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林玉玲在<<月白的臉:一位亞裔美國人的家園回憶錄>>中跨國別身分的形成

Formation of Transnational Identity in Shirley Geok-lin Lim's *Among the White Moon Faces: Memoirs of an Asian American Woman*

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中文摘要

本文將以跨國別身分的觀點來探討林玉玲的<<月白的臉:一位亞裔美國人的家園回憶錄>>。本論文將以林玉玲從馬來西亞到美國及新加坡的遷移路線為章節框架進行探討。論文中討論林玉玲如何在她所面臨的亞洲及西方文化中產生的衝突，交互，以及平衡的過程中轉變自己的身分。第一章闡釋變動性的遷移地點表面上是地理位置的跨越，但同時也暗寓文化層面的跨越。同時，此章節也提及跨國別的身分透過文化表徵的轉移而建構成型。第二章呈現在馬來西亞時，林玉玲在父系為重的中國家庭及個人為主的英國西方教育體制中面臨衝突的價值觀。林玉玲的母親選擇離開男權至上的家庭影響她對母親心理依附的關係以及反抗傳統的性別價值觀。第三章描述林玉玲身為一位外來者居處美國異地的錯置和疏離感的經驗，以及她如何透過美國公民身分的取得來轉變自己的身分。此章節也談及林玉玲如何透過解構性別的二元化分及建構她的美國家庭來排解她經歷亞洲和西方文化交互轉移時所面臨的困惑。第四章節敘述在新加坡時林玉玲重新評量及重新闡釋她受家鄉馬來西亞和新接受國美國所薰陶的文化身份。此章節也表現出林玉玲如何協商她的多元身分以及如何透過亞洲及西方文化的融合來轉變自己的身分。第五章總結林玉玲和多元文化互動下所擁有的一個嶄新的跨國別身分是奠基於家鄉馬來西亞的傳統文化規範的解構，在接受國美國中獲得的自主意識，以及在新加坡時傳統和自由開放的意識形態所產生的調整和重建。

關鍵字: 林玉玲，跨國身份，文化表徵，文化轉移

ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to explore Shirley Geok-lin Lim's *Among the White Moon Faces: Memoirs of an Asian American Woman* in the view of trans-national identity. The framework of this thesis is centered on Lim's migration routes from Malaysia, to the United States, and Singapore. The thesis discusses how Lim transforms her identity in the course of the conflicts, the interaction, and the balance between Asian and the Western cultural legacy she faces. Chapter One explicates that the shifting migrant nodes denote geographical border-crossing and connote cultural border-crossing as well. This chapter also mentions that the idea of trans-national identity is under construction through the transference and transit of cultural significations. Chapter Two represents the contradictory sense of values Lim perceives from her Chinese patriarchy family and the British individuality education in Malaysia. The escape from the male supremacy Lim's mother opts for influences Lim's border-crossing in her psychic affiliation with her mother and her anti-traditional sense of gender. Chapter Three depicts Lim experiences the sense of alienation and displacement as an alien resident in the United States, and shows the way how Lim transforms herself with her possession of American citizenship. Besides, this chapter also illustrates that Lim is on her way to de-confuse the interactive transference of Asian and Western cultures imprinted in her through deconstructing the gender binary and constructing her American home. Chapter Four portrays that Lim re-evaluates and re-interprets the cultural identities cultivated by her homeland Malaysia and the hostland America while she is in Singapore. This chapter also shows how Lim negotiates her multiple identities and transforms herself with the fusion of the Asian and Western cultures. Chapter Five concludes that the new trans-national identity Lim claims after her interaction with diverse cultures is based on the

deconstruction of the conventional cultural norms in her homeland Malaysia, the autonomy awakening in the receiving America, and the reconstruction and adjustment of traditions and liberal ideology in Singapore.

Key Words: Shirley Geok-lin Lim; transnational identity; cultural signification; cultural transference

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One

Introduction

In 1996, Shirley Geok-lin Lim published *Among the White Moon Faces: Memoirs of an Asian American Woman.* This memoir reflects the war-torn and post-colonial Malaysia in the mid-20th century and depicts Lim's experiences as an Asian woman in Malaysia and as an immigrant in the United States. Her birth background combines Chinese and Hokkien. In addition, she flights between Malaysia, America, and Singapore. She weaves the threads of her experience through a journey to borderless cultures and manages to juxtapose multiple cultural identities and engenders transnational identity through her writing so that she displays acceptance and interaction of different cultures instead of separation. In consequence, her memoir shows her changing and flowing identity from an Asian woman to an Asian American. In Lim's process to acquire the new Asian American identity, she suffers lots of tortures and stereotypes but eventually she survives the challenges. Thus, this thesis aims to discuss how Lim deals with the identity conflicts in her routes to Malaysia, the U.S. and Singapore in *Among the White Moon Faces* (hereafter referred to as *Among the White Moon Faces*).

The discussion of the Asian American identity can begin with a survey of Asian American immigration. The early Asian immigrants to the United States are mostly Chinese male working-class labors, coming with an American dream of earning a fortune in California, the Gold Mountain, in 1845. As Ronald Takaki observes a couple of months prior to the enactment of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, 39579 Chinese were shipped into America (40). They represent one-fourth of the entire miner laborers in California and compose the majority of the Asian community (Takaki 79).[1] Because of the Gold Rush, thousands of

[1] Therefore, the Chinese immigration experience here will be employed to generalize Asian American immigration experience in this thesis.

people flood into California and the largest group of Chinese immigrants is considered a threat to the Untied States. The Chinese Exclusion Act is passed in 1882 so that Chinese immigrants are barred from entry into the United States. From 1902 to 1904, another unfair immigration regulation, Immigration Law, is enforced, and the Chinese are restricted from not only entry but also claim for American citizenship. Being "American" means white and mainstream, which seems at odds with the Asian identity. The Asian immigrants in the United States and the dominant Americans are always in a tense relationship.

Early Asian immigrants are viewed as a minority group and under racist treatment and regarded as "sojourners" and settlers endeavoring to make a fortune and returning to homeland (Yin 5). The gold-seekers are considered sojourners, temporary settlers, with no intention of staying in the United States permanently. They want to claim themselves as Americans. However, as Elaine Kim notes, early Asian Americans are considered in Anglo-American literature as "unassimilable aliens" (1982, 9).[2] Under the western gaze, they are portrayed as savage and sexual degradation along with negative stereotype like laziness, exoticness, and cruelty. In turn, these immigrants do not see themselves as Americans but as "*huaquiao*, or overseas Chinese" (Wong 1997, 40). As they cannot acquire their American citizenship, they turn to their inherent Asian bonds for comfort (Yin 5).

"A small American-born generation" in the 1940s see the assimilated identity of Asian Americans (Wong 1997, 46). According to Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, this generation is influenced by the "assimilationist ethos of the time" (1997, 46). It is those native-born Asian Americans who are caught in-between by both of their Asian and American identities. They are in dilemma on account of their desire for American citizenship and self-negation of parental Asian culture. According to Takaki, Asian Americans in this period "felt the pushes and pulls of two worlds" (260). America is their birthplace; however, Asian country is their

[2] Xiao-huang Yin argues that the early Asian immigrants are considered "unassimilable," simply because they are excluded from the dominant cultures.

motherland. Different from early Asian Americans seeking American citizenship or returning to homelands, the American-born Asian Americans want to root themselves in the United States. Yin agrees that they can not turn to their parental Asian homeland for comfort, for America alone is their homeland where they were born and brought up (118). Because of the difference between ancestral homeland and present birthplace, the American-born Asians encounter complex identity problems while dealing with the identity conflicts between Asian and American countries. Despite the fact that they are born in the United States and legally have integrated identity of both America and Asia, yet, their birth in America does not guarantee their cultural place in the United States. They are viewed as neither Asians nor Americans by each race group. Yin says that "they were Chinese by face but bore the impact of mainstream American culture" (118). Amy Ling perceives that Asian American women's "facial features proclaim one fact—their Asian ethnicity—but by education, choice, or birth they are American" (20). The complexion of American-born Asian Americans estranges themselves from involvement in the white society. Growing up in the United States since their birth, they have a greater desire to possess American citizenship than the early Asian immigrants. What concerns them most is to be seen as Americans rather than foreigners or Asians. They are in search of a solid place in the dominant culture instead of seeking the Asian bonds of origin. Even though America-born Asian Americans are inherently of Asian ancestry, they are born and grow up in America, receive English education and speak English fluently. They are anxious to break away from their inheritance of parental Asian culture, and consolidate their own place in the American territory (Yin 118). They have intense craving to assimilate themselves into the mainstream culture instead of being alien in the American culture (Yin 119). As these native-born Asian Americans adjust themselves to full assimilation into the mainstream American culture, they become unfamiliar with the Chinese heritage.

Since the 1960s, the diversity and multiplicity of Asian American identity emerges (Yin

234). These Asian Americans embrace both new American identity as well as ancestral Asian heritage rather than discard their Asian identity. Sau-ling Wong proclaims that in the late 1960s and early 1970s Asian Americans can claim for "full membership in American society" rather than being racial minority (1997, 40). They do not claim for one single nation, nor do they deny their original Asian identity; they face transnational identity with positive attitudes (Wong 1997, 40). Asian American identity no longer centers on differentiations, confrontations, inequality, and binary oppositions between races. Instead, the emphasis has been laid on the ways to make the large American society a reservoir of heterogeneity, hybridity, and originality of each culture. Lisa Lowe argues that images or cultures transform beyond the limitation of binarisms and dichotomies, and she further suggests the breakdown of the binary logic of hegemonic politics of Asian American identity, either Asian or American (31). Distinguished from the stereotypical hierarchy, transnationality disavows discrimination and separation against any other race and seeks the affinity between multiplicities. The crossroad and mutual influences on cultures lead to the fluidity of Asian American identity. For Su-ching Huang, the idea of transnational identity refers to "straddling the fence of Asia and America—seems to offer an all-encompassing approach. Instead of confining themselves to one nation/culture, Asian transnational immigrants shuttle between two, construct their home in both places, and claim to build a bridge in between" (78). Gradually, the national borders become porous through an individual's migrant movements and the transnational identity is under construction through the ongoing interaction between cultures. The consciousness of the Asian American identity arises among such Asian American writers as Amy Tan, Frank Chin, David Henry Hwang, Jade Snow Wong, and Sau-ling Wong, to name a few, and their works also mirror the negotiation and reinterpretation of the transnational identity.

What composes the transnational identity has been discussed by critics. King-kok Cheung in her essay "Re-viewing Asian American Literary Studies," remarks:

> A significant switch in emphasis has [. . .] occurred in Asian American literary studies. Whereas identity politics—with its stress on cultural nationalism and American nativity—governed earlier theoretical and critical formulations, the stress is now on heterogeneity and diaspora. The shift has been from seeking to "claim America" to forging a connection between Asia and Asian America; from centering on race and on masculinity to revolving around the multiple axes of ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality; from being concerned primarily with social history and communal responsibility to being caught in the quandaries and possibilities of postmodernism and multiculturalism. (1)

Cheung upholds that the core of Asian American identity has been changed from "identity politics, cultural nationalism and American nativity to heterogeneity and diaspora" (1). To be more specific, Cheung contends that the connection between Asia and Asian America helps engender the combination of different cultures and create hybridity of identities and cultures. In other words, instead of fixing race and gender roles on an individual's national identity, one's connection between Asia and America has been concerned with social and cultural multiplicity of ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality. What's more, the prevalence of multiplicity and heterogeneity make their own way out of the previous eagerness for Americanness. An individual's identity is not confined to one nation alone any more. It is not Americanness but new Americanness, transnational identity that these Asian American immigrants are in pursuit of. The act of national border-crossing serves as the very first step on the way to claim transnational identity.

Amy Ling proposed the idea of "between worlds" to characterize transnational identity. Ling's idea of "between worlds" refers to the blurred national borders as well as the feeling of otherness within the white culture. For Ling, between worlds denotes the position of one caught between the cultures of the homeland and the adoptive country. She also states that

Asian American identity is in "the struggle for personal balance that is the experience of every American of dual racial and cultural heritage" (xi). In addition, responding to Ling's "between worlds," Susan Koshy also observes that "ethnicity is increasingly produced at multiple local and global sites rather than, as before, with the parameters of the nation-state" (316). Koshy's viewpoint indicates that distinct from the previous boundary-limited national identity, more Asian Americans shift their national identity into the transnational one. Besides multiple sites, Koshy stresses the constant shuttle between nations or residences. She illustrates that "ethnicity metamorphoses at multiple sites of transit, return, and arrival in the movement between and within nations; it can no longer be solely defined through the negotiation between origin and destination" (338). For immigrants, rather than anchoring at a certain "nodal point," the ongoing action of pursuing identification or belonging will be on the road at all times (Koshy 339). That is, immigrant identity does not simply belong to their birth place alone. As immigrants straddle on different sites, their identities are on the way to be transnational. Likewise, Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan claim that "circuits of transnational capital through a celebration of hybridity construct an apolitical collage of locations and people, linked not through their historicized social relations but through their mystified experiences as players in a field of global travel" (7-8). Similar to Koshy's idea of multiple sites of transit, for Grewal and Kaplan, transnational identity refers to the connection of different locations and construction of interrelations between different nations and people. That is, multiple locations provide as the base for hybridity linking not only locations but also identities. People embark on their migration journey with their original cultural experience as well as their acceptance of brand-new cultural patterns.

The claim for the transnational identity relates to three aspects— multi-cultural identities, transference of cultures, and refunction and juxtaposition of multi-cultural significations. The first idea comes to the co-existence of the multi-cultural identities. Each cultural pattern can co-exist without the loss of its originality. With the physical shift between two nations, each

national culture has the opportunity to interact with each other. The variations within the influence of multiculturalism "have transformed the nature and locus of literary production, creating a highly stratified, uneven and heterogeneous formation, that cannot easily be contained with the models of essentialized or pluralized ethnic identity suggested by the rubric Asian American literature" (Cheung 315-16). Leaving single nationalism behind, multiplicity, heterogeneity, proliferation of variety is characteristic of the idea of the transnational. To Koshy, "the transnational is not antithetical to the national; it both reconstitutes the national, and exceeds it in crucial ways" (340). When two cultures converge, what different cultures generate is not only difference but also similarity. In earlier times, immigrants strive to break in the impasse they faced in a new environment and repress their nostalgia toward their root cultures. However, at present, immigration to the U.S., besides the adjustment to the American customs, it also

> reestablish[s] links to the home-country, return visits under a new status, and the entry of family members into the U.S.. Within this context, becoming American does not necessarily involve a loss of the home culture, or a choice between ethnicity or mainstreaming as in earlier patterns of immigration to this country. (Koshy 335)

The passion for Americanness does not equate the disclamation of homeland. New identity and new culture patterns can coexist with the original that one has for life. Transnational identity includes the shifts between multiple locations, and the search for root turns into the route to transnational identity. On the way to construct transnational identity, the subject crosses national boundary; the circuit of different sites enhance the possibilities for an individual to get exposure to multiplicity and hybridity of cultures.

Another step of claiming for transnational identity has to do with the cultural transference of locations. The movement of the transnational subject represents the cultural transference of locations, including the cultural originality and cultural spirit. Shu-mei Shih's

perspective coins “signification in action” and “signification in transit” to indicate the exchange and interaction between significations (13). Shih explains that “contexts are multiple [. . .] because images and other visual products go places and signify different things in different places” (13). Signification is similar to image, norms, values, and everything related to one place, such as race, gender and culture. Shih employs “signification in action” to refer to the transplant of one culture moving into another new culture. The transnational subjects cross borders from the original cultures. They feel free to demonstrate their cultural styles featuring their inherent national culture within the new country, so that their demonstration of their original cultural values helps themselves find affiliation to their ancestry in the new culture and the new place. “Signification in transit” means that the images transfer from one place to another. It signifies the flowing and traveling of images or cultures. Once transnational subjects carry their original cultures into this new territory, both the new and old culture can juxtapose with each other and even engender a heterogeneous culture retaining the particularity of each culture. “Signification in action” and “signification in transit” typify cultural transnationality, for both “action and transit” exemplify the crossing movements of cultures and identities and the exhibition of the originality of cultures. The transnational culture emerges through the transgression of national boundary and the fluidity of cultures between worlds, which display the multiple facets of cultures.

Echoing Shih’s proposal of “signification in action and in transit,” W. J. T. Mitchell claims that “images have legs [. . .]. As they travel with or without legs, they may acquire and lose some aspects, and their meanings inevitably ‘refunction’ in new contexts to engender place-specific associations” (7-9). Similar to Shih’s flowing signification, Mitchell reasons the characteristic of the transnational. Images or cultural significations are not completely unchangeably confined to national borders. Instead, cultures travel and generate varied meanings in various sites. That is, cultures acquire new interpretations and play new roles when they are associated with other cultures. Cultures function and mean differently within

different societies. The transnational subjects and host citizens impose new interpretations on their place-specific cultures. Through immigration, transnational meanings are ongoing and relate the old illustration to the new one and also enable the old one to refunction and illuminate within a new society. Transnational identity not only enables one culture to refunction in another country, but it also helps cultures transform. When different cultures meet, some conflicts or confrontation may arouse; yet, after a period of fraction, the two turn disaffiliation into affiliation and coexist. Henceforth, each indigenous culture reworks in the new environment and regenerates new interpretation after their accommodation and refunctions with the place-specific meanings. Therefore, what transnational approach does is more than accommodation into the mainstream. An individual with multi-cultural identities can juxtapose diverse cultural significations at the same time and maintain the originality of each culture without any distortion. The transnational subjects are allowed not only to preserve their indigenous cultures but also to be accepted by the dominant culture.

Shirley Geok-lin Lim's *Among the White Moon Faces* speaks for a multi-national and multi-cultural Asian American. A Malaysian Chinese American, Lim grew up in an Asian immigrant family in Malaysia, child of a Chinese father and a Peranakan mother who was an assimilated Malaysian Chinese and lived in an extended family of many relatives. Lim went to a Catholic Convent school where she had the rigid British colonial education and became a baptized Catholic at the age of eleven. The Malaysian society where she was brought up is rich in multiple cultures, which enriched her life with western values, such as American movies and fashions. However, in Malaysia, Lim was uncertain about her future female role, for she lacked a feminine figure to follow at the age of eight. Lim had confusion about her gender values. She disliked the traditional female role her mother and stepmother play and hated the unsexed figures the Catholic nuns represent; yet she had no ideal female model to cultivate her gender values and discipline her female behavior. Besides, she also met several men, such as Professor James Hugh, Ben, and Iqbal. She experienced the gender hierarchy

and inequality in her relationship with James Hugh, Ben, and Iqbal, with whom Lim was forced to demonstrate Asian female signification. In length, Lim refused to fall victim to traditional female role by ending those suffocating relationships.

Around the age of twenty-five, Lim left Malaysia for America to achieve her academic ambition. At the beginning of her immigrant route, she suffered from alienation and dislocation. In her workplaces, Lim encountered the gender inequality, but she still reached her academic goal as being a professor with her distinguished academic performance. What's more, with Charles, who became her husband later, Lim had more peace and equality and had more freedom to be an independent woman chasing her ideals. In the United States, Lim constructed her American home with her husband and her son, Gershom, which provided her with an opportunity to build bonds with the American community and made up for her loss of family support. However, Lim was still faced with a dilemma between her family devotion and her career pursuit. She re-thought about the female identity she yearned for and attempted to present both the Asian and Western sense of gender values.

Besides the U.S., Singapore as another home country was not strange to Lim. Even though Lim's mother left Lim and her siblings behind, Lim still went to visit her several times in her teens. There she perceived her mother's female character, mixture of modernity and tradition. For Lim, she liked the modern style her mother introduced to her. On the other hand, Lim disliked the silent role her mother played while her mother stayed with another Chinese man. In Singapore, Lim and her mother both had the intention to repair the estranged relationship with them. Despite the catalyst Gershom, the mother-daughter relationship remained incomplete. Psychological fissure existed between Lim and her mother in spite of the efforts Lim made to be a daughter to let go of her abandonment memory. In addition to the recall of the experienced regretful abandonment, Lim came to Singapore as a female writer and scholar. Although Lim could not escape from the conventional female stereotype Singaporeans imposed on her, her unusual gender values acquired in both Malaysia and the

U.S. distinguished herself from other Singaporean women. Lim had lectures on university and Singaporean women, inspiring them to free themselves from the conventional female values without demarcating the traditions. Singapore witnessed Lim's transnational identity in aspects of gender values and family kinship.

This thesis intends to discuss Lim's *Among the White Moon Faces: Memoirs of an Asian American Woman* with central idea of juxtaposition of multi-cultural significations. "White Moon" reveals Lim's mixed transnational identities of American and Asian. White refers to the Americans, a white race. Moon implies the yellow color representing the Asian race. Moreover, the plural forms of "faces" and "memoirs" suggest that Lim's self-identity is not bound to one single country. The two plural forms clearly reveal Lim's transnational identity, which crosses the geographical boundaries as well as cultural, social, and psychic ones to decode the rubric idea of being loyal to one single nation. The three nations mentioned in this memoir are Malaysia, the U.S., and Singapore. Lim was born in Malaysia, and at her age of eight, her mother left them for Singapore. In Lim's teens, she traveled to Singapore to visit her mother. When Lim was twenty-four, she headed to the U.S. for her dreams. As soon as Lim leaves Malaysia for the U.S., she embarks on immigrant journeys, including her immigrant route to Singapore. The Asian American identity Lim portrays in *Among the White Moon Faces* does not conform to either the status of racial minority or integrated identity into the dominant culture. Instead, her identity transformation is a representation of transnational identity. She transgresses national borders among Malaysia, the U.S., and Singapore, and through her interaction with multiple cultures in Malay, the U.S. Singapore, Lim stands for and acts out the signification of Asian woman values in these three places and she serves as the medium for cultures to converge. Even though Lim undergoes harsh identity conflicts in the mainstream white society, she still makes good use of her constant interaction between multiple locations and cultures to make her way out of the confinement of national borders and succeeds at the quest for transnational Asian American identity. By means of her

immigrant routes to Malaysia, the United States, and Singapore, Lim re-views her transnational identity in terms of cultures and family kinship.

The following chapters will be divided based on national borders and each chapter will respectively discuss Lim's identity development and interaction in three nations, Malaysia, the U.S., and Singapore. Each chapter will cope with the way how Lim demonstrates the simultaneous juxtaposition of cultural identities, transference of cultures, and refunction of cultural significations in new social contexts. Chapter Two shows that the cultural heterogeneity of Lim's family signifies the juxtaposition of multiple cultural identities. In addition, her British elite education in Catholic Convent School inspires her with western values, which play a significant role in her formation of transnational identity. Chapter Three depicts that Lim experiences the transference of cultures and the sense of alienation and displacement as an alien resident in the United States, and shows the way how Lim transforms herself with her possession of American citizenship. Besides, Lim is on her way to de-confuse Asian and Western cultural values imprinted in her through the interactive cultural transference in her workplaces and her American home. Chapter Four portrays the simultaneous juxtaposition of multi-cultural significations in a new place and the way how Lim re-evaluates and re-interprets the cultural identities cultivated by her homeland Malaysia and the hostland America while she is in Singapore. Chapter Five concludes that the new trans-national identity Lim claims after her interaction with diverse cultures based on the coexistence of the conventional cultural norms in her homeland Malaysia, the autonomy awakening in the receiving America, and the multi-cultural juxtaposition of traditions and liberal ideology in Singapore.

Chapter Two

Lim's Multi-Cultural Identities in Malaysia

This chapter examines the beginning of Lim's formation of transnational identity in her homeland Malaysia where she encounters confusion and ambivalence about her self-identity in terms of culture. It will use the idea of simultaneous juxtaposition of multi-cultural identities to discuss the influence of Lim's multi-cultural ancestral lineage upon her. The focus will be on the ancestry heritage of her grandparents, parents, and Lim herself. Besides, the father-daughter relationship, mother-daughter one, and stepmother-daughter one will be illustrated to show the impacts of multiple transferred cultures and values upon Lim. The heterogeneity of her grandparents' cultures provides Lim with cultures beyond borders. Besides, what Lim perceives of her father is beyond gender and cultural borders. Lim's father represents the typical patriarchy power upon women. In addition, Lim's father influences Lim's westernization of language and sense of values. Concerning Lim's mother, Lim describes her intimate bond with her mother Emak when she was little. Even though the intimacy between Lim and Emak becomes thin, Lim's mother in Lim's mind is a potential female role model. As to Lim's stepmother, Peng, Lim feels estranged from her on account of her representation as a traditional Chinese female.

Lim's inborn identity speaks for the multiplicity and hybridity of cultures in her family. Her Malaysian family represents the transference of cultures starting from her grandfather, parents, to her. Lim's grandfather comes from Fujian province to Malaysia as an illiterate immigrant laborer. Through industriousness, her grandfather grows a prosperous family. Fujian province belongs to China and exhibits Chinese culture. Lim's grandfather transgresses national borders from China to Malaysia and simultaneously transplants Chinese culture into the Malaysian society. The parents of Lim's mother had resided in Malaysia all their life and they are both descents of Chinese traders moving to Malay and getting married

with local Malaysian women. The Straits-born Chinese mingled and intermarried with Malays, and gradually developed another cultural pattern. Emak's parents are Malaysians of Chinese origin. They represent the assimilation and fusion of Chinese and Malaysian cultures. The national border-crossing leads to the mixed identities that Lim's parents have. Lim's father is a Chinese descent of a South Sea Chinese family, and is actually a Hokkien of origin. Her father also loves Western culture greatly. Lim's mother is a Nonya, interchangeable with "Peranakans," a Malaysian calling for a woman, and the term suggests a Malay-born person of Chinese descent and experiences assimilation into this heterogeneous Malaysian society, once colonized both by Portuguese and British Empire for four hundred years. Lim's father wants to break away with Chinese inheritance and marries a peranakan woman standing for the combined cultures of Chinese and Malaysia westernized by British ideology. In turn, the cultural identity of Lim also crosses from Chinese to Malaysia, and even to the Great Britain because of the British-colonized Malaysian society. The cultural border-crossing repeats in Lim's ancestral origin and the co-existence of different cultures complicates Lim's cultural identity.

The heterogeneity and simultaneous juxtaposition of cultures exemplifies in Lim's full name, Shirley Geok-lin Lim. Lim bears multiple cultural identities inherited from her grandfather and parents. She mentions that her birth certificate shows her name as Lim Geok Lin, which is a Hokkien name and is picked from her grandfather's prior name list for his grandchildren. Even though Lim was a Malaysia-native, yet her ancestral origin is Chinese. Lim's naming means the signification in transit.[3] Her grandfather's Chinese naming method is applied to her, a Malaysian-born girl. "Geok" shows that Lim is from the female third generation of grandfather's line, and "Geok" is the Hokkien version of the most common

[3] According to Shu-mei Shih, "signification in transit" means that the images transfer from one place to another. It signifies the flowing and traveling of images or cultures. (13)

Chinese female name, "Jade" (*Prologue* 2)[4]. The naming demonstrates the juxtaposition of Lim's varied cultural identities consisting of Asian and Western cultures. "In the social hierarchy constructed in a Confucianist family, all members of the family know where they stand in relation to everyone else, in an order of social importance that is reiterated in naming" (Lim 1994, 36). The way of naming signifies respective cultures. Besides, Lim's name exemplifies the transference of Asian and Western cultures from her father's westernization. She was named after the American child-star Shirley Temple, who represents her Baba's fantasy of the West. Lim is just her Baba's fascinating girl-child, for she doesn't have blue eyes, golden ringlets, or anything western-like. She is merely a Malayan girl who has nothing western but speaks the language of the West. From her name, Lim has gotten intertwined with various cultural identities. She thinks that people live with "too many names, too many identities, and too many languages," which characterize the hybridization of cultures, languages, and identity (5). Lim's full name suggests the simultaneous cultural juxtaposition of China, Malaysia, and the West.

The wedding of Lim's parents was juxtaposes of Chinese and Malaysian cultures. They got married before the Pacific War broke out in 1944 (58). It's a traditional peranakan wedding. The photography of Lim's parents shows: "She wears an ornately embroidered headdress that sweeps almost a foot above her smooth pinched face [. . .]. His costume is a long Chinese gown, like a mandarin's robe [. . .]. The peranakan costumes testify to the young couple's acceptance of the conventions of Malaccan peranakan society" (58). The embroidered headdress Lim's mother wears signifies Chinese culture. Lim's father, a Chinese descent living in Malaysia, still signifies his Chinese ancestry through his apparel. The Chinese costume is transferred to the Malaysia culture in their Malaysian-style wedding. The

[4] The part of prologue is placed in the front of the text of this memoir without page numbers. In order not to mix readers up, the reference is cited as this way.

wedding represents the juxtaposition and interaction of different cultures.

Lim's father, inheriting Chinese culture and affected by Malaysian and the Western cultures, signifies a stereotype of Chinese man exercising patriarchy in his relationship with Lim's mother. Lim's father, a descendant of Hokkien origin, also experiences the heterogeneity of cultures in his early life. Besides the Chinese family background, he has received British schooling for five years and passes Senior Cambridge Examinations. He pursues leisure and ease, and loves Western popular culture. In the Confucian society, he is considered an irresponsible child. At the age of nineteen he got married with Lim's mother two years junior to him. His "unsettled, pleasure-loving" personality causes conflicts between his needs and the family's needs in his later life (59). He opens a shoe shop when Lim is five or six and they have their own house. Her father has a prosperous business, but at that time, he has a quick temper and unchecked (47). As a traditional Chinese man, he dominates the whole family, including his wife and children, whom he has beaten for no specific reasons. The beating of Lim's father leaves horror upon Lim's mind and estranges her from her father. She feels that she cannot count on her father's love and remarks "that moment as the consciousness of another self, a sullen within, hating the father who beat me" (55). Lim's hatred toward her father's slapping and whipping gives her "an enormous sense of secret power" (53). Instead of silently accepting her father's brutality, Lim engenders the rebellious idea of fighting against patriarchal dominance. When she was seven years old, her father was caught in a scam and owed a lot of money. At last, he went bankrupt and lost his shop. Since then, Lim and her siblings have suffered destitute and homelessness. Once, Lim's father hit Lim's mother because of their quarrel over his coming home late. For Lim, her father's malice toward her mother is unbearable. In traditional Chinese culture, men have great power manipulating women and children. The violence Lim's father has toward his family shows his stereotype of gender roles and influences Lim's viewpoints of gender roles.

Even though Lim bears a multi-cultural identity of Chinese, Malaysian, and the Western

one, her family centers on Chinese disciplines. In Malaysia, Lim grows up as a Malaysian girl and was taught to behave like a decent girl. Under the traditional gender system, Lim is "given the trappings of a girl-child: like an antiquated pleasure machine" (43). Girls are like objects for sense pleasure. Lim recalls her memory in her girlhood with tea-sets, blond dolls, dresses, ribbons and her treatment as a girl (43). Lim remarks that

> My name birthed me in a culture so ancient and enduring "I" might as well have not been born. Instead, "we" were daughters, members of a family that placed its hope in sons. Something condescending and dismissive, careless and anonymous, accented the tones in which we were addressed. Girls were interchangeable. They fetched, obeyed, served, poured tea, balanced their baby brothers and sisters on their lips while they stood in the outer circles of older women. Unnecessary as individuals, girls need concern nobody, unlike sons, especially first sons, on whose goodwill mothers measured their future. My girl cousins and I, collectively named Precious Jade, were destined someday to leave our parents' homes, claimed by strangers, like jewels given up to the emperor of patriarchs. No wonder we were valued generically as girls and seldom as individuals. (*Prologue* 2)

Lim delineates the destiny that a Malaysian girl faces in a Chinese-dominated society where boys are preferred to girls. In traditional Asian culture, girls are inferior to sons, and thus girls are not meticulously named. Girls are born to play a docile and restrictive role and are demanded to sacrifice themselves for their families and males. In other words, girls have no individual identities and are seen as the same, for they are attached to men. They are taught to do domestic chores, such as making tea and taking care of younger siblings, and to be submissive and condescending within families. Lim tends to be an anti-traditional woman to challenge the arbitrary gender values imposed on men and women.

Besides affecting Lim's viewpoints on gender roles, the westernization of Lim's father has impacts on Lim's border-crossing in language. Because of the cultural transference in

Lim's growth background, her language choice is greatly under the influence of her multiple family languages, such as Hokkien, Malay, and English. Ever since Lim was born, she has been exposed to Hokkien, but she resists speaking it because the language of South People makes her feel disowned in her birthplace. Lim doesn't feel "familiarity, affection, and home" in the Hokkien-spoken family (23). She was born to her grandfather's big house, but she did not feel belonging to the circle. Hokkien is the language of her grandfather's inheritance. Lim speaks Malay, her mother's language. Besides, her father's fascination with the Western culture influences her profoundly. In Lim's family, she is almost immersed in an English-oriented living environment. Her house is loaded with English newspapers, magazines, *Reader's Digest*, *National Geography*, and two film magazines. Lim remarks that her father communicates with them in English upon the children attend school at the age of six. She even expresses that when she is six, she chiefly speaks English and is good at it. Her father's westernized sense of values also impacts Lim's acquisition of the English language. His fascination with the Western culture helps Lim to cross language border.

Lim's mother is a *nyonya*[5], a Malaysian-native woman, and has a close relationship with Lim while Lim was little. Lim describes her mother as a knowing and funny woman living through senses. Lim's mother, compared with other women in town, receives better education and has a Standard Six Certificate. She is literate and is able to calculate. Her mother dresses elegantly and elaborately, and loves Western beauty. She perfumes herself with cologne imported from Germany. She only reads magazines about Hollywood stars. Lim's mother is a fashionable woman and has a good taste for beauty. Nevertheless, Lim portrays the traditional woman role her mother plays in her grandfather's house. When Lim is little, her mother in her memory does her chores and remains voiceless in an extended family. To the infant Lim, in the extended family her mother is "an outsider, and silent in their presence" (22). She does

[5] It refers to the women who are descendants of the early Chinese settlers in Malaysia.

not even remember her mother's figure in the extended family. Lim says that "my enclosing mother dimmed into two hands washing, holding, penetrating me, neither a face nor a shadow" (23). Lim's mother is not entitled to speak in the family, but she takes care of children dutifully. The aloofness between Emak and the Hokkien extended family may result from the language barrier, for Emak speaks only Malay and English. Therefore, with the language barrier and as a voiceless woman, Lim's mother is ignored in the family. Yet, Lim's calling her mother Emak, a Malaysian calling for mothers, and her employment of the Malay language instead of Hokkien language connote Lim's close attachment to her mother. But to Lim, the infantile relationship she builds with her mother begins from her bathing scene at the age of three. She recalls:

> Before there is memory of speech, there is memory of sense. Cold water from a giant tap running down an open drain that is greenish slime under my naked feet. My mother's hands are soaping my straight brown body. I am three. My trunk is neither skinny nor chubby. It runs in a smooth curve to disappear in a small cleft between my two legs. I am laughing as her large palms slide over my soapy skin which offers her no resistance, which slips out of her hands even as she tries to grasp me. I do not see her face, only her square body seated on a short stool and a flowered *samfoo* that is soaked in patches. (21)

Even before Lim can speak, she senses the intimate love her mother has for her. Lim details her mother's hand motion on her body, which shows Lim's closeness with her mother. Lim's first interaction with her mother is full of laughter, which suggests they build good mother-daughter relationship in the very beginning. Lim pictures her mother's complexion through body contact instead of a clear delineation about her mother's face.

However, Lim feels ambivalent about her mother. Except for the nursing days, Lim has no memory of her intimate connection with her mother. "I have no memory of that primal bonding, no memory of hugs, kisses, physical affection, the kind of comfortable, safe bodily

pleasure taken and felt in the presence of a loved other" (56). The intimate physical interaction between Lim and Emak does not give Lim a ring. This recalling implies that the relationship between Lim and her mother gradually diminishes. Furthermore, Lim ponders:

> this childhood sensation of gazing upon the maternal face,
> rather than of living within the maternal breast, I wonder if the break was mine, coming from an infant's original coldness to the mother. Or did the break originate in my mother, unable to or refusing to nurse the infant, to whom she hovers, as a face, but never satisfies and fills up, as a breast? (57)

Lim is eager for her mother's love, but she cannot see her mother's face clearly. She thinks that her mother's breast can only satisfy her hunger but not the emotional emptiness. She narrates that "the absence of physical intimacy, the coldness I felt even as a very young child toward my mother, may be, in part, derived from the history of war-time maternity" (62).

Lim's mother serves as the transformative subject that changes her traditional female role into a woman with self-affirmation in defense of her own right. Around the age of eight, Lim's parents had fierce arguments with each other for months. Lim's mother got hit by her father. What's worse, Lim's father even went out with Peng, the maid of Lim's family. Besides experiencing the destitute and malice from Lim's father, Lim's mother also suffers from the spiritual emptiness. Emak's sisters are also the women that Lim does not want to be like. She says that "I learned in self-defense to stand apart, not to be like Mother and her sisters, who wept helplessly and who ran away and gave themselves to helpless men" (47). The female figures Lim encounters in her Chinese family do not suit her ideal model. Lim does not want to either depend on men or believe in fate. Lim would like to create a space of her own. Pauline T. Newton points out that Lim's "limited and strained relations with her large Malaysian family, especially her mother, Emak, do not provide her a balm for her self-consciousness" (110). Lim's Malaysian family is based on Confucian thinking which

stresses patriarchy. Therefore, within an extended Malaysian family, Lim's mother always remains silent and plays a devoted mother role. However, for Lim, her mother's voiceless commitment to the family is not what Lim wants to be in the future. That is, the silent role of Lim's mother in the big family demonstrates what a decent woman should behave. Through her father's malice and patriarchy dominance, the seed of rebellion against orthodox gender role breeds in Lim's inner mind. She wants to challenge the traditionalized Malaysian society. Lim desires to move out of the conventional gender border and stretch her female identity freely. Lim's mother used to be a traditional woman. Similar to the traditionalized gender role of Lim's mother, Lim's aunts also undergo the stereotype of a woman role. Of these traditional women, only Lim's mother courageously transforms herself into an untraditional woman figure.

The departure of Lim's mother means a fight against the patriarchy that she has faced. Nina Morgan asserts that in traditional Chinese culture, girls and women "are not usually accepted in a masculine world where equality, individuality, and social freedom were opportunities one might fight for" (218). In the traditional culture, women are taught to follow men's orders rather than pursue their personal freedom. Lim's mother does not give in to the male mistreatment; instead, she chooses to free herself from the suffocating confinement by leaving the family. Her departure from her children and family not only creates a new life for herself but also provides her only daughter Lim with female role. In Lim's eyes, her mother's leaving results from her father's misdeed. Lim feels pity about the odds her mother has experienced. Neither resentment nor pity and forgiveness does Lim has toward her mother's departure. Lim lacks a female role to follow after her mother left. Emak's leaving on the surface disconnects her interaction with Lim; however the demonstration of Emak's feminist consciousness awakens the unorthodox thinking of gender role in Lim and sets a potential female role model on her.

Lim's stepmother typifies the inferiority of women and their subjugation to men in a

Confucian-gated Malaysian society. Peng, once the maid of Lim's family, becomes Lim's stepmother when Lim is ten. Peng "was strong, skilled in needlework, a good cook, thrifty, and already practiced in all the demanding chores of laundry, housecleaning, and child care" (92). She is a traditional woman who does domestic chores and provides mother care. Peng, unlike Lim's mother who speaks English, knows Mandarin, minimal Malay and no English. When Lim's father remarries Peng, Lim's father has lower social status than before. Lim's father, a patriarchal man, displaying his superiority of being a man through keeping an inferior woman as his company. Compared to Emak, Peng is doubly inferior. Peng, the daughter of a servant of Lim's family, acquires inadmissible social class. Besides, different from Lim's mother, who speaks Malay, English, and little Hokkien, Peng is almost illiterate, and she speaks only Chinese. Lim's father can strengthen his male power in Peng's dwarfed status and illiteracy. As a traditionalized woman without much education, what dwells on Peng is to contribute herself to the family and her husband. In contrast, Emak is a well-educated woman appealing to equality between men and women, and at last leaves the oppressed life for a free one. Moreover, the Chinese culture Peng represents confronts Lim's rebellious gender idea, and the relationship between Lim's father and her stepmother makes Lim sense that "sex was not forbidden, but it greatly complicated what we young women could plan of our lives" (158). For Lim, her stepmother becomes a personal belonging to her father through the sexual relationship. In another source, Lim says that

> the Asian women for centuries have been used by a patriarchal society [. . .] de-centered in traditional customs [. . .]. Not possessing economic power, she has been able to value herself only in the biological and domestic reproductive system, as mother and home-maker, values that rest on her ability to attract a mate, on her sexuality. (Lim 1994, 24)

Sex means responsibility which changes women's lives and makes women revolve around the family with little personal freedom. Women are caught in traditional gender values without

personal choices. Lim refuses to accept Peng because she does not act like a woman with independent thinking and female self-consciousness. Her desire to challenge traditional gender role comes to the surface.

Peng's Chinese culture distances her from Lim, who rejects to conform to the male-dominated Chinese culture. "Peng's place in our family was central and total. At the same time, we children proceeded as if she were absent in our midst" (91). Lim has a poor impression on Peng who was "sullen and unsmiling toward me from the very beginning" upon the first meet (92). Besides, Peng waits for Lim's father coming home and be nice to him alone. Lim's alienation from her stepmother results from her disagreement about the repression and oppression women suffer from in the Chinese culture. Lim would like to demonstrate another dimension of her nontraditional sense of gender values. The seed to be like Emak, challenging the gender norms and pursuing her own life, breeds in Lim. In addition to cultural barrier, the barricade between Lim and her stepmother also comes from language discrepancy. Lim remarks that

> I do not remember a conversation with her in all the eight years I continued to live in the same house with her, although we addressed each other occasionally and exchanged remarks. She spoke no English and minimal Malay; I refused to speak Hokkien to her. We barricaded ourselves behind our different languages [. . .]. Our mutual hostility remaining unexpressed and seemingly contained. (92)

Lim, refusing to speak Hokkien, rejects to have communication with her stepmother, who only speaks Chinese or Hokkien. The language border separates Peng from Lim. Lim further expresses the cultural and language barrier between them. Lim says "we were Western-educated children [. . .]. Our home culture was altogether Anglophone, including magazines, newspapers [. . .]. Peng was a thoroughly Chinese woman. Barely literate in Mandarin" (92). Lim refuses to accept Peng, typical of a Chinese woman role, and turns down the containment of Chinese patriarchy culture. Lim's emphasis on the Western

education she receives highlights her longing to act out her Western cultural identity, which is distinguished from Peng's Confucian-dominated Chinese identity.

Malaysia itself is a place where there is no pure ethnicity so that it embodies hybrid and heterogeneity of multiple cultures and languages of all time. Since four hundred years ago, the Malacca had been colonized by different colonizers, such as Portuguese, Dutch India East, and the British Empire. Therefore, the Malay is not a culturally homogeneous country. On Malaysian streets, one can perceive many exotic scenes, such as Hollywood movie posters, cinemas with Latin names, Indian newsstands. Lim was born in a Malaysian extended family where the ancestry of family members varies from Fujuan, Hokkien, Malaysia, or assimilated Chinese. They speak various languages, such as Hokkien, assimilated Chinese, and English. The language individuals speak represents and acts out their cultural identity. Lee Su Kim claims that "both the linguistic and cultural symbolic systems that an individual is raised in will play an instrumental role in socializing an individual, and in shaping his perceptions and his persona" (1). Lim's growth in such a heterogeneous cultural background enables her to be exposed to multiple languages and cultures. The cultures and languages shown in Lim's family and the society also signal the multiplicity of the different cultures. However, Lim considers the Malaysian society biased. For example, the dominant language is English placed as the top choice. The preference of language indicates the bias in the multi-cultural Malay.

For Lim, since living in such a culturally heterogeneous society and a multi-cultural family, identity is a mixture of languages and cultures:

> For my mother's people, the Peranakans—a distinctive Malayan-born people of Chinese descent assimilated into Malay and Western cultures—mockery and laughter accompanied our mélange of Chinese, Malay, Indian, Portuguese, British, and American cultural practices. Laughter acknowledged we were never pure. We spoke a little of this, a

> little of that, stole favorite foods from every group, paid for Taoist chants, and dressed from Western fashion magazines, copying manners we fancied. (5)

The statement Lim makes about her multiple identities is related to the collage of locations and people. The multiple identity of Lim's mother, a Malaysian of Chinese descent, typifies the hybridization of Chinese and Malaysian cultures. Besides the blending of Chinese and Malaysian ancestry, Malaysians were colonized by the British for a long period of time. Naturally, Malaysians were exposed to Western values. Although such a heterogeneous identity seems to bring Lim a kind of unease, on the contrary, Lim, in her very early years, was getting into the multiplicity of cultures and languages. She does not sever herself from different cultural experiences she has had. Her openness to various cultures, either Asian or American styles, makes herself a mixture of multiple cultures and identities. This paves the way for the formation of the transnational identity Lim tries to pursue in *Among the White Moon Faces*.

The British education Lim has received from the age of six to seventeen plays a significant role in her language choice of all languages she is exposed to, and helps Lim acquire Western values. She speaks fluent English because of her British education and her father's westernization. Besides spoken language, Lim is enthusiastic about written language. During Lim's school years, learning alphabets, Lim feels that alphabetical letters broaden her narrow sensory world and teach her a world beyond her imagination. She loves writing (poems) at the age of nine. She was inspired by English poems. She shows great passion for writing in English. From then on, she cannot help but keep writing, and she expects herself to be a poet in the future. She desires to master the English language, and recreates it. Because in Lim's mind, there is an inspiration she acquires while reading William Blake's lines and then turns into her belief of writing. She mentions:

> I was a child who never saw the universe as outside myself, but when I

> read Black's line, "To see the universe in a grain of sand," I understood myself to be both the marvelous grain of sand and the speaker who made that image possible. Life's miseries dissipated into the sharp fertility of sense through my fixed idea that all I saw and felt would become words one day. The ambition for poetry, a belief in the vital connection between language and my specific local existence, was clearly irrational, even perhaps a symptom of small madness. (114)

William Blake's poetic lines inspire Lim to experience a world from her self-perception, which helps build up her own world. Her daily experience in Malaysia and her employment of English generate a new subject, for the written English language substitutes for the visual images Lim sees in the heterogeneous Malaysian society. At that time, Lim has strong perception about words and she thinks that turning her life experiences into words is a process of relocating herself within her daily life. In the process of self-relocation, Lim's identity is also under ongoing transformation.

Writing, for Lim, is a way to depict the world she lives in. She expects her writing to be full of various cultures, which characterize and enrich the Malaysian society. Furthermore, what she cares about writing is to create another new image of her homeland Malaysia. What's more, she anticipates that writing helps build bonds with others. The act of writing shortens the distance between her and the Malaysian society. Lim attempts to get herself out of the strangeness of the Malaysian milieu. In an interview by Pauline T. Newton, Lim interprets that

> writing should be an act of finding affiliation. It should imagine community, offer the possibility of solidarity; point to relationships rather than to the modernist condition of alienation. I would like to find some other place of resonance than of nihilistic despair or masculine heroism alone against an indifferent world. I would like to find a counter dream to the

> dream of 'Call me Ishmael,' to Huckleberry Finn taking off alone for elbow room—all these Lone Ranger, Marlboro men figures. I would like writing to help us find families in each other. ("Cultural Roots" 171)

Writing, the written language, is not confined to literary production or creation: it can help communicate with others or cultures. What writing creates is not alienation and displacement but affiliation and selfhood. Moreover, this statement reveals Lim's longing for another place to transform herself. She would not like to be tied to a "masculine heroism" society where women have no space to stretch themselves.

With Lim's hybrid ethnicity and culture background, she undergoes the transference and juxtaposition of cultures by receiving different Western values through the British education. Lim's family essentially is an Asian Confucian family, which emphasizes the importance of moral percepts, ethics, and clan dependence. Compared with the Western education she receives, Lim senses the distinction between her Chinese discipline and the Western values from one poem in the English textbook.

> Lim learns "The Jolly Miller" from her brother's school rendition, which causes her to think about the idea of community in Chinese society and that of individuality in western cultures. The lyrics "I care for nobody, no not I, And nobody cares for me." This is the western ideology, singularity. (97)

Different from Chinese ideology, which emphasizes the value of the community, this poem clearly exposes Lim to another opposing sense of value, the idea of individuality. Brought up in Confucian traditions, Lim was disciplined to respect others and to have interdependence and sharing. The Asians have the tendency to be connected with the communal interests. The Asian-centered Malaysian society stresses the shared affiliation. By contrast, the axis of the Western education is central to the idea of individuality and singularity. The miller in the poem is characteristic of the Western ideology of individuality. The idea of individuality

means that an individual is separate from other people. An individual does not necessarily have to conform to the collective life or norms. Instead, an individual can live to fulfill his/her own needs and desires. An individual can be distinguished from the community. One can have the realization of singularity. Through the British education, Lim perceives the multiplicity of different cultures such as the western culture and would like to act out the Western idea of individuality to transcend herself from Asian cultural-identity.

Lim thinks of individuals as the seeds in pomegranate, which signifies the interaction of Malaysian and Western cultures. Pomegranate is an Eastern fruit from Persia. Ping-Chia Feng interprets pomegranates as symbols of "traditional Chinese values and familial system" (138). However, in the pomegranate, there are plenty of seeds. Lim wonders whether "within the pomegranate's hundreds of seeds is also contained the drive for singularity that will finally produce one tree from one seed?" (98). Lim's desire to get out of this tradition-stressed society is strong. Her individualism is further illustrated with her statement: "We are all mimic people, born to cultures that push us, shape us, and pummel us; and we are all agents, with the power of the subject, no matter how puny or inarticulate, to push back and to struggle against such shaping" (99). Lim states that even though she is born in a society claiming homogeneity and assimilation, she can still resist against such an assimilated ideology. Each individual is the agent of himself/herself, and one can be in quest for newness and distinctiveness. What Lim prioritizes is "to break out of the pomegranate shell of being Chinese and girl" (99). This reveals her inner voice of defying a traditional role shackling her free development. Lim has a strong intention to break away with "other familial/gender/native culture that violently hammered out only one shape for self" (99). Lim strongly refuses to fall into victim of conventions past down for generations. She hunts for diversity and variation rather than the sameness. Her intense passion for uniqueness is at stake and motivates her to break away with old values of family and gender cultures.

Catholic education imparts a conservative female role to Lim, which contradicts Lim so

that she wants to free herself from the gender stereotype. The Catholic school is a single-sex school, and girls are educated to be decent and lead restrictive life. When Lim attends school at six, she desires to go alone without the servant's companion. Lim says that "it was the convent school that gave me the first weapons with which to wreck my familial culture" (99). By the name of attending school alone, Lim feels "I was, like my brothers, free from domestic female attachment" (99). Her plea is the first step for her to claim her independence. When Lim turns fourteen, at the Catholic Convent School she is considered a naughty girl for her talking back to teachers. Lim's rebellious acts challenge teachers' disciplines and social gender conventions. Her misbehavior always gets her punishment, for she does not obey the manners that decent Malaysian girls must have. Females are educated to be voiceless and under patriarchy domination. She feels confused about the clear picture of being a woman because "no mother lectured her on female morality and warned her of unfeminine ways" (138). In Lim's mind, she feels perplexed with "the difference between what appeared manifestly correct to me and what adults with power—my parents and teachers—insisted on asserting or denying" (109). Even though Lim learns that typical Malaysian girls need to hide themselves behind "self-protective skill of silence", a self-consciousness different from conventional disciplines emerges in Lim's mind (107). She regards that her "naughty" behavior can be attributed to her "stubborn spirit" (107). She further remarks that "the burn of defiance in my chest became a familiar sensation" (109). Both usages of "stubborn spirit" and "defiance" make an implication of Lim's rejection of traditions, particularly the orthodoxy gender values. Lim does not follow the required pattern of being a familial and subordinate woman. Through the transference of cultures, Lim has the potential to fight against patriarchal norms and exhibits another new female role beyond the confinement of gender binaries.

Besides as a learning institute, Catholic school is where Lim tries to search for a female role model. She studies at Catholic school from six to seventeen when the school is Lim's

entry to a teenage girl identity. Not choosing to fully accept the stereotypes of Chinese Malaysian women, Lim craves for another untraditional female identity. Lim says "as a child, I had no clear models of womanhood. My stepmother was repugnant, while my missionary teachers represented themselves as unsexed humans" (136). Emak leaves Lim before she can see her as a feminine model. Her stepmother is a traditional woman, who resolves around her husband and her family without personal space. The nuns Lim meets at Catholic school also stress the importance of chastity and see silence as a feminine way. The departure of Lim's mother arouses Lim's consciousness to turn down the whole acceptance of traditional female role represented by her stepmother and Catholic nuns. Despite the fact that Lim is clear about what she does not desire, yet, she cannot figure out what kind of woman she should be. She feels like fighting against the gender binary; yet, she is not ready to construct her ideal female identity.

Education not only provides Lim with an opportunity to learn the English language and western values but also serves as a catalyst to evoke her female consciousness. Lim's desire to challenge conventions can be attributed to the transference of Western cultures. Even though obedience and silence are required traits of females, at Catholic school, Lim tries to break away with the conventional gender boundary through her untraditional adolescent companions. She says that "My westernization took place in my body, I wanted movement: the freedom of the traveler, the solipsism of the engine, the frenzy of speed, that single intensity inseparable from danger" (134). To be different from the prudish girls, Lim hangs up with rebellious girls like Mandy and Kim to resist the traditional social rules and even gender values. Kim and Mandy are singing sisters with American-style behavior drawing much attention from boys. The image of these two nontraditionalized girls makes a great contrast to other traditional Malaysian girls. "They stayed out late, danced closed, dressed in tight clothes, and didn't mind what people said" (140). Regardless of her brothers' warning, in Lim's mind, only through the companion with these two ill-mannered girls can she overcome

the convention-controlled society and create her own restriction-free space. Therefore, her solution is to seek comfort and support from the socially unacceptable girls.

Lim's violation of social restrictions imposed on women further reveals her ambition to transform herself into an unconventional woman. Because of her lack of a proper maternal figure to follow, she is at a loss while facing the transition from a teenage girl into a woman. Lim undergoes the cultural exchange through deliberate transgression of sexuality taboo to confront the Malaysian female virtue. Leslie Bow upholds that "sexuality mediates between progress and tradition, modernity and the 'Old World,' the United States and Asia. Sexuality becomes a gauge of progress, a gauge that informs the interface between Westernization and modernization" (11). For Lim, the transgression of sex border is a sign of being away from tradition. Lim's desire and the traditional gender expectations for women are in conflict. She simply wants to challenge or overcome the taboo of sex. Her action reveals the disjunction between her ambition and the familial standards. She regards the transgression of restrictive social norms as an act of progressive transformation and westernization. Not being domestic in the tradition-based country, she resists these social controls by manipulating her own body. Lim challenges these restraining gender controls confining women to limited liberation, which also mentions her pursuit for women liberation as her step to be an anti-traditional female.

As a teenage girl, Lim continues to figure out what kind of woman she longs to become. She writes in an essay,

> For years, I continued to believe that there was a kind of woman I wanted to be. But not my absent mother or silent stepmother, not the punitive nuns or my friends' sad mother, nor the rubber women my brothers laughed hysterically at, not jealous Mandy or acquiescent Kim. The problem that confused me for years, until the years themselves shaped their own ironic answers, was what to do with my life as a woman: not simply, what kind of

> work I wanted, but how to grow up as a woman. That problem kept bringing together what are usually mandated separates—sexuality and career, emotion and intellect, the personal and the professional. ("Cultural Roots" 150-51)

Lim's anticipation of the entry into adulthood is smoothly realized in that there is no suitable female model presented to her. Although at a loss to locate her own woman role, at least, Lim is quite aware of the female roles she dislikes. For Lim, the stepmother only causes hatred to her instead of likeness. As for the missionary mothers at the Convent School, they value the chastity highly and seem to be unsexed, and Lim is uninterested in leading a punitive life. Regardless of the sense-pleasure days with her schoolmates, Lim is aware of her ideal woman role, who does not idle around with men all day and abandon ambitions. She strives to learn 'how to grow up as a woman' without a positive maternal figure.

Before Lim can get herself a clear image of womanhood, she searches for female identity and gender values through her relationship with several men she met in Malaysia. She meets Professor James Hugh in the university. In their interaction, James Hugh represents the patriarchy power while Lim demonstrates as a traditional woman figure. Lim's intelligence and academic performance are derided and Lim cannot stretch herself freely. Even though in Lim's mind, she devalues patriarchy and seeks way to get liberation out of it, yet, her behavior repeats the conventional woman of silence and compliance. Ben, instead of the hateful dominance over women' freedom, he has another suffocating control over Lim. Lim's relationship with Ben makes Lim feel that "I zig-zagged between valuing the claustrophobic security of Ben's possessiveness and acting on a growing confused discontent" (185). His strong desire to claim his possession of Lim is another type of restriction for Lim, who needs space to refresh herself. Lim does not want to be tied with Ben all the time and becomes his domestic property. Otherwise, her belonging to Ben will be much the same to Peng's revolution around her father. Lim's longing for freedom cannot bear

the tight attachment to male's control.

Another man, Iqbal, is more like the residue of patriarchy system and strengthens Lim's motivation to deconstruct the social binarism of gender roles. Once, Iqbal holds a party and asks Lim to cook and serve. Then, Lim is in a dilemma whether she just gets married with him, or she can freely pursue her academic ambition. Lim's interaction with Iqbal is much similar to the traditional mode. Iqbal orders Lim to take care of the household chores which makes Lim cry at her own submissiveness and at that moment she feels sullen and silent. She considers herself a woman who is a "live-in Malay maid whose place in the apartment was functional and without rights" (194). Rather than giving in to the deprivation of her private space and liberty, Lim makes a decision to make a cut with the male-dominated power, and thus is determined to end up her relationship with Iqbal.

The image of home is introduced with the heterogeneity of Lim's family background traced from the transference of cultures from her grandparents' lineage. The multiple cultures Lim experiences help her have simultaneous juxtaposition and transformation in cultures, languages, and even gender roles. Lim's childhood experience of her parents' marriage is not pleasant. They both are characteristic of traditional gender roles. Lim has a strong intention to get rid of the limitation of arbitrary gender binary and desire an intact home. In the very beginning of this memoir, Lim mentions that "before I could learn to love America, I had to learn to love the land of unconditional choice. The searing light of necessity includes my mother and father, characters whom I never would have chosen had I choice over my history" (21). The statement that Lim critically makes negates her parents' role. Her father violently treats his family. Yet, her mother is forced to leave her family and shelters herself in another area. As John J. Geoghegan says, Lim's judgment about her parents is "highly flawed" (211). Although Lim is critical of her parents' role in the family, she has emotional bond with Emak. After the departure of Lim's mother, for Lim, she lacks a mother figure, which the stepmother Peng cannot substitute for. Avtar Brah upholds that home connotes our networks of family,

kin, friends, colleagues and various other “significant others” (4). Lim’ mother plays an important role in awakening Lim’s feminist consciousness and Lim’s longing for a spiritual home.

By the contact with different men, Lim broadens her viewpoints about the ideal gender roles between men and women. Lim gets to know what kind of relationship with men she wants—not tight attachment and dominance but elasticity and freedom between each other. In an interview with Pauline T. Newton, Lim shows her puzzle about her female role, and she remarks:

> But as a young girl and woman, I was facing choices and had no resources to draw on. Sex? Was premarital sex good, bad or indifferent? Marriage. Should I marry? And to whom? Should I focus on career or being marriageable? The two did not get together. Should I dress one way or another? What was a woman anyway, besides being a helpless, hopeless, envious, jealous, unhappy member of the human race? I was stuck with being a woman, but how could I get out of that future for which all women seemed fated? In short, how was I to become a happy independent person when being a woman seemed to dictate the impossibility of independence? (“Cultural Roots” 170-71)

In pursuit of her female identity, Lim contacts different types of women and men. Among these relationships with men and women, she by degrees is more conscious of the woman identity she is trying to cultivate. Her more and more confusion and questions about the female role help her female identity formation take shape. She casts doubts on the conventional social values of sex, marriage. She tries to draw an outline for her new woman identity. Last, Lim decides to leave for America, for her, “a career held more promise for satisfaction than marriage, this strong feminist vision didn’t lessen the intensity of sexual land emotional attachment nor the hysteria at its loss” (205). A traditional woman plays a dutiful

mother and wife role in the family. For an anti-tradition woman like Lim, if the achievement of her career ambition does not come as the first priority, then at least her nontraditional career ambition and traditional woman role weigh the same. She would like to juxtapose her multi-cultural identities.

For Lim, those unsuitable female roles she has encountered inspire her with novel thoughts. She at first negates the women she meets, such as her mother, stepmother, nuns, and schoolmates, but on the contrary, these women offer Lim different inspiration about gender roles. The leaving of Lim's mother gives Lim the inspiration that women can claim their own individual freedom without gender bondage. Women have the rights to reject suppression from patriarchy. Besides, the Catholic nuns' vocation also suggests Lim the possibility of a self-autonomous life, contradictory to the traditional woman's role, which is inferior and confined to domestic chores. On the way to womanhood, Lim has to search for the female identity and woman role on her own. Su-ching Huang says that upon realizing their own desire, ideals, and gender role, women can be able to free themselves from "patriarchal captivity" (47). Instead of what kind of work Lim will do, the question primarily concerns Lim is about what and how she will become. Lim has a clearer answer after her exposure to multiple cultures, men, and women.

Lim is aware of her untraditional female identity and longs for an unconventional identity to rebel against the restrictive female role. Raised up in a traditionalized Asian family and educated at a conservative Catholic school, what Lim seeks in these disciplines is not to be a follower of traditions. Traditional women are educated to uphold the family values and stay anchored to their husbands and children. However, Lim tries to throw away the bondages and live as she pleases. Pauline T. Newton says that "by coming to terms with her 'life as a woman' question, she takes the first step toward recognizing the shifting layers of identity" ("Jumping Fences" 116). Up to the present, Lim still cannot get herself out of the perplexities about her female identity. Lim doesn't want to follow the outdated traditional values, and her

western education also equips her with the potential and ability to cross or challenge the tradition and patriarchy. Lim wants to break with the traditions and to embark on her new woman figure journey. The Catholic School, to Lim, is the base for her later transformation of a transnational identity. In addition to the exposure to Western values, Lim's flying colors provide her more than "material and professional mobility" (131). Lim's success at the Catholic School and acquisition of English language pave the way for her to be an advanced woman, exceeding other women in thoughts and gender roles. Education serves as an outlet for Lim's harsh life. She says that "what I feared was poverty. Exams were a challenge I enjoyed, and that this challenge could lead me out of hunger, shame, ugliness" and simultaneously sharpens her ability to help seek her new transnational identity and woman identity (126). In May 1964, Lim left Malay for the university in Kuala Lumpur where Lim, through her great academic performance and ability, accepted the Fulbright fellowship to the Brandeis University in the United States (153, 159). Su-ching Huang argues that "a woman traveling may potentially signal feminist liberation" (48). Lim's departure from Malaysia to the United States starts a new page for herself, and in the meanwhile her quest for a new female identity also begins.

Chapter Three

Transference of Cultures between Malaysia and the United States

This chapter aims to discuss Shirley Lim's formation of transnational identity in her immigrant route from homeland Malaysia to the United States. Her immigration to the United States, her American life, and arrival between her Malaysian and American homes will be examined through the transference of multiple cultures and the new environment she lives in. The idea of home and kinship is central to Lim's construction of her own new home with her husband Charles in the United States. In the United States, although Lim forms a non-patriarchal family, yet, the Confucian decency Lim was instructed in her Malaysian childhood reappears in the course of nursing her child, Gershom. In the U.S., Lim demonstrates the transference of Asian cultures when she develops relationships with the American society. Lim's constant interactions with her Malaysian homeland and the adoptive country of the U.S. further complicate Lim's transnational identity cultivation. Besides, Lim's workplaces at Colleges also represent the multiplicity of Lim's cultural identities and the Western ideology she encounters, both gender inequality and feminine consciousness. Lim's migration to the United States does not simply mean her geographical movement but her demonstration of her multi-cultural identity.

Geographical migration can either mean liberation or signify rootlessness. For Lim, this migrant journey means both. On the one hand, it signifies her trans-national liberation to act out her Westernized social viewpoint. In 1969, Lim sets off on her immigration route to Boston by "boarding the Boeing jet in Kuala Lumpur en route to Bangkok, then to Frankurt, Amsterdam, London, and Boston, I was numb with misery" (205). After an exhausting long-haul flight transferring between numerous places, Lim senses that she is now in a foreign country where she comes for her academic ambition in Brandeis College so as to get away from her miserable family life. "I felt already the disconnection of the stranger. I would

never see Malaysia again, except through the eyes of a traveler" (206). This statement implies Lim's potential national identity transformation in the new terrain. Upon her arrival, she feels that

> I was a true immigrant, shabby, unrooted, poor, and perpetually afraid of losing my way. From the morning I arrived at Logan Airport in early September, I had felt two predominant emotions, gratitude and guilt. I did not belong in Boston, but I was relieved to be out of that monstrous compression chamber that had carried me from Kuala Lumpur, across Asia and Europe, and the Atlantic to Boston. (208)

Lim has an ambivalent feeling upon her arrival in America. On the one hand, America is where her dreams take off. She is grateful for the opportunity to better herself in the United States. On the other hand, it seems stressful and guilty for her to leave the destitute Malaysian family and siblings behind. Traversing different continents physically refers to Lim's geographical movement and breaking cultural boundaries as well. At that time, Lim appears to be ready to pursue another new identity—the American one, for Lim uses "a traveler" and "a true immigrant" to show her determination in the border-crossing of her national identity. However, being an immigrant in a foreign land is a hard time for Lim to tide over in that she has nobody to rely on. She is conscious of her exclusion from the mainstream America.

At the very beginning of the emigration, Lim's multi-cultural Malaysian identity is homogenized by the American culture as a Malaysian culture. The Malaysian cultural significations distinguish Lim from the Western culture and worsen her displacement in the United States. Shortly after Lim reaches Boston in February of 1969 when "the white stuff was falling still, dry light bits of brittle snow [. . .]. Pushed over from the wide avenue and stacked high on the sidewalks," Lim suffers from the snow blizzard (207). It is the first time for Lim to experience such chilly weather in America and she can hardly bear the coldness, which is quite opposite to the tropical climate she was used to in Malaysia. Not getting

accustomed to the freezing weather in this unfamiliar America, Lim is “looking for experience, persons, some tolerable moments in the stretched intolerable February” (207). Lim tries to associate herself with some similar and bearable scenes and feelings she had in her past Malaysian life. While lingering around on streets of the town of Cambridge, Lim knows that “I would meet no one except salesclerks and tradespeople. I would shop slowly, eking out each encounter, and buy nothing. There is a story in this for me, but I could not find it” (207). The continuous passersby are all strangers to Lim and exacerbate Lim’s otherness and exclusion from the foreign country. Before Lim finds an outlet for her new American or Asian American story, she suffers from uprootedness and displacement in the early American years.

Upon her arrival, Lim senses the contrast of cultural significations through living with the host family first and a Canadian couple later. The “heavy velour sweaters” given by the host mother are “warmer than anything I had carried with me from Kuala Lumpur” (209). Different living environments reflect in such cultural differences as clothing. Besides, there is a “stone-fitted fireplaces” warming up the freezing room. A fireplace does not appear in the tropical area. Moreover, Lim makes them an Asian meal, beef chips with soy sauce and stir-fried with chopped garlic. The ingredients such as soy sauce and garlic are common in Asian dishes. The Asian dish Lim makes in the American family is a way to transfer the Asian culture into the Western world. It’s a kind of cultural transference through food. However, the kindness of the host family makes Lim feel a sense of unease. She remarks that “I felt myself an empty-handed transient, dependent on the charity of strangers, without resources, adrift, wholly without community” (209). Without the natural bond with them, Lim feels drifting and unsettled physically, culturally, and emotionally. Later, she moves out to live with a married Canadian couple two miles away from the Brandeis campus in Waltham. Lim experiences cultural heterogeneity when getting along with this Western couple. Once at a cold night, Lim “turned up the thermostat from sixty to sixty-eight degrees. Even then, I

shivered under three sweaters and my blanket," but the temperature makes the couple feel like "living in a hothouse" (214, 215). The tolerance of coldness and heat signifies the cultural background each individual grows up in. Canadian people are used to cold air, but Lim is used to heat. It takes time for Lim to get accustomed to the chilly weather. Especially in December and January, Lim is chilled to the bone and prepares thermals, three pairs of socks, and muffles to get over the unbearable coldness. The opposite geographical locations of the Northern West and Southern Asia shape different cultural mold and cultural identity an individual bears. Lim exhibits the significations molded by her diverse Malaysian culture, which prepares her for the cultural crossroad to the United States.

Lim moves on to other rental places several times. The cultural difference Lim experiences and the help she gets from others make her aware of her lack of kinship support in America. She longs for the Western ideology of "individuality" that she learned from the British education. Once in Malaysia, Lim longs for being a singular individual, but the present situation in the United States causes confrontation in her mind. She says,

> How does one make oneself at home? I began to see that I needed
> to be useful to someone else other than myself. What had
> preserved me in Malaysia, the struggle for an individual self
> against the cannibalism of familial, ethnic, and communal law,
> was exactly what was pickling me in isolation in the United States.
> In the United States, I was only a private person. Without family
> and community, I had no social presence. (231)

Lim attempts to live out her individuality, free from being restricted to the conventions of the messy Malaysian life. She runs away from the poverty and mistreatment by her father and siblings. Lim chooses to leave because of the 1969 Race Riot and the Malaysian governmental policy of nationalism excluding Chinese descent. However, because Lim leaves the birthplace and she is new to the United States, her identity of an in-between

immigrant at this moment is evident.

Lim feels a sense of in-betweenness, not belonging to either her homeland or hostland. At the beginning of her migration route, unable to simultaneously accommodate herself to both her ancestral root of Malay and the new root of America, Lim cannot define herself by a clear and specific identity. She feels:

> No one who has not left everything behind her—every acquaintance, tree, corner lamp post, brother, lover—understands the peculiar remorse of the resident alien. Unlike the happy immigrant who sees the United States as a vast real-estate advertisement selling a neighborly future, the person who enters the country as a registered alien is neither here nor there. Without family, house, or society, she views herself through the eyes of citizens: guest, stranger, outsider, misfit, beggar. Transient like the drunks asleep by the steps down to the subway, her bodily presence is a wraith, less than smoke among the 250 million in the nation. Were she to fall in front of the screeching wheels of the Number Four Lexington line, her death would be noted by no one, mourned by none, except if the news should arrive weeks later, thirty thousand miles away. (238)

Lim's intense desire to transform herself in America turns out to be a sense of displacement. Everything in Malaysia seems to leave her behind, and everything in America seems irrelevant to her. At present, for Lim, America is not a paradise but a nightmare, for she does not acquire her social presence, let alone Americanness. Lim feels confused about her position and identity wavering between Malaysia and America. For the new country, Lim uses "guest, stranger, outsider, misfit, and beggar" to depict the miserable immigrant experiences she undergoes (238). People she mentions are temporary sojourners or excluded from the mainstream. It is this sort of drifting, invisible, or unpermitted identity that torments Lim. Lim feels awkward about her invisibility in America. Her existence in America appears

to be apparition. In "Immigration and Diaspora," Lim claims that immigrants are "deprived of the affiliation of nation, not temporarily situated on its way toward another totality, but fragmented, demonstrating provisionality and exigency as immediate, unmediated presences" (297). This unfixed identity comes to Lim strongly while she finds her out of place in the large space and disconnected with the strangers. Her promising American dream smashes. It's not a free land but a limited space, where she cannot stretch herself freely. Her border-crossing self-perception shows clearly with the expressions of estrangement, displacement, and homelessness. Without family, home, and society, Lim has no relations with this new country and has no presence to others. She seems non-existent, for she is an ignored subject in America. She is by all means an individual who is alone and emotionally lonely in America. Lim wants to build a home to substantially locate her being here and relieve herself from disaffiliation from the dominant world.

Bearing a sense of self-contradiction between Malaysian memory and current American life in mind and not having a permanent footing in the U.S., Lim considers herself an alien resident who

> has walked out of a community's living memory, out of social structure in which her identity is folded, like a bud in a tree, to take on the raw stinks of public bathrooms and the shapes of shadows in parks. She holds her breath as she walks through the American city counting the afternoon hours. Memory for her is a great mourning, a death of the living. The alien resident mourns even as she chooses to abandon. Her memory, like her guilt and early love, is involuntary, but her choice of the United States is willful. (238)

Lim's choice to leave her homeland Malaysia behind gives rise to her mental suffering. Nevertheless, Lim feels determined to choose the U.S. as her shelter for her identity transformation. Lim at present is leading an American life, and her Malaysian life becomes

the past memory, which is implicitly embedded within Lim's present American days. Lim's identity is composed of her past living Malaysian memory and the current living American life. Her border-crossing in national borderlines prompts Lim to interact with various cultural significations in the construction of her transnational identity.

Lim departs from her Malaysian family to break up with gender inequality; however, in the American workplaces, Lim still faces the same gender hierarchy. She mentioned that "I [she] had entered U.S. society through the workplace" (291). On the one hand, the workplace links Lim with others; on the other hand, Lim encounters the problems of gender inequality in the workplace. In 1972, when Lim is writing her M.A. dissertation, she gains a teaching fellowship to teach composition classes at Queens College. There, Lim observes that "women made up the teaching ranks of temporary composition instructors, while the few literature positions were filled by men" (247). Males dominate the chief positions, while females are assigned to minor positions. The faculty division of the Queens College reveals the gender bias and inequality. Without taking actions to fight against the gender binary, Lim makes up her mind to return to Malaysia where she is sure to be entitled to a real teaching position. For Lim, the phenomenon of gender binary exists not only in her Malaysian home but also in her American workplaces. Lim's pursuit of a liberal and self-autonomous woman identity gets trapped in the gender bias.

Despite Lim's longing for the acquisition of Americanness, she still transits her Malaysian cultural identity into the multi-cultural foreign land. In her job interviews, Lim "wore a green and yellow patterned Malay gown, a *baju kurong*, placing my foreignness in view, and determined not to be perceived as American" (251). Lim's traditional Malaysian wear signifies her Malaysian identity and culture. In the course of her pursuit of Americanness, rather than full assimilation into the mainstream culture and discarding Malaysian traditions, Lim chooses to display her unique Malaysian culture signified by her Malaysian attire. Even though Lim knows that she is "not white, not Jewish, not black, not

Puerto Rican, the four groups whose needs and words filled the columns of the *New York Times,*" she feels that the American society tolerates her difference (251-52). The United States is composed of multiple races signifying different cultures, and each culture can maintain its cultural significations and has cultural transference with other cultures.

The cultural hybrid of Lim's growth background helps Lim deal with cultural multiplicity of her students. At first, Lim teaches at Queens College, where the students are mostly Anglo American and Jewish. In September of 1973, Lim finds a teaching position at Hostos Community College in the South Bronx, where mostly consists of a black and Latino student population. Lim has to commute for an hour per day between house and work from Brooklyn to the South Bronx. Lim's class is comprised of students from different countries, such as African American, Peruvian Indo, and Puerto Ricans. Besides, in 1990, Lim teaches at the California University which is noted for a cosmopolitan composite. California is a crossroad state and embraces the multiple cultures. The background of Lim's students differs. They are European, Jewish, black, Hispanic, Koreans, Japanese, Vietnamese, and Filipina Americans. These different cultural identities get Lim aware of her culture-crossing identity. Suzanne M. Miller thinks that the classroom is a microscope of the whole America which represents the mixtures of races and cultures, and the classroom evokes Lim's self-awareness of her transnational identity while she and students are faced with the "cultural makeup" (262). The heterogeneous cultural composite of students' identities remind Lim of the multiplicity of her cultural identity. When Lim faces those students from different cultures, she senses her Asian-American identity, which represents Chinese Malaysian culture and her acquisition of the American culture.

The cultural identity dilemma between traditional woman and liberal feminist comes to surface when Lim wants to play both roles of a wife and a scholar well. In 1987, once Lim says to Charles that she would attend a summer seminar at Barnard with Professor Nancy Miller, a prominent feminist scholar of French Literature, but Charles would like Lim to stay

at home for the summer. He thinks that Lim needs rest and such long-distance driving to Manhattan would be a physical exhaust and torture (326). This moment is hard for Lim, as a wife and a mother, to make a decision between her ambition for her academic profession and her concern of being a devoted wife and mother at home. The Asian and Western cultural identities that Lim possesses perplex herself. She would like to play both roles well. Later, Lim again hesitates about attending a writer-in-residency at the East-West Center in Hawaii. Lim is not determined about her decision to leave her family for the summer program. She weighs "the costs to male comfort and domestic quietude, the apparition of my abandoning mother condensing on the film of my consciousness" (327). Lim's mentality is split between the traditional cultural image and the liberal feminine role.

Lim voices her feminist awareness rather than obediently follows the traditional footsteps in the American society. She is inspired by Professor Nancy Miller and her feminist colleagues with the idea that "I also had rights to a separate life, even within a traditional family" (327). Even a traditional woman has the chance to pursue another freer identity and possesses both of these two identities. Joan Chang states that Lim tries to cast away those traditional feminine images she is exposed to and refuses to fall victim to stereotypical roles (139). At the same time, Lim is on her way to interconnect the Asian and Western cultures she has learned about. Newton opines that "Lim must learn to contest imperialistic standards imposed by her homeland's female teachers and peers as well as male professors and lovers. These powerful Malaysian ties, however troubling, greatly contrast to Lim's interaction with U.S. Americans after she migrates" (109-110). For Lim, feminist consciousness is another woman identity that she has learned about from her mother's departure and American feminist scholars. It is a nontraditional idea that has influenced Lim since her childhood. In 1987, Lim applies for promotion to full professor, but the result disappoints her. Instead of receiving the result passively, Lim is encouraged by her female colleagues that confrontation is one of the ways for a woman to get promotion in an academic field. The feminist colleague

encourages Lim to speak out her doubts and confronts the authority if necessary. At first, Lim demonstrates the silent protective skills she has learned in Malaysia in the male-dominated college workplace. Even though Lim is not good at confrontation, she still tries to challenge the dean to find out the real cause for her being rejected. Instead of being voiceless among males, Lim is getting accustomed to speaking out her mind and defending her rights. Lim says that "my public participation as a feminist began with the vision of Miller" (332). Nancy Miller sets a feminine-consciousness role on Lim. For Lim, Nancy Miller "displayed both woman and mind in her very performance of self. I did not see the split, rupture, the ambivalence, and schizophrenic aura that I feared in myself as in the apparently oxymoronic structure of the woman scholar" (332). Lim compares herself with Nancy Miller, who has a firm mind to pursue her own career and female identity. Yet, Lim herself does not find a balanced position between her Asian traditions and Western ideology. But Lim is clear that "Miller's position of the feminist as teacher enacted a type of activism that I was comfortable with" (332). The feminist consciousness found in Nancy Miller arises in Lim.

Being a feminist teacher needs to face the challenge of gender binary and difficulties. "Woman's performance as a feminist teacher within U.S. institutions is fraught with contradictions and bad faith, for such institutions socialize, regulate, police, and domesticate, even as the nuns of my childhood colonial school" (332). The gender system within these institutions is mostly male-preferred. That is, in the United States exists gender inequality. The rigidity of the gender roles Lim was taught in the Catholic School reveals the limitation the society has put on females. However, those nuns are teachers, whose working signifies their autonomy and independence of males. So do the women scholars and Lim whose vocations suggest their independence. In Lim's real experiences, both Malaysia and the U.S. are male-privileged society. Women are not supposed to challenge the conventional demands. The biggest difference of Malaysia and the U.S. lies in the feminist inspiration Lim gets in the United States. Although the American society is also a male-dominated social context, yet,

unlike the confined Asian women, women in the U.S. are allowed to pursue their feminine ideas. Their profession and ability entitle themselves a visible place in workplaces and social status.

Lim's construction of her American home provides her with family affiliation that she has longed for in this new country. In Lim's second year at Brandeis in 1972, she meets Charles, a Jewish-American student one year ahead of Lim in graduate school. He was born in Brooklyn and raised on Long Island. He is a nonpracticing Jew who is tall and bearded. Charles is a native-born American of Jewish descent. He at heart bears a transnational identity mixing Jewish and American identity. His parents were dead and he is alienated from his only brother. Lim still has a family in Malay but she is alone in the United States. Charles and Lim are in a similar state of feeling alone. Lim feels that "there is no pain as bad as the pain of isolation" (224). "I was tired of being alone [. . .]. I was ready for marriage" (237). Besides, Lim finds peace and stability in Charles. In 1972 after the death of her father, Lim marries Charles for alleviation of her uncertainties in the United States. For Lim, "Charles was the stable center that finally brought me calm" (244). With the marriage with Charles, Lim finds her emotional settlement in his companion, and she moves from Massachusetts to live with Charles in Brooklyn in New York. With the family support, formed with her husband, Lim no longer has a lingering identity in the adoptive America. Lim is on her way to construct an American home.

In spite of the transcendence of gender values in workplaces, Lim encounters a dilemma between her domestic female role and feminist identity after she gets married in America. In 1973 after completing her Ph.D., Lim is granted a teaching position in Malaysia. But Charles cannot acquire a position there, for the Malaysian government is practicing the nationalist policy. She is in a dilemma between her teaching job and her husband. She says that

> I weighed my choices: returning to Malaysia, I would be assured of a university position, but it would mean separating from Charles and entering

> a life of difficult singlehood. I had to choose not only between countries but between two kinds of commitment: the commitment to a lonely celibate career teaching English in a Malay-dominant university at home, or to a shared life of literary studies, albeit in exile. (248)

Even though Lim comes to America for her academic ambition and desires to leave a gender-biased Malaysian society, while in America, her yearning for a family bond and a career achievement confronts in her mind. Gaston Bachelard remarks that the house, interchangeable with the home, makes the most powerful pyschospatial image (7). Home is both a physical and psychological living space Lim's Malaysian family lacks, for her memory is loaded with poverty, malice from the patriarchy family, and her mother's departure. Not wandering around in the new country, Lim has emotional attachment with her husband.

The border-crossing in geographical locations brings Lim a shift and dynamics in her identity. In 1978, she passes the Immigration Test to have her passage into American identity. "I may have been a blackbird, flying into Boston as a disheveled traveler uncertain whether I was choosing expatriation, exile, or immigration" (287). Lim claims her official American identity. In the foreword to *Reading the Literatures of Asian America*, Elaine Kim points out that the identity position Asian American immigrants have changed from Asian country alone to both of Asian and American countries (xiii). At first, Asian Americans are viewed as otherness, not being part of the dominant American culture. Asian American immigrants manage to get assimilation into the American melting pot so that they will not feel alienated from the society. After Lim's acquisition of American citizenship, she says that "I felt alien in a different way, as if my ambivalence toward the United States must now extend inward to ambivalence toward myself. No longer a traveler, I was included in my accusations of America" (289). Lim once felt puzzled about her dangling position between her faraway Malaysia and her new residential America. Now, Lim becomes an official citizen of the United States. Nonetheless, Lim feels emptiness, for she still cannot find her way to balance

her Asian and American identities.

Charles's gentry in Lim's American home makes a sharp contrast to the power abuse Lim's father had in the Malaysian patriarchal home. Lim does not feel drifting alone in the foreign land after her meeting Charles, who treats Lim tenderly. When Lim is pregnant, "Charles had brought home a book that listed all the suspected foods and their potential mutating effects on an evolving fetus" (286). Charles's considerate behavior helps to ease Lim's nauseous sickness. Compared to Charles's thoughtfulness, the mistreatment Lim's father did to her mother is the representation of patriarchy power. In 1980, Lim gives birth to her son, Gershom. Lim feels pleased to "steep in the transient sensations of motherhood [. . .] for motherhood is what women do as a way to make stories about their lives" (284). Her son's birth signifies Lim's transition from a Malaysian woman acquiring American citizenship into an American mother. Even though she is sick of the traditional role of the caring mother, she does not deny that playing a mother role is a way to construct womanhood. Lim recognizes motherhood as part of the woman role. Lim is influenced by the Western feminine awakening, but rather than discarding the Chinese woman role, Lim wants to make her story through entering motherhood. It is a test for Lim to strike a balance between the nonfeminist and feminist role. Joan Chang says that Lim "by giving up preconceived stereotypes of girl, woman, and wife, she ceases to imitate roles set by others for her, transforms her relationship with others from passive to active, and thus gains independent control of her body, sexuality, and love" (139). Instead of passively obeying the ritualized conventional gender roles, Lim can actively create her independent identity. Lim is her own pathfinder to create her own female figure and motherhood, both a traditional and an independent woman.

The way Lim and Charles teach and discipline Gershom reveals the cultural significations they carried with their distinctive cultural identities. Once Gershom is seated in a highchair and beats Lim's arm with his fist, and Gershom's non-stop hitting gestures get

Lim to slap his face. While Lim is disciplining Gershom, Lim repeats to Gershom that "Chinese children must respect their parents" and "Chinese children do not hit their parents!" (298). Lim's repetitive usages of "Chinese" show that the Asian culture is deeply rooted in Lim's multi-cultural identity and that Lim transplants the Asian sense of value into Gershom, a native-born American child of Jewish and Asian descent. Even though Lim lives in the United States and is under the influence of the American liberal ideology, her way to educate Gershom signifies her Asian Confucian heritage. Another time, while Lim is mad at Gershom's fussing about putting on his shoes, Lim again slaps him. On the contrary, Charles appears with a calm mind and a gentle action to put on shoes and sneaker for his little son. Once more, Lim seems to lose her temper easily for her child's misbehavior or indecency. Lim's habitual slapping seems to repeat her father's violence toward his children. Lim confesses that "I was repeating those very scenes of brutality that my father had wreaked on me" (299). In Malaysia, Lim intensely fights against the Asian patriarchy family, but in America she still falls prey to the effects of the patriarchal power. Lim perceives that

> The consciousness of family as love and violence all in one, and the power to stop the violence, whether practiced by men or women, is for me, feminist consciousness. I could only unravel the repetitions of fear and rage by understanding myself as a woman: a girl-child seizing autonomy rather than suffering damage, but damaged still by that premature forced growth, a young woman fearing independence but fearing dependency more. (299)

Lim recalls her Malaysian family where her father shows both love and violence toward Lim and her mother. For Lim, her mother's departure for a new life in Singapore is a way to be away from her power-abusing husband and serves as feminist awakening to her. The mistreatment Lim and her mother received remind Lim of her identity as a Chinese female. Because of the harsh time, Lim longs for self-independence and autonomy for a fight against the male power. Not wanting to be an empty mother like her Emak or a violent mother like

her father, Lim attempts to "change the blow to a caress, the sharp and ugly words to careful explanation, the helpless choking rage to empathy, that is my struggle as a mother: to form a different love" (299). Lim is trying to turn her Malaysian cultural identity influenced by her patriarchy family into a warm American family transformed through Charles's tenderness. Lim's crossing over to the United States not only signifies her crossing national borderlines but also her cultural transference and psychic transformation in the construction of her American family. The interaction between the Asian and the Western cultures keeps on and on in Lim's American home, which has a lot to do with the transit of cultural significations.

Lim's displacement in her early immigration trek turns into the familiarity and closeness with her multiple geographical sites, and her own American home means that her substantial and psychic settlement in the United States. Brah says that home is "the site of everyday lived experience" (4). Home is a location of one's lived experience. America is Lim's another home where she has found a lover, a child, the American equivalent for the opacity of her childhood (239). She traverses the borders of nations, cultures, and mentality. Kathaleen Kirby upholds that "home is a walled site of belonging" (21). Home, apart from a physical shelter and location, also emphasizes the emotional bonds tied with each family member. Within the larger American society, Lim gains psychic affiliation and support from her husband and her son. In "Jumping Fences," Newton thinks that, with Charles' assistance, Lim "loosens her tight grip on her Malaysian heritage (although she never lets go of it) and begins to relax in the United States' social and familial arenas" (119). For Lim, "the dense solidity of Asian society becomes a thin story. At some point, she no longer considers exchanging the remote relationship that pass as American social life for those crowded rooms in Asia, the unhappy family circles" (239). Lim finds peace and comfort in her American home and society. Besides, the present American life and her past Asian life bring her a different perception. For her, there is no clear line between goodness and badness. However, despite the fact that Charles plays a supporting figure to Lim's emotional release, Lim needs her academic work

to fulfill her dream. The ideas of playing a domestic wife role and the ambition to quest for her feminine consciousness occur to Lim simultaneously. Neither the traditional gender value nor nontraditional feminist awakening outrivals the other or satiates Lim. She needs to make a compromise between her ideals and the reality. Then, home becomes a site of conflicts. Her American home is different from her Asian family where women are required to follow patriarchal commands. Lim's American home is the demonstration of her flowing cultural significations through which she can negotiate Asian and Western cultural modes and make her own option for her ideals. Home, for Lim, is not a fixed idea or constructed with a limited pattern. Lim's dilemma and indecision display the juxtaposition and in-betweenness of the different cultural significations in her cultural identity. At last, Lim decides to live with Charles in America. Regardless of Lim's decision to live with her husband instead of going for her academic dream, the liberal female consciousness still remains as part of Lim's cultural identity.

Lim's connection with the past and the present helps her transcend the national boundary, for her Asian homeland offers her a sense of familial route mixed with the different American life she now leads. After her mother's death in 1984, Lim pays visits to Malaysia frequently to recall and to refresh her original identity. She reflects:

> Returning, I am filled with an ineffable sense of completion, satiety of recognitions. No matter how urgent my struggles to escape childhood poverty and the country's racial politics, I have continued to feel an abiding identity with Malaysia's soil, not only its shining waters, lush growth, and multiracial colors, but even its polluted streams, back lanes, and communal quarrels. (308-09)

What Lim lacks for years in the U.S. is family and community support, and she gains it from her American home and regains it during her visit to her original homeland. Lim depicts the scenes of her Malaysian homeland, inclusive of the enjoyable scenes and negative sides. The scenes give Lim a sense of familiarity. What comes to her eyes at present is what Malaysia

means to her, which is the same as her memory serves. These concrete objects reconnect and consolidate Lim's affects toward Malaysia, in spite of the fact that she has tense relations with her Malaysian home, as Brah indicates, home as a "community imagined" is "a place with which we remain intimate even in moments of intense alienation from it. It is a sense of feeling at home" (4). Even though Lim acquires American citizenship, she does not sever herself from ancestral heritage. Her Malaysian homeland is the place where she once has emotional connection with her family members. Despite the hardship experienced in the United States, Lim feels connected to her once lived Malaysia, which provides her with a sense of home. Lim admits that "the dominant imprint I have carried with me since the birth was of a Malaysian homeland" (341). Despite the fact that Lim has official American citizenship, the genuine cultural inscription in her is of Malaysia. Lim is aware of her brown skin and "long straight Chinese hair and accent," which cannot be altered in spite of the changeable cultural identity (245). Besides the new country, Lim feels an abiding identity with her motherland. Lim does not disclaim her root country. Instead, Lim opens her arms to both Asian and American identities. Politically and culturally Lim forms her transnational identity, which is a collage of cultures and identities.

Through the material worlds that Lim has experienced, she perceives the inseparable intimacy between Malaysian and American homeland. Lim possesses the American citizenship; yet, she never cuts herself from the Malaysian homeland. During her return to Malaysia, Lim, like a tourist, is marveled at the preservation of her past. The Malaysian scenes Lim sees bring her "the interwoven twinning and splitting of past and present, Malacca and the United States" (309). The past is not erasable; moreover, her past enlivens her identity. Her transforming self-perception infuses the primitive old days with the upcoming new identity. The definition of homeland is not limited to the birth place. Broadly speaking, homeland is the place where one can have emotional attachment besides a physical shelter. Lim is having her transnational identity because she feels tied to both her Malaysian

homeland and the American new country. Lim's routes to America and Malaysia redefine her identity and her Malaysian days are the foundation for her transnational identity. Lim remarks that

> Returning, I measure the years through the heights of nieces and nephews. I especially listen to their Malaysian-accented voices, to their longings for equality, their expressions of identity, and their testing of the bonds between parent and child. I would like to think that something of me remains in my Malaysian family, not merely as past but as prologue. (310)

Her Malaysian relatives' quest for equality, identity expression, and the parent-child relationship recalls Lim of her past struggling days. Her old Malaysian days are a milestone for her to begin a journey of searching for identity. Her immigrant route to the receiving country does not get rid of her past Malaysian memory. Her migration to the United States sets off following the prologue of her Malaysian life. The new route to the new territory helps Lim construct a transnational subject.

Transnational identity means more than a cultural, ethnical, and political shelter for the flowing identity within these two fixed locations. Lim's craving to demonstrate another aspect of her multi-cultural identity serves as a pushing force to embrace the multiple cultures she faces in America and earns herself a transnational identity. She holds a belief that a foreigner can get involved within a hybrid society eventually and Lim wishes to "lit up a different space [. . .] finally to place Malaysia side by side with the United States, and to become also what I was not born as, an Asian American" (334). Instead of leaning forward to either side, Lim juxtaposes her Asian and American cultures and transforms her politically single-nation identity into a dual-nation identity. Lim's becoming an Asian American signifies the plural cultural identities she has. Sau-ling Cynthia Wong regards Asian American identity as people with Asian heritage and having permanent residence in the United States (39). Lim is the embodiment of the blending of Asian cultural significations and American settlement

and legacy. Besides, Lim's Asian American identity refers to her inclusion of two nations and cultures. Lim's flexible identity as an Asian American flows between national borderlines and her Malaysian birthmark is added to her new Americanness.

For Lim, the recognization of the mother tongue does not necessarily refer to the language of the nation where an individual was born. In 1974, during Lim's return to Malaysia, she and her second brother pay a visit to a visiting Australian professor. Lim mentions that the Australian professor can lecture in the fluent Malaysian national language, but she has been strange to the national Malay language since her pre-college examination at seventeen. Lim is puzzled that "it was another of those international cultural ironies that befuddle simple identity equation" (258-59). Lim's confusion about the relation between language and (national) identity evidences that language does not stand for the signifier of an individual's identity. That is, the signification of language suggests that identity is not static. Language is mobile and full of fluidity, and so is one's identity. The signification of language can flow to those who use it and thus can become part of the cultural formation of the subject. For example, Lim says that she "had not used Bahasa Malaysia since studying it at seventeen for the pre-college examinations, so I lectured in English" (258). Lim had little or no usage of Hokkien or Malay language since she was little, and the English language becomes her mastery since her age of six. Lim's fluency in English becomes her Westernized cultural signification. Through contact and movement, language turns into a kind of complement of one's identity instead of the wholeness of one's representation. Her linguistic border-crossing exemplifies Lim's acceptance of the Western culture and prompts her formation of transnational identity.

Besides the spoken English language, writing, the written language, provides Lim with a peaceful place and acts as an outlet for her emotions. Writing serves as a conduit to imagination and seems a kind of "talking cure" for her while she is in the United States (Grice 159). Writing for Lim:

> Late at night, after days when I had suffered the panic of disappearing into the non-entity of community college work, phrases, thought, images surfaced from that other life of Malaysian childhood and hope. I would get up reluctantly from a warm bed and write, hunched, cold, and happy in an abstract kind of way, as a poem started up in the gray predawn hours. I wrote to know I was still there, somewhere among the accumulating details of numbing reality. Writing offered nostalgia beyond comfort, the only way to keep alive. (314)

Lim transforms spoken language into written language. Writing enables Lim to sense her own existence within the displaced American society. With writing, Lim indulges herself in an imaginative world where she is alive. She alleviates her pain of nostalgia by writing. Writing becomes the panacea for her emotional wound. In addition, writing still constitutes Lim a transnational identity. Lim says that "writing provides me with a deep satisfying sense of coming to who I am, becoming who I believe myself to be" (84). Lim gets great pleasure from writing, for it provides her a world full of freedom and there she can be the one she would like to be. Through writing and the English language, she crosses the linguistic borders and creates her imaginative transnational community. She believes that through writing, she can make room for a new self-identity.

In 1980, Lim publishes a collection of poems *Crossing the Peninsula*, and receives a great honor. Later, she publishes poetry, short stories, and criticism. Lim applies the English language to move herself out of the nationalism-bound Malay, and furthermore she takes advantage of English to have international relationship with the outside world. She expresses that "the English language as no longer a colonial intrusion but a postcolonial free-for-all" (278). In *Writing South East/Asia in English*, Lim explicates that "claiming English as my own was my first step out of the iron cage and into a voice, and who is to say it is not my own

language and not my voice?" (Lim 1994, 6). The English language used to be a colonial power. Yet, Lim's usage of the English language does not mean that she is colonized. Lim's choice of using the English language means that she accepts the English language as part of her multi-cultural identity. Besides, her employment of the English language means that she likes the British language and that's part of her identity. Rather than considering the English language as the residue of British colonial power implement, Lim announces the English language she uses to be her own. Lim reforms the elements shown in English words. Instead of the colonized thinking, what Lim shows in the memoir is the Asian images rework in the English words. For Lim, the English language no longer represents the British colonial power any more. For Lim, "the British education has shaped the spirit of independence and the language of independence that is to free her" (Lim 1994, 26). What Lim learns from her British education is the Western ideology of independence and individuality instead of colonial power. Lim leaves for America to be independent of her Malaysian family and quest for her independent life in the view of sense of gender. Lim is on her endless way to negotiate multiple cultures she experiences.

Lim with a multi-cultural Malaysian identity migrates to the United States where she serves as the hub of the Asian and Western cultural transference. Besides, Lim also demonstrates her Malaysian identity by wearing her traditional dress. Lim's transnational identity is continuously on the process. Lim's migration route is not a linear journey to the United States; Singapore is also included in her plural migration routes. While Lim goes to Singapore, her Asian American identity does not seem to fit the sense of values in Singapore. In Singapore, Lim's cultural significations of Asian and American cultural modes help her transform herself with a multi-cultural identity.

Chapter Four

Multi-Cultural Significations among Malaysia, the United States, and Singapore

Besides geographical border-crossing from Malaysia to the United States, Lim also traverses Singaporean national boundary. This chapter will discuss Lim's travels to Singapore where she demonstrates the multi-cultural identities she possesses through different cultural significations. In Singapore, Lim presents her relationship with her biological mother, Emak, who leaves her when she is eight and settles in Singapore. When she is a teenage girl, she visits her mother for the first time. After that, Lim occasionally pays visits to her mother. Through her shuttles between Malaysia, the United States, and Singapore, Lim's relationship with her mother varies in each visit. Lim's emotional attachment to her mother is intense when Lim is in her teens, but with her growth, the intensity of Lim's desire for maternal love weakens. Besides the mother-daughter bond, this chapter also deals with Lim's female identity transformed by means of the simultaneous juxtaposition of her traditional and nontraditional cultural identities. Different from the total subversion of traditional gender binarism, Lim accepts the multifaceted sense of gender values reflective of Asian and Western ideologies. The formation of Lim's identity is constructed with the gender conventions and her feminist awareness. In Singapore, Lim demonstrates the heterogeneous cultural significations and transference she accumulates since her childhood and transcends herself from the rigid gender constraints upon women. Lim is identified as a feminist scholar in Singapore and through the written language Lim displays the interconnection of multiple cultures she experiences.

The transference of cultures accompanies with the movement between geographical nodes. In other words, one's identity transits and transforms through cultural signification transplant as well as transgression in national borders. Both Lim and her mother cross national borders, and their shifting in geographical locations suggest their crossroads in

cultural fusion and demonstration of their original cultures. Each culture can refunction within varying social contexts and has interconnection with various cultural significations. According to Shi, what exists between different cultures is

> not just difference, but also similarity; not just incommensurability, but also new combinations and connection [. . .] engender new affinities as well as new discords between two terms previously not related to each other, thus making possible multiple fields of meaning. Effectively, the terms of relationship exceed binarisms and dichotomies. (13)

Cultures have their originality, but despite the difference, they also have something in common. For Lim and her mother, the American society and the Singaporean society are representative of liberation and acceptance of multiple cultures. Both the Western and Singaporean cultures, for Lim, represent a free world of multiple cultures. The American society provides Lim a chance to transform herself from a convention-bound female to an independent woman with the help of feminist women. In the view of the teenage Lim, Singapore, after visiting her mother twice, appears to be a free world to tolerate Lim's pursuit of nontraditional identity. The Singaporean society is the choice for the teenage Lim to disobey the sexuality rigidity with a boy, which she plots to challenge the traditional gender binary.

The departure of Lim's mother signals the emergence of feminist consciousness considered an anti-tradition act in a conventionally enclosed Malaysian society. The violence of Lim's father and the poverty gives rise to the departure of Lim's mother, which in turns brings about the lack of maternal love since Lim is eight years old. Before Lim is ready to learn to love her mother, her mother leaves them for Singapore. In *Writing South East/Asia in English*, Lim states that "even where constraints make it difficult for women to act against men's power, there are strategies available to lessen that abuse of power" (33). Women's social and familial status is limited and oppressed, and some choose to liberate themselves

from the arbitrary gender ties. Lim's mother opts to leave the familial and gender bondage behind and lives for herself, and leads a self-autonomous life freely. The departure of Lim's mother from her children generates varied meanings in the minds of Lim's mother and Lim. For Lim's mother, her choice to leave is to leave the bondage of the violent family and the patriarchy culture. She pursues her free life instead of living under the mistreatment of the male-supremacy culture. In *Writing South East/Asia in English*, Lim expresses that her mother's leaving, for her, means "displacing the Chinese tradition of the good woman as the dutiful mother, she [her mother] grasped the prickly principle of duty to self" (33). Lim thinks that her mother appears to escape from her role of being a mother. At that time, Lim does not feel surprised about her mother's sudden disappearance. She perceives that

> my mother may have resolved on escape long before she left us, but she shared nothing of herself with us in those final years. She was already absent, a weeping woman stripped slowly to some unknown other whose ultimate departure came to me as no surprise. (51)

Lim's memory of her mother remains in her infanthood, and there is no lasting bond while she is growing up. On the one hand, the bond between Lim and her mother becomes thin; on the other hand, Lim's mother plays a potential role of feminist consciousness for Lim.

Leaving for Singapore, the brand-new English name Lim's mother takes for herself signifies a new start of an independent life in contrast to the prudish Malaysian gender rules. Lim hears her mother's new name, Eleanor, in her first visit to her mother at age sixteen. The English name Lim's mother chooses for herself delivers the Western cultural significations distinguished from the tradition. Joan Chang upholds that "naming is a weapon to resist sexual and ethnical hegemony" (134). Lim's mother refuses to be confined to patriarchal power and accepts the Western cultural ideology, an autonomous individual. In Malaysia, the Chinese-dominated family does not empower woman with meticulously chosen names. Girls or women in a Chinese-centered society are often viewed the same instead of unique

individuals. Girls or women do not acquire specific names referring to her self-identity alone. Lim's mother is simply called Emak, a common calling for Mother in Malaysia. Besides, in a Chinese family, women do not take up major decision-making places but play a minor chore-doing role. Lim describes the establishment of business of her grandfather, her father, and even the father of her mother's, but there is no place for a woman to set up her own business. Lim's mother changes from a nameless Emak into a free individual with a self-chosen English name. Chang expresses the application of different names "breaks down fixedness and open up limitedness in the name/identity" (135). The nameless identity Lim's mother has in Malay and the Western name she takes in Singapore distinctly signify the different cultural inscriptions in her and demonstrate that her identity is changeable and flowing. She renews her life and sense of gender values with the renewal of her name.

The new English name not only suggests the liberty the Western culture transits but also signifies that Lim's mother starts to pursue her autonomy in her life. She works in Robinson, the largest department store in Singapore. Her choice to work is a great contrast to traditional women, who are home all day long resolving around household chores and family members. Having a job ensures her economic independence and social status without reliance on men. The new name and the job Lim's mother acquires represent the transference of the Asian and Western cultures. Lim's mother has a transformative identity through cultural interaction. Stuart Hall states that identity is a "production"—"never complete, always in process" (51). She is no longer viewed as a voiceless female and mother. Instead, her migration to Singapore means the help to remove the traditional gender confinements and sets her free from an invisible identity in an Asian society and family.

The change of Eleanor's dressing style demonstrates the occurrence of cultural transference between the Malaysia and Western society, which suggests different cultural implant into her sense of gender. Brah's viewpoint of women as the signification of "culture" and "tradition" in both the original birth place and the receiving country echoes the idea of

cultural signification and transference (12). The dress of Lim's mother signifies her migration experience accompanying with cultural significations of Asian and Western cultures. In Malaysia, even though Lim's mother dresses herself up elegantly and uses some Western goods, Lim says that

> my mother wore *nyonya* clothing, the *sarong kebaya*. Her stiffly starched sarongs wrapped elegantly around her waist fell with two pleats in the front [. . .]. The breast-hugging, waist-nipping kebayas were of transparent material, the most expensive georgette [. . .] my mother changed her sarong kebaya daily. (24-25)

The traditional Malaysian wear, kebaya, signifies her Malaysian cultural identity. Kebaya is a symbol of the Asian culture. Lim's mother possesses the multi-cultural identity, inclusive of the female consciousness, which is folded in the patriarchy family. In Singapore, Lim's mother feels free to embrace her Western liberal female identity.

Lim's transgression of national boundaries meanwhile displays the transit and transference of her plural cultural imprints from Chinese-Malaysian to Western Singaporean representation by the change of her dress. When Lim is sixteen, she pays a visit to her mother in Singapore for the first time. When Lim is in her teens, she goes to Singapore to visit her mother yearly. On her visit, Lim's wear signifies her Chinese cultural heritage. Lim wears an expensive tight *cheongsam*, her mother tailored for her annual visit to her in Singapore (162). C*heongsam* is the typical Chinese attire of females and typifies Lim's indigenous Chinese cultural identity. In the first visit, Lim stays with her mother in Singapore for the whole week and she feels that she has been transformed from a wretched thirteen-year-old girl, ignorant of girlhood, into a city sophisticate. Instead of wearing traditional Chinese clothes *cheongsam*, Lim's mother gives Lim dollar notes to purchase lots of Western female apparel and accessories such as "an expensive gold-inlaid compact, lipstick, perfume, and a Swiss wristwatch with changeable straps, strapless push-up bras, five-inch high heels, see-through

blouses, thick brass-studded belts, and skin-tight ski pants" (152-53). What Lim's mother bought her is pretty much Western items. Lim's perception of the cultures is shifting from Chinese to Western. Lim, through geographical border-crossing, juxtaposes her multi-cultural identities of Asian and American under the influence of her mother. Lim feels that "everything I bought transformed me, no longer that wretched thirteen-year-old with torn newspapers in her brassiere. So equipped, I felt certain my sexual inadequacy would be banished"? (153). Her visiting her mother in Singapore fulfills her dream of transforming herself into a girl identity. With her mother, she has more certainty and confidence about her sexual role. The female identity Eleanor represents and a liberal life she leads are both what Lim pursues in the formation of her female role.

Lim longs to have a border-crossing in her relationship with her mother in her boundary-crossing in locations between Malaysia and Singapore. Lim's crossroad to Singapore to find her mother is an attempt to repair the relationship between them. However, a conflict comes into being in Lim's mind when it comes to making out her feeling toward her mother. Through her interaction with her mother in Singapore, Lim perceives her mother's affection toward her. Lim's mother would like Lim to get acquainted with the friends she has made during the eight years. "'This is my daughter,' she repeated, 'Shirley,' as if this Eleanor, who hadn't seen me in eight years, were introducing me to herself over and over again, or as if my meeting her friends of the past eight years filled in the void of time between us" (57). Through the act of introducing her to others, Lim senses that her mother still feels proud of her, and even reveals her love toward Lim implicitly. Yet, Lim feels that "as my father's daughter, I knew love as familial and daily proximity, not so social ritual. Leaving Malacca for Singapore, abandoning family for society, my mother was always to remain estranged to me" (58). The mutuality and reciprocity of the mother-daughter bond matters to Lim. Lim has not seen her mother for years since she left. Therefore, when Lim comes to visit her mother, Lim feels that the mother-daughter relationship, once the natural

family relation, is ritualized through her mother's introducing her to others as her daughter. Lim feels that her mother's introducing act turns their natural familial relation into social ritualized one. Lim thinks that it is the social ritual of introduction that ties her with her mother. In other words, the long distance between Malaysia and Singapore distances her from her mother geographically and psychologically.

Lim's emotional attachment with her mother again is shown in her search of mental solace. The hatred of Lim's father toward the leaving of Lim's mother cannot stop Lim's desire for Emak. Once, after Lim's father blames Lim for her wrongs complained by Peng, Lim can turn to nobody for emotional smoothness but her missing mother in the distant. Lim's repetitious calling "Mother" reveals her deep longing for her faraway mother whose image serves as a balm and offers consolation to her wounded mind (151). It is telling that the departure of Lim's mother does not cease her relationship with Lim. Lim's eagerness for her mother's love does not vanish with her Emak's leaving. In Lim's mind, Emak's physical absence does not equate her disability of emotional support in Lim's hard times. The spiritual image of Lim's mother provides great consolation to comfort Lim's lack of maternal love.

Lim's second visit to her mother in Singapore crushes her dream of following the female model that her mother plays, which also brings about her disaffiliation from her mother. The attachment to her mother and her mother's world arouses Lim to call on her mother again. Lim goes to visit her mother during the next long school holidays early in 1963 and she has confidence in winning a scholarship to the university because of her good test results. The interaction between Lim and her mother during her second sojourn differs from her previous visit. During the second time visit, Lim's mother is living with a Chinese middle-aged businessman and is confined to a darkened room of an apartment, which is far away from the city center. The dark space implies the bondage of Chinese male supremacy imposed by her Chinese lover. Her mother represents the meekness and submission of a traditional silent woman. Lim's mother is again restricted to domestic space without personal choice and

freedom. Under the patriarchy command of the Chinese man, Lim's mother "cleaned, washed, cooked special dishes for him, massaged his back, chatted with his visitors, and was subdued only when she was alone with me," and she also has to gently fanned the man (154). Lim's mother does not officially get married with this Chinese middle-aged businessman, but she acts like his wife, waiting on his friends and silently obeying his patriarchy orders. Her once rebellious mother is now under subjugation to Chinese male power again. Even though Eleanor chooses a Western name for herself, she still falls victim to traditional gender binary opposition. Lim's mother cannot escape from the traditions imposed on women's roles. The silent behavior of Lim's mother again signifies the gender inequality. What's worse, Lim is told to call her mother "Auntie" instead of "Mother" in front of other people. The calling "Auntie" is what Lim wants to call Peng, for she does not want to form mother-daughter relationship with Peng. Now, Eleanor's demand to call her "Auntie" keeps Lim away from her mother again. Lim again feels confronted with her love and mental affiliation to her mother. The mother she longs for turns into a stranger to her. Lim gets hurt for the second time because of the unspeakable relationship between her and her mother. The disaffiliation between Lim and her mother deepens through Lim's calling her "Auntie" and widens because of the long distance between Malaysia and Singapore.

Lim's third visit to Singapore is to visit her mother as a routine and intends to transgress the traditional sexuality borderline to transform her gender role. Singapore is a place for Lim's mother to find liberty and for Lim to act out non-traditional gender norms. Influenced by the rebellious acts of her Malaysian friends, Kim and Mandy, Lim plots to transgress sexual taboo in Singapore with Rajan (166). Lim dresses herself up to meet Rajan to cross the sexuality line. "I sprinkled Mother's eau de cologne under my armpits and behind my ears, put on the Janzten shirt and dark green ski pants that Mother had just bought for me, and a pair of five-inch stiletto heels, and waited for Rajan" (168). She dresses like a Western girl to act out an untraditional action intolerable in the conventional chastity-stressed Malaysian

society. The dress and items Lim decorates herself with show her transformation from Asian rigidity to Western individuality. At that moment, Lim wants to cast aside her Malaysian gender decency. Rajan helps her "overcome the taboo of sex" (168). The chastity of a female is highly emphasized in a decency-stressed Malaysian society. Lim rebels against traditions by crossing the sexuality taboo as an act of individuality and liberation from the Malaysian convention.

During Lim's third visit, Lim's mother again has self-transformation from a traditional female role into an anti-traditional woman, but the mother-daughter bond becomes aloof gradually. Lim's mother makes a decision for herself to be a free individual without gender bondage. She leaves the male supremacy of her mysterious Chinese lover and starts her new life. "Each night, she came home with her black handbag full of change, and she kept two or three Horlicks jars full of ten- and twenty-cent coins in her *almeira*" (167). Lim's mother earns her own living. Besides, she even loans her brother money to buy an apartment. The room of Lim's mother in this new apartment is the best one of all and seems to be "newly middle-class" (167). Walking out of her past darkened space, Lim's mother makes over herself and looks like a middle-class autonomous woman with her own private space. The new room Lim's mother has suggests her regain of self-autonomy. Leaving the dominant and domineering Chinese men, including Lim's Chinese father and her Chinese mysterious lover, Lim's mother regains her subjectivity and independence. Instead of being a voiceless one, Lim's mother earns other family members' respect through her financial vantage. But the relationship between Lim and her mother remains strange. In Lim's third visit, her mother "was no longer a nervous, chatty woman. Instead, she seemed to have aged in a sullen manner [. . .] she stared for long minutes at me, as if I held a secret to her life" (168). Lim does not have much emotional affiliation with her mother. What she feels is alienation, for her mother hardly relates her contemporary life to Lim. The relationship between Lim and her mother remains stagnant.

Lim's visits to her mother provide her with multiple sense of gender out of traditional and nontraditional cultures, and help her to have multifaceted cultural demonstration in her identity formation. Her first visit reveals the feminist consciousness her mother has and her mother's independence and liberation from men's oppression and gender confinement. Lim has a happy time with her mother, who is potentially Lim's female model. Yet, her second visit again sees the stereotype of a traditional woman who is under patriarchy containment. Lim's mother is limited to a dark room without personal liberty. What the darkened room gives is not a personal space but patriarchy restriction. Besides, she has to please men and serve them. Lim would not like to step into this kind of limited freedom restrained by a man. Lim's determination to fight against the social gender role becomes strong under her mother's influences. During Lim's third visit to her mother, Lim rarely has affiliation with her mother, for her mother appears to be secret and mysterious for Lim. Furthermore, in the name of visiting her mother, Lim's intention to transgress chastity borderline is realized in Singapore. Lim's manifestation of unconventional sense of gender is achieved with her rebellious act.

Even though Lim has been separated from her mother for a long time, Lim's desire to repair her stagnant mother-daughter relationship gets complicated by her ambivalent emotions toward her mother and her re-position of a peranakan daughter. The unspoken relationship between Lim and her mother still perplexes her. In 1982 she returns to teach for a semester at the National University of Singapore without her husband's companion. Lim's mother wants to see her grandson, Gershom, and Lim would like to make up for her "unsettled ambivalences" toward her mother and to mend the mental gap between her and her mother (300). Lim, Gershom, and her mother live in a bungalow, their temporary rental home. "Returning to Singapore, I had hoped to prove myself a peranakan daughter" (303). Lim's mother settles down in Singapore, but she is still a peranakan of origin, native-born Malaysian mixed with Chinese descent. To follow the traditions of a peranakan woman role, Lim plays the traditional caring role and takes her mother for her walks. Lim tries to involve

her mother in her daily life. Lim takes her to greet neighbors, her colleagues, and friends and do shopping with Gershom. For Lim's mother, when they are home, she would cook for Lim and has a fixed gaze upon Lim to observe her reaction. For Lim, her mother's acts of cooking for her seem to compensate for her lack of maternal love. Lim's mother has never seen her eat, and she is curious about her reaction to her cuisine. Lim's mother makes every effort to get involved in Lim's daily life and social life, but Lim does not feel ease about her presence. It is not hatred toward her mother but a feeling of disconsolation and disaffiliation. Her mother is intrigued with Lim's conversations with others and listens attentively. Nevertheless, her mother's eagerness to get into Lim exchanges for Lim's escape. Lim's mind is torn and split because of her emotional detachment from her mother. Lim feels that

> I was both her daughter and a stranger, someone she would have known intimately but never did. She wanted to know me as her daughter, and it was too late. Rather, it was too soon. Too much the daughter, I could not forgive her yet for abandoning us. (304)

Lim figures out the confrontation she has in her mind—their natural mother-daughter bond and socially ritualized relation to reconnect them. Lim feels the estrangement between her and her mother. Lim still cannot get herself out of an unclear emotion toward her mother. A few months later, Lim's mother died. In the very end of this memoir, Lim says that "had I more time to talk to Mother, perhaps I could have learned to forgive" (341). Lim's intention to appease her restless emotions with her mother reveals her desire to make peace with her mother at last. In Lim's mind, through the numerous migration routes, her identity is changing and associating with multiple cultures. She becomes a mother herself now and she learns about the womanhood and mother role through her American family. Even though Lim experiences multi-cultural transformation in her identity construction, at last, Lim comes to terms with the co-existent cultural significations in her—that is, for one instance, she is a peranakan daughter of origin in spite of her American identity.

Lim's undergoing the multiplicity of American and Malaysian society complicates her existence within the Singaporean social context, which leads Lim to re-shape her perception of the Singapore society with her previous personal experiences and the current attention from the public. In Singapore, Lim, in her teens, transforms herself into a seemingly individual by crossing sexuality taboo to challenge Malaysian gender role. But years later, Lim notices that in Singapore her pursuit of being an independent and ambitious female is not highly valued. Lim remarks that "for all my [her] early struggles and professional visibility, once back in Singapore, I [she] was inevitably, inextricably woman. Wife, mother, and breast-I was continuously addressed as such" (301). Lim strives to transform herself from a confined gender role into an autonomous woman in terms of career and finance. In the meanwhile, Lim's literary competence comes to attention. Lim is interviewed by the Singapore newspaper about her husband's response to her success. Besides, she is invited by a breast-breeding club to talk on breast-feeding. Not until this moment does Lim perceive "a public sense of a [her] female self" (300). Lim senses that her female image is reflected upon the Singaporean social gaze. Despite Lim's self-realization of career pursuit, the Singaporean public view Lim as a woman who is supposed to conform to traditional rules. Lim feels unease about the identity she obtains from the male-centered Singaporean society—a woman responsible for taking care of her family. Lim observes that

> there was no escaping gender roles in Singapore, for the public sphere in Singapore was predominantly male. Magazines carried pictures of authorative men. The few women in the public domain were repeatedly shown nurturing, sharing, and caring. While Singapore men are exhorted to transform themselves into militarized rugged individuals, Singaporean women were usually presented as beautiful bodies and loving mothers. Anxiety about the modernization of society seemed displaced on women: the

> Asian self had to be guarded against Western corruption through the preservation of women's traditional feminine qualities. (300-301)

The Singaporean society is dominated by male power, not only in politics but also in social lives. Lim discovers the gender inequality in Singapore, once a free and ease world to her in her teens. The gender division and gender role influenced by Asian cultural heritage is rather clear in Singapore. Men are portrayed as manly and powerful; whereas women are taught to decorate themselves beautifully and play a caring mother role. Even those successful women in the public are supposed to perform their dutiful mother roles, such as nursing and caring.

However, neither does Lim want to follow the traditional woman model as a submissive and silent woman like her mother, nor does Lim want to be a radical feminist. Lim senses her in-between state in Malaysian, American and Singaporean gender roles. Her prominent opinion for gender roles surfaces during her trip to Singapore in 1982:

> During the six months in Singapore, I was approached as a woman writer, representing her sex. My unease comes from the struggle to speak as a woman without repeating and also without repudiating the traditional status of women as faithful wives, devoted mothers, and staunch caretakers of elderly parents. Representing women, speaking for the necessity to write as a woman, I was aware that I was speaking for a world in which women could be free of constraints of social roles, free to strive, to work, to grow selves outside the mold of gender. (301)

In Singapore, Lim's identities as a mother and as a traditional female role draw more attention and lay more emphasis than her revolutionary feminist consciousness. Her

frustration to display her achievement in deconstructing the rooted gender binary tells the prevalence of gender binaries in Singapore. Instead of siding with either cultural mode she has been exposed to, the simultaneous cultural significations and impacts on her signify her dynamic cultural identity.

What Lim pursues in the reformation of her female identity in Singapore is to negotiate her identity with traditions and evolutions of gender roles. In *Writing South East/Asia in English*, Lim expresses that

> the contemporary Asian woman writer is shadowed by this double, of active self-seen in the background of traditional social expectations that continue to complicate and subvert the process of claiming subjectivity. (Lim 1994, 23)

Asian woman writer like Lim is still caught in a dilemma between the plural cultural patterns. In Singapore, Lim at first cannot fully stretch her simultaneous juxtaposition of the multiple cultural significations she gains from Asian and American societies. Her representation of a nontraditional feminist identity counters the conservative and patriarchal gender binary in the Singaporean society. Still, what Lim wants to represent is not only her revolutionary feminine ways but also the reformation of the conventional woman status signified by her feminist and nonfeminist consciousness.

Lim's westernized feminist awareness seems a different voice in Singapore; however, Lim tries to perform her plural identities of being a caring mother, wife and a career woman with her own profession. Her migrant flights and her demonstration of varied cultural heritage indicate that her cultural identities are influx. Hall states that identities are "producing and reproducing themselves anew through transformation and difference" (58). Identity formation is in a dynamic process, and it is not steady and unchanged on account of the interactive cultural association and transference in different social contexts. Lim reworks the multiple cultural thoughts she perceives from her fluid identities and non-unitary gender

norms. The image Lim wants to introduce herself to the Singaporean public is a juxtaposition of traditional mother role and an independent feminist scholar observed in the way of Lim's being a peranakan daughter to her mother and her persistence in her academic field.

Besides the pursuit of a simultaneous representation of traditional and nontraditional feminine thinking, Lim's Malaysian identity and her employment of the English language to proceed her writing equip herself with a tool to transform into a transcultural identity. In the summer of 1977, after Lim's first year at the suburban community college, she and Charles go to Singapore. Lim brings her manuscript of poems to meet Edwin Thumboo, a poet, editor, and professor at the Singapore University. Thumboo is the son of a Tamil father and Hakka mother and is dark-skinned. He takes in editing an anthology of poetry from Malaysia and Singapore, which includes some of Lim's poems found in an Australian journal. Lim is ensured by Professor Edwin Thumboo that "such a thing as Singaporean/Malaysian writing existed, and that I was to be a part of it" (277). Her English writing moves her out of national borderlines. Due to Professor Edwin Thumboo, Lim's first book of poems, *Crossing of the Peninsula*, was published in 1980. Two weeks after Gershom's birth in 1980, Lim's publication receives the Commonwealth Prize and this prize honors Lim as a great poet. Moreover, she is "the first woman and the first Asian to win the prize!" (278). Lim chooses the written language of English to express herself. This prize proves Lim's efforts and talent in writing because it tells that even a woman can stand out of the males. Besides, even an Asian can shine on the foreign stage.

Lim's choice to write in English instead of Malay reveals that her reception of her multiple cultural identities. Lim's commitment to write in English instead of Malay language shows her individuality. Koh Tai Ann observes that

> because Lim is "committed to be an individual" instead of nourishing any nationalist enterprise, she is able to 'take on and slough off identities at will—peranakan, Chinese,

> Malaysian, woman, Asian American, or "to be all of these at once" and "to cross many cultural and national boundaries and join in the stream of international writing in English rather than belong to a national canon of writing—which in Malaysia anyway, is the literature in Malay". (153)

Because of the heterogeneous cultures Lim is exposed to, she bears and shows the multi-cultural identities, signifying different cultural inscription in her. Lim's various names signify different identities on account of her growth background consisting of ethnicity-mixed society and a multi-ethnicity ancestry family. Her identity is not limited to one nation state or simply within the geographical national border. In other words, Lim's identity does not fix her on Li Guicang's idea of "a sense of permanence" (207). Lim's identity is flowing and beyond boundaries. The composite of her identity formation coexists with one another and backs Lim up to transform into a transcultural subject. Through writing in English, she can communicate her ideas with people beyond the lingual and terrestrial border. Writing in English, for Lim, does more than simply escape from being caught within the feeling of alienation. What means to her is to face her transnational identity and embrace her multiple cultural identities.

For Lim, writing in English does not serve as her way to possess American identity but as her base to interconnect her Malaysian and Western culture. Lim proclaims that "writing provides me with a deep satisfying sense of coming to who I am, becoming who I believe myself to be" (Quayum 2). Lim, through the act of writing, demonstrates her original Malaysian identity and creates transnational identity mixed with the United States. Lim mainly employs the English language to portray her life in Malay and the United States. Lim sometimes interweaves with Malaysian words and customs to genuinely demonstrate the indigenous Malaysian culture. For instance, Lim uses the Malaysian word "kebaya" to signify the Malaysian custom and calling. Her crossing linguistic and cultural borders shows her

interactive relationship between Malaysian and American cultures. This displays her acceptance of heterogeneity of multi-cultural identity. Instead of declaration of root culture and claim for the adoptive culture, Lim strives to balance herself with these multiple cultures. Lim combines her Asian, American, and Singaporean cultural values and reveals the hybridity of cultural interaction in her English writing. She recreates a new cultural identity for herself through language.

Lim applies the written language to spread her thoughts and demonstrates the multitude of transnational cultures converging in her and transforming her identities and thinking. Lim feels that

> I am quite comfortable with American culture, since my identity, too, is an evolution. But the ways I deal with these identities, the historically situated Malaysian identity and the identity of the American 'promised land' to which I have entered, is through my writing. (Wagner 156)

Lim does not feel awkward about her changing identity. Instead, she seeks comfort and emotional anchor in her writing. Lim's writing reveals interconnection with different cultures. Through the act of writing, Lim injects her location and transformative life experiences into her memoir. In an interview with Jennie Wagner, Lim states that identity "is just a word, a figment of the imagination, a term, a sense of self is continuously evolving" (156). Lim holds a belief that identity is not fixed but flowing. Lim's growth background evidences her belief in the fluidity of self-identity in terms of nations and cultures. In addition, Lim's immigration to the United States at last gains more affiliation than rootlessness. Therefore, Lim inserts her senses of values and cultural hybrid she goes through into her writing. Her writing is loaded with the thoughts influenced by cultural transference.

The written language provides Lim with space to be the master of her own fate and works as a means to reflect her cultural significations of feminist and nonfeminist. Written language procures more than a mental shelter for the vibrant identity Lim possesses. Writing

a memoir, for Lim, is an act to claim her juxtaposition of various senses of gender values traditionally and nontraditionally. In a traditional patriarchy society, women's writing is taken as "unwomanly" (Lim 1994, 21). Not submitting to the traditional role, Lim acquires her transcending woman identity through writing (Lim 1994, 23). Lim narrates that "writing has been traditionally considered a male expression, and the act of women's writing is viewed as a rebellious sign of competing against men" (Lim 1994, 21). As a border-crossing subject, Lim's writing becomes an embodiment of her border-crossing in gender role. The written language acts as women's tool to create personal space and shelter their mind. In an interview with Wagner, Lim points out that from the very start her writing is about "'insertion'—'the insertion of my own space, my own country, and my own reality'" (154). In this memoir, Lim keeps track of the multiple significations and reconstruction of her senses of gender values. Writing guarantees Lim a woman space to embrace both her conventional female role and her pursuit of a feminist-awakening woman. In the process of conducting a memoir, Lim finds a place for her multi-cultural female identity.

Lim's memoir, a kind of story-telling, lays stress on the endless cycle formed by her Malaysian homeland, the adoptive country America, and Singapore where her mother and some siblings reside. In this memoir, Lim does not label herself with certain single national identity because she cannot sever herself from any of these three countries. Lim wonders "how does one make a home [. . .]. Too much can be made of homeland. Stories we tell often take their identity from a piece of soil, and the strongest stories may leave us still standing in the scene of our powerlessness" (282). Stories are made up of real life experiences. The place where the story begins is regarded as part of our identity formation. Telling a story gives story-tellers a sense of belonging to this place. Lim expresses that

> We tell stories to bind us to a spot, and often the stories that make us cry knot the thickest ropes. I image Baba's spirit breathing over the small Malacca knoll where he was buried, overlooking green paddy fields and

> leaning coconut palms. I have taken a little of him with me to California, not enough for him to haunt me, wanting to go home, but enough to kindle the joss of memory. Baba is never dead to me, as should be the case with filial piety. Parents do not die; they merely take on the form of ancestral spirits, tenacious in their power, keeping you a child forever in your first imagination. With such ghosts, it has taken me a longer time to leave home than most immigrants. (341)

Story-telling is a way for Lim to re-position her identity. Her bond with these places tightly interconnects through her numerous migration routes. Besides, writing is a way for Lim to bind herself with the spiritual home she constructs with her memory of her past Malaysian family. That is, it's a means of connection with the past and the present.

Lim's constant migration exposes herself to various cultures and helps her transform her self-identity. In the very beginning of this memoir, Lim starts by concluding her emotions. Compared with her infantry memory and the strong bond of the first memory, the American and Singaporean immigration life Lim sets out after her departure from her Malaysian life does not provide her with the same sense of belongings as her infantry sensuality (21). Lim recalls

> moving myself from Malacca, a small town two degrees north of the equator, to New England, then to Brooklyn and to the rich New York suburb of Westchester County, and now to Southern California, I have attempted to move myself as far away from destitution as an ordinary human creature can. In the move from hunger to plenty, poverty to comfort, I have become transformed, and yet have remained a renegade. The unmovable self situated in the quicksand of memory, like those primeval creatures fixed in tar pits, that childhood twelve thousand miles and four decades away, is a fugitive presence which has not yet fossilized. Buried in the details of an

> American career, my life as a non-American persists, a parallel universe played out in dreams, in journeys home to Malaysia and Singapore, and in a continuous undercurrent of feelings directed to people I have known, feared, loved, and deserted for this American success. (20-21)

Lim crosses national borderlines to pursue a better life and she feels transformed in her border-crossing in different locations. She gets rid of her Malaysian impoverish through diligence in her immigration routes. Despite her American residence, she does not consider herself an American, for she is in an unstoppable immigration cycle to quest for her identity in Malaysia, the United States, and Singapore. Even though Lim chooses to live in California for the rest of her life, in an interview with Mohammed A.Quayam, Lim says that

> Kuala Lumpur is definitely not My home turf; I am not 'delusionary'. But neither is California. As I said earlier, my work is deterritorialized, an ironic prior property for a writer to whom 'home' has been such a first-order question. (5)

This statement reveals Lim's belief in simultaneity and juxtapositions of multicultural significations. She does not take either Kuala Lumpur or California as her permanent settlement. She possesses a flowing identity and has frequent shuttles between Malaysia, the United States, and Singapore. Lim is not limited to a certain national identity. Lim's mutual communication between these locations and cultures, such as her interaction with her siblings and her mother, helps make the construction of transnational identity.

Writing gives Lim a sense of empowerment, transformation, and serves as a way for Lim to be an agent for herself. Writing a memoir provides Lim a connection with the past and the present. For Lim, "writing a memoir implies re-living or re-experiencing a provable past" (Lim 2007, 23). Additionally, writing also bridges the gap between traditional and nontraditional cultural values. Story-telling in written words allows Lim to re-evaluate her relationship with her mother—whether it is family bond or bondage. Through story-telling as

follows, Lim locates herself and has emotional bond to her mother—both signification of Asian and Western cultures. Lime recalls

> Everywhere I have lived in the United States—Boston, Brooklyn, Westchester—I felt an absence of place, myself absent in America. Absence was the story my mother taught me, that being the story of her migrant people, the Malacca peranakans. But perhaps she was teaching me that home is the place where our stories are told. Had I more time to talk to Mother, perhaps I could have learned to forgive, listening to her stories. In California, I am beginning to write stories about America, as well as about Malaysia. Listening, and telling my own stories, I am moving home. (341)

Lim's mother teaches Lim that home means the origin and beginning of one's story, and bears one's growth. Home, for Lim, is the place where her story begings, and the constant flights to each country help Lim build bond with these three locations. Lim uses stories to locate and portray her self-identity. Not wanting to feel regretful about her unspoken relationship with her mother, Lim would like to have more time to listen to her mother's stories so that she can learn about the choice her mother made at Lim's age of eight. "I would like to ask Mother how she could have left us, six unfed children, for Singapore. But we never spoke" (302-03). Lim would like to have a better understanding of her mother's life, particularly her hard time when she was trapped in imbalanced gender norms. The written story-telling procures Lim a way to repair her unspoken relationship with her mother. In the prologue of this memoir, Lim agrees about Virginia Woolf's idea that "women think back through their mother. For many of us, it is the story of our mothers that makes a female heroic so necessary, yet also so impossible" (*Prologue* 5). Through the story-telling of a mother, Lim can date back to the era of her mother and the female role that her mother plays. The traditional female role Lim's

mother at first plays awakens the revolutionary feminist consciousness in Lim. Lim's writing this memoir portrays her mother's and her transformation and multicultural significations of both a traditional female role and a female heroic of autonomy challenging against the patriarchy culture.

The transformation of Lim's identity is formed in the transit of the diversity of multiple cultures. For Lim, her transnational identity is relative to "an overlapping grid of spaces—from the physical to the ideological" (Kennedy 113). In other words, Lim's transnational identity is not only constructed on the shifts of locations but also the transference and transformation of cultural significations and sense of values. Lim's identity is signified through movements between heterogeneous cultures. bell hooks claims that the self is "not as signifier of one 'I' but the coming together of many 'I's, the self as embodying collective reality past and present, family and community" (31). "I" means more than an individual, which refers to a hybrid construction of cultures and bridges the past, the present, and even the future. Lim grows within the transplant and transference of cultures and turn into a multi-culture identity. For the signification of the transformative identity, Lim expresses the cultural confrontation, assimilation, and transference in her cultural experiences of Malaysia, America, and Singapore in *Writing South East/Asia in English*:

> I experienced none of these systems as closed. They were present as contradictions opening multiple counter-possibilities, offering questions rather than answers, divergences rather than oppressions, ferments rather than ideologies [. . .]. I understood pluralism as the ground of experience. (38)

Lim's conviction to have an open mind toward all cultures cultivates her with a multi-cultural identity. All cultural rules are not closed to one another. Cultures interact with each other and refunction within different cultural systems. Lim, influenced by multiple cultures, represents her flowing cultural identity through border-crossing cultures. During Lim's working days in

the United States, her feminist-consciousness has been evoked by a feminist scholar. In Malaysia, Lim's unconformity to traditionalized gender roles is considered a rebellious act. In the United States, Lim is also warned by male colleagues to protect herself with girl decency—silence and conformity. But Lim is also influenced by the feminist consciousness promoting women to walk out of the limited female rights. Lim's senses of values vary and juxtapose over her shifting journeys from Malaysia, the United States, and Singapore.

Chapter Five
Conclusion

The formation of transnational identity can mainly be constructed through the juxtaposition of multiple cultural identities, the transference of cultures, and the refunction and juxtaposition of cultural significations within new terrains. The dynamic cultural significations come with the geographical border-crossing. The transnational immigrant route takes significations such as images and values to multiple cultural sites. In other words, the transnational subjects not only cross national borders themselves, but they also exercise "signification in transit," and make those significations rework within different cultural places. For the immigrants, regardless of their geographical separation from the origin culture, they in reality have emotional attachment to their migrant countries. The idea of one single nation becomes vague and the geographical border lines get blurred. Transgression of national boundaries not only refers to the crossroad of national boundary but also means the mutual influences of different cultures. David Palumbo-Liu points out that with the coming of the globalization age, Asian Americans challenge the particularity of race and the universal standard of the modern society. The transnational subjects will still be on the process to cross borders and refigure the cultures within the larger society (393). The moving individuals enact the transit of cultural significations and promote the reshape of heterogeneous cultures to come into being. In the meanwhile, the various facets of cultures can co-exist within a large social context.

As discussed in previous chapters, the thesis explores the varied cultural significations Lim has out of her multi-cultural Malaysian family and her migration routes from Malaysia, to the United States, and Singapore. In her memoir, her diverse cultural experiences of family background, the British education and immigration routes to America and Singapore are thoroughly portrayed.

Lim inherits the multi-cultural identity from her ancestry and keeps on in her later life development. Lim's family is a representation of cultural mixture of Chinese and Malaysian heritage. The ancestral legacy cultivates her open mind to diverse cultures, which form her anti-traditional thinking and have influences on the construction of her transcultural and transnational identity. Lim learns Asian Confucian disciplines and the Western language in her family. Lim feels like challenging the patriarchal power her father signifies. Likewise, at the Catholic School, she is tedious of the prudish gender norms. Besides, she learns the English language and Western individuality from the British education. The multi-cultural Malaysian society brings Lim cultural conflicts at first while she is faced with her patriarchy family and the individuality-stressed British education. On the surface, the Asian and Western senses of values Lim learns seem contradictory; in reality, different cultures provide her extensive exposure to different cultural modes and offer her various perspectives to get to know what she wants to be. Home, for Lim, is a memory of poverty and brutal acts that she would like to escape. Furthermore, Lim lacks a female figure to set a model on. Lim's anticipation to transcend from the traditional gender role is evoked by her father's patriarchal violence and her mother's departure for self-autonomy. Lim's boundary-breaking in locations tells that she yearns to cross cultural boundaries and search for her female identity. The initial cultural confrontation causes Lim to feel confused about her choice from either the Asian or the Western ideology, but the cultural conflict Lim faces apparently prepares Lim for her transformative identity at the same time. The cultural multiplicity and heterogeneity of Lim's root home and of the Malaysian society both signify Lim's multi-cultural identity. Lim is on her way to make out her female identity with her exposure to traditional and nontraditional gender values.

When Lim stays in the United States, the ideas of cultural significations and cultural transference are intertwined with the reformation of Lim's elastic identities. Her initial movement to the United States brings her mixed emotions. Feelings of pain and alienation

come over her all the time. However, she does not discard her Asian heritage for her full assimilation into the American society. Lim neither homogenizes herself within this American society nor disavows her Asian identity but signifies her Asian identity by demonstrating her Malaysian wear during her job interviews. The identity Lim claims for is more than a confined Malaysian or American identity. Her migration to the United States does not simply turn herself into an American citizen. It is a multi-cultural identity of new Americanness, inclusive of both the cultural identities of the birthplace and the receiving country. Arjun Appadurai delineates that 'the politics of ethnic identity in the United States is inseparably linked to the global spread of originally local national identities [. . .]. No existing conception of Americanness can contain this large variety of transnation" (424). That is, those immigrants in the U.S. are not required to abandon their original identity so as to become part of this large host country. Instead, they still retain their ideological or emotional link to their home country. Immigrants still get attached to their homelands culturally, politically, and psychologically. In the Asian American context, the quest is shifting from Americanness to the New Americanness. Immigrants do not have singular but plural identity in the meanwhile.

Under the interactive influences of Asian and Western cultures, Lim's search for an independent female role encounters challenge in both workplaces and her American family. In her American workplaces, Lim undergoes gender inequality at first, and then her feminist-awakening arises with the inspiration she gets from her feminist colleagues. The United States offers Lim a chance to quest for her self-autonomous female identity. Nonetheless, in her American home, even though Lim's husband treats her tenderly, Lim still cannot feel free to go in for her academic ideals. Lim is faced with a dilemma between a wife role and a career choice. Lim's multi-cultural identity and feminist colleagues direct her to pursue both the traditional female role in a family and an autonomous professor of self-realization. She comes to know that she has to make a compromise between traditional and nontraditional female roles. In the course of Lim's nursing her American-native son,

Lim's disciplines repeat the conventional culture she grows up in and meanwhile she adapts her dominant attitude through her husband's patience toward her son. Lim senses that the idea of home and female identity is not fixed. They are influxes receiving dynamic cultural transference. Lim gets to know that there is no definite advantage and disadvantage between any culture. In her own American home, Lim not only plays a traditional mother role but also acts out her nontraditional individuality by acquiring her autonomy in an academic field. She possesses both two cultures and reevaluates the Asian and Western cultures she is exposed to. Lim's demonstration in the United States displays the real her who has dual cultural identities.

Lim gets to realize that she possesses multifaceted cultural identity and she can manage to strike a balance between them without disowning any of them. Lim's shifting migration routes do not simply proceed linearly from Malaysia to the United States. She also migrates to Singapore, where her mother resides in since Lim was eight. All these three places form a circular cycle to continuously communicate with each culture. Lim brings her Malaysian and Western cultural legacy to the Singaporean society. Yet, in Singapore, Lim observes that her feminist identity is invisible to the Singaporean public, who prefer a conservative female role. She innovates her thinking pattern to exhibit her self-transformation with her simultaneous cultural significations. In Singapore, Lim learns to tell a story to keep a record of one's life from her mother. Through writing, Lim is in search of a spiritual home that she wants to construct with her mother. Lim's interaction and her desire to converse with her dead mother are shown through her written language.

Lim uses this memoir to represent her transnational identity, which focuses on the simultaneous juxtaposition, transference, and rework of cultural significations in different cultural social context and sheds light on the hardship and displacement of immigration. For Lim, writing a memoir embodies her signified identities of traditional and nontraditional cultures. She applies the English language she learns from the British education instead of the

language of her cultural inheritance, the Hokkien and Malay language. Her life in various places and demonstration of cultures are portrayed through the English language. Writing leads her to recall her homeland, expands her new branch in the United States and Singapore, and makes her reborn with a new transnational identity. Via the scope of this Asian-American memoir, the process of how Lim identifies herself as an American, an Asian, or an Asian American is shown. Moreover, Lim's interaction and experience between these worlds, and how she deals with her Malaysian roots indicates her transformation from resistance against traditions to acceptance of both traditions and nontraditions. In an interview with Joan Chang, Lim says that "I consider myself not so much Chinese American as Asian American. That's because I'm not just Chinese. [. . .] When we use a category as large as 'Asian American,' it gives us a lot of room to make sure that all our different aspects of identity get in there" (1). Lim thinks that "Asian-American" is a more suitable term to describe her border-crossing identity, for she inherits Chinese and Malaysian ancestry and has trodden various countries. In the course of Lim's growth, the ethnic diversity enriches her multifaceted cultural identities. Lim negotiates her ongoing transformative cultural identity from her early struggle to achieve her ideal to her embrace of the co-existence of cultural significations. Lim's in-betweenness in Malaysian, American, and Singaporean culture reflects her interactive cultural identity.

Transnational identity is not a choice between either homeland and adoptive country, or that between origin and destination. Neither does the transnational subject have to make a choice between worlds. Lim observes that it is hard for an individual to make a clear-cut distinction between cultural impacts, particularly for herself equipped with so many cultural identities. The transnational identity is an ongoing process, plural, and has an interactive force between each culture. Lim's cultural significations in different places are the exemplifications of her transcultural identity and her multiple identities are formed through her cultural and linguistic border-crossing. Instead of preferring nontraditions to traditions,

Lim turns her multi-cultural identity into a simultaneous juxtaposition of the heterogeneous cultures and senses of values.

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