

An Analysis on Frank Chin's Chinaman English in the Post Colonial Context

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Abstract: Chinaman English Was Created by Frank Chin to Overturn the Stereotyped Image of the Chinese American and Strive for the Rights of Discourse. This Paper Probes into the Historical Background and Frank Chin's Intention and Motive of Creating and Spreading Chinaman English from the Post Colonial Perspective and Points out the Significance of Reevaluating the Value of Chinaman English in the Contemporary Context.

1. Introduction

Frank Chin is the Fifth Generation Chinese American Who Has Been in the Frontier of Asian and Chinese American Literature, Committed to Changing the Stereotypes of Chinese American, Especially Male Chinese American. One of His Ways to Show His Efforts is to Distort Standard English by Introducing the Words and Expressions from Black English, Cantonese, Slangs, Etc. Moreover, he Tends to Use Long Complex Sentences and Metaphors; Changes on Purpose the Syntax of Standard English to Contribute to the Obscurity of Chinaman English. in This Way, Frank Chin is Trying to Arouse the Consciousness of the Chinese American Community to Fight for the Equal Rights and Position in the U.s.

2. Chinaman, Chinatown, and Chin

Frank Chin Has Been Claiming Himself as a Chinaman Writer Since the Beginning of His Writing Career, So as to Be Distinguished from the Assimilated Chinese American Writers. Chinaman Used to Be a Discriminatory Term Referring to A Chinese Person or a Citizen of China. It Was Initially Used over 150 Years Ago When the Chinese Labors Went to California as Coolie. Shawn Wong Hsu Differentiated Chinese and Chinaman in His Novel *Homebase*, "When You Called Someone a Chinaman It didn't Mean Chinese. It Was a Mutant Name Dragged Up out of America's Need to Name Names...Being Chinese Meant You Kept to Your History, Your Culture, Your Language from a Country you've Never Been" (Hsu, 1979: 69). in Reality, the Chinese Labors Encountered Systematic and Violent Racism and Discrimination Which by Now Has Been Well Documented. Even Mark Twain, Who Harbored His Own Prejudice Against the Oriental, Remarkd on the Unjust Treatment of the Chinese:

Any white man can swear a Chinaman's life away in the courts, but no Chinaman can testify against a white man. Ours is the "land of the free"-nobody denies that-nobody challenges it. (Maybe it is because we won't let other people testify.) (Twain, 1972:350)

Nevertheless, Chin considered the pioneers of the Chinese American to be masculine and heroic, like other "explorers of the unknown-seekers after gold, the big break, the new country..." (Chin, 1972:2) In the 1870s, a huge amount of Chinese labors were brought to the U.S to build up the transcontinental railroad. In spite of the fact that the Chinese labors accounted for the majority of the whole, quiet a lot of them even died from the harsh job and severe weather, when the railroad was finished, they were left over and forbidden to take the train. Instead, they were rounded up and taken back to San Francisco where they clustered to form the Chinatowns. That's the reason why Chin always sees Chinatown as the products of racism and the Chinese themselves clustered together to preserve their alien culture is for him a myth: "The railroads created a detention camp and called it 'Chinatown'. The details of that creation have been conveniently forgotten or euphemized into a state of sweet confusion. The men who lived through the creation are dying out,

unheard and ignored. When they die, no one will know it was not us that created a game preserve for Chinese and called it 'Chinatown.'" (Chin, 1972:60)

The Iron Moonhunter, that seeker after the dream, carried the memories and hopes of the proud Chinamen who laid rails across the West. However, to Chin's anger, this history was scarcely mentioned in the American documentaries since the "masculine and heroic" deeds of Chinese people went against their stereotyped image of effeminate and passive, imposed by the white racist. What's more, affected by the so called "racist love", even many of the Chinese American writers themselves were assimilated to break away from their origin and cater for the mainstream American society. Promoted by the Civil Affair Movement of the U.S since the 1960s, the period seeing the emergence of the post colonial campaign, a great many more Chinese American rose to their fame in America, in particular, female writers like Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tam, etc. But Chin accused the younger writers, especially Maxine Hong Kingston, of adapting and misrepresenting the traditional stories to cater for the curiosity of the white as well as furthering and reinforcing the stereotypical views of this group. The accused then accused Chin of his principle of "male chauvinism" and "misogyny." Maxine Hong Kingston even used Chin as the model for the protagonist of her work, *Tripmaster Monkey*. The argument between the two lasted for decades and was vividly described as Kwan Kung versus Mulan (Zhang Longhai, 2004).

Said (Edward. W. Said) argued in *Orientalism* that "Once the west civilization wins over the east's, it, in order to maintain and reinforce the dominion, did everything they could to smear and spoil the image of the counterparty, so called 'the other' in their eyes"(Said, 1994:47). Among all the measures taken, stereotype is a universally used one. Chinese American, as the imaginary "the other", was naturally stereotyped to be satanic in white civilization. However, Chin never admitted the supremacy of western civilization, In *Aiiieeeee!*, he wrote that "The mere existence of the equally great or even greater Chinese civilization was itself a moral affront to the one civilization built in the image of the one God, who will demand his solitude and privacy in the universe." (Chin, 1991:35) Chin sees Kwan Kung as the "father" of Chinese American, hoping that all his fellows will worship their "father", hence conform to Chinese traditions and cultures and fight against racism and the white supremacy. Kwan Kung traveled to America with the Cantonese immigrants through the national epic "*The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*" in the forms of both novel and opera. The masculine ideal that Tam Lum sought in *The Chickencoop Chinaman* and the bold individualism that Fred Eng desired in *The Year of the Dragon*, Chin would eventually find in this popular folk hero revered throughout the centuries as god of war:

Nothing charitable, necessarily honorable, in any western sense, passive or timid about it... It encouraged an aggressive self-reliance and trust nobody, watch out killer's sense of individuality that reached a peak in China with the Cantonese, took to the image of what the Chinaman scratching out mountains for gold thought of themselves, grew roots in California and sprouted a Kwan Kung happy race of people who wanted to hear, read and rewrite, only one story, and sing and sit through and pass with one opera only. (Chin, 1976:11)

The masculine and heroic image of Kwan Kung is everywhere in Chin's works, which made him the agent of the Kwan Kung in America. Nevertheless, the Kwan Kung Chin portrayed was quite different from its original image in China. As Chin put it, the imported Cantonese opera became "purely Chinaman" in expression "as it adjusted language, style, detail, event, and setting to the changing world of the Chinaman as work on a new experience, making new language to define the experience, and make new history." Such were the changes made that for "Chinaman is mining and railroad camps and Chinatown," (ibid: 11) It is to this Chinaman version of Cantonese opera that Chin owes his artistic origin and Chinaman English: "I write from links with the original where mothers of our people and through my mother, ties to the most popular hero of the most popular novel and opera living with me. The Kwan blood from my mother meant I was chosen to write theater like making war, throw everything away and get even." Chin therefore says: "I am not white writer. I'm Frank Chin, Chinaman writer." (ibid: 33-34)

3. Hinaman English as the Weapon against the Stereotyped Image

In *Order of Things* and the accession speech in France College, Foucault talked about the combination of discourse and power for the first time: “obviously, discourse is not a transparent and neuter element in which sex puts off the knife and politic finds the peace. Instead, it is a good room for certain threatening power to expand. Vacant as it may look like, discourse shows the connection with desire and power where it conflicts with bans.” Over and over again history has been proving that “discourse is the means and purposes to fight with and the power through which people entitle themselves power.” (Foucault, 1971:17) It’s doubted whether Frank Chin read about Foucault, but it’s undoubted that Chin is the executor of Foucault’s theory. Chin confronts the linguistic problem that his characters face in a bold, revolutionary manner. Their language abounds with slang, obscenities, and unusual grammar. The Cantonese terms may also make for difficult reading. But Chin would argue that he has captured the rhythms and accents of Chinese America without which its culture cannot truly be represented. This philosophical position is perhaps most clearly stated in the introduction to *Aiiieeeee!*

Language is the medium of culture and the people’s sensibility, including the style of manhood. On the simplest level, a man in any culture speaks for himself. Without a language of his own, he no longer is a man... Yet, the minority writer, specifically the Asian American writer, is made to feel morally obligated to write in a language produced by an alien and hostile sensibility. His task, in terms of language alone, is to legitimize his ,and by implication his people’s orientation as white, to codify his experience in the form of prior symbols, clichés, linguistic mannerism, and a sense of humor that appeals to white s because it celebrates Asian American self-contempt. (Chin, 1991:22)

In the post colonial context, the ethnic writers became aware of the power of language and spared no efforts striving for the rights of discourse. They penetrated their mother tongue into English in various strategies so as to speak for their community. As to the Chinese American writers, in his only novel *Eat a Bowl of Tea*, Louis Chu used many of the dialect of his ancestral home, Siyi county of Guangdong Province, adding peculiar flavor and sense of humor into his letters. Other Chinese American writers used the strategy when necessary. Frank Chin is different, however, he noticed the success of the black and Latino writers and was determined to speak for the Chinese American community and created Chinaman English. Frank Chin’s Chinaman English owes its origin to Pidgin English and Chinatown English. According to Chin, American culture isn’t “the Fascist myth of the tower of Babel,” nor does it evolve from the hegemony of unilateral culture, rather, it is “pidgin marketplace culture” characterized by its multicultural. Still Chin claimed that with such cultural system, “there is no one American culture, what we call American culture, like American English, is a pidgin marketplace culture.” “In the market place, we leave our prejudices, grudges, religion, drugs, guns and knives at the gate ... and come to do business” (Chin, 1998: 232).

Pidgin English is an inevitable process before Chinese American began to learn and use Standard English. Pidgin appeared in Guangdong province in the 18th century. In case of necessity, early Chinese railroad builders and menial labors had to learn and Pidgin English as lingua franca before they were shipped to America. Later, In order to survive the distinguished treatment and tough environment in America, early Chinese immigrants began to learn to speak Standard English by themselves. Given the fact that most of them were illiterates clustering in Chinatown, idioms, slangs and Cantonese words as well as self-created words were all stuffed in their English, making a unique new Pidgin English, or Chinatown English which can be seen as a transition to Standard English.

To sum up, Frank Chin is gradually disappearing from the reader’s horizon due to the emerging of the new Chinese American writers and his own obstinacy, but the contributions he made to Chinese and Asian American literature, together with the individuality and masculinity embodied in his works should not be obsolescent. The globalization is quickening the spread of English while depriving the diversification of languages with irresistible momentum. Radical and utilitarian as Chin was, he saw the great power hidden in language and tried to utilize the instrument to speak for

the Chinese American and even the Asian American community. The end of last century witnessed the Chinese American writers attaching greater importance to the literariness of their works while purposefully concealing their ethnic identity. However, the importance of ethnicity and family bond was revalued in the U.S. after the September 11 attack. Hence it should come as no surprise at all that those who turned to literariness failed to capture much attention. Given the rising ethnic conflicts of the world as well as the resurgence of racism in the American society, it's of significance and value to rethink the original intention and motive of Frank Chin while popularizing his Chinaman English, not in his way, though.

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