishes from the Middle Kingdom. Sterling knows that, in his daily life, he is "not the kind of Chinese that viewers want to see" (348) so he learns to "act" (298) like one to please them. Sterling's acting of the stereotypical image of the Chinese turns him to a comical figure who is after his American Dream at the expense of his ethnic heritage.

Sterling becomes a TV star by exoticizing the ethnic Chinese recipes he snatches from his mother. With their exotic names and familiar (safe) ingredients, his Chinese dishes conform to white Americans' definition of the exotic food. Motivated by his desire for social mobility, he presents a glamorized version of "the plebeian fare the masses apparently want" (210). His food presentation appeals to the white public precisely because of its focus on exoticization and palatability. Rosalind Coward's re-definition of Chin's term "food pornography" (qt. in Lupton 24) can be borrowed here to explain whites' attention on the appearance of the exotic food. According to her re-definition, the term comes to mean that food functions as a

source of gratification through the pleasurable sensations its appearance ensures (ibid.). Sterling's food presentation offers his white viewers the chance to experience "food pornography" (ibid.) through their consumption of the visuals of his exotic dishes. He therefore succeeds in appeasing the hunger of the white fake multiculturalists.

Sterling's "famine" (class envy) (3) is not satiated by feeding his white viewers. It is because their (visual) consumption of his dishes does not bring his acceptance in American society. Their consumption corresponds with their exploitation of his ethnic culture and its members. As a racially and ethnically marked subject, Sterling is therefore manipulated by the white masses. His compliance with whites' understanding of Chinese food does not award him with their approval. As a result of it, Sterling does not pass as one of *true* Americans.

Sterling shows his awareness of his exploitation in one episode of his TV show. During his acting, Sterling suddenly drops his comical persona when he spots a well-known ingredient on the kitchen counter: salt. By means of collective memory that ensures his momentary acceptance of his ethnic culture, Sterling starts telling the history of salt looking directly at his white audience through the camera. His version of the history of salt differs from what his Western education has embedded in his mind. He rejects the white metanarrative on salt by remembering a suppressed history and exposing it to his audience. He looks at the camera and tells his white viewers, "salt was invented by the Chinese [...] The Chinese were the first to cultivate salt. We flooded fields with seawater, and after its evaporation, we harvested the remaining crystals from the soil" (332-333). Sterling's awareness of the silenced history and his use of collective "we" here initially indicate his possible return to his roots as they point at his affiliation with the Chinese field workers. Remembering the origin of salt, which is the "staple of life" (332), offers Sterling a chance to re-establish his ties with his ancestors as well as with his parents. However, despite the momentary insubordination to the white rhetoric and rule, Sterling's re-telling does not result in his full acceptance of his ethnic culture and history. His recollection of the forgotten is not enough for him to embrace his ethnic identity unconditionally.

Sterling's rejection by the white hegemony does not wear him down. He continues to bow down to the white norms and perform the white culinary practices. His unwavering loyalty to American culinary culture exasperates his parents. His exotic food presentation on TV disturbs them especially. Genius and Zsa Zsa comprehend neither the dishes Sterling cooks nor the character he plays on TV because their culinary enculturation does not recognize them. Sterling's and his parents' conflicts over food and food presentation come to break the fragile bonds between them.

In the narrative, the disintegration of the Lung family becomes most apparent through the absence of commensality. From the beginning until the very end, there is not even one scene in the narrative where all the members of the Lungs come together around the dinner table. Eating together is an important factor in sustaining the sense of togetherness in the family unit. In the domestic realm, family members confirm and reinforce their identities by gathering around the dinner table and sharing food that appeals to their (common) taste buds. The act of commensality reveals the changing relationships and subject positions in the family. Therefore, as Lupton states, "[t]he 'family meal' and the 'dinner table' are potent symbols, even metonyms, of the family itself" (39). Throughout the narrative, Sterling and his parents never share food in the private or the public realm. Their contrasting definitions of the appropriate food and conflicting understandings of good taste keep them from gathering around the dinner table. The absence of commensality in the Lung family breeds the absence of their family unity. The Lungs' dinner table reveals the extent of their conflicts and points at their insolubility. It therefore signifies the family members' alienation from one another. It also shows that the Lung family deviates from the social norm that associates the concept of family with the sense of togetherness.

Throughout the narrative, Sterling does nothing to improve his relationship with his parents. His class shame impels him to stay away from them. He therefore remains devoted to his palatal training and continues to mark his difference from them especially by cooking white food. Sterling's cookery becomes the potent sign of his character. Since cooking offers a process of "culturing" (Lévi-Strauss 41)

based on the specific rules of the cuisine at stake, Sterling comes to cultivate his identity through his white cookery. In other words, Sterling uses his cooking skills to continuously affiliate himself with the white middle class despite its rejection of him.

Fischer's reflection on the relationship between cookery and identification is significant to understand Sterling's identification process. According to her, "cookery [...] give[s] [...] a place in the world, a meaning" (286). By assimilating into the white culture and abiding by its norms of cooking, Sterling shows his determination to improve his socio-economic position in American society. His identification through his white cookery results in his disownment of a part of himself (his ethnic identity) which is not recognized by his cultural (American) identity. At the end of the narrative, Sterling therefore still does not share his parents' understanding of ethnic food and foodways.

In the last scene of **Barbarians**, Sterling rustles up "Genius's cracker stew" (371) for Moses's (his son) sake. While serving it to his son, he introduces it as a Chinese dish of which recipe Genius brought from his home country. Sterling's cooking of the 'ethnic food' initially shocks the readers as it signifies a sharp twist that can disrupt his white identity by polluting it. However, at that moment, Sterling discloses the fact that the ingredients of the concoction are "just flour, water, sugar, milk, and salt" (372), the mass produced products, which are bought from the American supermarkets. Hence, there is not any sign of it to ensure that it is an ethnic dish. In his ignorance of Chinese culinary culture, Sterling comes to believe that the concoction is authentic Chinese and so tells his son that it is "[t]he real thing" (ibid.). Sterling's understanding of the concoction (and ethnic food in general) completely differs from his father's understanding of it. Genius fixes this concoction on his modest dinner table when he arrives in America for the first time. It is born out of his socio-economic condition in the society, and it has therefore no connection with Chinese cuisine. Sterling's inaccurate re-definition of it as the authentic Chinese food marks his difference from his father and points at his deracination. It indicates that he guards himself against Chinese culinary culture, and as a result, he is not aware of the requisite qualities that identify ethnic food. At the end, Sterling still

shows his adamancy on white food and foodways. Because it is the only way for him to pose as a real American.



CONCLUSION

Food is an indispensable object for humankind. It is occasionally dismissed as an everyday normality. Our consumption of food is not only for our physical sustenance. Our food practices (food preferences, cooking styles and eating habits) work to confirm our sense of self besides alleviating our hunger. Since each act of ingestion is a way to *become*, we keep on affirming our identities by eating the culturally appropriate food. Our manners of eating also reinforce our identities by marking our distinction from people with different eating habits. Being highly symbolic, our food preferences and eating habits always disclose who we are, or who we choose to *become*.

The significant impact of food and foodways on the construction of identity is the motivation behind this study. Since Chinese American Literature is rich in food images and culinary references and fraught with identity conflicts, this study has focused on these properties and associated them with the concept of family in the analyses of the chosen novels. In this study, I have argued that the interaction between the restrained Chinese appetite and the social parameters of class and sexuality produces an appetite which works against the normativities imposed by Chinese culture. The nonconforming food choices and sexual orientations personalize and reinforce it. This personally re-defined appetite negates the ethnic (culinary and sexual) practices and thus comes to disrupt the coherence in Chinese American families. I have analyzed the destruction of the social relations in the family unit on the nexus of food, identity, sexuality and queerness in Ng's **Eating Chinese Food Naked**, and I have also read it on the intersection of food, class and identity in Louie's **The Barbarians Are Coming**.

In my reading of Ng's **Eating Chinese Food Naked**, I have tried to delineate Ruby's construction of a fluid (cultural, ethnic and sexual) identity through her varying food choices that completely dismiss the normativity of her ethnic culture. I have argued that Ruby's insatiable appetite deconstructs the rigid classifications on food and sexuality and thus ensures her alimentary, cultural and sexual movements against the workings of her ethnic culture which enforces regularity and stability in

its practitioners' lives. My analysis has shown that Ruby's adoption of a rich diet satisfies her changing sexual and physical hunger but precisely because of it, it disturbs her relationship with her parents who are strict followers of the ethnic dietary regimen and heterosexual normativity. From an alimentary perspective, it has been seen that Ruby's queer subjectivity poses a threat against her parents' static identities, and thereby, it gives rise to the intergenerational identity conflicts in her family. In the end, it has been revealed that **Eating**'s queer narrative gives its countenance to its protagonist's queerness on food, sex and identity.

Louie's **The Barbarians Are Coming** has been reviewed by unearthing its kaleidoscopic food and class references. I have initially pointed out that Chinese food is foreign to the white culinary system and so it threatens the white American body with pollution. It has been underlined that Chinese food is defined as the lower class food, and its consumers are stigmatized through its inferior status in the white society. I have argued that Sterling's aspiration to move up the social ladder impels him to dismiss the ethnic lower class food, which contaminates his identity, and forces him to discipline his appetite and culinary practices based on the norms and values of the white culinary center. Sterling's adoption of the American diet and eating habits whitens his identity but it does not grant him full acceptance in American society. Even if he does not pass as one of white Americans, his white culinary performances still mark his difference from his parents who are identified by their consumption of the lower class food/ethnic food. My analysis has also shown that Sterling's and his parents' different culinary membership gives rise to serious conflicts in his family.

The analyses of these novels prove that Chinese American Literature is abundant in alimentary and culinary images. These literary works point at the recurrent portrayal of the strong interrelationship between food, identity and intergenerational family conflicts in Chinese American Literature. The feasts offered by these nutritious novels have been chewed on slowly to appease my hunger for food-reading. By peeling off their alimentary and culinary tropes, I have tried to show that **Eating** and **Barbarians** are distinct main dishes on the same dinner table. The nutritious value of their content and their narrative taste and smell invite the audience for diverse reading experiences.

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