

**T.C.**  
**DOKUZ EYLÜL ÜNİVERSİTESİ**  
**SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ**  
**BATI DİLLERİ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI**  
**AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI PPROGRAMI**  
**DOKTORA TEZİ**

**DEFINING RACE: MIXED-RACE RELATIONSHIPS IN  
THE CONTEMPORARY CHINESE AMERICAN NOVEL**

**Özlem KARAGÖZ**

Danışman

**Yrd.Doç.Dr. Nilsen GÖKÇEN**

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## ÖZET

### Doktora Tezi

#### **Irkı Tanımlamak: Çağdaş Çinli-Amerikalı Yazarların Romanlarında Karma-Irk İlişkiler**

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Amerikan Kültürü ve Edebiyatı Bölümü**

Bu çalışma, çağdaş Çinli-Amerikalı yazarların romanlarında karma-ırk ilişkileri incelemeyi hedeflemiştir. Amerikan toplumunun kuruluşundaki ideal, bu toplumu diğer toplumlardan farklı yapan özellik, farklı ırklardan insanların karışarak Amerikan ulusunu oluşturmıştır. Irkların karışması, ırkçılık, ayrımcılık ve sosyal önyargılar nedeniyle hiç de kolay olmamıştır. Çağdaş Çinli-Amerikalı yazarların romanları incelenerek, karma-ırk ilişkilerin “rıza” kavramından çok “soy” kavramına dayandığı ortaya konmuştur.

Bu çalışmanın ilk olarak hedeflediği şey, Amerika’ya göçlerinin nedenlerinden ve Amerikan tarihinin gelişimindeki önemli rollerinden başlayarak, yaşadıkları benzersiz deneyimleri göstermek amacıyla Çinli-Amerikalıların tarihsel geçmişini okuyucuya sunmaktır. Bu çalışmada, “İrk”ın tarihsel bir dökümü sunulduktan sonra, karma-ırk ilişkilerdeki artışın ırk ayrımcılığının bittiği anlamına gelmediğinden bahsedilmektedir. Zira karma-ırk ilişkiler Amerikan toplumunda hâlâ “anormal” ve “gayrimeşru” kabul edilmektedir.

Karma-ırk ilişkilerin tartışılması noktasında önemli teoriler vardır. Werner Sollors’ın “rıza” ve “soy” kavramları, karma-ırk ilişkileri keşfetmekte ve Çinli-Amerikalı ailelerin yeni yapısını anlamakta yardımcı olacak bu teorilerden biridir. Başka bir teorik bakış açısı ise “ırk”ın sosyal bir “yapı” olduğu ve bir oluşum sürecine sahip olduğu olgusudur. Michael Omi ve Howard Winant tarafından ileri sürülen bu teori, ırk kavramının biyolojik tanımlarının modasının geçtiğini, ve bu tanımların Amerikan toplumunda ırkın ne anlama geldiğini açıklayabilmek için yeterli olmadığını anlatmaktadır. “Beyaz olma” olgusu hakkındaki teorilere gelince, “beyazlık” bir ırk kategorisinden çok, diğer ırk kategorilerinin üstünde tutulan bir kavramla anlam bulur. Karma-ırk ilişkiler, kimlik çatışmaları ve çağdaş Çinli-Amerikan romanında yeni aile yapısı olan evlat edinme gibi konuları tartışarak, bu çalışmanın amacı karma-ırk aileleri bir arada tutan kavram olduğu varsayılan “rıza” yetersiz kalmaktadır ve karma-ırk ilişkilerin asıl devamını sağlayan “soy” kavramıdır.

**Key Words:** Rıza, Soy, Sosyal bir olgu olarak Irk, Beyazlık, Karma-Irk İlişkiler, Kimlik, Evlat Edinme.

**ABSTRACT**  
**Doctoral Thesis**

**Defining Race: Mixed-Race Relationships in the Contemporary Chinese-American Novel**

**Özlem Karagöz**

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Department of Western Language and Literature  
American Culture and Literature Program**

**This dissertation aims to discuss mixed-race relationships under the framework of contemporary Chinese-American novels. The founding ideal of the American society is structured upon the fact that the distinctiveness of the American nation stems from the mixing of different races into a nation called Americans. The mixing of races in America was not that easy due to racism, discrimination and social prejudices. The discussion of contemporary Chinese-American novels suggests that mixed-race relationships in American society are based on descent rather than the consent of individuals.**

**First, this study aims to provide the reader with a historical background of Chinese-Americans for the purpose of demonstrating the uniqueness of their experiences, starting with the reason of their immigration to America, and their major roles in the development of American history. After presenting a historical account of race, this dissertation discusses that the increase in mixed-race relationships does not mean that racially discriminatory acts have come to an end. Mixed-race relationships in American society are still considered aberrant and illegitimate.**

**There are important theoretical aspects that support the discussion of mixed-race relationships. The theories that will help to explore mixed-race relationships and understand the new structure of the Chinese-American family are concepts such as Werner Sollors's concept of consent and descent. Another theoretical aspect is the fact that race is a social construction and that it has a formation process. The argument provided by Michael Omi and Howard Winant reveal that biological definitions of race are out of date and are not sufficient to explain the understanding of what race is in American society. In terms of whiteness theories, whiteness is not a racial category, rather, whiteness is defined as a concept which is superior to the other categories of race. With the discussion of mixed-race relationships, identity conflicts and adoption as a new family form in the contemporary Chinese-American novel, this study aims to argue that consent does not hold mixed-race families together; rather it is descent which supports the stability of a relationship.**

**Key Words:** Consent, Descent, Racial as a social construction, whiteness, mixed-race relationships, identity, adoption.

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## INTRODUCTION

“Every society, every nation, and every civilization has been a kind of melting pot and has thus contributed to the intermingling of races and new cultures eventually emerge” (Park, 1950; 192). Taking this quotation as a starting point to discuss how mixed-race relationships are perceived in American society, this dissertation aims to discuss mixed-race relationships under the framework of contemporary Chinese American novels. The founding ideal of American society is structured upon the fact that America is a nation of immigrants. Beginning with Crèvecoeur’s “Letters From an American Farmer,” it has been emphasized that the distinctiveness of the American nation stems from the mixing of different races and nations into a nation called Americans. In fact, it is this diversity of races and nations that makes America a unique nation. However, although the mixing of races is the ideal description of the American nation, since Crèvecoeur’s time, this in America has not been easy throughout American history due to racism, discrimination and social prejudices. In fact, the aura of conflict surrounding the increase in mixed-race relationships is so significant in America that this sociological fact has led to the development of mixed-race studies and mixed-race literature.

This dissertation aims to discuss the mixed-race characteristic of American society in terms of the contemporary Chinese American novels. The discussion of contemporary Chinese American novels under the framework of mixed-race relationships in American society are based on descent rather than the consent of individuals. Although mixed-race relationships should idealistically be based on the consent of individuals, these relationships in American society are met with obstacles related to descent. It is only when mixed-race relationships overcome these descent-related obstacles that the relationship could be based on consent.

Chinese Americans are the leading group among the Asian race of immigrants in America; their arrival has significant contributions to the development of America as a nation. Though they have faced severe discrimination because of their race, Chinese Americans have done their best with their hard work to be accepted as Americans. However, the racism that the first generation faced has continued in a different manner in the following generations. The American-born

Chinese could not change their racial features; that is why the Chinese Americans were total foreigners in the eyes of the white Americans.

Chinese immigrants have been omitted from American history as if they have had no impact on making America a developed nation. There is strong evidence to the contrary, however. For example, during the construction of railroads, the Chinese provided the major work force. However, they were not invited to the opening ceremonies of the railroads. Their efforts have been omitted from history books and as a community they have been neglected and left out of many of the protective shields that provided a sense of Americanness.

Besides the racial attitudes that the Chinese immigrants faced, they also had to cope with stereotypes related to malehood. Since the first immigrants were predominantly male, who had left behind their families in China to have a better income, the newly arrived male immigrants lived in bachelor communities. The maleness of Chinese men was degraded by white Americans because of their physical features. They were considered to lack physical strength which was ironic since these men worked at railroad construction which necessitates great physical strength.

Throughout American history, the Chinese, who have been a model minority group with their hardworking character traits, faced racial discrimination in return for their hard work. Although, the concept “model minority” is perceived as an affirmative metaphor because with the word “model” the Asian-Americans are presented as models to other non-white groups whereas it also refers to the fact that they are doomed to be a minority in American society, whether they are American citizens or not. Lately, the model minority myth is criticized for being an oppressive element that forces all the Asian-Americans to be hard-working people.

Similar to the questioning of malehood, Asian women also faced physical stereotypes. The Chinese and other Asian women were considered exotic, Oriental sex objects by white Americans. Under these circumstances, it was very difficult for the Chinese to form mixed-race families in America. When the Chinese got the opportunity to form families, they preferred marrying people from their own race and followed the Chinese family traditions of descent. Consequently, the first generation had a more traditional Chinese family structure, where the men were the leader of the

household and women were expected to obey their husbands, taking care of chores in the house and looking after the children. But later, the American-born, (second and third generation) Chinese preferred not to stay close to Chinese traditions and family structure. The American born Chinese individuals became more tolerant to mixed-race relationships or marriages.

First, in the chapter titled “Historical Background” this study aims to provide the reader with a historical background of Chinese Americans for the purpose of demonstrating the uniqueness of their experiences, starting with the reason behind their immigration to America, and their major roles in the development of American history. In fact, this is an act of revealing the racial discrimination that the Chinese have faced through centuries. Besides, it is an act of presenting how difficult it was for Chinese men to form families after the race and gender quotas that the American government had enforced upon them. Let alone mixed-race marriages, the first Chinese immigrants could not even bring their families from China and had to live in bachelor communities for extended periods of time. This status of bachelorhood continued until the San Francisco earthquake (1906), after which the Chinese had an illegal chance to bring their families to America. The Chinese, being the first group of immigrants in America to be excluded on the basis of race, were torn apart from their families in China. After the earthquake, since legal documents were lost, many Chinese claimed that they had sons in China who were actually “paper sons” so that another member of the family could immigrate to America.

The restriction that the Chinese immigrants faced was not only race related, it was also gender related. The population of first generation of immigrants was dominantly male. However, the most important difference between the first and the second generation of Chinese Americans is that the first generation could barely form families, whereas the second generation was luckier since the population of women immigrants had increased. Therefore, the historical background in this dissertation also intends to represent how family formation among the different generation of Chinese immigrants has developed from a closed structure to a structure which at least accepts the possibility of mixed-race marriages. Above all, this chapter on the historical background aims to demonstrate that the United States history, from its inception, is marked by racial and familial restrictions for the

Chinese. This part provides the reader with an overall understanding of racial oppressions under different historical circumstances. It also enables us to comprehend the fact that Chinese Americans have always been aware of the uniqueness of their experiences and that they have been called the “model minority” due to their hardworking character. Their incessant struggles started with their racial features which set them apart and later continued with the accusations that they were spies working for the Chinese government.

The historical background also aims to demonstrate that during the twentieth century, the attitudes towards Chinese Americans changed depending on America’s foreign policies. For example, during the Second World War, China was considered an ally of America whereas Japan and people of Japanese descent in America were considered enemies. Just a decade later, during the Cold War years, the positive image of the Chinese citizens reversed into that of foreigners and aliens, since communism was the threat to be spread by the Chinese in the United States. The condition of Chinese Americans after the 1960s is twofold. To begin with, there are some instances which are advantageous to the Chinese Americans. An example of an affirmative development for the Chinese Americans is that with the Civil Rights Movement and an atmosphere of racial consciousness, the immigration policy of America was revised, abolishing racial discrimination in the immigration law. However, there are also instances of racial discrimination or stereotypes attached to them that continue even in the twenty-first century. The Chinese are still targets of racial slurs and subtle and open racist discrimination. Similar to the decade of the 60s, the next decade, on the one hand continued racist attitudes, reminding the Chinese Americans that they are not real Americans, and on the other hand, there was also an optimistic environment in university campuses where student exchange programs were supported. It is also in this period that mixed-race marriages slowly increased among Chinese American population.

In the contemporary age, Chinese Americans are definitely luckier when compared to their ancestors who immigrated to America during the nineteenth century. For example, Chinese Americans are not doomed to work in laundries, restaurants or other low paying jobs. On the contrary, they have the opportunity to

get a university degree and find a well paying job. This aspect is the bright side of the situation while problems created in relation to race can still be observed.

In addition to documenting these new forms of racist attitudes, contemporary period certainly shows unmistakable signs of development in terms of the socio-economic standing of the Chinese Americans, but this does not rule out many instances of deep-seated racial prejudice. While the new image of the Chinese American is of one with a university degree and a well-paying job, rather than of someone that is doomed to work in restaurants and laundries, subtler forms of prejudice are directed against these people. As university degree became accessible to Chinese-Americans, the same opportunities are provided to other minority groups. That is why; the access to a university degree or the opportunity to work at a white-collar job is not a privilege that is presented to the Chinese-Americans.

Actually, the development of mixed-race marriages was not so sudden. Mixed-race relationships have existed since the colonial days of America. However, such relationships were banned and the limits of family formation were considered proper only if the members of the same race got married. After the 1965 Immigration Law came into effect, there occurred a significant increase in mixed-race relationships because this law stopped enforcing quotas to the newly arriving immigrants on the basis of race.

The increase in mixed-race relationships has changed the picture of the American family. Until the 1950s, scenes of American family in popular culture were totally white. The alternative to the all-white families came in the form of families that consisted of members that belonged to the same race, be it African or Asian races. This image, however, began to change in the representations of popular culture and literature where mixed-race families began to appear. The focal point of this dissertation is the period of time in which mixed-race relationships or marriages are on the increase: All of the novels analyzed in this dissertation have been written by contemporary Chinese American authors, and the time span of the setting in the novels varies from the late 1960s to the contemporary age. Mixed-race relationships have become a major theme that guides the development of contemporary Chinese American literature.

The next chapter, “The Roots of Mixed-Race Relationships in the United States” is an attempt to reveal that the existence of mixed-race relationships is not something that has suddenly become widespread. In fact, mixed-race relationships, though illegal, have always been an undeniable sociological fact of American society. Although mixed-race relationships have been legally banned through centuries, it was difficult for the officials to control relationships. The reason why mixed-race relationships were banned is connected to the unique racial formation of the United States. The first intention of this chapter is to trace the evolution of race and its development in America. The emergence of race as a concept goes back to the 1500s. Racism accelerated with Eurocentric tools during the eighteenth century in Europe. The development of race as a concept which discriminates people is rooted in the desire to establish power over the other. First, it was an economic factor in colonial Europe to dominate poor countries, whereas in America, besides economic factors, the first settlers emphasized the color difference between whites and blacks in a rhetoric based on the superiority of the whites an ideology which created a privileged class consisting of whites and outset the inferiority of other races. During the colonial days of America, race was an issue which was briefly structured upon being white or non-white. Since the colonial days, mixed-race marriages were considered a threat to the dichotomy of white and non-white. As a result of these relationships, now, race has become such a complex issue that the discussion of race in contemporary American society surpasses the bipolarization that racial prejudices are a matter of light skin tone or dark skin tone. With the increase in mixed-race relationships, it has become an issue where strict borders among skin colors cannot be drawn. The older understanding of race, aside from classifying African-Americans as “colored” also categorized them as intellectually inferior.

Mixed-race relationships faced resistance from the scientific ideas of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The eighteenth and nineteenth century scholars classified human beings according to their biological characteristics. Scientists such as Gobineau, Nott and Gliddon believed in scientific racism, emphasizing the superiority of the white race. They also concluded that children who were the product of mixed-race relationships were deficient beings due to the mixture of

different races. Similarly, Charles Darwin describes mixed-race relationships by referring to the word hybrid. For him, being hybrid is a state of incompleteness or deficiency.

After presenting a historical account of race, the next purpose of this chapter is to show that the increase in mixed-race relationships does not mean that racially discriminatory acts have come to an end. In fact, there are acts of racial discrimination done to people of mixed-race descent even today. The most important fallacy is that most of the modern scholars held the optimistic view that racism would end after a sudden increase in mixed-race relationships and especially the addition of the mixed-race category in the 2000 Census. The truth however is that mixed-race relationships are still considered aberrant and illegitimate. The prejudice towards mixed-race relationships or attempts to limit such relationships has ideological reasons. These reasons stem from the fact that whiteness as a racial ideology aims to protect its purity and eventually its superiority. The anti-miscegenation laws, at first were put into effect to protect whiteness from mixing with blacks. Later the enforcement of these laws led to the conclusion that colored races should be isolated from mixing with the white race. For years, by enforcing anti-miscegenation laws, the American governments tried to stop mixed-race relationships until it was decided in 1958 that anti-miscegenation laws violated the United States Constitution. The enforcement of anti-miscegenation laws reveals that the racial formation of American society is structured upon whiteness.

The increase in mixed-race relationships or their recognition as legal bonds has led to the theoretical discussions that aimed at analyzing them as a part of American culture. One such discussion puts at its center the two opposite tendencies, consent and descent. In the framework of mixed-race studies, Werner Sollors's theoretical book on the mixing of races and ethnicities, titled, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture*, provides an infrastructure to the analysis of mixed-race literature. For example, by analyzing mixed-race relationships, the opportunity to question the debate of consent and descent in familial relations will be revealed. The theoretical aspects such as consent, descent, the social construction of race and whiteness as a racial category will help explore mixed-race relationships and understand the new structure of the Chinese American family. The contemporary

Chinese American novels represent mixed-race relationships in which families formed on consent continue to struggle with the conflicts created by the lack of descent. This observation shows us that the ideal that relationships in American society, lacking any kind of racial prejudice can only be structured upon consent only when the two parties are white. Otherwise, in mixed-race relationships, concerns of descent shadow the idealistic perspective of consent.

The consent of individuals is thus not enough in order to continue a mixed-race relationship. In fact, couples that take part in a mixed-race relationship struggle with generational ties of descent and the problems caused by the lack of a racial consistency within the family. By referring to mixed-race relationships, we will explore whether the idealism behind consent is applicable to the racial myths such as the myth of the melting-pot. The analysis of mixed-race relationships questions whether the formation of the racial structure in American society is parallel with historical developments and whether this structure of racial formation is also valid for non-whites. The study of contemporary Chinese-American novel suggests that racial myths are only valid for white-white relationships.

In order to suggest a clearer understanding to the conflict between consent and descent, the exploration of Michael Omi and Howard Winant's theory of racial formation will be useful. This theory also suggests that American society is a race-conscious society and that the increase in mixed-race relationships or marriages does not prevent racist attitudes. On the contrary, the existence of mixed-race relationships creates a complicated situation in terms of defining the limits of racial categories. According to Omi and Winant, American society is a race conscious society and that is why "[w]e utilize race to provide clues about *who* a person is. This fact is made painfully obvious when we encounter someone whom we cannot conveniently racially categorize. . ." (Omi and Winant, 1994; 59). The argument provided by Michael Omi and Howard Winant reveals that biological definitions of race are proven inaccurate and are insufficient to explain the understanding of what race is in American society. Besides, race is not just a category of skin color or physical features in America, it is a characteristic which defines one's identity even before his/her gender. Omi and Winant call attention to the fact that race has always been

defined in relation to colored racial groups that exist in America, but that whiteness should also be considered a racial category.

Whiteness in America is not perceived as a racial category by white Americans; rather, whiteness is defined as unmarked. Whiteness is perceived as natural and dominant as the norm; it is not considered a racial category. As such, “[p]erhaps all of us regardless of race have an unconscious tendency to accept white culture as the majority culture as well as the favored culture. White is normal. Whiteness is desirable” (Wu; 2002, 318). The development of whiteness theories was crucial in race studies since whiteness was “[a] missing link in much of the social scientific work on race has tended to be the inattention to whiteness as a *racial* category” (Olumide; 2002, 30). Whiteness has been used to indicate “deserved privilege or superiority” (Olumide; 2002, 30).

Mixed-race categories are the most important threat to the contention that there are “pure” races whether they are white, black or yellow. Mixed-race relationships thus complicate the simple categorization based on the binaries of white and non-white. “Mixed race is the ideological enemy of pure race as a means of social stratification” (Olumide; 2002, 2). Equating whiteness with non-white races is degrading for the whites because in that case the purity and the superior condition of the white race would be lost. In this respect, “whiteness behaves like other racial criteria. Its advantages are claimed through the control of ideological production which has normalized and universalized a fragment of ‘white culture’” (Olumide; 2002, 31). Just like the social construction of racial categories, whiteness will be traced as a social construction.

The three aspects of the theoretical background are, namely, racial formation and the perception that race is a social construct, concepts of consent and descent provided by Werner Sollors. Lastly, whiteness as a racial privilege will continuously surface in the exploration of the themes of mixed-race relationships, identity conflicts and adoption. Five novels by contemporary Chinese American writers will be analyzed to prove that, conflicts between consent and descent, the social construction of race and whiteness as a form of racial privilege is a web of intricate relations in the discussion of mixed-race relationships.

The exploration of mixed-race relationships in contemporary Chinese American novels will be discussed under three themes. First of all, mixed-race relationships/marriages will be analyzed to reveal how concepts of consent and descent affect the existence of such relationships. Next, the theme of identity problems will reveal the conflicts that mixed-race identities struggle with, while also trying to reconcile their Chinese and American identities. Lastly, transracial adoption as a new form of extending the limits of mixed-race families in contemporary American society will be analyzed.

All the novels that will be discussed in this dissertation are problematic in terms of mixed-race relationships. The problematization of mixed-race relationships will be analyzed in terms of consent and descent. Assuming that mixed-race relationships are structured on consent, such relationships should not be haunted with problems related to descent. However, mixed-race relationships and marriages stand right at the juncture where consent and descent clash; therefore, it is in these marriages and families that their larger question or dilemma could be resolved. The present norms of the American society are far from achieving the mixed-race ideal based on consent. Even if a relationship starts on the consent and love of individuals, factors which can be symbolized by matters of descent continuously intrude in upon relationship. In the examples which will be provided from five different novels, it will be observed that consent is only valid in a relationship in which the members are Caucasian. America stands for the ideal where two individuals, regardless of their race should meet no obstacle as long as they decide to have a relationship. This equation of consent and America, however, is not a fact in Chinese-white relationships. While this is the ideal form of a consent based relationship, descent factors cause trouble in a mixed-race relationship. Problems related to descent are more concrete because, descent is related to bloodline, family line, last names, a family structure in which parents are expected to have biological children and carry on the traditions and the family name from one generation to the next. A family based on descent is the norm that is accepted as natural. The rules of descent decree that a mixed-race relationship would damage the purity of the family's race line. What is perceived as natural in familial relations is closely linked to what is being described with descent. For instance, marrying a person of the same race, having

biological children, the continuance of a bloodline are natural; however, mixed-race relationships, adoption and relationships based on consent do not fit the norms of naturalness. The characters who are the parents of young generation of Chinese Americans believe that it is a parent's duty to provide a marriage on the basis of descent. The parents feel relieved only when they accomplish this task for their children.

In addition to the difficulties of a mixed-race relationship, what makes this type of relationship more complicated is the individual task of reconciliation between a Chinese and an American identity. Generational gaps among Chinese Americans complicate the identity issues. The first generation of Chinese Americans expects their children to strongly follow the traditions of the Chinese family structure and culture, like themselves. However, the second and third generations of Chinese Americans try to be accepted as Americans even if their racial features doom them to stay Chinese forever. From the point of American born Chinese people, it is fair of them to act like Americans because China is an exotic place for them, a foreign country which most of them have never visited. For the young generation of Chinese Americans, trying to look white by bleaching their hair and wearing clothes that are fashionable to the whites is a way of becoming or passing as an American. In all of the novels, the only solution to the conflict between being Chinese or American is accepting that their identities are composed of both Chinese and American culture. Reconciliation between two different poles in a character's identity is the only way Chinese Americans could establish a peaceful life for themselves.

In the discussion about who is an American, it will be revealed that passing the American citizenship test is not enough to be accepted as an American. Theoretically, a person may pass the citizenship test and become an American citizen on legal documents whereas in practical terms, they do not become real Americans until they have the consent of the American society. This is a cultural acceptance which is not defined by law. Similar to the identity conflict of Chinese Americans, mixed-race identities also struggle with issues related to how their race should be categorized. There is a consistent treatment of mixed-race characters as foreigners, as if they are not Americans. During the analysis of the novels, it will be observed that white American characters tend to question the Americanness of mixed-race

characters since they are not perceived as real Americans. The exploration of identity suggests that being a citizen of America is sometimes insufficient to be accepted as “real” Americans.

The last theme that will be analyzed in terms of mixed-race relationships is adoption, which will complete the previous themes of race and identity. The discussion of adoption is especially important because, as if adoption does not involve problems related to identity, transracial adoption is a more intricate matter in the discussion of mixed-race relationships. Adopted identities search for their descent. For adopted selfhoods, descent describes their search for their biological parents, the contradiction between nature and nurture. The adopted characters are in a void in which they cannot anchor on to any sense of blood ties. Both adopted or an orphan, Chinese American characters, feel as if they are walking on a slippery ground, always in search of their descent, questioning who they are, who their parents are, and why they were left by their biological parents. As the adopted children of mixed-race relationships, they have no sense of a concrete, safe past. Even if parents try not to change their attitudes, the controversy between being a natural parent and a nurturer parents affects these families.

The discussion of mixed-race relationships in the contemporary Chinese American novel suggests that by analyzing themes of consent and descent in mixed-race relationships, identity conflicts and adoption as a new family form still does not ideally hold families together only by consent. In fact, descent is still central to any consideration of a mixed-race relationship or family formation. This dissertation aims to assert that race is socially created. The thematic analysis of the novels will reveal that whiteness shapes our ideas, prejudices related to other races. While perceiving whiteness as a form of privilege, the American society tends to classify other racial groups as unprivileged and as non-Americans. Therefore, the situation of mixed-race identities is even more complicated since they do not fit strict borders of racial categories. Also, in the exploration of the novels, it will be observed that the increase in mixed-race relationships does not mean that racial discrimination is coming to an end. In fact, racial discrimination continues in a different manner by trying to present mixed-race relationships as not the norm but the exception.

## 1. PART ONE: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

“The story of the Chinese in America is the story of a journey, from one of the world’s oldest civilizations to one of its newest.”<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1. The Chinese in America

China is one of the oldest civilizations in the world. With its unique characteristics and ancient culture, China still serves as an antithesis to the West. At first sight, the flow of Chinese immigrants to America may seem like a random adventure. However, there are strong push and pull factors that led the Chinese to emigrate. The Chinese have a unique history of becoming Chinese Americans. This process has two essential parts: The first part involves the reasons behind the emigration and the second part, the conditions that awaited them once they settled in America will be explored. There are vital reasons for the Chinese Americans to leave behind their relatives, belongings and ancestors and settle in a country totally foreign to them with its culture, language and society. Therefore, arrival in the United States is not the end of the story for the Chinese Americans; in fact it is just the beginning of a new and even more complex story.

Historically, we can classify the immigration of the Chinese people into three main waves. The first main flow of immigration was during the 1840’s known as the California gold rush. This group of immigrants was considered to be cheap laborers in the eyes of white employers and took part in the construction of the railroads. The second wave of immigrants who arrived during the 1950s was composed of either intellectuals or refugees. The second wave of immigrants was the reason for the development of the term “model minority” referring to Chinese Americans. What made the Chinese Americans a “model minority” was Chinese people’s hardworking character. Yet even success has a price: “The great irony of the Chinese American experience has been that success can be as dangerous as failure: whenever the ethnic Chinese visibly excelled--whether as menial laborers, scholars, or businessmen--efforts arouse simultaneously to depict their contributions not as a boon to white America but as a threat” (Chang, 2003; xi). The third wave of immigrants, who

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<sup>1</sup> Chang, Iris. (2003). *The Chinese in America: A Narrative History*. New York: Penguin Books.

arrived in the second half of the twentieth century, includes all socio-economic classes from China.

All of the three waves of immigrants have faced identity issues such as “a sense of feeling different or alien, in their own country; of being subjected to greater scrutiny and judged by higher standards than the general populace” (Chang, 2003; xi-xii). No matter in which phase of immigration they arrived in America, all Chinese immigrants confronted the prejudice that they were aliens because of their racial features.

What were the conditions at home that made these people leave their home and seek refuge in a new land? After all, China has one of the oldest civilizations and traditions in the world. China is also a vast country which geographically has diverse regions made up of different ethnicities and traditions. Despite this vastness, there has always been one strong element that connected this diversity, which is written language. Out of the disorder of different dialects spoken in various regions, only one written language has emerged. The unification in written language helped written official documents to be transported from one region to another even though the Chinese had different spoken dialects. Language was a means of stabilizing control over the country. The unification under one written language was crucial to keep order in China. In order to understand the reasons that caused large numbers of Chinese people to seek a new home in America, a glance at the “old country,” its geographical, socio-economic, and cultural circumstances is needed.

### **1.2. The Old Country: Imperial China in the Nineteenth Century**

Geographically a vast country, China is divided into three main regions: namely, the China of the inland, the central China and the China of the coast. Different classes of people lived in different regions. Those who lived in the inland China had the worst survival conditions. Most of the poor people lived in this area and they were mostly peasants whose muscle power was used in farms. The life cycle of the peasants was always the same. Their muscle power was used in pushing plows, planting rice by hand in ankle-deep water. These people spent all their lives under heavy labor conditions. The only survival option for the peasants was working

because rice, the staple crop of the region, provided them not only with wages, albeit barely enough for survival, but with the only means of subsistence:

To survive hard times, some ate tree bark or even clay. Rice was by no means the only crop the peasants grew, but it evolved into China's main food staple because of its nutritional value and ability to sustain a huge population. Rice could be harvested more frequently than wheat, and its system of cultivation far predated historical Chinese civilization. (Chang, 2003; 5)

Until the mid-nineteenth century the class which composed most of China was the poor peasants, who focused on cultivating rice and wheat. The ruling class of China isolated itself from the poor conditions of the peasants and lived in a totally different world where the main criteria were luxury. The rich were both economically and geographically secluded in the capital city of Beijing, which was the center of the nation. The richness of the ruling class was symbolized with their monumental architecture and grand works of art. For example, the ancient emperor's palace called the Forbidden City was such an architectural masterpiece that "within the Forbidden City was a Chinese vision of paradise on earth" (Chang, 2003; 6). Another architectural beauty of the Chinese is the Great Wall of China. The longest structure on earth, the Great Wall of China was built with the purpose of protecting the Han from foreign invasions. With their way of governing, the rulers of the Chinese people caused an increase in the inequality between the rich and the poor.

In 1644 however, the Manchu rulers, managed to pass the Great Wall of China and moved into the Forbidden City. They established their own ruling line, the Qing dynasty. The governmental system of this new dynasty deepened the inequalities among the rich and the poor. The Qing dynasty was so authoritative that the Chinese people lived under oppression for years. The governors using absolute power over the Chinese citizens were the epitomes of authoritarianism. The wealthiest people lived in mansions with huge gardens. They had their private libraries and art collections. In contrast to this glorious richness, some groups of people were terribly poor. There were so many poor people that most of them died in front of the doors of the rich people's mansions begging for food.

This income gap reached its peak in the nineteenth century with the increasing signs of decadence, which also pointed towards the imminent downfall of China as a world power. Chief among the reasons behind this downfall were domestic factors. Many centuries before, China was a powerful civilization, which medieval European countries admired. However, by the 1800's the country was isolated from the rest of the world. The Industrial Revolution triggered the technological developments in Europe with which the Chinese civilization could not keep up. Meanwhile, the Chinese population doubled between the years 1762 and 1846. While only 200 million people lived in China in 1762, in 1846 the number had increased to 421 million. As a result of this population increase, farmers chopped down entire forest areas near major rivers, which led to "soil erosion, causing serious floods, which in turn brought famine and epidemics" (Chang, 2003; 14).

Besides the domestic reasons, there were also foreign impacts that made China open to foreign exploitation by Western countries. For years, the Chinese civilization had been the focus of Western countries for new market reasons. By the early nineteenth century the British had introduced the dangerous drug opium. The reason why the British imported opium to China was a trades plan. Since Britain was buying tea from China they could not cope with the amount of money that they had to pay to China. Therefore, in order to gain advantage in this long run of trade, Britain "imported increasing amounts of opium into China. As more and more Chinese became addicts, the balance of trade reversed" (Chan, 1991; 7). The Chinese government tried to stop the trade of opium but they were unsuccessful. When the British noticed the fact that the Chinese governors were trying to stop the opium trade, they invaded the port cities of China. As a result of these attacks, the Qing dynasty signed the Treaty of Nanking in 1842, "which forced the country to open its ports to international trade, pay massive indemnities, and continue to allow the open importation of opium" (Chang, 2003;15). Besides these conditions that the British government enforced, China had to accept "Christian missionaries to preach in various localities . . . and most damaging of all, grant not only Great Britain, but also its allies, extraterritoriality, which made Westerners immune to Chinese law" (Chan, 1991; 7).

Unfair treaties with the West inevitably caused disorder in the countryside, when the Qing government transferred the burden of indemnities to the peasants, forcing them to pay increased taxes. The peasants were already living in slave-like conditions, and these new heavy taxes meant to them more load of work and more oppression from their landlords. Under these circumstances, the peasants could not stand the heavy load of work, and most of them sold all their belongings and even their children in order to get out of debt. Such conditions under which people had to live over the next decade left the population devastated and the land destroyed.

Under these circumstances the Chinese started hearing stories about the wealth in America. The pull factor in America for the Chinese was the myth of the Gold Mountain. When gold was discovered in California in 1848, a Chinese resident in California wrote home a letter about it, and soon all the people in the Canton region were talking about how to get to Gold Mountain with the hope of solving all their problems. Soon all the men in the Canton region were preparing to leave. Short of money, the Chinese borrowed money from their families or contacted a labor agency that would provide them money in exchange for a claim of their forthcoming earnings in America.

### **1.3. America: A New Hope**

Being tired of oppressive leaders and difficult living conditions and working like slaves, the Chinese people thought of immigrating to America after hearing about the “Gold Mountain” which gained a legend of hope in the eyes of the Chinese. Like many people from different countries of the world before them, for the Chinese immigrants, America became a land of opportunity to provide them with not only better circumstances of life but also opportunities that would enable them to start a completely new life.

Thousands of people worldwide who found themselves desperately trapped, without money, property, job, or future, this land of wide open spaces, seemingly infinite resources and unsettled territories held out the promise that here was a place where a person could walk away from his or her past

and begin again, reinvent himself or herself and give that new self a better life. (Chang, 2003; 20)

There were other conditions which required hard work for low payments. America's geography seemed to be a vast natural resource where each individual would have enough space of his/her own. Next to the Chinese people, nineteenth century was a century of other ethnic groups of immigrants flowing to America with the common hope that they would have a better future in this new land. For example, "[m]ore than one million Irish immigrants in flight from their countries potato famine arrived on America's shores" (Chang, 2003; 21). The arrival of immigrants in America from different nations worsened the survival conditions for the immigrants since now the labor market had become highly competitive for the immigrants, for the employers could replace them with newer immigrants who would work for less. Hence, most of the Chinese immigrants desperate for a job, had to accept low wages in order to survive. However, not every hope they cherished was going to become true since nineteenth century conditions in America also needed extra effort for survival. The optimistic stories of wealth that the Chinese heard about when they were in China soon proved to be exaggerated rumors. The Chinese immigrants of the nineteenth century did not have many options besides leaving their past in China and starting a new struggle for survival in America after their arrival. They obviously did not have a wide range of choices: They were either going to continue the desperate struggle of survival, or they were truly going to believe in the American dream and work hard for being wealthy.

In short, having left very poor conditions of survival in China, the Chinese began a new struggle of endurance in America. The main obstacle for the newly arrived immigrants was competition with other immigrant groups in search of a job. The industrialization of America made survival more difficult for the immigrants, although it provided more jobs for the predominantly unskilled immigrant population. While the nation was becoming a technologically advanced, industrial country there was a lot of work to be done in order to adjust to this process of change. When mechanization was on the rise taking place in the East, the West of America needed great numbers of physical labor power to convert the prairie into farmlands. The

Chinese had arrived in America mainly as a result of the Western Expansion when the news of the discovery of gold in 1848 spread all over the world. Hopes of being wealthy were increasing, but the Chinese were not aware of the racial prejudice that they were going to face. “For the Chinese headed for California from across the Pacific, the greatest threat would come not from the harshness of nature but from the cruelty of fellow humans and the racism endemic to their beloved ‘Gold Mountain’” (Chang, 2003; 25). It was under such conditions when the first wave of Chinese immigrants arrived in the United States. The first group of Chinese immigrants did not cause a sense of threat for the Americans since they did not arrive in huge numbers. Later, however, the increase in the number of Chinese immigrants influenced racial politics and controversies.

These difficulties had never been mentioned in the glamorous advertisements of America, which invited the Chinese laborers with promises of instant wealth. Since the Chinese people had no other sources of information about the conditions in America, advertisements of the companies who carried Chinese immigrants focused on the superficial richness of the American land and other endless opportunities. The advertisements emphasized that Americans were rich people, and once they arrived in the United States, the Chinese immigrants would have the same opportunities as other Americans and live in large houses and have no difficulty in obtaining food. In reality, however, the conditions that they had to face were a far cry from the descriptions in the advertisements. The Chinese immigrants’ American experience was embedded in hardships at every stage, and it is thus not surprising that there were many who could not survive.

Most of the newcomers to America planned going back to China after earning some amount of money. Despite this initial plan of a temporary stay in America, most of the Chinese immigrants later abandoned the idea of going back to China. The first obstacle to overcome was the journey across the Pacific Ocean from China to the United States. According to the weather conditions in the ocean they either traveled by a boat or a steamer both of which were dangerous to cross the whole ocean. It took about four to eight weeks’ time to arrive in the United States. For those who stayed in America, there were three essential phases which are respectively journey and arrival

in San Francisco, Gold Rushers and Gold Mountain, and the construction of the transcontinental railroad.

As soon as the Chinese arrived, they spent years in search of gold because the only hope they had for their future was discovering a gold mine and to build up an existence in American society. While the Chinese were searching for gold, however, they were living in poor conditions. They had to live in tents or other small places like huts. Although many of the Chinese lost their hope of finding gold, there were a few people lucky enough to discover a gold mine. Yet official racism intervened at this point and even these lucky few could not have an easy survival and equal opportunity as the white pioneers. As the government realized the fact that some Chinese immigrants albeit a small number, were becoming rich, the government officials thought that the valuable gold mines “should be reserved for Americans” (Chang, 2003; 42). They even thought of excluding the Chinese by imposing heavy taxes on them so that only white Americans could work in California gold mines.

In reality, finding gold in California mines was a very rare case for the Chinese immigrants. In most cases, they were disillusioned since they could not be a part of the “wealthy America” scene which they had seen in advertisements before their arrival in America. The ones disillusioned with the idea of finding gold, had to think of other ways of earning money. Some preferred making use of the Chinese cuisine and opened Chinese restaurants, others provided domestic services such as laundry washing and ironing. Most immigrants worked for low wages in America. But the fact remained that even the small amount of money that they earned in a month was the equivalent of several months’ payment in China. While the Chinese immigrants were working hard to send money to their relatives in China, the people in China were fascinated with the amount of money sent to them.

As the Chinese community expanded especially in San Francisco, the whites felt hatred and fear towards these immigrants. They felt disturbed by the fact that the Chinese men were harder working than them and they were slowly managing to organize new job opportunities for themselves. “In April, 1852, Governor John Bigler called for an exclusionary law to bar future Chinese immigration” (Chang, 2003; 51). This reaction was the first expression of anti-Chinese sentiment. He claimed heatedly:

they are not of that kin that Americans can ever associate or sympathize with. They are not of our people and never will be, though they remain here forever. . . . They do not mix with our people, and it is undesirable that they should, for nothing but degradation can result to us from the contact. . . . It is of no advantage to us to have them here. They can never become like us. (Quoted in Chang, 2003; 51-52)<sup>2</sup>

Next to such anti-Chinese sentiments, debates of Civil War were also increasing. Therefore, the impact of the Chinese immigrants in the United States did not assume much importance in the discussions in the Congress. Since for the time being many American officials saw the Chinese as a source of manpower, the Chinese immigrants were often regarded rather than a political threat, the major source of labor during the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad, which was to transform America throughout the nineteenth century.

The Civil War, which ended with the victory of the industrial North and the resulting acceleration of Industrialization, increased the need for unskilled cheap labor which the Chinese immigrants provided. They helped transform the Western wilderness into farmlands and constituted significantly to the construction of railroads.

After the decision of the Congress to construct a transcontinental railroad, two companies took this task: The Central Pacific Railroad Corporation (from the West) and The Union Pacific Railroad Corporation (from the East). “The goal was to meet in the middle, connecting the nation with a continuous stretch of railroad tracks from the Atlantic to the Pacific” (Chang, 2003; 54). The Central Pacific’s task was more difficult than the Union Pacific because geographically, The Central Pacific had to work on steep mountains. It was the Chinese labor “that helped make the transcontinental railroad a reality” (Chang, 2003; 55). When the corporation managers realized that the Chinese were hardworking people and worked for less than the white workers, they brought more and more Chinese immigrants from China, and in a short period of time their numbers reached thousands. With the flow of Chinese

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<sup>2 2</sup> Iris Chang refers to two sources for this newspaper report in: *San Francisco Daily Alta California*, May 21, 1853, p.2 as cited in Victor Low, *The Unimpressible Race: A Century of Educational Struggle by the Chinese in San Francisco*. pp. 2-3; H. Brett Melendy, *Chinese and Japanese Americans*, p. 30.

railroad workers, they “represented 90 percent of the entire work force [and] . . . the savings derived from the employment of Chinese rather than white workers was enormous” (Takaki, 1989; 85).

The Chinese workers were chosen particularly for very difficult working conditions such as geographical difficulties: the workers had to dig tunnels through huge mountains. Sometimes the technology of the time such as gunpowder was not enough to break through the mountains. In order to manage breaking through the mountains, the company brought different solutions such as the use of nitroglycerin. This was such an explosive that only experienced workers should have used it, but many Chinese workers who had no such experiences died in explosions.

Though the Chinese often patiently endured harsh work conditions, there were times when they rebelled against their employers about the wages they earned. For instance, the Chinese rebelled in 1867 when their wages were not paid on a regular basis since the corporation was on the verge of bankruptcy. Besides, while the Chinese immigrants were working longer hours than the whites, the whites were paid more money. In return, the company answered back very cruelly. They immediately took the Chinese immigrants out of work and placed them with “freed American blacks” (Chang, 2003; 62). When the Chinese workers understood that they would not be able to survive without food or any shelter, they agreed to return to their jobs on the railroad construction, a solution which the company also preferred.

In 1868, the Burlingame Treaty was signed, which allowed “‘free immigration and emigration’ of the Chinese to the United States to ‘enjoy the same privileges, immunities, and exemptions in respect to travel or residence, as may there be enjoyed as the citizens or subjects of the most favored nation” (Takaki, 1989; 114). Nevertheless, when the American government was amending its racist laws against the Chinese, this time the source of racism was the white American public itself, for the American citizens did not recognize the privileges mentioned in the treaty. The Chinese were thus still subject to discrimination and racial prejudice. While the treaty was supporting the immigration of the Chinese, the Americans continued their oppositions to the increase of Chinese immigrants in America.

It is very clear that the transcontinental railroad is a success of Chinese labor. When the railroad construction was completed in 1869 “the Central Pacific had built

690 miles of track and the Union Pacific 1,086 miles” (Chang, 2003; 63). The two coasts were now connected together. Before the construction of the railroad it took four to six months going from east coast to the west coast. After its construction it only took six days. Yet, “[d]espite their heroic feat, the Chinese were not invited to the jubilant ceremonies that marked the completion of America’s first transcontinental railroad” (Chan, 1991; 31). Not only that, but after the construction had been completed, the Chinese workers were left insecure and jobless.

The Chinese were now scattered in the foreign lands of United States after having completed their jobs in the railroad construction. In search of new job opportunities, some immigrants continued working in mines for low wages. The Chinese immigrants in America were still going to face new obstacles.

#### **1.4. Spreading Across America**

After completing the railroads, most of the valleys in California were turned into agricultural areas, which meant that farm labor was going to be needed in order to produce agricultural products. “Many white landowners were eager to use Chinese labor because it was both inexpensive and self-sufficient” (Chang, 2003; 72). Not only did the Chinese immigrants worked in the mines, railroad construction and farms, they had also cleared all the swamps in the California area. Since the landscape of main cities such as San Francisco changed after the period of Civil War, an era of technological development and mass production renewed the job opportunities in the cities. Factories were being established, the meat industry, tobacco and textile industries flourished. The Chinese immigrants were able to find new jobs in these newly emerging industries.

In the post-Civil War society, some Chinese went south. Some of them worked as substitutes for former black slaves in southern cotton plantations. Nonetheless, the plantation owners, rather than acting as employees to the Chinese immigrants, acted toward them as if they were slaves to serve them as sires. “In a culture that viewed blacks and Native Americans as having sprung from an inferior culture, the Chinese quickly recognized that anyone associated with these two other races was likely to be abused” (Chang, 2003; 94). The plantation owners wished to

continue their old habits of putting people to work for endless hours for mere subsistence although the Chinese workers were working on contract with scheduled work hours. The Chinese were looking for ways to show their reaction to the rudely behaving plantation owners. Under such conditions, many of the Chinese immigrants ran away from plantations to other cities, so by the early 1900s there were scarcely any Chinese workers left in the southern plantations.

The 1870s were crucial both in the history of America and for the Chinese since the beginnings of hatred towards the increasing number of Chinese immigrants established the view among white Americans that their job opportunities were taken away by the Chinese population. The increasing number of immigrant workers also affected the economic crisis in the country. While the gap between the rich and the poor was widening, “the Chinese became the scapegoat, especially in regions where they clustered in the greatest numbers” (Chang, 2003; 116). After the Civil War, the approval of the fourteenth Amendment had guaranteed the right to vote and other rights of citizenship for recently freed slaves. However, the Chinese immigrants were withheld from voting or becoming citizens of United States unless they were born in America. The attitude of the Americans to the Chinese immigrants was to take political cautions to limit their numbers.

While there was such an anti-Chinese sentiment at both legal and public levels, there was also a contrary tendency among some Americans who supported the flow of new Chinese immigrants since they provided cheap labor for the country. To provide the workforce needed, companies arranged ships to bring more immigrants by passing out handbills such as: “It is a nice country. Better than this. No sickness there and no danger of death. Come! Go at once. You cannot afford to wait. Don’t heed the wife’s counsel or the threat of enemies. Be Chinamen, but go” (Chang, 2003; 97). As a result of these handbills and advertisements thousands of new Chinese immigrants arrived in the United States only to increase the anti-Chinese sentiments in this country. Density of the Chinese immigrant population in areas such as California became a reason for manifold drawbacks.

Since most of the Chinese population lived in California, especially in this state their conditions after the Civil War worsened because the soldiers who had fought in the war were back home, which meant that they needed jobs to look after

their families. The railroad construction had come to an end, so there were no visible job opportunities left for the increasing population. Moreover, the completion of the railroad became a negative effect on the local industries in California, since eastern goods were now easily transported to the west coast. Still the California businessmen, in a time of economic crisis preferred Chinese immigrants for the jobs “because they were usually willing to work longer hours for less than half the pay” (Chang, 2003; 117-118). This increased the hostility of California’s white working classes towards the Chinese laborers.

As a result of the Civil War, corporations now controlled industries and manual labor lost its importance since every step of production was accomplished through mass production with fewer workers. Thus, there were thousands of unemployed people in the city, struggling to find a job, of which there were very few left. All of these events gave way to the rise of anti-Chinese sentiments in all walks of life all over America. In such an atmosphere, the American politicians now started to look for ways to stop Chinese immigration. The idea of stopping Chinese immigration into the United States became a major issue in political groups; politicians started debating the consequences of such exclusion. The majority of white American Congress members agreed that the Chinese should be excluded for twenty years. A minority group of politicians wanted to remind the Congress about the economic value of the Chinese immigrants and their contribution to the development of the American West. These latter ideas, however, were not taken into consideration seriously, because most of the members of the Congress believed in the supremacy of whites. A Congress member named John F. Miller, who was famous for his anti-Chinese sentiments asked the Congress to exclude the Chinese for 20 years. He describes the Chinese people as “. . . machine-like [,. . . of obtuse nerve, but little affected by heat or cold, they are automatic engines of flesh and blood; they are patient, stolid, unemotional. . . [and] herd together like beasts” (Quoted. in Chang, 2003; 130)<sup>3</sup>.

The proposal of excluding the Chinese for twenty years was rejected since the Congress members thought of the importance of American and Chinese trade

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<sup>3</sup> Quotes from the debate in Congress can be found in Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gate*, p. 224-44.

relations. The Americans feared that the Qing dynasty would shut down the Chinese ports to American trade. Therefore, the Congress members thought that twenty years of exclusion would be a very long time, and instead an exclusion of only Chinese immigrants for ten years was agreed upon. This act was signed on May 6, 1882 and is known as The Chinese Exclusion Act. Banning the entry of Chinese laborers and preventing the formation of Chinese families, this act was the most visible form of racial discrimination by excluding the Chinese entry into the United States.

When the Chinese Exclusion Act was put into practice, violence towards the Chinese was also on the rise. For example, the white American population in many states was urging the Chinese to leave the country. This public opinion found its resonance also in new legal sanctions that were meant to deceive the Chinese immigrants. In order to decrease the number of immigrants flowing from China to the United States, two years after the Chinese Exclusion Act was signed, the Congress amended that the Chinese who had been living in the United States before 1880 would be given a special certificate indicating that they could travel from America to China and back again without any problems. What the Chinese did not know was that this was a lie for sending the Chinese people away for good since their certificates were denied when they came back to United States. This was one of the “(il)legal” ways that America used in order to stop Chinese immigrants.

Legal measures continued to be taken against the possible flow of new Chinese immigrants, but these measures made a qualitative distinction among the Chinese. After the Exclusion Act expired in 1892, the Congress passed the Geary Act in order to suspend Chinese immigration another ten years. According to this act, the Chinese immigrants had to have their certificates of lawful residence. The important factor about these acts is that they both excluded only the Chinese citizens who were suitable for manual labor. Merchants, teachers and students were still eligible, but their number was negligible. Still, it was only a limited number of people who were allowed to enter the United States because education was a privilege designated for the rich people in China who already lived comfortable lives in their home country with hardly any intentions of leaving it for a prejudiced environment.

A court decision in this period known as the Toy Decision created a tension in the diplomatic relations between United States and China. According to this decision,

“Chinese immigrants denied entry to the United States, even if they alleged American citizenship, could no longer gain access to the courts to appeal the decision” (Chang, 2003; 141). As a result of this decision the Chinese citizens in China started protesting. They boycotted American companies in China and even gave up their jobs in them, and, took out their children from American schools.

While the United States still kept the number of Chinese immigrants flowing into the country very limited, a natural catastrophe changed the lives of Chinese immigrants. The San Francisco earthquake of 1906, resulted in the total destruction of the city, including the major buildings, and also the fire that broke out right after the earthquake burned down most of the official documents, including birth and citizenship records of the immigrants. Since the official records were lost, after this catastrophe, the Chinese immigrants had the right to claim U.S. citizenship since there was no record left to show where they were born. The Chinese immigrant also had the option of telling “the American authorities that his wife in China had given birth to a son, where in reality no child had been born, and then sell the legal paperwork of this fictitious son to a young man eager to migrate to the United States” (Chang, 2003; 146). The chance for the Chinese immigrants to claim that they had fictitious sons in China led to the emergence of a term known as “paper sons.”

However, the authorities soon became aware of the fact that they were being cheated. Strong precautions were taken by the American government to hold down the number of Chinese immigrants entering the country. In order to prevent the cases of paper sons, the government held the Chinese in custody at immigration centers where they were interrogated. Angel Island was set up to be used as a detention center to stop the flow of immigrants and to cross-examine the immigrants. The interrogations were so long and detailed that the immigrants had to stay at Angel Island for days while they were asked many questions about their families, backgrounds, and relatives in China. The immigrants had to answer the questions about their family tree consistently, sometimes facing the same question over and over again.

The aftermath of the Chinese Exclusion Act turned America into a kind of purgatory for the Chinese who felt ostracized in American culture and alienated from China. Going back to China was no option, because they had to earn money to look

after their families. Ironically, it might sound contradictory to see many more Chinese people trying to enter the U.S. even after the stories of immigrants revealed some of the reality in this country. Clearly, the immigrants were in search of gold and that they became rich in a very short period of time and started running their own businesses in America. Still their relatives chose to believe, sometimes based on letters filled with straight lies that, that Chinese were wealthy. In fact, no matter how difficult the conditions were in America, when the Chinese immigrants compared their lives in America to those they had in China, they believed that America was the land of freedom.

Meanwhile, the lives of Chinese were taking unusual turns in America due to the particular conditions in this country. Probably part of the reason why their relatives in China found it hard to believe that they were having financial hardships was that most Chinese people in U.S. were beginning to start their small businesses as restaurants, laundries. Yet this itself was a result of discriminatory laws in America. For instance, the immigrants were the target of the 1913 Alien Land Act. With this act, the ownership of lands for the immigrants was restricted. The Chinese had no option left besides becoming farm laborers without owning any land. This act is one of the main reasons why the Chinese immigrants searched for new job opportunities and opened laundry shops or restaurants that cooked Chinese food. According to Takaki, “self-employment was not an Asian ‘cultural trait’ or an occupation peculiar to ‘strangers’ but a means of survival, a response to racial discrimination and exclusion in the labor market” (Takaki, 1989; 13). Laundry business for the Chinese was one of the main sources of self-employment. As Takaki notes, there were no laundry businesses in China and therefore, he describes the laundry business as an “American phenomenon” (Takaki, 1989; 92). The reason why most of the Chinese men entered this business is that it requires little investment. As Takaki states, “the requirements were minimal: a stove, trough, dry-room, sleeping, apartment, and sign” (Takaki, 1989; 93). The Southern racial context also contributed to Chinese immigrants’ becoming self-employed. Some of the immigrants in the South owned grocery stores. The whites who did not want to see African Americans shopped from the shops of Chinese Americans.

The gender component of the demographics among the Chinese in America contributed not only to the discrimination from the mainstream but to the ways families were formed within the Chinese. American community from the earliest days of Chinese immigration, the number of male immigrants had always dominated over the number of female immigrants significantly. Most of the male immigrants were forced to live in “bachelor societies.” This long-term and long-distance separation of families turned out to be a tragedy since most of the male immigrants never saw their children growing up to be adults in China. As a matter of fact, the most important difference between the first generation of immigrants and the second generation was in the formation of a family. The first wave of immigrants was dominantly male who had left their families in China. However, the second wave of immigrants concentrated in cities and sought employment in Chinatowns where they could also form families. The Chinatowns are the examples of a community in which Chinese families were formed. Especially with the immigration of some women population after the San Francisco earthquake increased the number of families in Chinatowns. Although the Immigration Act of 1924 forbade the entrance of Chinese females into the United States.

Raising families against all odds did not put an end to the problems; on the contrary it brought new and unforeseen ones that needed urgent solutions. For example, it was not long before the immigrant families realized that even the public education for their children would be a painful experience in America, because public schools were dominantly white-American. Therefore, they were prejudiced against other ethnic groups and segregated the Asians, American Indians and African-Americans. Whenever the Chinese children were accepted to a Caucasian school with the consent of the local community, they were accused of cheating in exams because they were very successful students. Racism that the children had to cope with was only one obstacle. Even when their success was accepted as a genuine fact, Chinese children had problems of a different sort, for, attending integrated schools mostly dominated by whites, created “confusion about their identity” (Chang, 2003; 178). When the daughters came home from school, they were expected to act by the rules of Chinese traditional upbringing where they were supposed to have domestic skills such as sewing, cooking and cleaning. However, they were taught to be individuals

rather than being obedient family members of the Chinese culture. The attendance of Chinese-American children to integrated schools served to quicken their assimilation and adaptation to American attitudes and values although the newly formed families in Chinatowns continued their traditional structure of the Chinese family.

The clash between American and Chinese gender roles in the choice of occupation was also a major source of problems. Within the families and the process of family formation initially the choice of occupation was determined according to gender roles in the newly-formed Chinese American families, according to which women were expected to have home-based jobs. It was after World War I that the American born second generation Chinese immigrants took part in labor-intensive industries. As Chinese women adapted themselves to American culture, Chinese men found the Americanized behavior of Chinese women immoral. Since marrying a member of another ethnicity was totally out of the question many males wanted to marry females from the homeland China. This in turn added to the discrimination that the Chinese faced on the one hand and the strengthening of Chinese traditions on the other. Thus their isolation from the mainstream American society became deeper. With the Great Depression this isolation resulted in a short term trend of going back to China.

The Great Depression struck America while everyone seemed to have money and enjoyed a life filled with technological equipments of the period such as “automobiles and radios, washing machines and vacuum cleaners” (Chang, 2003; 199). Because of this period’s economic breakdown, the survival conditions for the Chinese Americans became harsher. During the period between the 1920’s and 1930’s, the first generation of immigrants told their American born children to use the education and degrees that they had earned in America for careers in their homeland, China. The Great Depression had deepened the gap between the white and non-white races resulting in more severe racism among the whites on the one hand and a stronger homesickness among the Chinese on the other. Therefore many wanted to take their children back to China. Some parents believed that their children would never earn the respect that they deserved in America even if they became doctors or engineers. Their race would always be an obstacle in the race of success. For some

parents, it was a duty to serve their own country, and also for the respect they had for their ancestors.

While America was struggling with the Great Depression, however, back in China there was a more serious crisis. In 1931, Japan attacked China, capturing the port city of Hong Kong. This port city was crucial in the connection between Chinese immigrants in America and their families in China. After the outbreak of the Japanese-Chinese war, the Chinese in America wanted to protest Japan's attack on China. They started protests in order to boycott Japanese goods sold in America. The Chinese immigrants in America collected money in order to help the Chinese citizens back home. During the 1930s even though most of the Chinese were born in America and they could not personally identify themselves with China, they still tried to raise funds and protested Japanese goods. Such dangerous conditions in the homeland are responsible not only for the rise of patriotic feelings for China among the Chinese in U.S. but also attempts at uniting families. Thus, some Chinese Americans decided to bring their families to America.

During World War II, the Chinese Americans benefited from the affirmative description of their race. Although America wanted to remain neutral after the war broke out, with the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese air forces, America participated in the war. The bombing of Pearl Harbor changed the stereotypical Chinese depictions immediately. "Suddenly the media began depicting the Chinese as loyal, decent allies" (Chang, 2003; 222-223) whereas the Japanese were described as "a race of evil spies and saboteurs" (Chang, 2003; 223). The period of World War II was when the Chinese immigrants had the hope that they could fully be accepted into the American society. Most of the Chinese were willing to take duty in the U.S. army. Depending on where they were appointed, some were happily accepted among the other soldiers whereas some had to face discrimination and prejudice, but as a whole their wartime experiences helped "create a new national Chinese American consciousness" (Chang, 2003; 232). One of the advantageous results of World War II for the Chinese veterans was the passage of the 1945 War Brides Act that permitted them to marry in China and bring their wives to the United States. This resulted in a rapid and dramatic shift in the imbalance of gender ratios. The male dominance of the Chinese population was stabilized with the increase in female immigrants.

The fast changing political agenda of the United States affected the relations with China on a national level. The postwar period had started in an environment in which the Chinese citizens were favored by the mainstream Americans because of their loyalty to the American government. However, this optimistic era did not last long. Two new developments in foreign affairs affected how the Chinese were perceived in America: the Cold War era and the establishment of a communist regime in China. Chinese Americans faced accusations of being communists and helping America's enemies. Since China had become a communist country, those Chinese Americans who were planning to go back to China had to give up the option of going back home. They accepted the fact that they had to plan a future for themselves in America. The Chinese Americans faced accusations of being disloyal to America because of the nuclear weapons race between America and Soviet Russia. The positive image of the Chinese Americans during World War II did not last long, for Chinese Americans were considered threats to the American society during the next few decades.

### **1.5 New Arrivals, New Lives: The Chaotic 1960s**

The first half of the 1960s was a continuation of the post World War II period, in which anti-Chinese discrimination remained strong, but in the second half of the 60s in which the Civil Rights Movement gained momentum, not only were the African-Americans getting conscious about their civil rights and freedom, but also other ethnic groups existing in the United States had lessons to take for their ethnic group identities: "[T]he Civil Rights Movement had begun to awaken the moral conscience of America, condemning racism in all of its forms, including immigration policies. Equality for Americans logically implied equality for immigrants seeking entry to America" (Takaki, 1989; 418).

The changing social and political atmosphere of American society has affected the new generation of Chinese-Americans to be more American rather than Chinese. With the increase of Chinese-American population, the new generation of immigrants was more willing to extend their territory into city centers and university campuses. In fact, some new immigrants of Chinese descent were not willing to go to

Chinatowns so that they could adapt themselves more easily to American culture. As Chang states, during the 1960s, “Many of these Chinese Americans saw themselves first as Americans, albeit of Chinese descent, and their only real knowledge of the ‘old country’ came through stories they heard from their parents and grandparents” (Chang, 2003; 262). In time, Chinese Americans tried to adapt themselves to the Anglo-American norms of family and lifestyle. Many of the American-born Chinese citizens were totally foreign to their ancestral Chinese culture.

While the Chinese-Americans were trying to blend themselves in the American culture, in China there were new reasons that triggered immigration to America. For example in China, the communist government in 1958 started a new program called “Great Leap Forward.” This plan was an effort to increase industrial output, but in contrast it resulted in great failure with “the worst famine in Chinese history, possibly the worst in human history” (Chang, 2003; 263). Under this condition in China, most of the Chinese wanted to immigrate to America.

On the American side, the most important and crucial development in the immigration policy came with America’s revision of its immigration law with a new Immigration and Nationality Act, also known as the Hart-Celler Act (1965). This act abolished racial discrimination in the immigration law. With the passage of this act, the number of Chinese immigrants increased dramatically. This act created a drastic change in the future of America’s immigration policies. Since there were no more restricting quotas on immigrant groups, the law “represented a sharp ideological departure from the traditional view of America as homogenous white society” (Takaki, 1989; 419). This act holds a significant place in the lives of Asian immigrants because until the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act, the European immigrants composed the largest portion of the statistics. After the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act, however, “one out of every two immigrants comes from Asia” (Takaki, 1989; 420). The increase in the Chinese American population gave way for new agreements to be signed between China and America especially during the 1970s and 1980s.

The relation between China and U.S. also shaped the destinies of the people of Chinese ancestry and the new immigrants from China in America especially after the death of Mao, the legendary leader of China, whose term of leadership is nonetheless

characterized by “starvation and repression” (Chang, 2003; 313). After the death of Mao in 1976, Deng Xiaoping came to power during the 1980s. Deng was willing to increase diplomatic relations with Western countries especially with the United States. In America, during Ronald Reagan’s presidency, China and United States signed agreements in order to “promote scientific, technological, and cultural exchanges” (Chang, 2003; 314). Student exchange programs were financed by the government during the twentieth century. However, earning university degrees in America alone was not a sufficient criterion for being accepted as a part of the American society. Therefore, the Chinese students tended to marry Anglo-Americans so that they could become a part of the mainstream Americans. Yet the American society was not tolerant to mixed-race marriages. Mixed-race marriages were criticized: “Some American-born Chinese braved ridicule, gossip, and ostracism by entering into interracial marriages, which in many states were banned entirely by anti miscegenation laws” (Chang, 2003; 196).

All in all, the 1960s diverge in to aspects about the perception of the Chinese-Americans in American society. The first of these aspects is that as a continuation of World War II, Chinese-Americans had to struggle against discriminatory acts. However, the second aspect, the Civil Rights Movement, just like influencing all other racial and ethnic groups, has also influenced the Chinese-Americans in the sense that rather than being stuck in their local communities or university campuses, they wanted to expand their boundaries to the mainstream American culture and get a share from the American Dream. While the Civil Rights Movement has provided a sense of optimism, the more encompassing immigration law has led to the increase in Chinese immigrants. However, this optimism of the Civil Rights Movement has not created any tolerance about the perception of mixed-race marriages.

### **1.6. Decade of Fear: The 1990s**

During the 1990s there were two distinct classes of Chinese immigrants. The first group of immigrants was educated, and most of these immigrants became the prominent intellectuals in universities whereas the second group of immigrants was the uneducated, poor Chinese who were forced to work under miserable working

conditions. The irony is that whether they were educated or not, both groups would face a series of crises during the 1990s related to their Chinese ethnicity.

The first group of immigrants was highly educated at the best universities in America. This young generation of intellectuals, after completing their education, started working in important institutions such as National Laboratories. Having such well-paid jobs could seem as if the Chinese Americans finally achieved the American Dream, but there were other facts behind what was at first visible. In fact, Chinese Americans faced prejudice under situations of investigation regardless of their prestigious jobs. There were cases in which Chinese Americans were suspected of being spies sharing top secret information with China. The most famous of these unfair accusations or treatments was directed at Wen Ho Lee who worked as a scientist at the Los Alamos National Laboratory. He was accused of spying for the Republic of China and carrying over top-secret information about nuclear weapons. After years of investigation, the jury found no proof that Wen Ho Lee was guilty. Yet, being kept in jail during the investigation was enough of trouble and prejudice.

During Wen Ho Lee's investigation, the media was also very biased. The articles in the media created an atmosphere in which suspicion was on all of the Chinese American scientists working at the national laboratories. Ironically, however, an institution of high importance, such as the National Laboratory does not trust the Chinese Americans working for them. The irony in the situation is that, while Chinese Americans are categorized as a hardworking racial group who can take place in high priority job positions, they are at the same time condemned to be foreigners who can not be trusted by white Americans. "The Wen Ho Lee case shows how racial profiling against Asian Americans comes from a severe lack of understanding and . . . [how] Asian Americans are visible only in such stereotypes as 'perpetual foreigners,' 'overachiever,' and the 'model minority'" (Fong, 2002; 2-3). As the quotation has stated, the controversy about how the Chinese-Americans are "labeled" stems from the clash of them model minority myth and the perpetual foreigners stereotype. Despite cases of prejudice like the Wen Ho Lee case, by the end of the twentieth century, Chinese immigrants constituted the largest group of foreign students in the United States, mostly concentrated in science and engineering.

In conclusion, no matter how hard the Chinese-Americans tried to be a part of American society, their racial features have been a natural obstacle. The efforts of the Chinese-Americans were mostly in vain since the American society easily categorized them as foreigners. The attempts of the Chinese-Americans to have themselves accepted as Americans was a very painful since the Chinese were marked as different from the European immigrants by their “racial uniforms”<sup>4</sup> (Takaki, 1989; 13). Their physical features became a handicap, and they were easily stereotyped by the Americans. Takaki describes the situation as follows: “they had qualities they could not change or hide—the shape of their eyes, the color of their hair, the complexion of their skin. They were subjected not only to cultural prejudice, or ethnocentrism, but also racism” (Takaki, 1989; 13). During the 1990s, having a university degree from famous universities or having prestigious jobs for Chinese-Americans did not mean that they were going to be accepted as Americans. Instead, having a prestigious job brought along with it a racial discrimination of suspicions related to their racial features.

The characteristics of the Chinese people and the reasons that have led them to immigrate to the United States have been discussed. Starting from the 1840s during the California Gold Rush, Chinese people, still continue to immigrate to America despite numerous exclusion laws. The most important reason that led the Chinese people to immigrate to America was economic during the Gold Rush. The hope that they could have better living standards and provide a better future to their families in China increased the number of immigrants that arrived in America. The belief that Chinese immigrants were going to be wealthy as soon as they arrived in California was nothing but a superstition. The truth was that an optimistic definition of “Gold Mountain” was superficial since no Chinese was lucky enough to become rich over night. During the nineteenth century, the arrival of immigrants in America from different nations hardened the survival conditions for the Chinese. In search of a job, they had to accept the minimum wages offered to them in competition with other immigrant groups.

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<sup>4</sup> According to Ronald Takaki’s book *Strangers From a Different Shore*, the term “racial uniform” belongs to sociologist Robert E. Park.

No matter how hard they work, the racial features of the Chinese people have determined how they have been treated. As a result of this anti-Chinese sentiment, the Chinese Exclusion Law in 1882 has been the first law to limit immigration on the basis of race. Besides being racially excluded from entering the United States, the Chinese Americans were also denied citizenship rights. Under these restricting circumstances, the Chinese Americans searched for new ways of survival in America such as opening laundry shops or restaurants. The Exclusion Act of the nineteenth century or other attempts of othering the Chinese Americans did not stop their struggle in the American society. Even though they were now American-born citizens of America, they still had to cope with prejudice and discrimination in the twentieth century. Besides stereotypical descriptions of “model minority” and hard-working overachievers, the Chinese people have clearly contributed to American history. However, these contributions have been obscured behind racial discrimination. Despite the low wages and long working hours, the most significant contribution of the Chinese Americans had been during the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad. After completing this task, many white Americans were annoyed of the Chinese Americans since they were the cheapest labor force and took away the jobs that could have been offered to the whites. The whites treated the Chinese Americans as if the Chinese are doomed to be forever aliens in the American society.

The Immigration Act of 1965 has become a turning point for the Asian immigrants “allowing a quota of 20000 immigrants for each country and also the entry of family members on a nonquota basis” (Takaki, 1989; 5). The Chinese were forced to become aliens or outsiders due to the dominant white ideology which define “America as a homogenous white society.” The attitude toward Chinese Americans has been hypocritical. For instance, while the railroads were under construction Chinese American population was a need for the American society as a source of cheap labor; however, later, due to the changes of American’s foreign and domestic expectations, Chinese Americans were considered threats during the Cold War years. Since the 1960s, American society has become more tolerant to diversity. This environment also provided Chinese Americans the chance to integrate to American society. With this integration, the Chinese Americans started interacting with the

whites and started living out of their enclosed Chinatown communities. Beginning with the 1960s, the interaction between the Chinese and most significantly the whites increased and this led to the increase of mixed-race relationships. Such relationships are not a new phenomenon in American society. Instead the existence of mixed-race relationships has led to the enforcement of miscegenation laws as the following chapter explores.

## 2. THE ROOTS OF MIXED-RACE RELATIONSHIPS IN THE UNITED STATES

Race cannot be defined in a single way. The difficulty of racial discussions stems from the variety of approaches. The main controversy over race has been on whether it should be defined biologically or socially. The historical development of race and how the concept of race has historically categorized people and differentiated them from one another will be explored. The classification of people according to their biology or physical appearance goes back to prehistorical times. Later, the modern concept of race took place with the rise of Europe and the colonization of lands including America. The discussion of race also involves the controversy of mixed-race identities. Mixed-race relationships or identities are not a new phenomenon, rather mixed-race relationships have existed since the beginning of U.S. history.

The ultimate origin of the word is unknown; suggestions include Arabic "rais" meaning "head," and also "beginning" or "origin." The etymological roots<sup>3</sup> of the word race can be traced in Middle French around 1500 to refer to "people of common descent." It was referred to in Italian from the word "razza" to mean "race, breed, and lineage." The meaning "tribe" or "nation" emerged in the seventeenth century. As a term "racism" first appeared during the eighteenth century in Europe. In an age where the European nations were trying to establish power dominance among one another, one of the methods which they used to exploit some groups of people economically was their racial features. "European scientists became obsessed with classifying all things in nature and determining what place humans had in the mix. As more colonies were established and more people enslaved, it was necessary to devise 'proof' of the inferiority on non-Europeans" (Texeria, Mary Thierry; 2003, 23). Under the guidance of this Western ideology, more and more Europeans started to believe that the whites were superior to other racial groups. Most of the Europeans who believed that they were superior to colored races were mostly the settlers who had migrated to North America in the colonial period.

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<sup>3</sup> *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Ed. Douglas Harper. November 2001. 2 March 2007.  
<<http://www.etymonline/index.php?l=r>.

Among race scholars, the dominant view both in Europe and in the United States during the end of the eighteenth century and at the beginning of the nineteenth century was “scientific racism.” This term was used by scientists who believed that race could only be explained by biological traits. One of the supporters of biological racism was Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau who believed in the supremacy of the white race. In his essay titled “Recapitulation: The Respective Characteristics of the Three Great Races; The Superiority of the White Type, and Within This Type, Of the Aryan Family,” he states:

Such is the lesson of history. It shows us that all civilizations derive from the white race, that none can exist without its help, and that a society is great and brilliant only so far as it preserves the blood of the noble group that created it, provided that this group itself belongs to the most illustrious branch of our species. (Gobineau, 2004; 40-41)

Gobineau thus structures his argument on the supremacy of the white race like many other followers of scientific racism. Interestingly, his explanation for the supremacy of the white race was not related to color; he preferred using explanations such as climate conditions and geographical location. He believed that superior races produced superior cultures and that racial intermixtures resulted in the degradation of the superior racial stock.

Among the followers of scientific racism who held similar views during the nineteenth century were Josiah Clark Nott and George Robins Gliddon. These two scientists exemplified how believers in biological racism reacted to mixed-race relationships. These scientists reacted to the mulatto race. “Mulatto” was the first term used to designate the children of a black and white relationship and they were categorized as “the short lived of any class of the human race” (Nott and Gliddon, 2004; 42). Besides being considered unintelligent, mulattos were also considered to lack physical power when compared to pure whites or African Americans.

However, it was not only the “white” scientists who opposed the mixing of white and other races. Perhaps one of the most prominent African-American nationalists was Martin R. Delany, who was an abolitionist opposing the mixing of the African race with the white race: “... the races as such, especially white and

black, are indestructible; that *miscegenation* are popularly understood--the running out of two races, or several into a *new race* cannot take place” (Delany, 2004; 52). He concludes his argument by stating that if mixed-race relationships occur, races lose their purity and that “mixed race is an abnormal race” (Delany, 2004; 53).

Charles Darwin’s theory has a strong impact on race theories and theories on mixed-race relationships. In his book *The Origin of Species* (1859), he refers to the scientific theory that all species have evolved over time from common ancestors through the process of natural selection. He also touches upon the subject of hybridism. Although Darwin’s theory of evolution was revolutionary, in the case of mixed-race relationships, his views did not differ from race theorists who considered them illegitimate and the offspring defective and imperfect. During the nineteenth century it was believed that each racial group had boundaries that they could not cross over. This containment of races in their places served primarily to protect the superiority of the white race:

Pure species have of course their organs of reproduction in a perfect condition, yet when intercrossed they produce either few or no offspring. Hybrids, on the other hand, have their reproductive organs functionally impotent. . In the first case the two sexual elements which go to form the embryo are perfect; in the second case they are either not at all developed, or are imperfectly developed. (Darwin; 1909, 285-286)

During the nineteenth century, Darwin’s views in the field of anthropology were revolutionary. It is clear that his scientific researches were considered milestones for the study of races. Indeed, Darwin’s theory of evolution opened up a new field of discussion in the twentieth century to go beyond biological classifications of races. For instance, the European-American settlers address the African race as inferior, so that they could exploit them as a labor force in the newly colonized America. Later, the European immigrants emphasized so powerfully that the Africans were inferior and brainwashed them into believing that they had no other choice than obeying the rules of the “superior whites.” The white immigrants tried to assimilate the Africans by “forbidding them to speak their own languages, taking

away their religion and names, and convincing the lighter skinned slaves that they were superior to the dark skinned slaves” (Texeria, Mary Thierry; 2003, 23). In this manner, the whites tried to classify skin colors in a hierarchical way to emphasize their own superiority to other races. During the colonial period, the discussion of race was only limited to the European white settlers and the African American slaves who were exploited because of their skin color.

During the colonial period, the discussion on race was polarized as white versus black due to the labor division. According to this labor division, the slaves were both economically and racially exploited. On the other hand, the whites thought of themselves as a privileged group of people who were “selected” to create a “city upon a hill.” In the colonial period being a slave was identified with being black. As long as a person was non-white, the white race demonized them since they were a threat to the purity of their white race and not much has changed since the colonial period. Mixed-race relationships during the colonial period were limited since the blacks were identified with slavery whereas, all white men were free. In order to protect this division of labor whiteness needed to be protected. Maternal descent was the criterion of acceptance for mixed-race children. The relationship between a white man and a black woman used to fit the rules of maternal descent. As long as a black man was not in a relationship with a white woman, the purity of the white blood was protected.

Mixed-race relationships, in American society have existed since the colonial period and were tolerated before mixed-race relationships in America were accepted as legal. Although people now seem to be more tolerant to mixed-race relationships as compared to the legal restrictions of the past, the statistical rates of increase in mixed-race relationships do not prove that the American people are a less race conscious society. Morning provides an example in his article titled “New Faces, Old Faces: Counting the Multiracial Population Past and Present:”

In 1790, the first national census featured only one racial label – “white” – although the accompanying “slave” category was understood to denote blackness. In contrast, the 2000 census offered six main racial categories that could be combined to yield 57 possible multiple race identities (U.S.

Office of Management and Budget [OMB], 2000a).  
(Morning, 2003; 42)

The quotation above not only shows that “race” in American society has been defined differently according to the social circumstances of society, but also indicates that race is not a static concept as can be understood from the variety of racial categories provided in the census statistics in different decades.

In a society where the definition of “race” is a dynamic concept, what makes the matter more complex is the existence of mixed-race relationships. The most important dilemma among scholars is whether America has always been a mixed-race nation or whether it has just become conscious of the mixed-race characteristic of society. For example, DaCosta states that “according to conventional definitions of race, people of mixed-race descent have existed in American society since its inception, yet their multiraciality is not recognized by the state and has not served as a basis for collective action” (DaCosta, 2003; 75). Similarly, Maria P.P. Root states that the American nation has been blind to the fact that America has been a mixed-race nation. Since, according to Root, perception of race has aimed to keep racial designations stable, categories besides the monoracial ones have been considered “illegitimate or pathological” (Root, 2003; 17). The U.S. Census Bureau “has pretended that race mixing does not occur, is aberrant, or is not significant” (Root, 2003; 4). Therefore, the legitimate classifications of race have been limiting and oppressing when the multiracial population is taken into consideration.

From the beginnings of U.S. history, race has been a fundamental aspect of daily life of the American society since it was closely related to issues such as “slavery and freedom, citizenship, enfranchisement, and property rights” (Morning, 2003; 50). Since the nineteenth century American scientists have been interested in mixed-race population. However, their interest testified to their obsessive fear that the purity of the white race was in danger. The mixing of other, non-white groups, however, was not a concern on their part. African American slaves and Native Americans were the first racial groups that had mixed-race identities. Both of these groups were forced into assimilation so that they could “adapt” themselves to the norms of the dominant white European immigrants.

Yet as is to belie the white supremacists' denial the mixing of white and non-white races, the first category of mixed-race option, namely mulatto, was put in the U.S. Census in 1850 in order to refer only to a black-white relationship and American Indian race combination with other races:

In 1850, when the mulatto category was introduced on the census schedule, enumerators were not given any direction concerning who should be considered mulatto. It is likely that census officials felt the designation to be self-evident, especially in light of Forbes's (1993) contention that in the United States the word *mulatto* originally denoted all people of mixed-race ancestry, not just those with white and black origins. (Morning, 2003; 45)

The term mulatto derives from Spanish and Portuguese. "Mulato" meaning "of mixed breed" literally meant "young mule" could be a possible allusion to hybrid origin of mules<sup>4</sup>. For instance, during the colonial period, the African Americans and Native Americans were kept under control since these were the two largest non-white groups. They were kept under control because the whites wanted to protect their "whiteness." The protection of whiteness is an attempt to isolate the pure white race from the intrusion of other non-white races:

This 'gate-keeping' social function of mixed-race groups helps explain both the consistent interest of white Americans in people of mixed-white and other ancestry and the variation in the degree of importance attached to, as well as the ways of classifying, multiracial groups. (Morning, 2003; 49)

The mulatto category in the U.S. census exemplifies the relationship between multiracial records and concerns about the nature of whiteness. Such records consistently emphasized that people of mixed-race descent were defective and lacked intelligence. "Comparison of the fertility and mortality rates of mulattoes, blacks, and whites would eventually be of great interest to scientists wishing to test theories of 'survival of the fittest' and to assess the supposed benefits of slavery and later racial segregation" (Morning; 2003, 49).

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=mulatto&sourceid=Mozilla-search>

The existence of a mixed-race population was thus used as a rhetorical tool by the whites to support the argument of their superiority. Therefore, the anti-miscegenation laws were passed by states to prohibit miscegenation. Even though such laws were never enacted nation-wide, most of the states put into practice anti-miscegenation laws beginning from the nineteenth century until the 1950s. As such,

miscegenation statutes criminalized interracial sex and interracial marriage; such sex was, like all extramarital sex, prohibited as fornication but generally accepted (by the dominant culture) when occurring between white men and black women. Statutes prohibiting interracial marriage did not (arguably, nor were they meant to) deter white men from engaging in sex with black women, especially with their slaves; in fact they were positive economic incentives for slave owners to do so, since the progeny of interracial intercourse with white fathers would become the white fathers' property. (Saks, 2003; 11)

The enforcement of anti-miscegenation laws was justified by emphasizing that such laws functioned to preserve the racial integrity of white citizens. Even if the legitimate purpose of the miscegenation laws was to protect racial purity, the only race that was kept pure was Caucasian. As Zabel states in his article, if the purpose of such laws was to protect racial purity then the same should have been done in other racial categories:

If racial purity is a desirable goal, then why are only Caucasians protected, and why should a 'pure Negro' be allowed to marry a person who is seven eighths Caucasian and only one eighth Negro? This occurs not from a lack of logic or from ignorance, but because these laws are designed to preserve the purity of the majority Caucasian race – which in itself is one aspect of their larger, unexpressed goal of preserving what may think of as our 'white American culture.' ” (Zabel, 2000; 59)

Susan Koshy in her analysis of anti-miscegenation laws and the situation of Asian Americans in the practice of these laws, suggests that by prohibiting mixed-race relationships, “these laws defined it as deviant and dangerous and positioned the sexuality of racialized others in opposition to white-middle class sexual practices and

family values” (Koshy, 2004; 1). The anti-miscegenation laws were another way of reaffirming that Asian Americans were doomed to be aliens in American society.

The *Loving v. Virginia* case has been a turning point in the history of America’s anti-miscegenation policy. The ban on mixed-race marriages started during the early colonial period, it had continued until the *Loving v. Virginia* decision. In 1958, two residents of Virginia, Mildred Jeter, a Negro woman, and Richard Loving, a white man married in the district of Colombia. In 1959, the couple was found guilty and was sentenced to one year in jail; however, the trial judge suspended the sentence for a period of 25 years on the condition that the Lovings leave the state and not return to Virginia together for 25 years. In 1967, the United States Supreme Court ruled that anti-miscegenation laws were unconstitutional. The decision of the California Supreme Court justice Roger Traynor was that California’s anti-miscegenation law violated the U.S. Constitution. He states in *Perez v. Sharp* (1948) that “By restricting the individual’s right to marry on the basis of race alone, they violate the equal protection of the laws clause of the United States Constitution” (Perez v. Sharp, 44).

The discussion of race was thus polarized as white and non-white. All of the racial and ethnic groups which were non-white were inferior in the eyes of the dominant white race. Actually, the anti-miscegenation laws were enacted specifically to protect whiteness. However, the protection of whiteness did not only consider isolating only the African Americans from the whites. Instead, the protection of whiteness meant isolating whiteness from all the rest of the racial groups such as Asian Americans. Even though these laws were enforced to keep whites and blacks apart at the beginning, later other racial groups “that threatened white sovereignty and ownership of white women: Chinese Japanese, Filipinos, Hindus, Mexicans, and Indians (Root, 2003; 6) were included in the exclusion of an interracial relationship.

After the U.S. Supreme Court abolished the anti-miscegenation laws, people were no longer legally restricted in their relationships according to the criteria of race. “Thus for the most part, as an unanticipated extension of the 1960s integrationist thrust, interracial marriages have taken place in larger numbers in the post-civil rights era than in any other time in U.S. history” (Williams-Leon, 2003; 160-161) However, the increase in mixed-race marriages does not prove that

American society is not a race-conscious society. The only difference in late twentieth century was that the biological understanding of race was outmoded; instead a rationality method was preferred emphasizing the differences rather than superiority or inferiority among races. The black/white dichotomy was softened to shades of color but continued racism in a different way.

The historically significant development which affected the perception of mixed-race relationships today in contemporary America is the Civil Rights Movement. One of the consequences of the Civil Rights Movement was to redefine race so that the meaning of race would be subverted, and it would not be limited to the dominance of a specific group and the oppression of other minority groups. However, as Williams states, “the promise and optimism ushered in by the civil rights movement have all but evaporated” (Williams, 2003; 87). Williams mentions in the article that there are three reasons for the changing trends in the perception of mixed-race relationships. These are “new immigrant trends, increase in interracial marriages and births and the publicizing of these developments” (Williams, 2003; 90). It is obvious that American society’s perception of race today is different from the perception of race during the Civil Rights Movement. “If current demographic trends persist, within the next 50 years, as everyone is currently categorized, whites will no longer make up a majority of the U.S. population” (Williams; 2003, 90). In other words, the optimism of the Civil Rights Era has evaporated. Moreover, immigration, mixed-race marriages or publicizing these trends do not prevent specific instances of racism.

Despite such resistance to mixed-race or multiracialism, American perspectives on race and equality changed dramatically in the twentieth century. The Supreme Court’s decision to abolish laws that banned interracial marriages in 1967, transformed the attitudes of the American society towards mixed-race relationships. Racial enumeration takes place today in a political and social context very different from the one that existed when the mulatto or mixed-blood census categories were introduced. Unlike in previous generations, now children are born into a context of legal marriage in mixed-race relationships. Most important of all, “Of course, the option to identify oneself as more than one race in the 2000 U.S. Census has been the

single most important ‘official’ institutional act in the recent affirmation and legitimization of ‘multiracialism’” (Edles; 2003, 222).

Historical facts such as colonialism, slavery, miscegenation laws, the existence of other racial groups besides whites and blacks provides the conclusion that mixed-race relations in American history have always existed. However, the reality of mixed-race relations has been ignored and the reality of a race conscious American society continues. Furthermore, although one aspect of the cultural uniqueness of America stems from cultural and racial diversity, American society tended to react to mixed-race relationships in a “tongue-in-cheek” manner. The following paragraphs will consider aspects of contemporary views on mixed-race relationships in the United States.

The mixing of people is one of the greatest themes of world history. The history of the world is a story of people on the move: invading, conquering, migrating and trading. The most famous historical statement that the future of America depends on mixed-race marriages belongs to St. John de Crevecoeur. Just before the American Revolution he had the vision for the future of the American society that one of the uniqueness of America stems from the mixture of blood which you can find in no other country:

What then is the American, this new man? He is neither an European nor the descendant of an European; hence that strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country. I could point out to you a family whose grandfather was an Englishman, whose wife was Dutch, whose son married a French woman, and whose present four sons have four wives of different nations. *He* is an American, who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. (Crevecoeur, 1782; 826).

Crevecoeur was one of the first to state a vision of America in which only the Europeans mostly Western Europeans were to come to America, get married to people of different races and create a new mixed nation. Although Crevecoeur’s opinion seems to be the ideal vision, the practical fact did not turn out to be as what

Crevecoeur had foreseen. In the quotation above the emphasis on the mixed-race marriage is on the members of the white race, even if they were from different nations. However, no Africans, Native Americans and Asians were included in this idealistic world of the melting pot.

In fact, what makes United States unique is the fact that, it is a nation of immigrants who have gathered from such diverse origins. As Spickard states, American people “bore every conceivable color, religion, and national heritage. Within a generation or two after arriving here, most socialized and mated with people who were not like them -- who did not share their color, their religion or their national heritage” (Spickard; 1989, 4).

Newspaper articles such as “Interracial Marriages on the Increase” point out that United States has shifted from being a “ ‘salad bowl’ - where racial groups maintain separate identities and resist marrying outside their groups – to an updated ‘melting pot’, where they are far more open to relations, including marriage, with people of a different race” (Lobe; 2005, 32). Another important signal that there will be an increase in the number of people who define themselves as multiracial is that, the number of people who already define themselves as multiracial belong to a young age group:

Whereas only 1.9% of adults 18 years of age and older chose more than one race to describe themselves, nearly 4% of people younger than 18 were described by two or more races. As a result, people younger than 18 years contributed 42 % of all multiple-race responses even though they made up only 26% of the U.S. Population. (U.S Census Bureau, 2001b). (Morning, 2003; 58)

In connection with Crevecoeur’s ideal of a nation of mixed people, contemporary critic Maria P.P. Root provides information about the increase in mixed-race individuals. She states in her article titled “Five Mixed-Race Identities: From Relic to Revolution,” that “by 2050 those identifying themselves as multiracial will account for 21% of the American population” (Root, Maria P.P.; 2003, 3). This statement proves that even though America is a race conscious society, the racial

borders among different racial groups will be blurring in the twenty first century due to the increase in multiracial population.

One of the influential factors that led to the increase of multiracial population is closely related to immigration. After the change in the immigration laws in 1965, America has attracted more and more immigrants from all around the world. Accelerating the effects of changing immigration patterns, there has been substantial rise in the number of interracial marriages in the United States over the past 30 years. “Such marriages grew from about 150,000 interracial married couples in 1960 to 1.4 million in 2000; these numbers continue to grow” (Williams; 2003, 91).

Most of the newly arriving immigrants have not faced a regulation in their mother country where they had to check a race box in the census forms. Moreover, most of the immigrants check the boxes arbitrarily, and they become race conscious after their arrival in America:

Americans do not perceive race in the terms dictated by the U.S Census Bureau. . . Unable to find a box that applied to themselves . . . In 2000, over 15 million Americans selected “Some Other Race.” Many of these people clearly did not understand the Census Bureau’s mandates. (Williams, 2003; 90)

The U.S. Census Bureau statistics show that Asian Americans make up a major portion of the multiracial population. For example, “of the 1.5 million interracial marriages counted by the U.S. Census, 14% reported an African American spouse, 22% reported a Native American/ Native Alaskan spouse, and 31% claimed an Asian spouse. (Williams-Leon; 2003, 159). Besides, Williams-Leon also states that nearly half of the interracial families defined “one parent as an Asian and the other as white” (Williams-Leon; 2003, 165).

Nevertheless, the increase in mixed-race relationships does not mean that the American society is not a race conscious society anymore. One of the scholars who has emphasized that the American society has become more race conscious with the increase in mixed-race relationships is Henry Yu. In his article titled, “Mixing Bodies and Cultures: The Meaning of America’s Fascination With Sex Between ‘Orientals’ and ‘Whites,’” Yu states that the American society is a race conscious

society and that the markers of that awareness are physical differences such as skin color, hair texture. Americans tend to classify or differentiate people in respect to their physical characteristics as if these features stand for cultural differences. The main controversy in the American society is that when Anglo-Americans see an American born Chinese, they automatically equate his physical characteristics with the fact that he's non-American. Furthermore, Yu believes that we define the physical characteristics of bodies as either "good" or "bad" according to the culture we live in:

An awareness of the physical markers of biology is still part of American consciousness, and so there remains a masked connection between bodies and culture. It is only because of our fine-tuned awareness of bodily difference that our fascination with intercultural sex and marriage makes sense. As long as Americans connect cultural difference, with physical difference, we shall equate the racial with the cultural, and we shall remain fascinated with the idea of sex across racial boundaries. (Yu, 1998; 459)

Furthermore, Yu illustrates how our preconceived notions of race and their connection with physical features create stereotypes. To exemplify this argument, he refers to the famous golf player Tiger Woods since his racial background nearly encompasses all the races. The case of Tiger Woods shows us that there have been changes in how Americans classify concepts of race and culture. Being an African American in physical appearance, he should not be playing golf since this sport is designated to white upper-class male Americans. "As a child of multiracial heritage, Woods added color to a sport that was traditionally preserved for those who were white and rich. For its very significance as a bastion of hierarchy, golf had also become a marker of the opposition to racial and class exclusion" (Yu; 2002, 7). According to historical conceptions of race, Tiger Woods would be classified as African American because of his dark complexion. However, the media emphasized his mixed-race background as if trying to teach a lesson to all of the racial classes to create the new icon of the American Dream. The fact that Tiger Woods was mixed race was used by the media to give the message that each racial group has the potential to live the American Dream.

Tiger Woods and his presentation in the media demonstrate the changing patterns in American society's perception of race. In the past, race was a concept which used to refer to physical differences among groups. This perspective of race emphasized the biological differences among races such as skin color, hair texture, or physiological differences such as genes, or blood characteristics. Contemporary views on race, however, agree that race is a social construct. Furthermore, rationalizing the superiority or the inferiority of races based on biology is now considered inaccurate among contemporary anthropologists. Hoffman states the complexity of determining the matters of race through biology alone:

On average there's 0.2 percent difference in genetic material between any two randomly chosen people on Earth. Of that diversity, 85 percent will be found within any local group of people. . . More than half (9 percent) of the remaining 15 percent will be represented by differences between ethnic and linguistic groups within a given race. . . Only 6 percent represents differences between races. . . that's 6 percent of .2 percent. In other words, race accounts for only a minuscule 0.012 percent difference in our genetic material. (Hoffman, [hypertext](#))

To conclude, race has not been defined in one single way. There have been contradictions whether it should be explained biologically or socially. At first, race was a tool of power among distinguishing Europeans and non-Europeans. Later, during the colonial period in America race categories were structured upon who was white and non-white. Another purpose of this chapter was to provide instances of mixed-race relationships from American history. The examples show that mixed-race relationship is not a new concept and that such relationships have always existed. The uniqueness of the American society in terms of race, stems from the fact that America is a nation composed of different races. When historical examples are analyzed, it is observed that American society has become more tolerant to mixed-race relationships. However, this tolerance should not be equated with the lack of racism. Instead, the existence of mixed-race relationships has increased an insincere attitude to the discussion of race.

### 3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Race is the first thing that Americans notice when they meet somebody new because they tend to believe that race provides clues about who they really are. Therefore, when they meet somebody of mixed-race descent, people tend to feel insecure due to the fact that they are not clearly provided with some stereotypical clues of race. The American preoccupation with race has historical and social significant implications. As Haney López states in the introduction to his book titled *White By Law: The Legal Construction of Race*, the physical appearance of individuals, such as their hair and skin color, influences “whether we are figuratively free or enslaved” (Haney López; 1999, 3). It is clear that we interpret race according to our own preconceived notions of race that have been historically shaped by society.

The first part of the theoretical background will focus on Werner Sollors’ theory of ethnicity which concentrates on two crucial concepts which are “consent” and “descent.” Sollors explains the importance of these concepts especially by referring to the fact that the American society has been a mixed-race society since the beginning of colonial days. Actually, the main contradiction according to Sollors is that while America is a country established by the consent of individuals, descent is the norm which determines the foundation of families. The discourse in America about the formation of families is based exclusively on consent. However, in such a race-conscious society as America, descent is also the factor which directs the creation of families. The concept of “consent” sheds light on the analysis of the mixed-race relationships in the novels. Werner Sollors’s theory of “consent versus descent” will be insightful to observe the contradiction between families of descent and consent. Consent is valid when the parties of the relationship are both white whereas when a white person is involved with a non-white to establish a family, descent becomes of uttermost importance. In other words a sense of hypocrisy is obvious in terms of mixed-race relationships in America. Americans only pay lip service to consent whereas descent is the main criterion in white-non-white mixed-race relationships.

The second part of the theoretical infrastructures of this dissertation draws on Michael Omi and Howard Winant's theory of racial formation, according to which race is a social construct rather than a purely biological categorization. Omi and Winant's theory of "racial formation" represents a break with the past since they explain race as a process of social formation rather than a biological categorization. Older models of race concluded that minority groups in the United States must adapt themselves to the mainstream American culture. Nevertheless, as minority groups tried to be accepted as Americans, they were perpetually perceived as foreigners because of their physical features that marked them as members of a specific race. The mindsets of Americans are programmed to classify people according to their race. For example, an American-born Chinese is seen as a foreigner by white Americans since that person has the racial features of an Asian though s/he has never been to China. The most important distinction which makes the theory of racial formation a social construct is that, biological explanations of race emphasized the belief that racial distinctions are biologically inherent in the genes of humankind.

Whiteness as a category of race then will be the next concern in this chapter. Whiteness is the norm by which other races are judged. Any other race is considered to be a deviation from the norm; thus every mixed-race relationship threatens the purity of the white race and points towards a deviation from the norm. When, however, a mixed-race relationship does not include a white person, it is not considered dangerous or threatening. When we consider a mixed-race relationship of both from minority groups, this relationship is not considered to be problematic as long as it does not "contaminate" the pure white race.

To conclude, this chapter draws a framework of the main theoretical aspects that will be used that will be used as a guideline in the thematic discussion of the novels. Firstly, concepts of "consent" and "descent" provided by Werner Sollors will be insightful in the analysis of mixed-race relationships. Particularly, "consent" and "descent" will reveal that race is still an issue of conflict in contemporary American society. Secondly, the theory of "racial formation" provided by Michael Omi and Howard Winant structure their argument on the fact that race is a social construct. This theory will also be supportive in the sense that the perceptions of mixed-race relationships are still hypocritical. Lastly, the discussion of whiteness as a racial

privilege will expose the attitudes towards mixed-race relationships. The discussion of whiteness reveals that mixed-race relationships are influenced by white norms.

### **3.1. Consent and Descent in the United States**

Werner Sollors' theory of ethnicity focuses primarily on the concepts of consent and descent. Sollors traces the origins of these concepts back to the roots of American history. The establishment of the United States as a new continent and its break with the traditions and rules of Europe made America a unique continent. What added to the uniqueness of this new nation was the fact that it was in search of new ideas, new principles to guide it into the future. Therefore, it needed to break away from Europe and its hereditary values, such as old-world hierarchy and propose another alternative to them. Thus, Europe and rootedness are symbolized with the concept of descent, and the core American values such as "the vision of a new people of diverse nativities united in the fair pursuit of happiness" (Sollors; 1986, 4) are symbolized with consent. Sollors defines these concepts as follows: "Descent relations are those defined by anthropologists as relations of 'substance' (by blood or nature); consent relations describe those of 'law' or 'marriage'" (Sollors; 1986, 6). Descent thus stands for stable concepts such as hereditary qualities and consent refers to "our abilities as mature free agents . . . to choose our spouses, our destinies and our political systems" (Sollors; 1986, 6).

Sollors discusses the uniqueness of American society by comparing it to other mixed-race countries such as Cuba and Brazil. According to Sollors, what makes America different from other mixed-race nations is America's great emphasis on consent. Throughout history, there have been nations which have defined their greatness and power in terms of their single origin, being of one blood. In other words, descent has been a source of pride for nations because it represents traditions, hereditary values and a linear continuity of bloodline. However, such perspectives do not foresee the rise of mixed-race relationships and continue to believe in the purity of the assumed blood which stereotypically refers to whiteness. Meanwhile, consent relations inevitably move towards mixed-race relationships and while explaining his argument, Sollors differentiates between race and ethnicity; according to Sollors,

race, “while sometimes facilitating external identification, is merely one aspect of ethnicity” (Sollors; 1986, 36). In discussing a racially distinguishable group such as the Chinese in America, the nature of relations between race and ethnicity and consent and descent takes a particularly revealing meaning.

In order to illustrate the importance of consent and descent in American culture, Sollors refers to the term melting-pot and Israel Zangwill’s play titled *The Melting Pot*. Sollors states that, “More than any social or political theory, the rhetoric of Zangwill’s play shaped American discourse on immigration and ethnicity.” (Sollors; 1986, 66). Sollors states that “On the level of characters, hardness is related to the past and the boundaries of *descent*: under the dispensation of ‘hardness’ people are defined by the call of the blood” (Sollors; 1986, 69). From the way Zangwill structures his play he believes that “American ideals are not transmitted by descent but have to be embraced afresh, even if that requires opposing the actual descendants of American founding fathers” (Sollors; 1986, 70).

Not surprisingly, in Zangwill’s play both protagonists who represent consent is white. If one of the lovers had been a non-white person, then this relationship would not have been idealized. The consent of individuals is only applicable to relationships in which both parties are white. What makes a relationship of consent problematic is when a white person is in a relationship with a person from a different race. The problem is that the “purity” of the white race falls into danger. It is debatable whether a piece of fiction depicting a love relationship between a white and non-white person would, “sacralize loving consent as the abolition of prejudices of descent” (Sollors; 1986, 72) as in the case of the lovers in Zangwill’s play. The phrase “melting-pot” represents an idealized American nation living in peace with people from various racial and ethnic backgrounds. As a matter of fact, in a mixed-race relationship when one of the individuals is white, this means that the idealistic, popular image of the “melting-pot” is not what it seems to be.

Involuntary descent relations are associated with blood whereas consent relations are considered as a matter of choice and are symbolized by sexual intercourse. In America, the importance attached to consent can be traced back to some of the founding texts of American civilization, for instance, “The Declaration of Independence.” This document not only declares the independence of a nation but

also announces the principles of the newly established nation. Among these principles “consent” holds a crucial place in the explanation of the power that people have in determining the future of their nation:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. (Jefferson, 1776; 129)

Defining citizenship in terms of a social contract among consenting individuals, the “Declaration of Independence” identifies national identity with order of law and consent. Ethnic identity, on the other hand, is related to blood, nature and consent. “American identity may take the place of a relationship ‘in law’ (like ‘husband, wife, step-, -in-law, etc.’) and ‘by blood’ (‘father, mother, brother, sister, uncle, aunt, etc.’)” (Sollors; 1986, 151). Horace Kallen explains “descent” as a stable and binding concept in his article titled “Democracy versus the Melting Pot: A Study of American Nationality.” He states that “Men may change their clothes, their politics, their wives, their religions, their philosophies, to a greater or lesser extent: they cannot change their grandfathers” (Kallen; 1996, 91). Kallen perceives “grandfathers” as a representative of blood whereas “wives” are defined by law. American identity is often imagined as the act of making a conscious choice symbolized by consent, as love and marriage, and ethnicity as unchallengeable ancestry and descent. The clash between consent and descent increases as new immigrants arrive in the United States. With the arrival of new immigrants, the successors of the founding fathers were associated with lines of descent; whereas, the newly arrived immigrants were with consent through which they would be a part of American society:

In the world of Zangwill’s *Melting-Pot*, descent is secular and temporal, consent is sacred and eternal. It follows logically that the high priests of the cult of consent must be immigrants whose line of descent has been disrupted—like

that of the first New England settlers, whose tradition of disruption and love is revitalized by the newcomers. . . . Immigrants could thus be portrayed as cultural newlyweds, more enthusiastically and loyally in love with the country of their choice than citizens-by-descent. (Sollors; 1896, 74)

Sollors develops his argument by creating a parallelism between the concept of citizenship and love relationship based on consent. For a relationship defined by consent he uses the term romantic relationship in which he means that personal choice governs rather than descent. He further states that “the belief in romantic love as the basis for marriage is clearly a cultural norm in America” (Sollors; 1986, 114). Consent-based relationships are not problematic as long as it is a white-white relationship. The examples that Sollors provide are not only between the people of the white race. Through American history, the relationship between a white and a non-white person has received societal approval as long as the white party, the privileged side approved it. However, if the white parents did not give their consent to a mixed-race relationship then, that would be counted as a force of assimilation or to stain the white race. Hence, the idea that America is based on the ideal of consent and free will of individuals proves to be no more than a mere lip service. In practice, however, it is obvious that consent based mixed-race relationships are the privilege of the white people only.

Melting-pot and mixed-race marriages or relationships are perceived as a threat to ethnic and racial purity. The racial pursuit of individuals is very selfish since everybody desires that one day people will look like themselves, resembling their physical features. People do not think of sacrificing from themselves in resembling the features of a different race from that of their own. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries people tended to reject mixed-race relationships since such relationships for them symbolized “the loss the children” (Sollors; 1986, 224), meaning that when their children choose partners from different races, the purity of their own race is lost and their race is not sterile anymore.

In conclusion, Werner Sollors structures his theory of American ethnicity on the concepts of consent and descent. The establishment of United States as a free country is based on the consent of people as it has been stated in the Declaration of

Independence. From Sollors' point of view, consent is a characteristic which makes America a unique nation among the other mixed-race countries. The founding of America as a new nation was based on ideals such as freedom, opportunity and a break with traditions. All of these values demonstrate that the seeds of America are based on consent. However, the ideal that America will be a melting-pot nation has not become proven in time. Otherwise, mixed-race relationships whether they include a white partner or not, would be more welcome in America. Consent relations describe relations of law or marriage, emphasizing the importance of personal choice, rebirth and regeneration with romantic love and marriage. Descent relations derive from blood or nature, emphasizing old world, place of birth and heredity. Descent is stable and unchangeable.

In the novels that will be analyzed, paralleling Sollors' discussions, characters of old age will be representatives of descent whereas younger characters in mixed-race relationships will prefer relationships of consent with the hope that they can choose a future for themselves by their free will. Before going into the thematic analysis of the novels, the next part of the theoretical background will discuss the impact of whiteness as a racial power over the minority groups and how white privilege and laws construct whiteness as the norm of the American society.

### **3.2. Racial Formation in the United States**

Michael Omi and Howard Winant discuss their theory of racial formation in their book titled *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*. The core of Omi and Winant's theory consists in the socially constructed meaning of race. The authors suggest in their introduction that even though American society had the potential to become a color-blind society, it has been far from achieving that goal. On the contrary, they state, "even a cursory glance at American history reveals that far from being color-blind, the United States has been an extremely 'color-conscious' society" (Omi and Winant; 1994, 1). The authors claim that everybody in American society has an opinion of what race is, but the varieties of definitions are endless since race is a biased concept. Omi and Winant define race with reference to

the social nature of race, the absence of any essential racial characteristics and the historical flexibility of racial categories.

In their explanation of racial formation theory, Omi and Winant provide a historical review of how race has become an issue of formation supported by social circumstances. For example, during the colonial days of the American continent, with the arrival of the European explorers, the distinction between the “old” world and the “new” world took shape and “social distinctions and categorizations fundamental to a racialized social structure, and to a discourse of race, began to appear” (Omi and Winant; 1994, 61). The newcomers to America discovered people different from themselves such as Native Americans. The meeting of people from different races promoted a racially conscious perception and racial categorization based on physical “deviation” from the white norms. After the arrival of the Europeans in the American continent, especially with the increase in slave trade, European immigrants thought of themselves as the privileged race. This racial categorization “distinguished Europeans, as children of God, full-fledged human beings, etc. from ‘Others’” (Omi and Winant; 1994, 61).

According to Omi and Winant there are three paradigms of race, which are “ethnicity”, “class” and “nation.” In the discussion of racial formation, Omi and Winant analyze race as complex web of system interrelated with “ethnicity”, “class” and “nation.” They categorize ethnicity under three subheadings in order to provide a historical overview of how its definitions in American society have changed in time according to the prejudices and dominant views. In their categorization of race, the first time span of ethnicity starts in the nineteenth century and continues until 1930s. Actually, the roots of this period of time can be traced back to the nineteenth century, to the belief that biological race was the right explanation for racial categorization. During this time period, people were strictly categorized according to biological criteria. Each biologically defined race has its cultural norms, like being an African American symbolizes inferiority. This type of classification meant that members of each race were destined to accept the racial category that they belonged to and the possible form of racism without questioning the arguments that blur the boundaries between the binary oppositions of white and black and challenge the polarization of races. It goes on saying that, “whites were considered the superior race. Racial

intermixture was seen as a sin against nature which would lead to the creation of ‘biological throwbacks’” (Omi and Winant; 1994, 15).

In the next period, 1930s to 1965, as opposed to the categories of biological racism, race was defined as a social category, as an alternative to the hierarchical divisions of strict race categories. “Ethnicity was understood as the result of a group formation process based on culture and descent” (Omi and Winant; 1994, 15). The term ethnicity was born out of a social way of rationalizing differences among people. The point of view that explained ethnicity in terms of social construct started during the 1930s. For example, Carl Gustav Jung stated that heredity or biological definitions were insufficient to understand the dynamics of the American society. Furthermore, in his explanation, Jung does not classify the African Americans as biologically inferior. Instead, he calls attention to the desire in each white man to have qualities of blackness and vice versa:

Since the Negro lives within your cities and even within your houses, he also lives within your skin, subconsciously. Naturally it works both ways. Just as every Jew has a Christ complex, so every Negro has a white complex, and every white American a Negro Complex. The Negro, generally speaking, would give anything to change his skin; so too, the white man hates to admit that he has been touched by the black. (Jung; 1930, 195)

Similar to Jung’s discussion of ethnicity as a social construct is the discussion of ethnic identifications among the immigrant groups. For instance, Nahirny and Fishman discuss the effects of ethnicity on generations of immigrants. According to their argument there are generational gaps among immigrant groups. Regardless of their race, the generational differences within a race were defined by ethnicity:

On the one hand, it has been observed that most immigrant fathers desperately tried to instill in their sons their own (i.e. the fathers’) love for allegiance to the ethnic heritage; on the other hand, most of the sons of these immigrant fathers were found determined to forget everything—the mother tongue that left (or was rumoured to leave) so many traces in their speech, the ‘strange’ customs that they were forced to

practice at home, in church, or even in public places, etc.  
(Nahirny and Fishman; 1965, 268)

Theories of ethnicity provided a ground for the development of assimilation theories especially after 1965. Ethnicity-based theories of differentiation among people were widely used to focus on the generation gaps within the same race of people. Likewise, Howard Winant in his article titled, “Race and Race Theory” states that all of the three paradigms discussed in the book *Racial Formation* are reductionist although ethnicity-based theories were “generally the most mainstream or moderate. They saw race as culturally grounded framework of collective identity” (Winant; 2000, 178).

More recently, the post 1965 phase of ethnicity focuses on the assimilation theories of Robert Park and Milton Gordon’s model of assimilation where all of the ethnic groups in America pass through stages of adaptation to American society. According to Gordon’s model of assimilation, ethnic groups pass through stages such as behavioral assimilation and structural assimilation. Melting pot however, is not the only metaphoric reference to the adaptation and assimilation process. Moreover, Gordon names that there are three main ideological tendencies during the assimilation process. These are “Anglo-conformity,” “the melting pot” and “cultural pluralism.” Anglo-conformity is the ideological belief that the immigrant group must adapt itself to the values and customs of the Anglo-American way of life. The melting pot tendency is the belief that the cultures of the immigrant groups and the host country blend into a new culture and new lifestyle. Gordon exemplifies the assimilation process by using imaginary country names. He provides a host country named “Sylvania” and a group of immigrants called “Mundovians.” Both the Sylvians and the Mundovians accept new behavior patterns; an interchange of customs take place, and a new cultural system evolves. “This is a cultural blend, the result of the ‘melting pot,’ which has melted down the cultures of the two groups in the same societal container” (Gordon; 1964, 74). Lastly, cultural pluralism is the “preservation of the communal life and significant portions of the culture of the later immigrant groups within the context of American citizenship and political and economic integration into American society” (Gordon; 1965, 85). The concept of

cultural pluralism is closely linked to the issue of multiculturalism since both of these concepts refer to the preservation of some cultural values where at the same time, the immigrant also orients to American culture and values.

Of particular significance in the construction of race is the paradigm of class. The class-based theories classified race in terms of group-based stratification and economic competition. This view of class supports the creation of socially constructed races. Classes are created by three different methods of inequality which respectively are market (exchange), stratification (distribution) and class conflict (production).

The market relations approach was not able to explain the reasons of racial discrimination in business life. Besides it was believed that if the state did not interrupt business life then racial discrimination would be eliminated: “the monopolistic practices model suggests a society structured in the interests of all whites, who gain thereby through a systematic transfer of resources from non-whites in a wide variety of fields” (Omi and Winant; 1994, 25). Not surprisingly, as this quotation illustrates, whites are racially advantageous compared to other racial groups in terms of the opportunities provided to them just because of their skin color. To sum up, this model “shares certain elements with nation-based analyses of race, especially those which stress the operation of ‘white skin privilege’ or of a ‘colonial labor principle’ which allocates rights and resources differentially to groups on the basis of race” (Omi and Winant; 1994, 26).

Next, the stratification theory mainly deals with the distribution of resources. Unequal distribution of resources result in economic division among non-white races. Omi and Winant illustrate the stratification theory by focusing on the position of the blacks after the Civil Rights Movement. Before the Civil Rights Movement the blacks were segregated from social and economic resources. However, after the Civil Rights Movement, “a black community . . . is stratified into a small privileged ‘class’ whose opportunities are equivalent to those of whites with similar high levels of training and skills, and a massive black ‘underclass’ which is relegated to permanent marginality” (Omi and Winant; 1994, 27). In other words, according to the stratification theory, while the Civil Rights era could be perceived as a very

optimistic era, this optimism was shared by only a small number of blacks; the rest of the blacks still had to cope with problems of further degradation in society.

The last element of the class paradigm according to Omi and Winant is the class conflict theory. Marxism is the most direct way of explaining the class conflict theory. Although Marxism never directly addressed the issue of race, it is clear that Marxism has an impact on class-based and nation-based paradigms of race. “Class conflict theories of race in the 1960s, rooted in an idea central to Marxist analysis—the concept of exploitation—posed a fundamental challenge to ethnicity theory” (Omi and Winant; 1994, 29). The stimulating point about the defenders of the class conflict theory is that they accept the fact that the structure of class relations causes racial conflict. They further believe that ideologies of racial inferiority are rooted in racially-defined economic interests. The class conflict theories in relation to race focus on the principle of “divide and rule.” This first principle is the key notion to keep people of various races powerless. Besides dividing and ruling them, exclusion is the second principle which increases inequalities among people: “Despite the diametric opposition of the two positions, there is an agreement between them on the primacy of class conflict over racial conflict” (Omi and Winant; 1994, 30). Class conflict supposes that racial conflicts occur because of the class conflict. The class conflict theories thus base their arguments on economic inequalities among races/classes.

The last paradigm that supports the construction of race is nation. Nationalists have participated in the defense of minority rights especially in the form of political movements. The general purpose of such political organizations has been to focus on the “failures of racial accommodation and integration” (Omi and Winant; 1994, 36). The nation-based theories emphasize the infrastructure of colonialism and race. In other words, racial dynamics are seen as products of colonialism. The difference of the nation paradigm from the ethnicity paradigm is that nation provides a broader variety of elements that cause racial oppression such as “inequality, political disenfranchisement, territorial and institutional segregation, cultural domination” (Omi and Winant, 1994, 37).

Colonialism started in the fifteenth century Europe and reached its peak during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, resulting in debates on race and racism. If we are still

preoccupied with race long after colonialism we have to acknowledge “the continuity of *racial* oppression prevailing in colonialism’s heyday” (Omi and Winant; 1994, 37). Omi and Winant conclude, however, the similarity between “U.S. conditions and colonial systems of discrimination composed of colonizers and colonized—systems which made use of racial distinctions—does not automatically carry over into postcolonial society” (Omi and Winant, 1994, 47). The authors emphasize that circumstances in American society differ from those of other countries. In terms of nation-based theories, America still continues racist attitudes towards people by using nationhood as a tool of racism. For example, after 9/11, Arabs were treated unfairly just because of their nationhood. People in America disregard nationhood because they identify nationhood with race. The unfair treatment of people according to their nation, race is also valid for Asian Americans. For instance, they do not try to distinguish whether a person is of Chinese or Japanese descent. The race-conscious American society neglects clues of nationhood and only focuses on the race, being an Asian, when they “gaze” at a person.

All three paradigms of race: ethnicity, class and nation enhance racism. The purpose of the paradigms is to assimilate the minority groups into the dominant society. Those who follow class theories discuss race by structuring their arguments on the concept of inequality. Practitioners of class theories focus their arguments on the existence of a loser and a winner. Beyond making theoretical discussions of race, the complexity of race starts when we try to classify people to racial categories.

Besides individual prejudices that shape our conceptions of race, Omi and Winant propose that “the state *is* inherently racial” (Omi and Winant; 1994, 82). As such, the state is a tool which increases the tension of racial prejudices; it is an instrument which creates racial conflicts. Racial order is organized by the state and is made forceful by the law. American history is full of examples and of cases in which individuals have sued the state to define their individual racial category. In a particularly important case a woman named Susie Guillory Phipps sued the Louisiana Bureau of Vital Records in 1982 to change her racial classification from black to white. She lost the case and the court decided that it was “the state’s right to classify and quantify racial identity” (Omi and Winant; 1994, 53). This case illustrates how the state plays a part in assigning race to individuals.

While political authorities busy themselves with determining the demarcations among races, scholars of race have difficulties on agreeing on a single definition of race. Omi and Winant summarize the fact that the old theorists tended to define race as something fixed, concrete and unchangeable. Contemporary critics, however, defined race as an illusion and an ideological construct:

There is a continuous temptation to think of race as an *essence*, as something fixed, concrete, and objective. And there is also an opposite temptation: to imagine race as a mere *illusion*, a purely ideological construct which some ideal non-racist social order would eliminate. (Omi and Winant; 1994, 54)

In order to suggest a solution to such a polarization of race definitions, Omi and Winant define race as: “*a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies*” (Omi and Winant; 1994, 55). According to this definition, the purpose of racial differentiation is not classifying human bodies. Instead, the main debates are social conflicts and personal interests in establishing power over people who are physically different from one another.

Omi and Winant claim that “for most of its existence both as a European colony and as an independent nation, the U.S. was a *racial dictatorship*” (Omi and Winant; 1994, 65). The type of dictatorship in America is based on the value attached to whiteness. The acceptance of whiteness as “American” is supported by law, and public institutions enforce such laws. Americans tend to categorize one another according to racial categories that depend on closeness to or deviation from the standard whiteness category; not only that, “[o]ur ability to interpret racial meanings depends on preconceived notions of a racialized social structure” (Omi and Winant; 1994, 59). Omi and Winant define race as a living organism which passes through all stages of our lives not only on an individual level but also on institutional levels:

Race is not only a matter of politics, economics, or culture, but all of these “levels” of lived experience simultaneously. It

is a pre-eminently *social* phenomenon, something which suffuses each individual identity, each family and community, yet equally penetrates state institutions and market relationships (Omi and Winant; 1994, 99).

American society is governed by norms of how people are categorized according to their race. The preconceived notions of race are personal matters of how an individual categorizes other people on the basis of race. In this sense, Omi and Winant state that American society is based on a racial social structure, since each individual is brought up with a racial consciousness and the government enforces whiteness as the racial norm of normalcy. In short, Michael Omi and Howard Winant's theory of racial formation emphasize the "*centrality of race* in American society" (Omi and Winant; 1994, 138). The race relations in American society have been reduced to a dichotomy of black-white relations. Simplifying race relations to black-white dichotomy is wrong since "racial difference and racial identity are unstable" (Omi and Winant; 1994, 157).

Scholars of race and ethnicity agree upon the idea that race and ethnicity are not entirely inherent or natural traits although physical characteristics certainly have a lot to do with how people categorize members of racial and ethnic groups. Regarding the theory of racial formation, Haney López states that, "advancing the argument that race is a social process rather than a biological given, provides a crucial break from past static notions of race" (Haney López; 1999, 27). Rather, researchers argue that racial and ethnic identities derive their meanings from social and historical circumstances, which change in time. López maintains that as "human constructs, races constitute an integral part of a whole social fabric that includes gender and class relations. Third, the meaning-systems surrounding race change quickly rather than slowly" (Haney López; 1999, 28). Hence, race is not hereditary; instead, society attaches a significance to our appearance, "and in that system of meanings lie to the origins of our race" (Haney López; 1999, 38).

Omi and Winant mention three paradigms of race. These paradigms are: ethnicity, class and nation. The ethnicity paradigm classifies ethnicity in three time eras, one of which is the colonial period of time to the 1930s. During this period of time, race was defined biologically under strict hierarchical categories. Between

1930 and 1965, the definition of race changed direction from the biological perspective to a social way of defining race. After 1965, theories of race and ethnicity focused on assimilation in which the minority groups were adapted to the mainstream American culture. During this period, race was analyzed as a mixture of biology and social circumstances. The class paradigm of race increases racism since stratification and economic distribution increases the inequalities in racial terms. The whites are privileged since they have more upward mobility and the biggest portion in the distribution of wealth. The nation paradigm is a product of colonialism. Lastly, America is so much conditioned to evaluate people only with their racial appearance that nationhood is not a criterion of differentiating a person from another.

In conclusion, Omi and Winant argue in their theory of racial formation that America is a color-conscious society. This consciousness of race is socially created both by individuals and by the state itself. What makes the theory of racial formation different from other interpretations of race such as the biological explanations of race is that, is that Omi and Winant explain that race is a social construction. In order to support their argument, they refer to how ethnicity, class and nation support the creation of race as a social structure of American society. The theory of racial formation will be insightful in the analysis of contemporary Chinese American novels where the issue of mixed-race relationships will be discussed in terms of the social construction of race.

### **3.3. The Construction of Whiteness as a Racial Privilege**

When matters of race are in question among racial categories, whiteness is the norm by which other races of color are defined. This, however, does not result from the nature of races; rather society with its laws and legislation creates “whiteness” as the norm. Such practices help hide the fact that whiteness itself is a social construction subject to change under differing socio-economic and historical contexts. Richard Delgado refers to the fact that whiteness was defined in opposition to how non-white was defined. The opposition between white and non-white creates also a boundary between the privileged and the oppressed. The white privilege to which many scholars of white studies refer to involves the social advantages and

benefits that come by being a part of the dominant race. Delgado defines white as “. . . normative, maybe even a kind of property. It sets the standard” (Delgado; 2001, 76). Being an American is thus synonymous to being white. The white people tend to neglect that whiteness is a racial category since they are conditioned to believe that whiteness stands at the center and includes the ideal physical and cultural characteristics.

We are so much conditioned to perceive whiteness as what is natural that, most of the time whiteness is not referred to as a racial category in a similar way that races of color are considered. Richard Dyer exemplifies this situation by pointing out that we do not specifically refer to people who are white but instead to the Chineseness of people that we know: “The sense of whites as non-raced is most evident in the absence of reference to whiteness in the habitual speech and writing of the white people in the West” (Dyer; 2000, 540). Similar to Richard Dyer’s idea, Ruth Frankenberg summarizes the advantages of whiteness and how these practices are unnamed:

First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a “standpoint,” a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, “whiteness” refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed. (Frankenberg; 2000, 447)

Similarly, Gregory Jay in his article titled “Who Invented White People?” states that people have “created a blindness to whiteness, or been blinded by whiteness itself” (Jay; 2007, 98). Since we have been blinded by whiteness, we perceive whiteness as the norm, as the symbol of correctness and regularity. The superiority of whiteness in the United States will continue as long as people continue to prioritize whiteness in the discussion of race. Whenever issues of race or racism are being discussed, all of the colored minority groups are always referred to in terms of their relations to whites. It is actually whiteness which keeps racism alive in America. Although the discriminatory laws of United States history have now mostly become illegitimate, the legal definition of America as white has yet to be eradicated.

An excellent discussion on the legal construction of whiteness can be found in Ian Haney López's book *White By Law: The Legal Construction of Race*, which maintains that American society has been shaped by forces of whiteness both legally and in daily life experiences. He also argues that colorblindness is not the solution to America's problems of racism as long as legal forces serve as the supporters of white supremacy: ". . . colorblindness, a legal construction that serves increasingly as the most powerful ideology of race in the United States, will protect continued White racial dominance in the decades to come" (Haney López; 2006, xviii). The perception of mixed-race relationships will continue to be seen as "awkward" since being colorblind to race in America is not the solution to end personal prejudices related to race.

Ideologically, the white race is the dominant race which sets the norms in the country, and America is considered a white country. In other words, whiteness has become the unquestionable norm of American society where the naturalness of whiteness is also supported by social and legal construction of whiteness. Whiteness, a social construction has been naturalized and made into a criterion that precludes questioning. Therefore, the biology of whiteness prevents any questioning of what the truth or the norm is besides whiteness. The naturalness of whiteness and accepting it without question is related to the fact that everybody is assumed to know what white is. However, it is not nature itself that has historically constructed the boundaries of Whiteness by deciding who was not white:

The construction of race thus occurs in part by the definition of certain features as White, other features as Black, some as Yellow, and so on. On this level, the prerequisite cases demonstrate that law can construct races by setting the standard by which features and ancestry should be read as denoting a White or non-White person. (Haney López; 2006, 12)

There are various cases which represent that being colorblind is not a sufficient way of ending racism, instead the American government supports different ways of enforcing whiteness as the norm. A good example of how whiteness was constructed could be observed in the Naturalization Law of 1790. This law restricted

naturalization only to white persons. When this law was in practice, only the whites could be American citizens. That whiteness here does not refer to skin color but a socially constructed category can be seen by the fact that the Asian races, which have light skin colors are not included in this category. In fact, with such changes in laws, whiteness is socially constructed just as race is socially constructed: “Whiteness is contingent, changeable, partial, inconstant, and ultimately social” (Haney López; 2006, xxi). Thus, referring to court decisions, López argues that whiteness is legally constructed. To justify their decisions, courts based their facts on two criteria of rationalization. These are “common knowledge” and “scientific evidence” (biological explanation of race). The courts preferred rationalizing their decision by “common knowledge” in cases such as when an Asian American applied for citizenship; even though their skin color was white, they were rejected on the basis of common knowledge since having a white skin color was not sufficient to be counted as white. Scientific evidence, meaning biological racism, was used primarily to rationalize the inferiority of African Americans. Zabel states that in the example of African Americans,

. . . courts have accepted, either explicitly or implicitly, two erroneous assumptions in order to find a rational basis for the laws: (1) the white race will be harmed by intermixing because of its innate superiority over the Negro race and (2) the progeny of Negro-white marriages are inferior. There is no scientific evidence to sustain the assumption that the white race is innately superior to the Negro race. (Zabel; 2000, 59)

This means that the courts did not provide a coherent reasoning in explaining their decisions. The court decisions were reasoned on either common knowledge or scientific racism. In this way, the court rationalized its argument to protect the purity of the white race. “The social construction of the White race is manifest in the Court’s repudiation of science and its installation of common knowledge as the appropriate racial meter of Whiteness” (Haney López; 2006, 7). Moreover, the laws and court decisions not only protected the supremacy of the white race, it also demonstrated that race was socially constructed. From López’s point of view, the

prerequisite laws determined the physical characteristics of being white and othering the rest of the minority groups and even limiting their preference of a partner:

The prerequisite laws have directly shaped the physical appearance of people in the United States by limiting entrance to certain physical types and by altering the range of marital choices available to people here. What we look like, the literal and “racial” features we in this country exhibit, is to a large extent the product of legal rules and decisions. (Haney López; 2006, 11)

Skin tone becomes a crucial element in defining one’s level of whiteness since whiteness serves as a tool of power in American society. The white race was a designated privileged position, people were categorized in a hierarchy based on how similar they looked to whites; the shade of skin color was one of these criteria that were used to determine this hierarchy. For instance, immigrants of Western and Northern Europe were superior to other late comers such as the Italians and the Eastern Europeans. Such instances show us that even shades of whiteness are important in the American society to determine one’s limits of power.

From the days that the modern meaning of whiteness was created which were during European colonialism, the Europeans felt the need of uniting under the white race so that they could differentiate themselves from colored races. This was how the Europeans upgraded themselves in comparison to colored races such as the Africans, Asians or Native Americans. The African Americans went against the grain of the melting-pot ideal since they were classified as inferiors by scientific knowledge. If the ideal of the melting-pot was to create a fusion of all the races that exist on the American continent, then Crèvecoeur’s most quoted lines would also include the Africans, Asians and Native Americans. Gregory Jay analyzes Crèvecoeur’s definition of the American race, which consists of white people: “. . . the descendants of Europeans constructed a myth of themselves as a white race with special claim on the answer to the question ‘What is an American?’. An American was a white man” (Jay; 2007, 100).

Just as race is a social construct, whiteness then should be an illusion. If all the colored races are born out of personal prejudices and conventional beliefs,

whiteness cannot be anything different from the rest of the races. In other words, the superiority or the privilege attached to whiteness is our creation. However, it is also evident that as long as people continue to believe in the purity of the white race, they will keep on insisting that whiteness is a privilege. In fact, it is impossible to think of any race as pure. With the increase in mixed-race relationships and marriages, all races have lost their purity long ago. Physical similarities and groupings are misleading because they do not constitute proofs of lack of mixture with other races. There are instances in which people look white but are mixed-race, so if only looking white was enough for the consent of the society, then the Naturalization Laws back in history would have accepted the Asian Americans as citizens of America. “Historically, white people are an invented ‘race,’ various Northern European ethnic groups that form a powerful social coalition . . . Whiteness as an ideology derives from the historical practice of institutionalizing ‘white supremacy’ (Jay; 2007, 101).

In the discussion of whiteness it is important to note the impact of Asian Americans. After their arrival in the United States, whiteness had to be redefined since their skin color was white, but their facial features did not classify them as white. The Naturalization law which was put into practice in 1790 was not sufficient to exclude Asians Americans from citizenship. “The definition of white identity, thought to have been settled by defining precisely through the law who was black and what the place of Native Americans was in the polity, had to be reopened and more narrowly articulated to address the question of whether Asians could become Americans” (Koshy; 2001, 165).

In conclusion, whiteness is the source of the systems that sets the whites as superior and privileged while defining the other races as subordinate. Whiteness is a social and legal creation. One would think that a "color blind" approach promises a peaceful future for interracial relations, but actually, this "racelessness" is anything but "color blindness" because many of the whites definitely do not see people of color as raceless. Whites see themselves as the norm, free from race or ethnicity, and non-whites as abnormal humans with race and ethnicity. Whiteness is set as the norm that others have to measure themselves against.

## 4. THE DEVELOPMENT OF MIXED-RACE RELATIONSHIPS IN THE CONTEMPORARY CHINESE AMERICAN NOVEL

### 4.1. A Brief Introduction

The Chinese-American novel, inevitably takes the subject of mixed-race relationships and marriages especially after the 1980s, the period marked by multiculturalism debates. Some of these novels that typically represent the issue of mixed-race relationships and that are analyzed in this study from this perspective are Gish Jen's *The Love Wife*, Paul Jeffrey Chan's *Eat Everything Before Your Die: A Chinaman in the Counterculture*, Shawn Wong's *American Knees*, Kim Wong Keltner's *The Dim Sum of All Things* and David Wong Louie's *The Barbarians Are Coming*. Since the mixed-race issue initially involves marriages/relationships, this first topic is discussed under the heading "Mixed Race Marriages/ Relationships". Next the issue shifts to the results of mixed-race relationships and marriages, namely the children who embody racial markers and cultural habits. The problems specific to their cases are dealt with in the next part entitled "Identity Crisis: Being Chinese Becoming American". Yet, another concern, especially in the contemporary American society arises when adoption contributes to the mixing of races in the family. The discussion of adoption from a variety of perspectives will be the subject of the last part. "Adoption: New Extended Families". The analysis of themes such as mixed-race relationships, identity crisis, adoption and mixed-race babies proves that race is a social construct in which mixed-race relationships are haunted by the power of "descent" rather than being a "consent" relationship.

To begin with, Gish Jen's *The Love Wife* (2004), sets forth the boundaries of the new American family. The Wongs are a family formed through mixed-race marriage, adoption and a mixed-race baby. Carnegie Wong, a Chinese American, marries Janie Bailey, a white American, who is stereotypically called Blondie through the novel. The family has two adopted daughters, the fifteen year-old Lizzy and nine year-old Wendy. The biological son of the Wong family is the thirteen-month-old Bailey. The family's consent based happiness faces a breakdown with the

arrival of Lan who is a distant relative. It is Mama Wong, Blondie's mother in law who organizes the coming of Lan to America.

Throughout the novel the difficulties of a mixed-race marriage are examined. The relationship between Carnegie and Blondie, which perfectly exemplifies ties of consent, is juxtaposed to ties of descent especially after the arrival of Lan, who Blondie sees Lan as a rival, trying to take over her family with her Chinese manners and racial look. The challenges that ties of consent have to confront are further presented through the cases of adopted daughters of the Wong family, Lizzy and Wendy who have no idea of their past, as if they have no roots. Not only are the relationships between the adopted daughters but also those between adopted and biological children complicate the structure of the mixed-race families.

The next novel, Paul Jeffery Chan's *Eat Everything Before You Die: A Chinaman in the Counterculture* (2004), focuses on Christopher Columbus Wong, a grown orphan, and his quest to uncover his origins and process his life experiences: growing up in San Francisco's Chinatown in the 1950's and going to university during Vietnam War. There is a wide variety of characters among Christopher's "fake" or constructed family formed by consent. For example, there is dying Uncle Lincoln, who might be Wong's father, Peter his gay older brother, Auntie Mary, known to kill pigeons from her balcony with slingshot frozen peas, and lastly Wong's father-figure, Reverend Candlewick, who was defrocked for pedophilia.

In discussing the limits of family, the novel presents a family formed not according to a common bloodline or descent but one formed on consent. Instead of ties of consent, what keeps this group of characters together is their common point of being "losers" in contemporary American society. As in the former novel, in *Eat Everything*, too, adoption is used to define alternative ties. Yet the darker side to adoption prevents this issue from being idealized, for adoption is used as a tool of trading people from China to the United States. In connection with adoption, the theme of identity reveals itself as a problematic issue for the adopted characters in the novel. These adopted identities, paper identities are also in search of a rooted past. This is the only way they could feel safe in the Counterculture of America for survival in such an experimental society of the 70s is not that easy. In terms of identity, the first generation of immigrants are characters who have arrived in the

United States as paper sons. They construct new selfhoods to survive but identities made of “paper” do not last long and are open to destruction.

The next novel is Shawn Wong’s *American Knees* (1995), which is about a character named Raymond Ding, a 37-year-old assistant at Jack London’s College, Office of Minority Affairs. Recently divorced from a Chinese woman, Raymond questions how race and ethnicity become determining factors in the lives of individuals. With Raymond’s divorce from his Chinese wife, his families’ expectations of a loyal son are not fulfilled. His divorce places him between either clinging on closely to his ancestral ties and bloodline or going after his love for a photojournalist named Aurora Crane of half-Japanese half-Irish descent.

Ironically, while trying to shed his descent ties, Raymond is so conscious of his ethnicity that during his relationship with Aurora, he constantly calls her attention to her Japanese past, by interrogating her about the traumatic experiences that her family went through in internment camps. At the beginning of the relationship, this was a difficult task for Aurora who preferred focusing on the “white” part of her identity. Through their relationship, the novel provides insightful discussions on race. Thematically, this novel explores Aurora Crane’s mixed-race identity and her mixed-race relationship with Raymond Ding. Another theme emphasized in the novel is the identity crisis. Being Chinese and becoming American is a difficult process starting in childhood. This conflict of either staying Chinese or becoming American continues in Raymond’s family relationships. He is only expected to be an American in terms of wealth. In his marriage and family life, Raymond’s family presupposes that he should be a Chinese man, in other words a loyal son fulfilling his parents’ expectations.

Next, in Kim Wong Keltner’s novel *The Dim Sum of All Things* (2004) Lindsey Owyang is a Chinese American who is in her twenties, a third generation American-born Chinese. *The Dim Sum of All Things* centers on the life and insecurities of this woman who does not seem to fully appreciate her Chinese heritage. She works as a receptionist at the politically correct magazine where employees are tested to ensure that they are not meat-eaters. Since childhood she did not want to be related to anything Chinese. For example, she told her friends that she hated Chinese food and would prefer a pizza. Lindsey is what her brother calls a

Twinkie "yellow on the outside, but a total white girl inside" (Keltner, 2004; 34). Indeed, however, as hard as she tries to seem American with her tastes, she cannot stand the fact that white men see Asian women as Oriental sex objects, until she falls in love with a white man named Michael Cartier, the magazine's travel editor. While trying to keep herself safe from white men who perceive her as an oriental sex object, she also rejects being with a Chinese American man who demands that she should be a subservient domestic woman. With these conflicts in her mind, she also has to put up with blind dates with Asian American men arranged by her grandmother.

This novel focuses not only on the mixed-race relationship particularly between Lindsey and Michael but also on the generational gaps among family members of Chinese descent. The first generation represented by Lindsey's grandmother is devoted to her Chinese traditions with the food she eats and the way her house is decorated. However, the second generation represented by Lindsey's parents, tries to be both Chinese and American. Finally, Lindsey, a third generation member, acts totally American and specifically stays away from anything related to her Chinese heritage until she visits China with her grandmother. In terms of the identity theme, the novel sets a compromise between Lindsey's neglected Chinese heritage and the American side which she has tried to overemphasize. Another important racial theme emphasized in the novel is how Chinese see the whites and vice a versa.

Similar to Shawn Wong's novel, David Wong Louie's *The Barbarians Are Coming* (2000), is about the conflict of a young man who is torn between the forces of either pleasing his family, who hoped he would become a doctor and marry a Chinese woman, or becoming a chef and pursuing his love with a Jewish girl from Connecticut. Sterling Lung is the narrator of the novel. He is a recent graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, and he cooks lunches at a Wasp ladies' club in Connecticut. Meanwhile, Sterling's parents conspire to import a picture bride, Yuk, from Hong Kong for him to marry and carry on the Lung bloodline. By focusing on the father-son relationship between Sterling and Genius, the novel aims to discuss generational gaps and its connection to the clash between consent and descent. Similar the to arrival of Lan in *The Love Wife*, Yuk's arrival in America is presented

as a resolution to Sterling's inner conflicts of consent and descent. Sterling's parents bring Yuk (descent) to establish a consent relationship. Among generational gaps, there are push and pull factors. For instance, the arrival of Chinese brides is a force which injects Chinese culture to the Americanized characters. At the same time, his girlfriend Bliss, a Jewish dental student announces that she is pregnant with Sterling's child. But at this point the father falls ill with cancer causing to postpone their marriage. During his entire life, Sterling has been rebelling against his culture and his parents. Instead of becoming a doctor as his family wished, he majored in art history, and then trains to become a French chef. This is the reward for his parents for their sacrifice, leaving home for America. He has proved to be a particular disappointment to his father, with whom his relationship has always been remote and cold. At the heart of Sterling's failings is his troubled and distant relationship with his father, Genius, who is devoted to the Chinese laundry he runs.

While discussing the clash of consent and descent in mixed-race relationships, by focusing on *The Barbarians Are Coming*, it is obvious that in this novel, the consent of individuals may from time to time be insufficient for the maintenance of a mixed-race marriage. In terms of the theme of identity, the generational difference between Sterling and Genius, investigates the conflict of following Chinese traditions as in Genius's case or as Sterling tries to adapt American values and manners. Sterling, an American born Chinese has especially ran away from dating Chinese girls meanwhile his parents expect him to marry a Chinese picture bride, not even born in America and has not been exposed to the American culture. Another issue while focusing on the theme of identity is how Sterling's father has created a life for himself and his family out of fictitious documents. Sterling's father was one of the paper sons who have immigrated to the United States.

In conclusion, during the discussion of the novels mentioned above, there are three important themes that will be emphasized. The first one is generational gaps. By referring to generational gaps, the analysis of these novels point out that tie of descent is protected by the old generation of Chinese-American characters. Also, in order to provide a protection of descent for their children, Chinese spouses attempt to organize arranged marriages for them. Besides the parents' concern of a descent

marriage, they also have expectations about their careers. For instance, all of the Chinese-American parents expect their children to have prestigious jobs, however, not always is this expectation made true by their children. The second aspect that is worth noticing is emphasized in the formation of new families. The main point of clash in the discussion of forming new families is between consent and descent. Consent based marriages or relationships are problematic since white spouse's conflict with the Chinese one. Another aspect that makes this issue more problematic is picture brides. As if mixed-race relationships are no complicated, the parents of Chinese-American characters do not resist bringing picture brides from China. There are also obstacles related to stereotypes. For example, white men stereotype Chinese women as Oriental sex dolls. The third issue as an outcome of mixed-race marriages, mixed-race children brings forth new sensibilities about having being mixed-race. The most important characteristic about mixed-race children is their divided sensibilities and their loyalty to their parents' race. Also, some mixed-race characters involve the problematic issue of "looking white" whereas they are also expected to be faithful to their colored race. Another result of mixed-race relationships is adoption. In mixed-race relationships, the act of adopting a child is an act of consent where the adopting parents give their consent to adopt a child of Chinese descent. The complications of interracial adoption and its effect to the identity of adopted children with parents of a mixed-race marriage will be discussed.

#### 4.2. Mixed Race Marriage / Relationships

In Gish Jen's novel *The Love Wife*, Carnegie Wong and Janie Bailey are mixed-race married couple. They have two adopted daughters and just when they are going to have their first biological son, Carnegie's mother named Mama Wong decides to bring a distant relative from China to help Blondie look after the children. At first sight, Carnegie and Blondie's marriage is by Sollors' standards a relationship based on consent. According to Blondie's narration, her family was an "improvisation" (Jen, 2004; 3) which their neighbor claims to be "*the new American family*" (Jen, 2004; 3). Their marriage continues happily until the intrusion of Mama Wong, the person who is not happy with this composition of Anglo-Saxon and Chinese family. When Mama Wong decides to bring Lan to America, it is revealed that marriage is something more complex beyond the consent of individuals.

The story of how Carnegie and Blondie have gotten married reverses the order of events that lead to marriage in romantic love in the sense that lovers are expected to first fall in love with each other, than get married and finally have biological children. During university years, Carnegie was living with his mother who called him "the last real Chinese son in America" (Jen, 2004; 58). She was so proud of her son being obedient until he met Blondie. What brings Blondie and Carnegie is the discovery of a baby left alone. It is actually a classmate of Carnegie who finds out that an "Oriental baby" (Jen, 2004; 60) has been left on the steps of a church. It is the first time that Carnegie experiences holding a baby in his hands, and out of this experience he feels "what a civilized being" (Jen, 2004; 60) he is. Carnegie clutches the baby since he is immediately attached to it. Carnegie's marriage proposal to Blondie is prompted by his desire to adopt and raise this child in a family atmosphere: "Let's get married and have this baby" (Jen, 2004; 61). In other words, Carnegie grabs Blondie as the person closest to him at that particular moment, not particularly because he is in love with her. It would not therefore, be wrong to say that the love affair in this novel is actually between Carnegie and the baby, not between Carnegie and Blondie. The bond that keeps Blondie and Carnegie together is their consent on looking after the baby. Mama Wong as a character who

represents the continuance of Chinese traditions naturally opposes the marriage of Carnegie and Blondie.

From Mama Wong's perspective, Carnegie and Blondie's mixed-race marriage is not a source of pride. As an old lady strongly connected to her Chinese traditions and cultural values, and probably with the effect of her Alzheimer illness, she never feels happy with Blondie being his son's wife. She cannot accept that her son prefers to marry an Anglo Saxon American woman. According to Mama Wong's expectations, her son should marry a Chinese-American woman. The arrival of Lan is like Mama Wong's last effort to provide a slow penetration of Chinese values and traditions into the family. Mama Wong clearly states her feelings to Blondie: "*What? You think you are white? You are Wong! Wong! Wong!* she would say, banging her hand on her mattress. Or else: *Two Wongs – two Wongs – two – don't make a white!*" (Jen, 2004; 28).

Taking her stand, thus, Mama Wong tries to create a territory for herself and her son, leaving out Blondie. The only way she can achieve this is by the power of language. For instance, when Mama Wong is unhappy about something, she continuously mumbles in Chinese in the house. Even though Blondie knows some Chinese, she can not figure out what she says. Blondie describes her feelings of exclusion when she complains about the mere sounds of Chinese: "That argumentative, sibilant sound, irregular and explosive, like firecrackers. I wished she had taught me to speak it. But she never did. Could she ever have said why?" (Jen, 2004; 28). By not teaching the language she speaks, Mama Wong creates a kind of territory only designated for herself and her son, for language is the only weapon she has to create and continue the private relationship she has with her son even after his marriage to Blondie.

According to the Chinese cultural understanding of motherhood, represented by Mama Wong, Blondie should be a housewife and only take care of her child and focus on daily house chores. Therefore, Mama Wong is always criticizing her son and accusing Blondie of not looking after her kids and of being selfish because of her American lifestyle. Blondie, however, has a job, so her time with her children is limited. Besides criticizing Blondie for not spending more time with her children, her

main concern, however, is taking herself into protection by making sure that she has a brides who will take care of her:

*What happen? In the end, you don't even take care of me? Since when you have to pay outside people take care of your mother? What is Blondie doing, tell me. Work outside for what? I can tell you, she is not work for money. She is work for herself! Make everybody suffer. Even her own kids, she do not take care of them. Your mother took care of you your whole life. Struggle so hard. For what, tell me. For what? . . . Throw mother out like garbage, waste money besides (Jen, 2004; 32).*

The most important thing for Mama Wong is to marry her son to a Chinese-American girl who, unlike Blondie, is brought up as a Chinese woman who is willing to dedicate her life to the happiness of her husband and family. Before Carnegie and Blondie gets married, Mama Wong tries everything to prevent this marriage. For example, she offers her son one million dollars so that he will not marry Blondie. She even tells her son that she can still see Blondie and go to the movies with her. As long as Carnegie and Blondie's relationship is not legitimized it is not a problem for Mama Wong for her son to spend time with Blondie. "You can still go out to dinner. But on the paper, name is somebody else. I find you nice Chinese girl, she is going to make everybody feel so nice" (Jen, 2004; 72).

Since Mama Wong fails to prevent this marriage, the best she can do is to add to it more Chinese elements. Lan is this element that Mama Wong wants to inject into the marriage of Carnegie and Blondie. While the family is waiting for Lan to arrive at the airport, Blondie continuously says that Lan is coming "from a little town some place between Shanghai and Beijing" (Jen, 2004; 9). This repetition is a representation of Blondie's fear that Lan's arrival will take over her position as the mother of the family. Blondie repeats that Lan is coming from China so insistently that, even her adopted daughter notices it and says: ". . . Mom keeps going over the thing anyway like it's what to do in case of a fire or something" (Jen, 2004; 9). As if to comfort herself with the thought, Blondie also tells her children that Lan will be with them only for a "couple of years" (Jen, 2004; 9), hoping that her stay will be temporary. Deep inside, however, Blondie does not perceive Lan only and merely as

a nanny; she thinks that she is sent as Carnegie's second and/or optional wife. She vehemently complains about Mama Wong's arrangement to Carnegie, revealing her true fears:

‘ - A second wife, I said. Only your mother.  
- What second wife?  
- Only your mother, I said would send us, from her grave,  
the wife you should have married.’ (Jen, 2004; 195)

At the other end of things, Lan's task is not easy. At first, she does not feel that she is accepted as a member of the Wong family. Although the Wong family is a family of consent, Lan never gets the consent of Blondie to be a part of their family. Such an observation leads Lan to think that she is merely a babysitter who is there for a temporary stay. She stays at the limbo between China and America, leaving one but never being admitted into the next. She questions the reason why she was brought to America: “*Why was I brought here? Because Carnegie's mother wanted me to come, they said. But I wondered, what was the real reason? What did they want from me?*” (Jen, 2004; 49). After the death of Mama Wong, it is revealed that she had stated in her will that a nanny named Lan would come to live with the Wong family so that the children would not lose their Chinese identity.

In fact, Mama Wong's death and Lan's arrival create some profound changes in the relationship between Carnegie and Blondie. According to Blondie, sending Lan from China to the United States is Mama Wong's last attempt of creating a family out of descent. Lan is the “proper” wife that Carnegie should have married and Blondie is aware of that. With Lan's arrival, Blondie is concerned that their marriage could break down if Carnegie gets caught up in the attraction of descent. Her fears are painfully realized, for Mama Wong looms large in Carnegie's psyche after her death. Carnegie, before his mother's death was not a man who focused on his Chinese identity. After the death of Mama Wong, however, he wants his three children to be brought up with an awareness of Chinese heritage. Even his adopted daughter Wendy is aware of this change, but she sees no risk of being bothered by her father because they already look Chinese. Carnegie focuses on his biological son Bailey so that his Anglo-American features do not prevent him from learning about

his Chinese heritage: “I want Bailey to be Bailey Wong, not Bailey Bailey” (Jen, 2004; 204).

Rather than the physical appearance of their biological son, Blondie seems to be the character who is most concerned about feeling like an outsider because of physical similarities of Chinese characters. In an attempt to explore the limits of the new American family, Jen demonstrates its differences from the Anglo-Saxon family. Blondie is probably the most “divided” character between these two family formations. In this family characters with Asian physical characteristics dominate, so Blondie looks among them like an outsider. Blondie starts believing that in the “picture” of the family that she lives in, she looks like an outsider who has merely come to visit the family. Blondie, by hoping that Lan’s stay will be temporary resembles, the arrival of Chinese sojourners to America in the nineteenth century. In fact, Mama Wong’s aim by bringing Lan to America is not for a temporary stay, instead it is intended to be permanent:

But here it was still, and how odd our family looked in it – all those heads of black hair, with just two heads of blond. The Wongs and the Baileys. Any passerby would have thought that Lan and Carnegie were the husband and wife of the family, and that I was visiting with my son, Bailey. (Jen, 2004; 245)

As much as a picture seems to make Blondie feel like an outsider, in fact, the components of the new American family come from completely different origins and races. Although she herself has contributed to the makeup of this radical change in the family it baffles Blondie, for she and her son stands out in the family picture as the “white”. This picture is a reversal of the situation in American society, in which whiteness sets the norm, and white people are born with privileges. Thus, the new family pushes the limits of consent further and while doing this however, a yet larger definition of descent also comes into existence: families between racially similar people in fact continue in the line of descent in the multiracial American society whereas marriages between racially dissimilar people add a new definition to the meaning and perception of consent relations.

When making a decision of marriage with Carnegie, Blondie at first, does not think of problems that would be the outcome of descent. For Blondie, their own consent is initially enough for a marriage between the two. Later Lan's arrival leads Blondie to question things that she had not seen as a problem before. At the beginning of their marriage, Blondie does not think about what the people surrounding them would think of this marriage, but now she understands how people see this marriage differently. In terms of how the concept of marriage is defined as a consent relationship. However, it should be pointed out that arranged marriages and the marriages of people from the same race are also considered a relationship of descent. In which ever way a marriage is structured, the power of descent secretly leaks into it:

I am embarrassed to admit that I did not think much then about what it meant to be surrounded—what it meant to be outnumbered. I did notice that people did not talk about his nobility in marrying me. And I did correct them when they talked about my nobility in marrying him, especially since he came with Lizzy. *How open to difference!* they said all the time. *How loving! How willing to take risks!* (Jen, 2004; 247)

What strikes Blondie at the early stages of their marriage is her ignorance of the price of raising a mixed-race family. She not only sees the emptiness of her presumptuous nobility but she also confronts the fears that poison white supremacists' nightmares: one day the white race may be in minority only to disappear gradually. She realizes her act threatens the very standards of "normalcy" and "propriety," a white dominated society.

In the marriage of Blondie and Carnegie, it is racial similarity rather than blood tie that holds the family together. The only people who are left out according to racial similarity is Blondie and her biological son. While analyzing this family, Jen problematizes consent and descent. In this respect, the formation of this family is beyond what can be explained with blood ties. Racial similarity rather than meaning blood ties in this family becomes a symbol of descent. The meaning of the word descent thus broadened to include relatedness between those who have racial similarity. According to Blondie what seems to be natural is the scene when she sees

Lan, Carnegie and their daughters at the dinner table. Left out of these natural ties, Blondie feels like a complete stranger, an outsider. She questions what naturalness of a family is: “How much more natural this scene than the one that included me. How natural, and how quiet it was – the quiet was almost the worst part” (Jen, 2004; 257). If the Wong family had been a family of descent then, this would be natural. Naturalness for Blondie is following the descent line. In order to look like a natural family, Carnegie, being a Chinese American man, would marry a Chinese looking woman like Lan, so their biological children would look exactly like them. Carnegie’s marriage to Blondie however, goes against the grain of such natural ties. Any family formation is an act of consent, however, in multinational and multiracial societies like America, national origins or races are to be included among family – therefore, descent—ties.

Lan’s definition of descent however is more traditional when compared to Blondie. Lan believes the only way to form ties of descent is achieved by blood ties. For her, the criterion of having a family is having biological children with a person of her own racial origin. For example, in her conversation with Lizzy she states that since she is 47 years old, she believes that she is too old to *have a family*, which is synonymous with having children, not with marrying someone. For Lan, just as marrying a white person is out of the question, the option of adopting is not a real way of having a family as she states in her conversation with Wendy:

And when she says she’s too old to have children, I tell her that’s not true, she can always adopt.

- Adopt what? she says

- A girl like me, I say. I’m adopted remember? In fact you could probably adopt me.

She just laughs though and says in Chinese – *I meant a real family but ok I’ll take you.* (Jen, 2004; 300)

Giving birth to her biological children is Lan’s only criterion of having a “real” family. Therefore, according to Lan, the adopted girls and the parents were not a real family until Bailey was born. In the imagination of a Chinese woman brought

up to follow the descent line when she is married, a family constructed by consent is not a definition of a family until biological children are born into it.

Such examples from *The Love Wife* reveal that the main conflict in mixed-race families is between consent and descent. Not only are they in conflict with each other but they are also in conflict within themselves. Typically, the old generations of characters in these novels are supporters of descent-based family formation. The formation of a family is actually structured upon elements of both consent and descent. However, in the novel titled, *Eat Everything*, there are no signs of descent, and this situation does not provide any sense of comfort. The lack of descent in a family that connects the family members to each other annoys the characters and consistently leads them to search for what they lack. Different from *The Love Wife*, the old generation of characters does not insist on descent relations but have similar problems on deciding what a family is.

The meanings of family and descent ties are further problematized. In *Eat Everything*, in which the characters are all “losers” and this seems to be the common denominator, not blood or genes, in its largest sense that keeps them together as a family. From the perspective of children and their relationships to their adopted parents, Using Werner Sollors’ terminology, the family in *Eat Everything* is a family of consent. The definition of “descent” is stretched further to include people of different origins trying to survive in American society during the 1970s. The narrator of the novel, Christopher Columbus Wong does not know who his parents are except that he is one of Uncle Lincoln’s paper sons. Also Christopher has a brother named Peter, another adopted child, another orphan brought to America by Uncle Lincoln. “We’re family. Everybody’s imitating us now that we’ve learned to imitate everyone else. Our made-up family of facsimiles of uncles and aunts, of orphans and secrets, of interventions, of disguise, is rock solid. We’re incorporated” (Chan, 2004; 3). The core value which holds this family together is not anything related to descent, instead this family is a “paper family”, a made-up family. This family is constructed not according to a bloodline but instead, according to the consent of the individuals who want to be a part of this gathering.

Although the characters act as if they are a family, their relations to each other are not what they would have been in a biologically related family. For

example, Winnie has a short-term relationship with Christopher, but later, she gets married to Uncle Lincoln. The fact that Winnie and Christopher have previously had a relationship and that later Winnie has a relationship with Uncle Lincoln, who is considered to be Christopher's father proves the loosely structured family relations among the members of the family. After having a relationship with Chris, Winnie gets married to Uncle Lincoln, whom Chris considers his father, although he is not his biological father. Such a relationship would have been considered scandalous if Uncle was Chris's biological father. Indeed, Christopher at the funeral of Uncle Lincoln describes Winnie's state in the family as: "... our Winnie, Uncle's publicly acknowledged widow, Auntie's protégée whom she saved from a poorly conceived green-card scam with hapless me" (Chan, 2004; 7).

The loosely structured familial relations in *Eat Everything* do not have an essence. This lack of an essence in the family needs to be filled with confirmations. After the death of Uncle Lincoln, Auntie, who is supposed to continue her "mother" image in the family says, "Well, Lincoln's dead now. Everybody's free. We are all family now. We'll just remember what we want to remember. That's America" (Chan, 2004; 21). This is in fact what Uncle Lincoln kept saying when he was alive in various circumstances. This repetition is an emphasis, making the characters memorize that they are a family. When Uncle Lincoln was in his death bed, Christopher remembers that he told him that "... now we really feel like family" (Chan, 2004; 14). At the time of his death, Uncle Lincoln, aware of the fact that he does not have a biologically related family, needs to remind the group of people around him that they are all there because they share maybe not an essence but the same fate with him. Thus, this lack of essence and their mutual search for it becomes, unlike alternative blood ties, the cement that keeps them together.

The family relations of these characters are therefore, very complex, owing to the unusual nature of their familial ties as losers. For instance, Christopher wants to get a divorce from his wife named Melba but he cannot figure out where she is to have the divorce legalized. In addition, Christopher's brother is a good friend of Melba: "Peter and Melba, my soon-to-be ex-wife, are always better as friends than as family" (Chan, 2004; 24). In terms of Winnie's situation in the family, as nothing is based on descent in this family, why Winnie married Uncle Lincoln, a man at an age

to be his father should be discussed. There were rumors that Winnie married him to get a green card and to permanently stay in America. Lincoln also wanted to reward by marrying Winnie, for being faithful and taking care of him when he was ill. Actually, marrying Winnie was Uncle Lincoln's reward for taking care of him.

In *Eat Everything*, there is no concrete factor that holds this family together, such as the continuity of the bloodline. The members of this family have a life of their own, but at the same time they feel the need to stay connected as a family. For example, Melba is in Italy with her new boyfriend named Lazio. Furthermore, Melba and Winnie are good friends and occasionally talk on the phone whereas Christopher cannot communicate with her to get a divorce. When at last, Christopher and Melba talk on the phone, Melba thinks that they should listen to Winnie's advice and get a divorce: "But Winnie says we must finally divide in order to multiply, we have to trust her and poor Mary's judgment in these matters" (Chan, 2004; 26). In this quotation, the word "multiply" leaves the impression that rather than being a family connected to each other by consent, they are trying to establish ties of descent. If this family had been connected to each other by descent, the new girlfriend of Chris would not have been the communicator of Chris's divorce. Since this family is only connected through descent, Chris's new girl friend plays the role of the mediator of the past relationship.

The bloodline that connects family members naturally is replaced by other sorts of ties in *Eat Everything*. The narrator, Chris believes that though the members of this family are not tied together by descent there is a connection which holds the family together. For him, this connection is related to finding a home and caring adults with other orphans. He is actually thankful for at least sharing a life with other people or orphans like himself: "But together, all of them were saving us, hiding us, feeding us, layering us with enough history to be able to explain ourselves when we were old enough to speak" (Chan, 2004; 41). Even though the past that Chris is talking about is not a rooted past, the creation of a family "history" by Auntie and Lincoln gives him a reason for happiness. He is aware that when he gets older he will have a past that he will be able to reminisce about.

In this particular family structure, it seems that every member of the family has a role to play. Auntie Mary is the mother of the family who tries to hold the

family together like a real mother would do. Since Chris is the youngest member of this family, he is willing to carry out any role that is given to him: “I felt prepared to accept the responsibility of my role in our ersatz communion we called family” (Chan, 2004; 175). This role-playing has little to do with natural facts like giving birth or sharing a common gene pool, but is based instead on choice, willingness and functionality.

Since this family cannot be defined by ties of descent, much of the value judgments concerning familial relations in it need also to be redefined. If this was a family of descent, then some of the relationships that take place in the family would be defined as incest. Chris explains why he got married to Winnie, “. . . I married our ‘mother’—rather our ‘father’s’ wife to be. But luckily we are orphans. I did elope with Winnie on a whim right after I graduated from university. But the truth is I married her to complete what I imagined was the next step in my life, to invent or reinvent myself” (Chan, 2004; 60). Chris’s marriage to Winnie is not a marriage of love. He gets married to her with the hope that he could reinvent himself. Chris gets married to the person who will later be his stepmother. The “fakeness” of the family, even how they call each other titles like “uncle” or “aunt” are all imaginary titles that have been taught to Chris. Those titles are not the actual relationship among them. The titles are slippery, since one day the characters may be one’s girlfriend becomes the stepmother the next day:

I’d adopted the title because I’d been taught to introduce everyone who was older as ‘Uncle.’ I said it without thinking. . . . Fictive family titles, the ‘Uncle’ and ‘Auntie’ the young bestow on those who might or might not be relatives, on friends of the family who are not relatives, on strangers whose favor you’re asked to curry. (Chan, 2004; 69)

In her marriage with Chris, Winnie has difficulties understanding this constructed family. Since Winnie is a Chinese girl who was brought up in China, the type of family relations that she is familiar with is descent. Therefore, she keeps asking Chris questions about the complex web of relations among members of the family. For example, she questions how Peter and Chris could be brothers. Chris

explains that Peter's mother and his mother were sisters. This fact does not make any sense to her, for if they had been sisters that they should not have been apart from each other:

'How were they sisters? Peter says he was born in Hong Kong and you were born in some little place here.'  
'Lompoc.' It's a little joke in the family. Everyone likes to say the word because it amuses them to hear it in all the accents the family employs to describe me and my blunted history. But I never lived there. It was Peter from Paradise, and Columbus from Colombia. (Chan, 2004; 70)

The history of Chris's biological family is a total mystery. Therefore, he has adopted a family history, partly given to him by the creative stories of others and partly chosen by him. Even the place of his birth is so fictitious that it sounds like with his name. Chris lives in a family where nothing is natural or real. He has no sense of connection to a past or a family tradition that he knows of or any grandparents. The person who he knows as his father, Lincoln, was also an orphan without a "safe" past history of himself. The fact that Chris and Uncle Lincoln are trying to create a past for themselves is an attempt to create a family tradition out of a lack of tradition, for tradition is closely linked to ties of descent and provides a feeling of safety.

The family in *Eat Everything*, tries to stay connected to each other by sharing difficulties and carrying burdens together. The efforts of the family members to stay connected through hard times are what keeps the family connected to each other. Although they do not share a common last name that they could pass on to another generation, they still stay connected. Even though the members of this family do not share the same blood with each other, they share a life together. In hard times, Chris believes in this fact even more, and after his divorce from Winnie, he says, "There was no other boys in our extended family to carry Lincoln's paper name" (Chan, 2004; 73). After Winnie divorces Chris for not being a proper husband to her, Chris feels left alone. Even though the family that he is a part of is not his real family, he feels the need to be close to them and have their attention on himself. Whatever people think of his family and even if Reverend Candlewick was accused of

pedophilia, he was Chris's "counselor. Teacher, my father . . . And Peter, my brother, despite all" (Chan, 2004; 73). Chris very often, during the novel, repeats that he has known Reverend Candlewick his father and Peter as a brother as if they were connected by blood ties. Chris attempts to cover up his loneliness when ties of descent are concerned.

The divorce of Winnie and Chris does not stop Winnie from being connected to the family, Winnie's status simply changes from being Chris's wife to other titles: "She would eventually move in with Uncle. Winnie would wrestle with my family on her own terms as a cousin, perhaps as an adopted daughter, and in the end as Lincoln's wife" (Chan, 2004; 84). The statuses of individuals are stable in families of descent. Therefore, if Winnie is the wife of Chris, she should have continued being his wife, for the rest of her life, or in the case of a divorce, Winnie would have no connection to that family afterwards. In their unique family, after divorce Winnie becomes a sister who should be protected by all the members of the family. "I cared about her as I imagine I would have cared if she were an older sister. . . . She was more in tune with the family than I could ever be" (Chan, 2004; 87).

Winnie does adapt herself better than Chris to this loosely structured family in which titles keep shifting even, for there are particular times when Chris finds it difficult to adapt and adjust himself. For instance, when Lincoln decides to marry Winnie to reward her because she looked after him when he was ill, Chris tells Winnie that he does not want his ex-wife to be his stepmother. He tells Winnie that he does not want her to get married to Lincoln because if she does so, Chris will have to call Winnie "auntie." Meanwhile, Winnie is considering marrying Lincoln not out of love but for finding an anchorage in America. Later Winnie marries Lincoln when he is in his deathbed. "Like all daughters, Winnie never needed a father. But she did need a husband. And a green card. And Lincoln, as a last act, saved her, adopted her by marrying her" (Chan, 2004; 222). Marriage, in this case, brings together two kinds of relationships: by being Uncle Lincoln's wife, Winnie establishes a consent tie with him but she is also a daughter of sorts for Lincoln, which makes their unique relationship a tie of descent, which provides for Winnie not only a father/husband but also a new nation.

Descent relations have a haunting presence for the characters in *Eat Everything*, for they have not even one relation of essence in their lives. Chris's longing for a family is a never-ending fact through the novel. Since he will never have biological parents, a real family can be found only in the scenes of Toisan couplets for him. According to a couplet that he reads, the scene which describes a family has a dusty road to home and the footprints of thieves on the way home. Whether this scene fits a family life or not, Chris believes that other orphans like him have their own scenes of what a family means to them. This search of a "real" family with the hope that some day he will find it is never lost: "Searching for relief, I am bound to follow that same dusty path I imagine all my familiars have taken before me, leashed to a grotesque, multi-limed chimera bearing more than a faint family resemblance, bound for home" (Chan, 2004; 59). Furthermore, sometimes Chris creates scenarios in his mind that the members of this family could have been a family which was connected to each other by descent. From Chris's perspective there are many blurry scenes about the family that he is a part of. He wishes that he would be able to say who his parents are: "In my movie, I imagined that Mary was at one time secretly married, first to Lincoln, then Wick. That Peter and I were their unacknowledged children, the paper sons of an illegal marriage consummated after a Mexican divorce" (Chan, 2004; 113). The Toshian couplets and the dream scenes that Chris memorizes are because of his search of a descent past. He compensates what he cannot find in real life by trying to use his imagination. This hunger for ties of descent is never covered up by consent. Chris has relationships with several people such as Melba and Winnie, his desire to belong to a family is never fulfilled. A relationship with a woman does not provide Christopher with a past or a safe ground where there are other people sharing the same purpose with him: "What was I waiting for all these years, something more momentous than what, that I would understand my place in a family, in a religion, in a community of idealism, in service to my people, to mine own self? None of it and all of it" (Chan, 2004; 30).

However, there are certain consent relationships in this novel which surpass the depths of blood ties. The family relations of Chris and Peter who act as brothers to each other are extraordinarily strong. Although Peter and Chris are not connected by descent, having shared similar experiences as orphans connects them to each other

as brothers. Chris states that, most of the time Peter knows what Chris is thinking and that he understands him better than he understands himself. "Peter always told me what I felt because he felt the same. We understood the linguistic absurdity of our family's curses . . ." (Chan, 2004; 74).

When Chris falls in love with an American woman named Melba, the first person that he tells about her is Winnie and Peter. He asks Chris whether if what makes her attractive is Melba's race. Chris tells that this relationship does not have any racial concerns, but indirectly there is something that attracts Chris about Melba's Americanness: "It's not about race. She's not like that. She sees past all that, Peter.' All I knew was she was most decidedly not Chinese, not Chinatown. So far from the manipulations, the constant negotiations that made my relationship with family so flawed" (Chan, 2004; 101). In this relationship with Melba, Chris has found what he lacks in the family. He thinks that this relationship has nothing to do with manipulations, instead Melba accepts Chris the way he is. After a short marriage with Melba, they decide to divorce. In this mixed-race marriage of Melba and Chris, Melba was defined as American by Auntie Mary, since for her being white is what being an American is. Different from Auntie, Peter calls Melba white. Though Peter's personal preference of calling Melba is white, he knows that he cannot do this on TV when he is hosting a cooking show. Since the television is a source of imposing mainstream culture and what is widely accepted, Peter knows that he shouldn't call anybody white because then he would be classifying the dominant racial category which is accepted as the norm among the other racial categories: ". . . Auntie's generation says 'American' when they mean 'white.' Peter on the other hand, makes a point to say 'white' when he means 'white,' except on TV. For Auntie, Melba's an American girl; for Peter she's a white girl" (Chan, 2004; 133).

In this family, family roles are performed quite unexpectedly and inconsistently. Therefore, role expectations are not always met with required on expected answers. For example, the role model in Chris's fictive family was Uncle Lincoln, the father figure of the family. Nevertheless, Lincoln is not the typical father figure. For instance, sometimes the family has dinner at a restaurant. In one of these dinners Peter wants to leave early, and even before Peter asks if he could leave,

Lincoln tells him to go where he wants. He says, "I'm not your father" (Chan, 2004; 118). After Peter leaves the restaurant, Chris tells his family that he wants to live on his own. While saying this, he is not anxious about how Lincoln will react; instead, he wonders, as if Uncle Lincoln is his biological father, how he will react to this situation. Lincoln's answer to Chris's idea of moving out is: "Do what you want. I told you already, I'm not your father" (Chan, 2004; 119).

In this unusual family, unusual people are matched with unusual roles to play as family members. Chris fantasizes about another unlikely father, Wick, who was defrocked for pedophilia is certainly not a suitable attribute for any father or father figure. Besides physically being similar to Wick, Chris disregards that Wick was defrocked for sexually abusing children, and that he was still the "virtuous man strengthened by sacrifice, a man to imitate, a father figure who could stand tall in tennis shoes" (Chan, 2004; 109). The father-son relationship between Chris and Wick surprisingly flourishes when Wick gets out of jail due to pedophilia. This is when Chris is preparing to marry Melba, and he wants Wick to conduct the ceremony. Chris even tells Melba that Wick was the only father he had ever had. Chris tries to rationalize why Wick was sexually abusing boys:

When I think back, it was all transparent, clear. Mary and Lincoln were family, but Wick didn't have anybody else, no adult peers. He was always in the company of kids, always the most imposing figure, the locus of attention paid by all the fatherless children in Chinatown. . . . To be parental, an authority, demands obedience. To be a guide, counselor, spiritual advisor, requires respect paid to a young person that parents find difficult if not possible to offer. That's Wick's strength. Or at least that was his strategy to command and, unfortunately, to seduce. (Chan, 2004; 156)

From Wick's point of view, all of the members of this family share the characteristic of being refugees and their need for each other is larger than wherever they come from, larger than family. "It's the gene pool. We all learned to survive the Fall, the death of the past. We don't rise. We lie down together. We settle, and in that settling we become equal" (Chan, 2004; 209). According to Wick, how the members of this family league together is beyond the definitions of a family. For him, the

gathering together of this family is a quality more valuable than a family based on descent. For Wick, after the Fall of Adam and Eve, the whole of human beings are related like a gigantic family; therefore, he broadens the definitions of descent to include all humankind. It is against the fallen state of humanity that they all should unite and multiply. Wick announces the birth of a new humanity when he announces that he will marry Chris and Melba so that “from their union a new people, a new kingdom [will rise]. We need to spread our seed, cast it as widely and as far as possible. Create new traditions, new ways of forming families, communities” (Chan, 2004; 211). While Wick announces that new families should be formed, what he understands from a family is something limitless, without the usual boundaries of descent. Instead, he criticizes the fact that families are valued according to their biological ties to each other: “The measure of acceptance—but who’s measuring, and who’s creating the measure? What are we to the world, or to each other? Have we created enough necessities to test and expand our capabilities?” (Chan, 2004; 251). Wick thus announces the coming of a new understanding of humanity as a grand family.

*Eat Everything* is the only novel in which the old generation of characters does not insist that young generation of Chinese Americans should have families of descent, because they themselves do not have families of descent. On the contrary, the characters that have been explored in *Eat Everything* are held together by consent rather than blood ties. The variety of characters in this novel reveals that, such diverse characters are pulled together by a magnet of consent, sharing the state of being orphans. In *American Knees* however, the characters that have been raised by the principle of descent are subject to the oppression of their families so that they would have a marriage of descent. Whenever a character chooses to follow consent in a mixed-race relationship, this relationship still has the task of coping with the power of descent.

*American Knees* starts with Raymond Ding’s divorce from his Chinese wife named Darleen. At the beginning of the novel, the main character, the 37-year-old Raymond Ding, starts questioning his position in his traditional Chinese family. His family’s expectation from him is to be a loyal son to them and continue his marriage with Darleen so that they could have grandsons and continue the family name from

one generation to the other. Raymond's parents, who are typically devoted to Chinese traditions, are strictly tied to a descent-based understanding of a family in which, divorce is unthinkable. In descent-based families, the old generation of parents expect from the younger generation a continuance of the bloodline and in the Chinese type of family of descent, a person loses his/her individuality and the filial duty of the child is to serve his family. After his divorce from Darleen, Raymond is no more the "good son" that his parents expect him to be: "What was a good Chinese son without a Chinese family in which to practice his legendary Chinese filial duty?" (Wong, 1995; 11). Therefore, after his divorce from Darleen, Raymond does not feel free from his familial obligations, instead, the Chinese culture and the power of descent reveals itself in a more oppressive way.

Raymond has his reasons for divorce, for the period in which he was married to Darleen was very oppressing for him. The oppression that Raymond feels is structured upon the Chinese culture. In Chinese culture, Raymond did not only marry Darleen, but he also married her family. For example, Darleen's father and her brothers are in the restaurant business, and Raymond thinks that when one is in family business, s/he loses his/her free will. When he is married, one of Darleen's brothers tells him that if he was not giving himself such a high salary he would quit but, "you couldn't quit family" (Wong, 1995; 16). Both Darleen's parents and Raymond's family think of a family as a community where individual rights are minimized. If Raymond had been working at a business rather than the family business, he would have the freedom to leave his job but he cannot leave family business that easily because of the obligations he has for his family.

Both because of his responsibilities to his parents and also to his wife's family Raymond is oppressed on both sides. His answer to the oppression that he feels on both sides is infidelity. After divorce because of his infidelity, Raymond moves to the Bay Area where his father lives. Raymond imagines having a conversation with his father in which he wants to tell him that he will never again marry a Chinese woman. He was the first in the family tree to divorce his wife and who rejects marrying a Chinese woman. Raymond's father, Wood is disappointed in his son, because Raymond is the only son of the family who was supposed to continue the family name: "In the Chinese world, being the first son gave one a sense

of place, of belonging, of leading the family” (Wong, 1995; 31). It is ironic that while he was trying to stay away from his father and ties of descent that his father represents, after his divorce, it is again, his father or descent that he holds on to. However, Raymond’s term of being a good son ends with his divorce. As if he is keeping his promise of not to have a relationship with a Chinese woman, he meets Aurora Crane, a photo journalist of Japanese-Irish descent.

*American Knees* is set in contemporary America during the 1990s, an age of multiculturalism. It is notable that, whenever the characters in the novel are at a party or some other social gathering, they talk about the changing racial trends in American society. For example, Aurora and her third generation Japanese-American friend named Brenda talk about the future of racial dynamics: “The whole country is going to be Hispanic in a few years; maybe all Asians could pass for Hispanic in a generation or two, then pass for white after that, even change their names, like the Jews and the Mexicans” (Wong, 1995; 93). They also discuss that in the contemporary American society, racial dynamics are becoming more complex. In the quotation mentioned above, after the mixing of races, it is assumed that more and more people will be passing as white. As if the colored races are not mixing with each other, the assumption that the tendency to remain white or the belief that whiteness will always increase in future is the expectation that is mentioned. This quotation also reveals that the popularity of whiteness will not decrease and the fact that whiteness is never challenged remains as a fact of American society.

While these tendencies towards the popularity and the safety of whiteness continue, mixed-race characters have other obstacles that they must overcome. Race and gender are factors which particularly affect the lives of mixed-race identities. Aurora Crane is a special example both because of her mixed-race identity of Japanese-Irish descent, and also because of her gender. It is mostly white men who choose to have relationships with women who belong to colored races. This fact is not out of any coincidental innocence; instead, white men use it as an opportunity to affirm that they can be attractive to different women, while women tend to use it as an opportunity to move upward in the social structure of the society. The increase in mixed-race relationships or marriages leads to new hierarchical categories of race. In mass media, it is more probable to see celebrity couples in which the Asian is a

woman married to a white man. Brenda and Aurora are disturbed by the fact that Asian women are presented as the sex objects of white men. ““Our acceptance is as much a product of stereotype as the Asian man’s ostracism as an unmanly wimp. The media exploit our sexuality. Name a middle-aged Asian American actress. You can’t”” (Wong, 1995; 101). For example, the increase in the number of Japanese women marrying men from a different race leads to the creation of hyphenated last names such as ““Nishitani-Miller, or a Nishitani-Polanski, or a Nishitani-Washington”” (Wong, 1995; 93). The increase in mixed-race relationships is a statistical fact; however, this increase does not mean that race is not a tool of discrimination and derogatory stereotypes. The novel seems to define multiculturalism not as a source of less racism or discrimination; it prefers to define multiculturalism as a fad that actually continues obsessions and stereotypes related to race.

Both Aurora and Raymond unconsciously clings on to descent. Aurora with her mixed-race character, before her relationship with Raymond anchors on to the descent of her father that is whiteness. Also, Raymond, after his divorce, goes back to where his father lives although he has been trying to stay away from family obligations. Aurora Crane, is familiar with insistent questions about where she is from referring to her race. The people around her, not being able to fit her to a racial category that they have in their minds, keep asking her where she is from. Aurora protests such questions and she answers back by saying that she is from Minnesota. In terms of Aurora’s mixed-race background, to be accepted as an American, being a citizen of America is not enough. The American society is so race-conscious that some of the people around her even go further and rudely ask her what her nationality is. From both of the aspects, either defining who an American is from the perspective of the whites or defining it from the perspective of mixed-race people, there is a racial obsession. The white Americans try to equalize being an American with being white. The mixed-race people however, prefer to define Americanness as being multiracial and multicultural. “What nationality are you?” *American like my parents*. ‘What are you—you know, what race?’ Was ethnicity so hard a word to use? ‘Oh, how wonderful to be Japanese and Irish! You’re so pretty.’” (Wong, 1995; 34). While she faces such reactions at social gatherings, since Raymond is attracted

to her, his inner voice dreams that they could be talking about their racial preference in a relationship: “. . . *how comfortable we are with voicing our racial preference to each other honestly and forthrightly. How adult of us; how politically correct*” (Wong, 1995; 40). As Aurora tries to run away from the issue of race, she gets more caught up in the limits and categorizations of race. Just like Raymond, the more Aurora wants to stay away from descent, she clings more on to it. Unlike Aurora’s typical conversations with other people about her race, Raymond never asks questions on that topic. However, Aurora prefers talking about her racial mixture since Raymond has not asked questions about it. She tells Raymond that her mother is a second generation Japanese and her father is an Irish American. The beginning of Raymond and Aurora’s conversation is not similar to any other conversations that Aurora has had previously. It is different because, many of the people that she has met were curiously asking questions about her race. In her conversation with Raymond, however, she is not bothered by questions related to her mixed-race identity. In her previous conversations with other people, Aurora is duped into the race talk.

In terms of a mixed-race relationship, Aurora makes the matter more complicated for Raymond. For him, this relationship is not only a consent relationship in which they share their love for each other but also Raymond acts as he is Aurora’s racial mentor. “Aurora wondered if the differences between them were strictly a matter of race. Sometimes she thought Raymond made too much of the whole issue” (Wong, 1995; 54). It is ironic that Raymond wants Aurora to be aware of her Japanese identity whereas when his father asks him to be loyal to his Chinese heritage, Raymond does not obey that. Descent lingers and gets stronger in its absence. In a discussion, Aurora admits that the only thing that he wants to hear from Raymond is that he loves her and continues their relationship of consent. Raymond is being problematic by trying to create issues of conflict between them by focusing on Aurora’s racial identity. In the relationship between Aurora and Raymond, it is impossible to detach race from descent. Since both of them cannot achieve this detachment, this situation turns out to be a racial pride in Raymond’s case. He also wants Aurora to be under the same influence by trying to make Aurora conscious of her Asian identity using the rhetoric of multiculturalism.

In her previous relationships, men defined Aurora as white with reference to her white phenotype. Whenever she told them that she was mixed-race, men “tagged” her as “half-white,” putting emphasis to her white heritage. Actually, whiteness is not a reality that could be anchored on to. Whiteness is rather discursive and a social construction of American society. While Raymond focuses so much on Aurora’s half Asianness, in Aurora’s previous relationships in which men were all white, men never acted like a teacher to her and emphasized her Japanese identity. Instead, since whiteness is the norm and what is accepted as natural, the white men that she has had relationships with do not even understand that she is only half white because she completely looks white. “I’ve never been with any non-Asian man who hasn’t at one time or another during our relationship tripped himself up and said something racist. They don’t understand it when I say I’m not white. Their defense is that I’m half white” (Wong, 1995; 64). Aurora throws the white prejudices in the faces of her boyfriend, for according to the dominant concept of whiteness, even the slightest deviation from whiteness makes the person a non-white.

If the white people have their racist prejudices, the Chinese also have their own. At the beginning of *American Knees*, Raymond’s father was the typical Chinese American who insisted that his son should continue his marriage with the Chinese wife named Darleen. For some time after Raymond’s divorce, his father still thought that his second marriage should also be made with a Chinese woman. Raymond states that his previous marriage to Darleen was a marriage which fit the requirements of his father. However, Raymond’s disbelief in descent stems from the fact that this marriage has ended in failure:

If I marry someone Chinese I’ll have structural redundancy. It’ll make the relationship stronger. We’ll use the same genetic building materials, and our children will come out pure and strong. Dad I was married to a structurally redundant woman once already. I had Chinese structural beams all around me, and the building collapsed. (Wong, 1995; 117)

Later, in the novel, Raymond’s father who previously opposed relationships of consent, approves of the relationship of Raymond and Aurora. While Wood

approves of his son's relationship, Raymond believes that his father's idea of marrying a picture bride is not a "proper" way of getting married. As Wood observes relationships are not only a matter of descent. The relationship between Aurora and Raymond, is very special for them, and Wood admits to Raymond that after their breakup he has understood that Aurora and Raymond's relationship has the "structural redundancy" and that they should be together. "Structural redundancy" is an engineering term that Raymond's father uses, when he wants to refer to the stability or power of a relationship, like the strength of a building. While Wood accepts Raymond's relationship with Aurora, for himself, he thinks of traditional ways of marriage years after his wife's death. He tells his son that he wants to get married to a picture bride who will be brought from China. Wood's reason of approving of Raymond's relationship with Aurora is not out of innocence. His motive behind accepting this relationship is connected to the idea that he could get married to a picture bride. This way of getting married with a picture bride, both involves consent, because to people who actually do not know each other agree upon getting married, while it also involves descent since Wood only thinks of getting married to a Chinese woman. Raymond questions his father's method of marriage; however, Wood rationally tells his son that a Chinese girl will not have his modern ideas of marriage. Instead, the Chinese girl will probably be thankful to Wood for being in America. From Raymond's point of view, this marriage does not have the right reasons to be married.

Raymond knows that Chinese families "are ruled by tradition, custom, history, superstition" (Wong, 1995; 192). This depiction of the Chinese family is very similar to Werner Sollors's definition of descent. America, as a nation is open to new possibilities, for it needed freedom to break away from the rooted culture and traditions of Europe. By extension typical American relationships ideally had to be based on consent, though an overwhelming resistance to mixed-race relationships has shown the ongoing weight of descent. Raymond's father does not show a strict stubborn attitude against of a consent relationship. At the beginning of *American Knees*, Raymond's father was a man who did not accept his son to have a relation of consent with Aurora. As the novel develops, Wood observes that the happiness of his son should not be limited with the rules of descent, and if he is happy with Aurora,

then they should be together since his happiness is also connected to getting married with a picture bride from China..

The next novel that first rejects, later accepts a mixed-race relationship is *The Dim Sum of All Things*. Similar to *American Knees*, the mixed-race relationship in this novel will result on the consent of individuals after conflicts evolving from ties to descent. This novel focuses on the contradictions of a third generation Chinese American woman who refuses to go out with both white men and also Chinese men for different reasons.

In *The Dim Sum of All Things* Lindsey Owyang prefers to stay away from anything Chinese including dating Asian-American men and white men. Lindsey's opinion about relationships changes when she falls in love with Michael Cartier, a white looking man. Before she falls in love with Michael, Lindsey's theory about white men was that they were interested in Asian women because they found Asian women exotic playthings to have fun with until they were bored. "She had a theory that these neat'n'tidy nerds were disguised as 'good guys' but were actually stealthy predators who feigned interest in Asian cuisine, history, and customs in hopes of attracting an exotic porcelain doll . . ." (Keltner, 2004; 3). Evidently, not only does she stay away from going out with white men, she also stays away from going out with Asian men. She hates the fact that Asian men expect women to be subservient and domestic. For Lindsey, relationships are a huge dilemma under these circumstances. In addition to this dilemma, there are her grandmother Pau Pau's plans for finding a Chinese match for her. Although she hates going on these blind dates and finds them humiliating, both out of respect for her grandmother and due to a gratitude to her for living in her house, Lindsey feels she owes it to Pau Pau to meet the men she arranges for her to meet:

Every few months or so, Pau Pau would announce that a young man, a grandson of a friend, would be picking her up for a date. . . . She was living rent-free, and these arranged 'dates' meant so much to Pau Pau, who worried about her granddaughter's marital status. (Keltner, 2004; 39)

The relationship between Lindsey and Michael Cartier starts when Michael sends Lindsey an e-mail which only says “I love you.” Because of Lindsey’s theory that white men like to play games with Asian American women and do not consider with them a serious relationship, Lindsey does not want to reveal her interest in him. She tries to stay as cool as possible. Moreover, before she met Michael, she also had a prejudice towards mixed-race couples because she thought that either the attractive Asian American women were out to use white men as a means of entering white society, or the white man was using the attractive Asian American woman to carry her as a proof that he can be attractive to beautiful women: “Lindsey didn’t want to be part of one of those interracial couples where the woman was attractive enough but the white guy was inevitably overweight, bald and spore-like” (Keltner, 2004; 68). In both cases, Chinese-white relationships, for Lindsey, depended on self-interest not on romance.

Obviously, Lindsey is not the first person who is about to have a relationship with a white man. Previously, Lindsey’s cousin Stephanie went out with a white man to whom she is married at the moment. However, at the beginning of their relationship, the Chinese family opposed this relationship and thought that it was temporary. Stephanie’s boyfriend was called “the white guy” as if he did not have a name and no other quality besides being white. Similar to the stereotype made to Jaine Bailey by being called Blondie in *The Love Wife*, Stephanie’s boyfriend was named as “the white guy”:

At first the whole family had been extremely wary of Mike, Stephanie’s white guy. That’s what everyone called him, too, as if ‘that White Guy’ were actually part of his name. No one ever referred to him without mentioning this phrase that identified him as a separate, white human. Every time someone spoke of him it was as though they meant to say, ‘Don’t get too close to him, he’s *That. White. Guy.*’ (Keltner, 2004; 102)

Similar to how whiteness defines or categorizes other races, the Chinese-American family stereotypes all white people in the person of Mike as one to stay away from. Just as it is hard for a Chinese person to become a part of the white

society, it is difficult for a white person to become a part of a Chinese-American family. In this sense, not only the whites but also the Chinese contribute to a racial divide. Still, however, the whites see themselves as a group of people above and beyond the races that exist in American society. In *The Dim Sum of All Things*, a conversation of Lindsey with her white friend reveals that whiteness is equal to being normal. “They are stealing all our men!” her friend Andrea says:

Lindsey frowned. Andrea smiled and patted her hand. ‘Oh, I don’t mean you,’ she said. ‘You’re white, anyway.’  
‘What’s that supposed to mean?’ Lindsey asked.  
‘You know, you and Mimi are different from other Asian girls. You’re normal like me,’ Andrea said.  
Lindsey did not reply. What the hell did she mean by ‘normal’? (Keltner, 2004; 120)

From the white perspective, all Asians, no matter how different their customs and origins are lumped together because of their physical similarities. Instances of Lindsey’s daily life provide clues that race is a social construction. It is obvious that definitions of racial categories are whiteness-centered. Some of Lindsey’s co-workers think that she is Japanese. They are indifferent to Lindsey because she is racially not one of them. For example, the public relations event planner asks her what is written on a travel guide to Tokyo. When she says that she cannot read the text since it is in Japanese, the co-worker tells her that she thought she was Japanese. “By the look on Yvonne’s face, Lindsey could tell that the woman didn’t know the difference between Japanese and Chinese surnames” (Keltner, 2004; 149). To increase the woman’s astonishment, Lindsey tells her that she can not read Chinese either since she is an American-born Chinese. Ironically, the magazine that Lindsey is working at is supposed to be a politically correct magazine, yet the white staff is far from being politically correct.

Just like the white Americans, Chinese-Americans also have their own source of stereotypes about the perception of whites and their attitudes to mixed-race relationships. Lindsey and Michael have preconceived notions of race just like the white people. She is a young woman who defines race according to physiognomy. In a dinner they have with Pau Pau, Michael tells Lindsey that his grandmother whom

he has recently lost was Chinese. Therefore, he is one-quarter Chinese. At that moment, Lindsey looks for a small racial clue that could provide some small hint of a Chinese look on Michael's face. "She searched his race for any Chinese detail: a slanted eye, a yellow undertone in his skin, or a certain shape of the nose" (Keltner, 2004; 205). Michael, however, finds Lindsey more Chinese rather than American because of her Asian physical features. Michael tells Lindsey that she could be his cultural guide to discover a part of his identity that he has avoided. As they get to know each other, all of the prejudices that Lindsey had in mind about white men end. The development of Lindsey's relationship with Michael softens her grandmother's insistence on a Chinese American husband. Accordingly, with the consent of Lindsey's family and with their own consent their relationship continues.

The next novel that involves a mixed-race relationship is *The Barbarians Are Coming*, in which Chinese American man and a white woman struggle through the clash between consent and descent. Similar to the other novels that have been previously mentioned, the pressure of continuing the family's descent line is clear. The struggle of the Wong family in this novel faces many obstacles until they realize that consent is not enough for the stability of a mixed-race marriage. Crucial in the discussion of mixed-race relationships is that love does not always conquer each obstacle that a mixed-race relationship faces.

Mixed-race relationships in *The Barbarians Are Coming* are as complicated as in the previously-discussed novels. Controversies between consent and descent, examples of the insistence on descent of older generations are a part of this novel. Sterling Lung who is a chef at a WASP Ladies Club in Connecticut is in a long-distance relationship with a Jewish dental student in Iowa named Bliss. Twenty-six years old, Sterling has avoided dating Chinese women all his life because it reminds him of "an aunt, my mother, my sisters or the Hong Kong girl" (Louie, 2000; 7) whose picture his mother has taped on to a mirror. He has never thought of a romantic relationship with a Chinese woman. Sterling's attempts of going out with white girls while he was in college were not very successful. One of the girls reacted to him saying, "Concubines. Asian Studies 101. First wife, second wife, third wife. Your history full of it. I won't be a part of some harem" (Louie, 2000; 58). This quotation represents how white-Americans tend to see the Asian race in a rather

derogatory and stereotypical way. For the whites, the Asian culture is a culture which is structured on the inequality of females, where they are only the objects of men.

Nonetheless, his relationship with Bliss is far from perfect; it has turned monotonous in time, and he has probably lost interest in her. “. . . I liked her but I didn’t love her” (Louie; 2000, 10). While Bliss is really in love with Sterling, he does not seem to be equally attracted to Bliss. When Sterling confesses to his parents he has been dating Bliss, “they acted hurt and surprised she wasn’t Chinese” (Louie; 2000, 17) even though none of Sterling’s previous girlfriends had been Chinese. Sterling had never given hope to his parents that he would marry a Chinese girl. Instead Sterling has a hatred for ties of descent and a denial of what the Chinese American family expects from their son. Thus, the familial relations are structured upon conflict between consent and descent. The greatest cause of conflict is the clash between consent and descent. This clash subverts Werner Sollors’ schema of consent and since the marriage of Sterling and Bliss become a compulsory one because she is pregnant.

During Bliss’s visit, Sterling learns that she is pregnant. After Bliss leaves to go back to Iowa, Sterling tries to find a solution to Bliss’s pregnancy. Meanwhile his parents, to complicate matters further, bring over to America a picture bride. The picture bride that Sterling’s parents bring from China is their last and desperate attempt to provide a descent based marriage for their son. Sterling’s parents Genius (his father) and Zsa Zsa (his mother) believe that it is the parent’s duty to provide a “safe” marriage for him. If they do not accomplish this task, their duty of parenthood will be incomplete. Sterling’s mother organizes this as “a gift to her son, parental obligation done” (Louie, 2000; 54). While the parents think of bringing a picture bride for their son as a “gift” Sterling is oppressed with this attempt. Zsa Zsa thinks that it is her duty to marry her son to an obedient Chinese girl. For the parents of Sterling, arranged marriage was the appropriate way to get married. However, the gossips that flourish in school that Sterling will get married in an arranged marriage is very humiliating for him. The conflicts that Sterling has with his family since high school years, is also a representation of an American and Chinese cultural conflict. As a result of this cultural conflict, Sterling feels humiliated while his parents try to organize an arranged marriage for him. From the perspective of his parents, there is

nothing to be humiliated about since this is an ordinary way of getting married. Under such circumstances, the acculturation of Sterling is a painful one since he can neither reconcile with his family nor with the necessities of American culture.

Chinese parents believe that their last obligation is to marry their son to a Chinese girl that would continue their descent to the next generation and have grandchildren that will carry the family name to the next generations. “. . . my sisters technically are no longer members of the Lung family, and only I, the son, am left and can carry on the line” (Louie, 2000; 115). From time to time, Sterling’s parents insist that they should have grandchildren. To stop their insistence, Sterling tells his parents that they already have grandchildren from their daughters. However, in the Chinese culture it is the son’s duty to continue the family name. In contrast to what Sterling’s family expects from him, Sterling believes that his existence as a son in the family is reduced to tool that must continue the family name: “My genetic material is more highly valued because I’m their lone male child, passer-on of the vaunted Lung family name” (Louie, 2000; 97).

Sterling cannot tell his parents that Bliss is pregnant due to his divided selfhood. While he feels a sense of guilt because he has not been a responsible son to his parents, he also has a sense of individuality which forces him to make his decisions about his life, regardless of what his family thinks about the consequences of his decisions. If Sterling had told his parents about Bliss’s pregnancy, they would immediately subvert his plans of marriage: “I wouldn’t be surprised if in their infinite weirdness they accept the Bliss baby and designate Yip Yuk Hing its Chinese mother, whose influence will purify its tainted bloodline” (Louie, 2000; 60). The fact that Bliss will be the mother of Sterling’s son is not a valid criterion for the acceptance of Bliss in the Chinese-American family. Even if Sterling told his parents that he was expecting a baby from Bliss, their insistence on descent would continue. However, Sterling, if he ever gets married, prefers to marry the woman he loves, regardless of her descent. For him, consent as embodied in love, is enough for a marriage, disregarding the race of the woman he will marry. In other words, Sterling by getting married to Bliss has to forget his own state of fatherhood and respect his own father. In Sterling’s situation it is very complicated to differentiate consent from descent.

In a conversation with his close friend Fuchs, Sterling tells him that Bliss is pregnant, and he has to make a choice between being “the good son or the good father” (Louie, 2000; 70). If he chooses to be the good son, he should not get married to Bliss or disregard his family’s expectations of him and become the father of his child. Sterling’s father thinks that his son has turned into an American who does not value things associated with descent such as, “family, tradition, nation, culture, blood, race, face, shame, pride, honor, dishonor” (Louie, 2000; 88). Sterling’s father expects his son to be obedient to the norms of a Chinese family. In this sense, he wants his son to be obedient to traditions, bloodline and every other thing associated with descent. By marrying Bliss, Sterling collapses his father’s dream of an obedient son to Chinese culture. Not only are values of consent and descent complicate the state that Sterling is in, but also the picture bride who comes from China complicate the matters even more. Ironically, the picture bride is supposed to be closely connected to Chinese tradition however, she turns out to be just as American as the Chinese-Americans.

The picture bride that Sterling’s family has brought from China does not fit the classical meaning of what a picture bride is supposed to represent. She represents the values of what it means to be an American. Yuk, the picture bride who has come from China speaks English; she is beautiful and has been to many places in Europe. Sterling is amazed by her qualities and thinks that she is not a typical Chinese girl; this is why, he even thinks of marrying her. What makes Yuk more attractive to Sterling is their conversation about marriage in America. Yuk asks Sterling whether it is true that people in America get married by “freedom of choice,” in other words, consent. Yuk has heard in China that people in America marry the person that they want to marry without any familial connections. When Sterling confirms this observation, Yuk is relieved because she does not want to have a marriage dictated by others. Ironically, Sterling was supposed to be the one who does not want to get married to Yuk; however, she is also planning a marriage of consent for herself.

Bliss wants to marry Sterling because she wants her child to grow up with a father and she loves Sterling, which are enough reasons for their marriage to take place. Sterling, however, does not have the intention to get married since he has concerns about race; being a part of a Jewish family, he will feel like an outsider. He

does not belong to a specific culture since he is squeezed between being Chinese and adapting himself to the Jewish culture. While Sterling has spent his life trying to be a part of mainstream American culture, wherever he goes or whatever he does, Sterling is never accepted to mainstream American culture. What Sterling thinks of “whiteness” is actually a socially constructed culture and the reason why whites see themselves privileged is because in the socially constructed mosaic of whiteness, there are “tones” of whiteness in which Jewishness seem to be more white when compared to Chineseness. Sterling’s conflict is that if he gets married to Bliss he will not be a part of their family and will look like an outsider with his racial features. Sterling realizes that whiteness is not something homogenous. The way he perceives Jewish people as whites are is not the norm that whiteness is really referred to. There are “shades” of whiteness against the argument that whiteness is inherent with purity and that it is a privileged racial category. Sterling has not made up his mind about marriage and during this visit to Bliss’s family; he realizes that they have totally different families. In his mind, he compares his own family to the family of Bliss:

It’s my back-of-the-laundry soul clanging inside her beautiful house; it’s my bigoted immigrant parents who’ll remain, until their death days, bottom-feeders, washing and ironing for others, while her bigoted immigrant grandparents ran a tailor shop into a chain of department stores. (Louie, 2000; 154)

During this visit, Bliss tells Sterling that they should get married. Also, Bliss attempts to find a consent feature, which is their baby, knowing that Sterling is not in love with her. In her conversation with Sterling, Bliss focuses on emphasizing that the fact that they are going to have a baby is so vital for their relationship and in terms of blood relations in the family, the baby to be born will be a symbolic mixture of both consent and descent. This mixture enhances the complication of family ties and how mixed-race children’s physical look determines their racial categorization.

The cultural differences between Sterling’s and Bliss’s family cause Sterling to feel “out of the frying pan into the fire.” Before his relationship with Bliss, Sterling had conflicts with his family because of their insistence that he should marry a Chinese American girl. Hence, not having solved this problem, we must cope with

racial and cultural differences as a consequence of his relationship with Bliss. The only common point between these two families is that they are both immigrants. Yet, though both families at least have light skin colors the conflict between them is not structured only on ethnicity. Whiteness has expanded to include the Jews in what is called “white.” This reveals that there an essential unchanging category of whiteness is nonexistent.

Besides, how people are categorized according to their definition of whiteness, Bliss at the same time is categorized as non-Chinese and this is the reason why Sterling’s parents bring a picture bride from China. Even after their marriage, concerns related to Chinese descent continue in the form of bringing a “picture bride”. In other words, Sterling’s marriage to Bliss does not decrease the amount of value attached to descent. The legality of marriage between Sterling and Bliss is nothing for the parents of Sterling, since they still struggle for the construction of a descent line. Sterling’s parents also attend the wedding ceremony unaware that Bliss is pregnant. Upon their arrival from their honeymoon, Zsa Zsa tells her son that Yuk is back from Canada. Speaking in Chinese makes Bliss suspicious but, Sterling tells her that his cousin from Hong Kong is here. Meanwhile, Bliss gets angry at Sterling for not informing them about her pregnancy, so she does it herself. She tells Genius, Zsa Zsa and Yuk that she’s pregnant. Moreover, Genius tells Bliss that Yuk is not a cousin but a picture bride and that she is a “family obligation” (Louie, 2000; 178).

In the construction of a mixed-race family, the sense of dividedness continues. The fact that there is an area of conflict between two families, reveals itself with the representation of children that Bliss gives birth to. She gives birth to her son and names him Moses. Although Moses is a mixed-race child, when the baby is new born, he looks like Morton Sass, Bliss’s father. However, as Moses grows up, his features resemble Genius. Sterling says, “I’m relieved that the baby . . . has chosen to resemble Morton Sass, and not Genius or some mutty blend of the two. He is my child, precisely because he is loaded with Sass genetic material” (Louie, 2000; 182). However, their second son in physical appearance was just the opposite of Moses. They name their second son Ira and as a new baby he “metamorphosed from Lung into Sass. No signs of Lung chromosomes remained. Natural selection” (Louie, 2000; 217). Even the children of a mixed-race family are not enough to make that

family “mixed.” The chromosomes of the children do not entitle them as “mixed-race children” but rather as Chinese or Jewish. Children born out of mixed-race relationships are categorized as “either-or” as if they cannot belong to two different racial categories at the same time. For example, one of Sterling’s children looks totally white whereas the other one looks Chinese-American. People disregard the fact that, though these children have a physical appearance as if they belong to a single racial category, they actually belong to both racial categories. Mixed-race children are perceived as who they are according to the social constructions of how we define them.

The fact that one of their sons looks Chinese and the other one white is another source of conflict for Bliss. Her attitude toward them is different. She wants Moses to go to a special school where he will learn about Chinese culture, but, since Ira does not look Chinese, she does not see the necessity of teaching him Chinese culture. Bliss’s attitude to her children as a mother is biased toward since their physical appearance determines how they should be brought up. This instance also reveals how individuals are conditioned to respond to people according to their racial features. Motherhood is identified with being at an equal distance to all of the children a mother has. However, in Bliss’s situation, the racial appearance of her children is the motive behind how she treats her children. For Bliss’s attitude toward her children, physical appearance is substantial.

Each phase of mixed-race marriages are full of difficulties. The most prominent difficulty in such marriages is the invisible power of descent that steers within the marriage and reveals itself as conflicts in the marriage. After moving to California with his family and giving up his job at the ladies club, Sterling senses some peculiarity in Bliss’s actions. After giving birth to two children, she starts watching her weight, she is more concerned about her beauty and she starts going out whenever she wants to without informing Sterling about where she is going. Sterling senses that Bliss is getting away from him but just in order not to bother his wife and let her feel happy after two births, he does not interfere with her life. This sense of freedom for Bliss continues until Sterling, with his two sons, encounters Bliss with a geology professor named Jack that he had previously met. The moment when Sterling sees his wife with Jack, he feels as if he is not part of a family because of

their racial features, Jack and Bliss look like a married couple whereas, Sterling is a total outsider:

I'm standing alone staring at my sons Jack Pierce, my wife: I'm looking at an ad for auto insurance: the geologist and Bliss, the typical upper-middle-class couple; Summer the au pair girl; Ira their child; Moses their adopted refugee from an Asian war. . . . Of course she wants Jack Pierce. It's only natural. How can I blame her? I don't fit there. (Louie, 2000; 315)

Sterling painfully realizes that what is called “natural” in American society is a white-white relationship, or a relationship between individuals of the same race. After finding out about his wife’s relationship with a white man named Jack, Sterling realizes that whiteness is the norm that gives shape to the future of a mixed-race relationship. As such, their marriage does not fit the criterion of naturalness; however, the illegitimate relationship between Bliss and Jack is “natural” because they are both white. Since America is such a race-conscious society, even the criterion of relationships is based on race. The whiteness of Bliss and Jack make us assume that their relationship is natural and normal. The problematic side of mixed-race relationships is witnessed when it is put in a comparison with people from the same race. Finding out that Bliss is cheating on Sterling, in a hurry to follow Bliss in traffic, forgets to put the safety belt on his son Ira dies after an accident. The death of his son leads Sterling to question how good he has been as a son, a father and as a Chinese:

Will the ancestors recognize Ira as one of theirs without Genius at his side or there to welcome him? And will those same ancestors claim me, after my breakneck dash from them and into the arms of any willing American girl who would have me—my desperate attempt to overcome the remarkableness of being a Lung, and create a family more to my liking? (Louie; 2000, 323)

Sterling, as a result of the traumatic accident, recognizes that conflicts that he has come across and that he will continue to face are not issues that can easily be

solved. The conflicts related to consent and descent are problematic since they are complex matters which sometimes have no solution. Neither descent nor consent by itself is unproblematic since the interaction between them is inevitable. His most important decision to make is the one about his marriage, rejection of his familial obligations to continue a descent based tradition and being a loyal son to his family.

The study of the novels analyzed in this chapter reveals that neither consent nor descent by itself is unproblematic. The reason which makes mixed-race marriages difficult to analyze is that, consent and descent are interrelated to each other in a very complex way, and it is very hard to isolate one from the other in a mixed-race relationship. The power of consent or descent is not the one and only key to a happy marriage. The characters in the novels that have been explored move between a pendulum of consent and descent. On this pendulum of consent and descent, it is impossible to stay stable; the characters' task is to find a individually satisfied balance between these two conflicting forces.

### 4.3. Identity Crisis: Being Chinese, Becoming American

One of the main dilemmas in the contemporary Chinese American novel is identity conflict, a condition of being caught up between being a Chinese and becoming an American. So representing this fundamental conflict, fictional Chinese American characters, besides coping with racial prejudices, have also obstacles to overcome about their identity. Obviously the ideal and peaceful resolution for the characters is to reconcile their Chinese identity with their Americanness. Excluding one part of one's identity, by trying to be only Chinese or only American is a painful choice. The only way the Chinese Americans can feel happy about their selfhood is accepting and embracing both of their heritages.

The identity crisis in *The Love Wife* is twofold: The first tendency is to preserve the old ways and customs, namely the Chinese culture and traditions. For instance, Mama Wong holds on to the Chinese traditions and hopes to ingrain them in the next generation; indeed, it is revealed that the major reason why Mama Wong has adopted Carnegie is to continue the family name. The second way identity crisis appears in the novel is exemplified by the adopted daughters of the Wong family Wendy and Lizzy. In this case physical markers of race become the central issue. While Lizzy is peaceful with her Asian racial features, Wendy has a desire is to look "American" as much as possible. Wendy unquestioningly and inadvertently adopts the white supremacist views that being American equals with being white. Therefore, she desperately tries to identify herself with her white mother. Physical characteristics, placed at the center of racial identity, we condemn these characters to remain forever un-American. Conflicts of identity are resolved when they reconcile with their Chinese side.

*The Love Wife* represents generational differences among Chinese Americans. For example, there are contradictory attitudes between Mama Wong and Carnegie towards China and America. In *The Love Wife*, Mama Wong is the character who symbolizes traditional ties to China. She keeps comparing China to America. In most of her comparisons China emerges as the more valuable of the two cultures. However, there is one characteristic about America that attracts Mama Wong: The success myth attracts her and holds her connected to America. "*Only in America*"

(Jen, 2004; 31), was Mama Wong's favorite saying. Carnegie tells us that Mama Wong was in love only with success. For her the only way to survive and be treated as a human being in America was success. Mama Wong brings up Carnegie to be successful and adapt himself to American culture if that is what it takes for success. Nevertheless, when the issue is marriage, Carnegie's choice should have been marrying a Chinese girl. The fact that Carnegie should have married a Chinese woman is only accepted by him after his mother's death. Descent reveals itself again as a magnetic source where Carnegie can hold on to. After the death of Mama Wong, Carnegie regrets the time he has not spent on learning about Chinese traditions. He starts to think that his children should also be brought up with awareness of their Chinese identity. Carnegie thought that he had been an American but realizes that a Chinese part of him has always remained.

It is not only the Chinese-Americans that are stereotyped since they lived in closed communities where they can continue their traditions. In reverse, it is this time Blondie, a white woman who suffers the stereotypes of the Chinese-Americans. In *The Love Wife*, there is a reversal of stereotypes. In most cases, the Chinese Americans were stereotyped because of their racial features. Throughout history, Chinese Americans have been stereotyped by white Americans as "chink" or other derogatory name tags. However, in *The Love Wife*, the act of stereotyping is not done to Chinese Americans. Since the majority of the household is of Chinese descent, Janie who is the only white American in the family, is stereotyped by her mother-in-law as "Blondie," emphasizing her whiteness with the nickname she chooses to call Janie. However, Blondie's friend Gabriella advises Janie to react to being called "Blondie": "*Janie. Your name is Janie, I can't believe you let Mama Wong call you Blondie all these years. And Carnegie too! That is like the definition of low self-esteem*" (Jen, 2004; 4).

The narrative strategy of *The Love Wife* is presented through multiple characters. In the narration of Wendy, the nine year old adopted daughter, she describes her fifteen years old sister Lizzy. This description shows Lizzy as trying to look as "American" as possible, by:

. . . wearing a nose ring and earrings, and henna tattoos in the shape of snakes. Thank god the tattoos at least wash off and that short blond hair will grow out too, Mom says, but of course not in front of Lizzy, because she completely knows what Lizzy will say back. Namely, *Why shouldn't I bleach my hair, it's no different than you highlighting yours, and besides why shouldn't I be blond when my mother is blond?* (Jen, 2004; 7)

Ironically, the references that are equalized with being an “American” are not originally American. This situation also puts forth how whiteness is mistakenly perceived by other racial categories. With the intrusion of Lan, the adopted daughters Wendy and Lizzy seem to have a new mother figure. These girls are metaphorically motherless. That is why, they want to identify themselves with the physical features of Lan, who look like their biological mother when compared to Blondie. The power of the white culture leaves these girls mothers even though they are adopted by a white woman, they are practically are motherless as if a white woman cannot be the mother of Asian girls.

Before the arrival of Lan, Lizzy tried to look “American”; in other words, white as much as possible. In her point of view being an American meant being blond. She tried to hide her Chinese features as much as possible. However, the arrival of Lan creates changes in her and she realizes that she can be happy with what naturally exists in her. Lan not only represents what an “appropriate” mother should be to Wendy and Lizzy, she also represents the Chinese culture. Besides being a part of the American culture, Lan’s arrival demonstrate to the adopted daughters that there are other cultures that can be chosen to idealize.

Various instances in *The Love Wife* prove that racism is a daily reality for Chinese Americans. In most of the situations, American society condemns Chinese Americans by emphasizing their race, reminding them of their Asian features and in other words, continuously inferioring them. Under these circumstances, what makes Lan different from the other Chinese American characters is that, she believes that Chinese Americans should be proud of her/his race and that they should stand against the racial stereotypes of racial inferiority. For example, in *The Love Wife*, Lan attends English courses; in the classes she observes that racism is a daily issue of

talk. If her dream of becoming rich becomes true one day, she wants this dream to be true in China not in America. She explains the reason stating that China has more opportunities and there is not racism in China. Carnegie is amazed to learn that Lan has heard of racism. He tries to explain to her how people see racism in America: “Americans believe all racism is a problem . . . Or at least a lot of Americans. Some, obviously, don’t. Seeing as how they are racist” (Jen, 2004; 237). Lan is resistant to being a part of the American culture. In most of the conversations that she has with Lizzy and Wendy, she says that she is not an American and she is not willing to change her habits, such as not getting out to the sun without an umbrella even though being sun tanned is admired in America. Lizzy asks Lan if she would want to be an American, she answers “No no no no . . . This is not my home” (Jen, 2004; 86).

Daily matters in Lan and Jeb Su’s marriage show that race is one of the factors that define ones identity, and how a person is treated. After marrying Jeb Su, Lan moves to a white community, Independence Island, where they own a local restaurant. Later their restaurant becomes popular, and even a local newspaper interviews them. However, they are criticized by the local community for having immigrants work for them for low wages. In response to this criticism, Lan and Su fire the immigrant workers. Though they hire non-immigrant workers, the reaction of the people continues. It is important to notice that the inhabitants of the white community are not relieved after the immigrant workers leave the town. In terms of the white hierarchy, next when Lan and Sue hire white workers for the restaurant and again racial categories in the minds of the white people is annoyed. They cannot accept the fact that white Americans are working for Asian-Americans. Lan and Su live in a house which belongs to a distant relative of the Baileys.

The owner of the house is named Sue Bailey and she keeps annoying Su and Lan. For instance she tries to enter the house like a thief or yell in front of the house “This is my house!” Though Sue is mentally ill, the local people think that Lan and Su should leave the house. Even a mentally ill yet white person, in the eyes of the local community, defines what normalcy is. A person’s distance from “whiteness” defines that person as “less” American. One’s race thus is the criterion which determines a person to be accepted as an American or not. Su defends himself by

telling the people reacting to him that he has passed the citizenship test. According to the community, however, the criterion of being an American is not passing the citizenship test:

- In any case, the fact that you are a citizen doesn't make you an American, *said the tattoo man*.
- Oh, really, said Jiabao. And how is that?
- A citizen thinks this country is about law. But an American knows it is about who is really American. (Jen, 2004; 341)

*The Love Wife*, demonstrates that one's identity in American society is closely related with the proximity of their race to whiteness. Since being Chinese is a racial quality which is distinguished by physical features, this quality marks characters as un-American. For example, one of the adopted daughters of the Wong family, Lizzy tries to disguise her Chinese features and tries to look American, and Lan's husband struggles to prove his Americanness by telling the local public that he has passed the citizenship test. According to the white community there are other markers of how a person's identity is defined. In this case being a citizen of America is insufficient to prove that Lan and Sue are Americans. While race, being Chinese-American defines one's identity in *The Love Wife*, the characters in *Eat Everything* are connected to each other by sharing a past of being orphans.

The immigrant experience causes most of the characters to break away from their past and their biological families; therefore, each character *chooses* a role to play in the family. Auntie Mary is aware of their constructed identities and reminds the orphans that each of them has a role to play in the family: “. . . the identities we all construct to link our immediate past to our presence as aliens, new citizens, the American born hoisted just this side of Golden Gate in a city surrounded by all varieties of cantilevered, drawn, and pontooned contraptions” (Chan, 2004; 4). Auntie Mary, who plays the role of being the mother of the family in *Eat Everything*, seems to be more consistent in her opinions about how Chinese-Americans should reconcile both of their identities and keep both parts of their identities at a balance.

The tendency to lean on one specific side is something that the family should stay away from. Mama Wong, on the other hand in *The Love Wife*, in comparison to Auntie Mary, is not a person of balance. The advices that she gives her son are either based on being a total American in terms of success for example, at the same time, she expects her son Carnegie to be loyal to Chinese traditions when the subject matter is marriage. For example, Auntie Mary who has had all the orphans together like a mother holding the family together, acts as the mother figure for Christopher. After Auntie Mary's death Christopher feels as if there is no one left to talk to and no one to listen to him. Auntie Mary was an undeniable character that has helped Christopher shape his character:

Being an orphan in *Eat Everything*, is the main metaphor for being Chinese-American in American society. Orphans, are open to multiple influences, Auntie Mary being a major one of these as she helps younger characters in their path of constructing their identities in American society. While Auntie Mary is the mother figure of the orphans like Christopher, the most important thing she tries to teach these orphans is that living in America for Chinese Americans is like standing on a bridge. On one side of the bridge the orphans may proceed towards assimilation. The other side of the bridge is the Chinese heritage and traditions. Auntie Mary advises her orphans to stand in the middle of the bridge: "To stand at either end of the bridge meant choosing to be the despised enemy alien or martyred refugee" (Chan, 2004; 4).

The reason why Chris feels a dilemma of being Chinese or American is that he never thinks that he can be both at the same time. Also, the way he was brought up as an orphan influenced him. Chris and Peter's patriarchal side is divided between Lincoln and Wick. Lincoln represents the side which should mix into the American society; while, Wick on the other hand, prefers to stay within the limits of the Chinatown and not integrate himself to American culture. For example, during his childhood, Lincoln would try to teach him to be only Chinese, and he even would not take Chris and Peter out of the boundaries of the Chinatown. They were never exposed to "real" America by Lincoln. Reverend Candlewick however, tried to make them familiar to American culture as much as possible, because he believed that this was the only way that they could create a future for themselves. Auntie Mary believes that Chris should create a balance between Chinese and American values.

Chris's earliest childhood memories are about the contradiction whether he is an American or a Chinese. For instance, sometimes he felt that he could not translate his feelings to Chinese. When he felt like that, he had the urge to count to ten in Chinese to prove that he has a Chinese part of him: "Auntie taught me my numbers, taught me to count to ten, to disguise my foreignness" (Chan, 2004; 39). Besides the Chinese values embedded to him, Chris is also under a strong influence of American values. Since Chris was brought up during the 1950s, an era in which the minorities were expected to assimilate into the mainstream culture, he was sent to parochial schools and the Presbyterian Church "to reassure everyone of our perfect faith in the miracles of Jesus Christ, our loyalty and gratitude to the Christians who helped smuggle and shape us for acceptance in America" (Chan, 2004; 45). Going to the church was not his decision, it was decided for him that he should go to church like other children. He does not show any sign of regret for that but, he feels as if he was compelled to become an American. The irony is that no matter how hard they try to be Americans, they are never "real" Americans in the eyes of the whites since their racial features determine that they are foreigners in America. While going to a Catholic School, Chris feels that he has a divided self. The only person who listens to him and advises him is Wick.: "Wick was there to listen and advise, to be a go-between for my divided self." (Chan, 2004; 77). Whatever Lincoln or Wick do as a "constructed" father to Chris, trying to guide him is at one point helpless because Chris feels unconnected due to a lack of descent.

Since Chris and Peter were brought up as brothers, they have shared the same identity problems with each other. The following quotation emphasizes descent in a positive manner. The sentences that Chris utter give significant details about what it means to be a Chinese American and how genetic codes or descent defines who they really are:

'You understand people speaking Chinese. But you can't speak Chinese. I know that. The Chinese words you understand are felt experiences, not just words; they are feelings, sensations, all taste and feeling, all your aunts and uncles, all the dead and living.' He thrives on my most heated and intimate confusions. They both do, Wick and Peter. (Chan, 2004; 83)

The quotation above is a statement of what it means to be inherent with Chinese culture while being surrounded by American culture. Chris defines being Chinese as a connection between racial characteristics to the Chinese culture. Accordingly, Chris feels connected to this culture whether he wants to be connected or not. In other words, Chris does not define being Chinese as a social construction; instead, he defines it as a stable, unchangeable fact that they inherit. Being Chinese-American for Chris and Peter is not some quality that takes place on a linguistic level. Instead, being Chinese-American is a quality that is embedded in their body, a descent tie that they cannot get rid of. From the perspective of the whites, naming a person as Chinese-American requires a different cultural construction. The whites can only think of Chinese-American at a linguistic level while for Christopher and Peter, this is embedded in their body and being Chinese-American is something which they can never detach themselves from. Chris and Peter, who have been brought up in an environment where they have tried to balance two sides of their identities besides being orphans, they feel the Chinese qualities inherent in their body. Descent is a factor which is potentially inherent in them. However, descent is not anything pure. We observe an alternative descent here which is nurtured by social environment. Chris and Peter feel that descent exists within their selfhoods without any biological family connections. The family construction in *Eat Everything*, challenges both descent and consent. For example, the lack of any white family member reveals itself as the inefficiency of consent whereas, although the members of the family have no blood connection, still the power of descent anchors on each character.

The state of being an orphan and questioning who Chris culturally and biologically is continues all his life, including the period of time that he was married to Winnie. After his graduation from university during the Vietnam years, Chris feels as if he does not belong anywhere. Besides lacking a family, what increases his frustration in life is the fact that there is not really anybody that he feels connected to. If he was a member of a family of descent, he could have felt more responsible for them. He is tired of the freedom provided to him because he does not belong anywhere or anybody:

What do you do when you graduate from the university with a lifetime's experience as kitchen help, poorly read student, and travel agent who's never traveled? I was looking forward to becoming a nothing in the family's eyes, the unacknowledged son of an anonymous mother. I might have looked forward to the freedom of being nothing. (Chan, 2004; 64)

Since Chris's life is structured upon "uncertainty" beginning with the fact that he is an orphan, freedom in his life is not something that he values, instead, it turns out to be a disadvantage because he does not know how to make use of that freedom since he is not connected to a biological family. His wife Winnie tells him about all of the rumors going on about him and the family, and she asks for the answers to the questions that she is curious about. "Everybody knows that Mary and Wickman lived together. And all the stories about him. But they don't know where you fit. Who are you to them? . . . Nothing." (Chan, 2004; 70). Chris's reaction to these questions is just laughing, because these are questions to which he does not know the answers. To Winnie's questions, he tries to explain that he does not know the answers to these questions: "'What should I know that I don't? I don't know. What's the question? Who am I? Where did I come from? My father? My mother? I told you, I don't know'" (Chan, 2004; 70).

Lincoln's attitude about shaping Chris and Peter's identity is structured upon the invention of a past by creating stories, as if they are connected to each other by descent. The stories that Lincoln creates reveal the fictional nature of stories. Peter and Chris need a source of past, and Lincoln tries to invent a past for them. Since Lincoln was brought up as an orphan like Chris, he has no sense of a past. Therefore, Lincoln can at least guess how it feels for Chris and Peter to be brought up as orphans. From time to time, Chris asks questions about Lincoln's past as if he really has one. However, Lincoln creates stories just as he creates an identity for himself; he also creates stories of fatherhood. He continuously tells different stories to Chris: "But Lincoln would often confuse the father he imagined for himself and the father he wanted to be. . . . In another story, Uncle Lincoln said that he was born in America" (Chan, 2004; 46). Remembering each story that Lincoln has told them, Peter is also familiar with these stories of Lincoln. Chris is amazed by Peter's

memory of stories. Whenever Lincoln tells Peter and Chris a story about his past, Peter would “repeat the same story word for word as if it were the truth” (Chan, 2004; 47). Since Lincoln himself has no stable past, his solution to have a past for Chris and Peter is creating stories. However, he creates so many stories that Chris and Peter never know which one is true or which one they are supposed to believe. Just like Chris and Peter, Lincoln was also raised as an orphan and not having a past of his own he does not know how to seem consistent to his children with one story. The way that Lincoln attempts to hold the family together as if they are connected by blood is in its nature constructed. Lincoln’s act of telling stories is a construction of language. By telling stories, he tries to fill in the empty gap of descent which can never be replaced by a tool of consent. Besides these stories, the state of orphanhood is an absence about Chris and Peter’s past. Ironically, what holds them together as brothers is the absence of descent. The only thing that is left behind as a fact is that the only shared past experience of this family is about being orphans: “Lincoln’s obituary becomes our shared orphan history, just paper, as Lincoln was the only surviving son of a paper father, and Peter and I, his grateful wards, at last, legitimate orphans” (Chan, 2004; 6-7).

The role of fatherhood in the family structure is divided between Lincoln and Wick. Although Lincoln is the father figure of the family, Chris has a special relationship with Wick whom he tends to see as his father. Wick is notorious for child abuse in the Chinese community. Since they perceive Wick as the father figure, they do not want him to be associated with child abuse. The Chinese community has a questioning attitude about whether Chris and Peter have confronted sexual abuse by their father figure. Even if Wick was defrocked for pedophilia, Chris still loves him like a father. He tries to rationalize Wick’s abuses of boys with the explanation that he is a lonely man. On the other hand, Wick never denies his love for boys and this makes Chris angry because he does not want his childhood memories to be associated with child abuse:

Don’t remind me of childhood again, Wick. You make me equate my entire Chinese identity with the acts of childhood, infantilizing the culture of Chinatown, equating all things

Chinese with the act of growing up. It is as if growing up Chinese in America is child abuse. (Chan; 2004, 229)

In Lincoln and Wick's attitudes in their role of fatherhood, Wick is a very unconventional father figure since he is notorious of pedophilia in the Chinese community. Having grown up as Wick's sons, both Chris and Peter does not want Wick to be equated with pedophilia. Actually, this is a consistent act of Wick, he has created his descent out of pedophilia.

As a result, in *Eat Everything*, the theme of being an orphan, besides being an identity problem, can strongly be equalized with being Chinese-American. Both of the conditions require a struggle of a sense of belonging to a concrete place. As orphans, Chris and Peter require a sense of belonging to a past and as Chinese-Americans, they feel the urge to be a part of American society. As most of the characters such as Lincoln, Chris and Peter are orphans, they have no sense of a past. Chris says he feels as if he is nothing in the family. Being the father figure of the family, Lincoln feels compelled to create stories as if the family has a common past. Peter and Chris go through the conflict between being Chinese or American, while they are brought up by the members of the family, for each family member has his/her own perspective on the conflict of being Chinese or becoming Americans. While Uncle Lincoln, the father figure, tells Chris and Peter to grow up as Chinese men, and he never takes them out of Chinatown, Wick wants them to grow up as Americans because this is the only way they can create a future for themselves, and lastly Auntie Mary, as if reconciling between Wick and Lincoln, believes that the children should be in the middle of the bridge that metaphorically connects Chinese and American cultures.

Although Raymond in *American Knees* has conflicts related to his identity, his conflicts are different from the ones mentioned in *Eat Everything*. While Raymond's family identifies being Chinese with the "success myth," Raymond's view of the world is more problematic and subjective. For instance, Raymond in *American Knees*, is a man conscious of his Chinese identity who forces his girlfriend Aurora to gain consciousness of her Japanese heritage of her mixed-race identity. In *American Knees*, Raymond Ding has memories of his childhood and the way his

family brings him up with an emphasis on his Chinese identity. Raymond is only expected by his family to be American in terms of wealth. His family identifies being Chinese with going to college and becoming a doctor or an engineer, an ideal totally against Raymond's expectations from life. However, while Raymond rejects being "Chinese" according to his parents' expectations, in his relationship with Aurora, he wants her to gain an awareness of her Japanese racial background to which she has blinded herself.

As Raymond tries to stay away from the expectations of his family, he confronts living in a society where race is socially constructed and people carry race tags to define their place in American society. In this socially constructed environment of race, neither consent nor descent by itself relieves Raymond's conflicts. Instead, Raymond feels foot-bound to the traditions of the Chinese culture. In fact, as Raymond tries to stay away from the influence of descent, the power of descent haunts him. Similar to the previously mentioned novels, descent reveals itself as a ghost that haunts Raymond as much as he wants to stay away from it. Descent is a source of power which gets stronger in the absence of blood ties or especially when the character who is the symbol of descent passes away. The ability of descent to take under control who runs away from it increases in the absence of descent. Raymond wants Aurora to be conscious of both her identities. Until she meets Raymond, she focuses on her white descent, neglecting her Japanese part. The first few months of their relationship had been like comparing "notes about being Asian in America and being biracial. . . . Raymond had become 'Asian American'—without the hyphen. Sometimes he lectured in bed about institutionalized racism" (Wong, 1995; 53). Raymond puts too much pressure on Aurora about issues of race and ethnicity; he lectures her about issues such as affirmative action, for "she needed to know the exact definitions of race and ethnicity, the history of struggle, the symbols of institutionalized racism" (Wong, 1995; 53). Raymond acts like a teacher to create curiosity in Aurora about her Japanese background. He tells her that her awareness of her racial heritage is directly related to an awareness of her selfhood: "If you don't know what questions to ask, you lose your history; when you lose your history, you lose your sense of self" (Wong, 1995; 53). As Raymond wants to instill Aurora with race-consciousness, he uses history as a tool that will help her gain an

awareness to the issue of race. History becomes important when there is the risk of losing it since it would also signify losing one's past. The discourse of decent is falsely anchored onto the body in the mainstream culture. Considering that Aurora is mixed-race, her bodily existence is not on safe ground for the attachment of mainstream values of descent.

Meanwhile, Raymond also thinks that Aurora is being hypocritical in her attitude about race. From Raymond's point of view, she is disregarding her Japanese heritage and focuses on her white features and passes as white in social gatherings. He believes that it is unfair of Aurora not to mention her Japanese side if it is not asked and as if she has to indicate it without being asked. "Men think you're beautiful, and you're quick to point out that they are being racist when it affects your identity, but you're not being responsible at other times for the race" (Wong, 1995; 57). From Raymond's point of view, Aurora's attitude about race is hypocritical. As long as she is considered white she does not problematize race as an issue which annoys her. However, when people cannot categorize her because of her mixed-race features, she criticizes people for classifying her in an irrelevant way. She also finds Raymond's attitude very oppressive and wants her mixed-race quality to be accepted as what is natural.

In an argument with Raymond, Aurora tells him that he is being too oppressive on issues of race. Raymond's answer testifies to the oppressiveness of racial stereotyping: "Don't you know in America skin color is your identity? This is a racist country. You can't be invisible" (Wong, 1995; 55). Similar to Raymond's rhetoric in *American Knees*, Michael Omi and Howard Winant's theory of racial formation has argued that race defines one's identity in American society. They have also argued that America is such a race conscious society that even shades of color are enough to categorize the race of people while mixed-race people are unsafe because our prejudiced minds about race cannot categorize them into one single category of race.

One of Aurora's friends named Julia shares her ideas about Raymond. Her observations of Raymond are related to his racial identity. According to Julia, Raymond has the potential of being white in himself but because of his job as the assistant director of minority affairs of the university, he has the tendency to

disregard his white tendencies such as wearing clothes that white men prefer and emphasize his Asian side so keenly: “Raymond has banana tendencies, but that job of his keeps him from peeling. Or he’s popcorn—you know yellow yellow yellow yellow until you put him under pressure, then he turns white” (Wong, 1995; 132). Julia’s comments about Raymond signify that, although he is trying to make Aurora race-conscious, he has a tendency to look white and act white. This observation about Raymond resembles symbolic ethnicity. Putting pressure on Aurora to be aware of her race is not parallel to Raymond’s acts of assimilation in the white culture.

Another friend of Aurora, Brenda, criticizes Raymond for putting Aurora under pressure about her racial appearance and gaining a consciousness of her Japanese past. Brenda has an argument with Raymond about the changes that he has tried to create in Aurora. Brenda argues that Raymond has turned Aurora into a racial paranoiac. She thinks that Aurora has become too suspicious of white people because during all the time they were together Raymond has acted like a teacher to Aurora and over-emphasized her Asian American identity. Brenda criticizes Raymond for constantly thinking in terms of “color” or race. According to Brenda, racial identity should not be something constantly dictated:

Everything has to be black or white, or should I say yellow and white? People have to express their identity all the time. It wasn’t enough that Ro was half Japanese. She had to be hundred percent Asian. You should have let up and then let her decide what her identity was for herself. (Wong, 1995; 146-147)

Brenda’s criticism of Raymond is another form of racism. She doesn’t want Raymond to affect Aurora about her identity since Brenda believes that identity is a flexible concept and that trying to fix the “liquidity” of one’s identity is not proper. From Brenda’s point of view, Raymond is trying to demolish the flexibility of Aurora’s mixed-race identity.

Raymond is not very convincing in his attitudes to convince Aurora to be aware of her Japanese heritage. It is difficult for him to convince Aurora because, the first obstacle that he must overcome is his own dividedness between being a loyal

son (descent) and living his life on his personal choices (consent). It is ironic that while Raymond is trying to stay away from descent, at the same time he advises Aurora to be conscious of her Japanese descent. Meanwhile, Raymond structures his defense on the fact that he did not force Aurora to choose either being white or Japanese. Instead, he wanted her to be aware of both her racial identities. "I didn't ask her to choose one or the other identity. That's like asking her to choose between her mother and her father" (Wong, 1995; 147). The way Raymond rationalizes himself is partly true because he really wanted Aurora to be aware of her Japanese identity which she has neglected. Nevertheless, Raymond acted like a paranoiac about Aurora's racial identity. Consequently, for Raymond, it is impossible to define one's identity by isolating his/ her race.

The social construction of race in *American Knees*, reveals descent as a power which haunts the lives of Raymond and Aurora. Although the American definition of racial thinking should be structured upon consent, the power of descent haunts the lives of the main characters. The main conflict in Raymond is that he was brought up to be a loyal son to his family but he did not accomplish this task after his divorce from his Chinese wife. Ironically, while opposing his father in fulfilling his Chinese expectations, in his relationship with Aurora Crane, he wants Aurora to be conscious of her Japanese identity that she has neglected because she looks white. The thesis that one's race in America defines one's identity is shown to be still valid in America in this novel. What makes the situation more complicated is the case of Aurora's mixed-race identity since in mixed-race identities the categorization of race is not so simple as in the "pure" categories of race.

The next novel that will be analyzed will also explore themes of identity in the process of Chinese characters struggling to be accepted as Americans and the conflict of another mixed-race character who totally looks white but who is also one quarter Chinese. While Aurora in *American Knees*, does not have the intention to especially "look" American, the woman character in *The Dim Sum of All Things*, Lindsey constructs her identity in relation with her racial appearance, and having Chinese features she feels the need to look American.

In *The Dim Sum of All Things*, Lindsey, a third generation Chinese American woman has passed her life trying to be as "American" as possible, with the clothes

she wears and the things she eats. In her childhood she tries to stay away from Chinese culture as much as possible and focuses on her American identity. Even since the days of her childhood, though her parents wanted her to be familiar to Chinese traditions, Lindsey has preferred to stay away from anything Chinese. For example, during her childhood, instead of eating Chinese food, she told her friends that her favorite food was pizza, the quintessential “American” fast food “. . . her Chinese heritage was not one of the main components of her identity but she was simply a superfluous detail. As far as she was concerned, her *Chinese-ness* was not the first thing someone should notice about her” (Keltner, 2004; 4). Being an American is not connected to citizenship. In the case of Lindsey, although she is an American-born-Chinese, her racial features prevent her to be accepted as an American. As much as Lindsey wants to look American, the fact that she has a cleaning obsession just like her grandmother reveals that there are irreplaceable qualities that she inherits because of her descent ties to her family. Since childhood, Lindsey has thought that the Chinese culture was too complicated to explain to the white people, so, instead of explaining it she has just preferred staying away from it. Although she has tried to be American as much as possible, her racial features did not stop other Americans teasing her like other characters in *American Knees* and *The Love Wife*, “Kids used their index fingers to stretch their eyelids into slants and they’d sing ‘Chinese, Japanese, knobby knees, look at these’” (Keltner, 2004; 7). Lindsey has tried to eliminate her racial bodily existence so that the cultural connections to the fact that she is more Chinese rather than American can be disguised. For instance, her act of eating American food is an attempt to Americanize her body, as if that would make her look more American. Lindsey’s body prevails her race over anything that is symbolic.

While Lindsey is trying to overcome racism in her daily life, America continues to be a racist society. Even in politically correct behavior, people perpetuate the prevalent norms of racism in different, probably hypocritical ways. Lindsey’s co-workers are not aware that, while trying to be politically correct, they still have a racial obsession. Lindsey works at a magazine dominated by white people. In a seminar titled “How to Establish a Community of Diversity in the New Millennium Workplace,” she is very bored since she is the only non-white employee

working at the magazine. As a young Chinese American woman, Lindsey thinks that such seminars do not have any contribution to make America a less race conscious society. As a person who experiences being seen as Chinese but not American, she believes that these theoretical instances such as organizing seminars on learning to work in a multicultural environment do not change the fact that America is a racial state. “She was the only non-white employee, and as the receptionist, she was a person who didn’t have the authority to create a more diverse staff, and she was never asked even once to partake in brainstorming meetings of any kind” (Keltner, 2004; 18). Trying to avoid racial practices is not applicable to the daily of American society and stereotypical classifications of race continue in the daily lives of the characters. Living in a culture where race is bodily and culturally divided, attempts of being politically correct becomes another form of hypocrisy.

Stereotypes such as popcorn, egg are symbols which emphasize the social construction of race. The presence of racial tags, make clear that classifying a person as Chinese is not only related to physical appearance. Defining a person’s identity is more complex than simply classifying them as white or Chinese. In a conversation, her totally Americanized brother named Kevin advises Lindsey that if she wants to go out with a white man she should go out “with an *egg*” (Keltner, 2004; 34), white on the outside and yellow in the inside. Kevin explains what the egg metaphor means by telling her that she is a “Twinkie – yellow on the outside but a total white girl on the inside” (Keltner, 2004; 34). Similar to the metaphors that are used in daily English to describe racial identity, words such as banana and popcorn signify one’s racial identity in American society. The ideal that America will one day become a less color conscious society is nothing more than a dream with respect to the conditions in the novels that are analyzed.

A gradual Americanization can be observed in the three generations that begin with grandmother Pau Pau and end with Lindsey with her mother in between. Lindsey is divided between the influences of her mother and her grandmother Pau Pau. There are generational gaps between Lindsey’s grandmother Pau Pau and Lindsey’s parents. These differences among the generations of Chinese Americans are often signified through the choice of food. For example, as it has been stated before, Lindsey, a third generation Chinese American has avoided eating Chinese

food especially when she is with her American friends. For her, eating “American” food is a way of being accepted into the American society. Also, Lindsey’s parents most of the time preferred eating American food rather than Chinese food. The most consistent representative of Chinese cuisine in the novel is Lindsey’s grandmother. As second generation Chinese Americans, Lindsey’s parents did not want their children to be spoiled with access to a world of consumption. Instead, Lindsey’s mother wanted her children to be in the middle on the scale of being Chinese and American. To achieve this aim, when the children were young, she gave them house chores that they had to be responsible for and also sent them to a Chinese school. “She wanted them to be the perfect combination of qualities: well-educated with good manners like upper-class Americans, but with humility and toughness like the Chinese” (Keltner, 2004; 65). Lindsey’s parents try to be rational and balanced when the concern is reconciliation between the Chinese and American part of their identities.

However, Pau Pau is more emotional for the preservation of Chinese traditions and that is why Pau Pau expects Lindsey to be connected to Chinese values like her. Although Lindsey struggles to be as American as possible in her childhood, as she gets older her insistence at avoiding anything Chinese has softened since she has been living with her grandmother. Pau Pau is a woman who lives in a “Chinese world” as it can be understood from the decoration of her house. She has figurines of Buddha and Chinese ointments everywhere in the house. Another influencing factor after Lindsey’s family becomes Michael, although he is a white looking man, he encourages Lindsey to be tolerant to Pau Pau’s emphasis on Chinese culture.

Living with her grandmother, Lindsey stays away from the Chinese traditions until Michael softens her attitude towards the Chinese culture. In fact, the development of Lindsey’s relationship with Michael will accelerate Lindsey’s awareness of the Chinese culture. Michael achieves Lindsey to reconcile with her Chinese identity not by putting pressure on Lindsey, different from Raymond’s attitude in *American Knees*, Michael’s way of reasoning is very spontaneous. He wants this reconciliation not only for Lindsey’s sake but also for his own. Though it is not visible in racial features, the fact that Michael has Chinese blood in his background is his own discovery about his identity. Thus, she realizes that she does

not have to hide who she is. She accepts that each Chinese quality or tradition is a different experience and experiences with Chinese culture are what compose her selfhood. “Every experience, even the unpleasant ones, had helped to slowly build her character, creating a one-of-a-kind Chinese American named Lindsey Owyang” (Keltner, 2004; 258).

One of the factors that has helped Lindsey become softened towards Chinese culture is Michael Cartier. He is a mixed-race man who has eventually avoided his quarter Chinese past. He has no racial clues in his physical appearance. He has identified himself as white so much that he accidentally uses the word “slant,” as if he does not have Chinese blood in his racial heritage. This word refers to an Oriental person either Chinese or Japanese but has an offensive meaning. At first, Lindsey is offended when she heard this word from Michael. The reason why Lindsey is offended when Michael uses the word “slant” is related to the race-consciousness in American society. Later, when she thinks from Michael’s point of view, she finds his words somehow excusable since though he is a quarter Chinese he has never faced racism due to his white features:

Despite having his grandmother’s genes coursing through his veins, Michael did not appear of mix-race heritage. . . . Never having been called a ‘chink’ to his face, alone in a parking lot or surrounded by friends . . . he had escaped discrimination and tears. . . .Never having experienced subtle mistreatment or outright hostility due to his race, how could Michael know the terrible loneliness, or feel the awful embarrassment, helplessness, and anger she felt when she heard a word like ‘slant’ used so nonchalantly? (Keltner, 2004; 257)

Another factor that makes Lindsey aware of Chinese traditions is when her grandmother Pau Pau decides to visit her husband’s grave in China. It is decided that Lindsey should accompany her grandmother on the trip because she is the only person who does not have a serious job. Her first reaction to this trip was that it was unfair for her to go to China because she is a total foreigner. Later, even before their trip, Lindsey gets curious about it and starts asking questions to her grandmother. She asks about Pau Pau’s life in China, why she came to America, and how she met her grandfather. Lindsey’s return from the trip creates drastic changes in her

character. For example, she now believes that she has to respect her relatives in China and though she does not know a word of Chinese, she hugs them with love. This trip is important because Lindsey embraces a part of herself that she had neglected before. This is a positive race-consciousness than the prevalent one in America, where individuals from different races are reminded of their race constantly in daily life either with slurs or with politically correct behaviors. However, the trip that Lindsey goes on with her grandmother is one of education about who she really is. She discovers that she will be more peaceful not by trying to be an American but by being a Chinese American.

To conclude, issues related to the theme of identity in *The Dim Sum of All Things* develop in three aspects. The first aspect is Lindsey's education process and her reconciliation with Chinese culture. She achieves to accept a part of her identity which she has consistently neglected with the help of Michael Cartier. Lindsey's relationship with Michael teaches her that she should not to deny racial identity, that she is both Chinese and American. Understanding that she must reconcile with two cultures that construct her identity is the most peaceful resolution for her. The second aspect that the theme of identity is related to is political correctness. In *The Dim Sum of All Things* while Lindsey is trying to look as "American" as possible, daily instances remind her that while trying to be polite, people consciously or unconsciously remind her of her racial identity. Lastly, in terms of Michael Cartier's development, before his relationship with Lindsey, he was a man who passed as white. However, his relationship with Lindsey has made him more conscious of his mixed-race identity, not to make their relationship more complicated but to define who he really is. Before his relationship with Lindsey, Michael was a man who was classified as white. American society classified him as white since his racial characteristics gave no clue that he could be Chinese.

Among the variety of problems created out of the theme of identity, *The Barbarians Are Coming* focuses on generational conflicts and on the clash between consent and descent. Sterling Lung, in *The Barbarians Are Coming*, has never been a "good" son to his parents. Like the children discussed in the previous novels, he has not fulfilled his parents' dream of becoming a doctor or an engineer, as a proper Chinese son would do. Instead, Sterling has studied art and later graduated from the

Culinary Institute of America to become a chef. When he confesses to his parents that he has become a cook, his parents are disillusioned: “This was the reward for their sacrifice, leaving home for America, for lean lives among the barbarians” (Louie, 2000; 28). Sterling from childhood on had been raised to be a loyal son. He is only expected to be educated as a doctor and be respected for that. Meanwhile, his soul was supposed to be Chinese in terms of marriage and his lifestyle. “Until I was fourteen or fifteen my family never owned a car. That fact was consistent with the profile of Chineseness that was forming in my young brain: We don’t own cars, we don’t live in houses, we don’t eat anything but rice” (Louie, 2000; 45).

The generational conflict between Sterling and his parents stem from different expectations about Sterling’s future. His parents want him to follow the Chinese-American dream of success and become a doctor to be wed to a Chinese girl. However, his parents make grand sacrifices to live in American society so that Sterling could have a better future by their definition. Sterling’s parents think that living in the American society is living among the barbarians, and the only reason why they put up with being in America is to see their son become a doctor. Learning that their son has become a “servant” at a ladies club is thus a big disappointment. Sterling is aware that his occupation is the collapse of American Dream for his parents: “I occupied the servant’s quarters. And I was undeniably the servant. In the way Genius and Zsa Zsa were right: I hadn’t come very far at all. I was doing no better than they were . . .” (Louie, 2000; 29). The ladies’ club that Sterling works at is an example of how the whites see non-white people. In a conversation, white ladies women at the club discuss the success of the Asian race and racial features are emasculated. One of the ladies says:

‘It’s suited for the whole race of them. Those petite paddles  
and little balls are perfect for their little hands’  
‘I agree. It’s all in their genes. They’re small people, with  
delicate bones and skinny muscles.’ (Louie, 2000; 49)

In their perception of the Asian race, white women feminize the racial features of Asian men. Besides feminizing their racial qualities, the success that is designated to Asian men is only limited to serving the white race. The function of

Asian men is restricted to serving in jobs that are stereotypically classified as feminine. The white women never think of the option that, such skillful hands of these Asian men can also be successful surgeons. The white women at the club try to rationalize the Chinese culture by referring to physical characteristics of the Asian race. For example, according to them, the Chinese culture does not value the individual; that is why the Chinese individual's chances of physically developing themselves is very limited. The white lady says that the Chinese "have no evolutionary imperative to develop bigger, stronger bodies" (Louie, 2000; 50). The quotation above exemplifies the clash between consent and descent. From the white women's perspective at the Ladies Club, physical racial characteristics determine a Chinese-American man's status in American society. Meanwhile, the probability that Sterling can have a consent based romantic relationship determines one's sense of belonging to a place beyond the limits of what the white people provide Chinese-Americans to. The different necessities of consent and descent represent that there are various expectations related to consent and descent.

Sterling's expectations are better understood when we focus on Genius's life starting from the days before his arrival in America. During his youth he has been a loyal son as his parents had expected him to be. Before coming to America he got married to the girl of his parent's choice and she was pregnant when Genius arrived in America. The parents were content because they were happy to see their son wedded to the woman they chose and continue the family name. Thus, as parents they had done their duty: "His parents could say: Our son is in America, making us all rich; he has given us a splendid daughter, and a grandchild, perhaps even a grandson is already on the way. We can now die in peace, our duties done" (Louie, 2000; 239). The same scenario should have been performed by Sterling, but, since he married Bliss his parents' expectations have all evaporated. However, it is revealed later in the novel that after his arrival in America, Genius fell in love with a white woman named Lucy and had a relationship with her, resulting in Lucy's pregnancy. Years later, when Genius finds himself as a father whose son repeats the same pattern, he takes on a different attitude. Instead of supporting his son's choice of a white woman, like he once did, he appears as a true defender of descent. Obviously, his experience with life has led him to be obedient to the unbreakable bonds of

descent, so he expects his son to do the same thing. From Genius's point of view, for a Chinese person the American type of consent-based relationship is romantic in the sense that it is adventurous and temporary; there is freedom of choice which is only for white people. Being Chinese-American excludes him from the freedom of having a consent relationship.

Moreover, Sterling blames his father for leaving him in a cultural clash between the Chinese loyal son and the independent American son. He was a man born in America. He thought he was an American; however, his family has insistently reminded him that he was Chinese. Sterling has acted like an American son, not like a Chinese one, so he has not accomplished the tasks of being a loyal Chinese son. Sterling's rebellious attitude toward against his family's descent based expectations:

What did he expect? I was born here, among the wolves. If he wanted a clone of himself, if he wanted Yuk for a child, he should have stayed in China. All my life he's killed me over this. . . . I am unfilial because I don't know Chinese ways. I am stupid because I forgot my Chinese. (Louie, 2000; 348)

The maxim, "sins of the fathers are visited upon the sons" is appropriate for Sterling and his father. Sterling, after the death of his father feels guilty for not having achieved his father's expectations from him. This situation reveals the power of descent over Sterling and he understands that "blood is thick" and the power of descent cannot be defeated by consent.

A fundamental theme in the contemporary Chinese-American novel is identity. Generating information from the novels discussed in this chapter, all of the characters are trying to resolve how they define their identity. Each character who goes through this identity crisis realizes that the most peaceful way of settling down the clash between Chinese and American parts of one's identity is reconciliation. Before achieving this reconciliation, one of the mistakes that some of the characters make very often is excluding one part of their identity, which is usually the Chinese part. Another aspect of the identity theme is that in all of the novels that have been analyzed, the oldest generation of Chinese-American characters are pure

representations of descent whereas, younger characters cope with the clash between consent and descent. Reconciling with one's identity is a painful process. For instance, the young Chinese-American characters at first seem to be as "American" as possible. However, the power of decent reminds these Americanized characters that they are a part of a rooted tradition of the Chinese culture. Another factor that reminds these characters that they should not neglect their Chinese part is that, the racial characteristics of these characters remind that their bodily existence is not accepted as complete Americans. Also, in terms of mixed-race identities, such characters go through further confrontations, deciding on how to define their racial heritage. Some mixed-race characters have neglected the fact that they have the characteristics of another race besides being white. Since whiteness is accepted as the norm, as the rule of normalcy, they have disregarded their left out identity. Mixed-race relationships help them earn a consciousness about their racial identity. Beyond the state of being mixed-race which complicates how one defines his/her identity becomes more complicated if their identity involves being adopted. The concept of adoption both is a sociological concept which makes it difficult to define a person's identity and it also subverts the definitions of consent and descent.

#### **4.4. Adoption: The New Extended Families**

Adoption, as a sociological concept, is of increasing significance in the discussion of race, identity and family. The discussion of adoption has become a tool which defines the social meaning of race, identity and the limits of a family. The most important conflict of adopted identities is related to descent. Most of the adopted individuals wonder about their biological parents, who they are, where they come from, why they have been abandoned. The identity problem of individuals is related to “blood, genes, culture, nature, biology, or nurture” (Patton, 2000; 1). Especially in international adoptions, not only identity, but also race becomes a problematic factor in the formation of a selfhood for the adopted individual. The issue of adoption reveals problems related to identity, sense of belonging and descent. It is not only memories of what the adopted people are curious to find out about themselves; they also wonder what kind of a heritage they are a product of. In interracial adoptions, identity problems related to race and in international adoptions national differences affect the identity of the adopted person.

The tension between biological and cultural explanations of race and identity is similar to the dichotomy between nature and nurture. Therefore, by exploring the issues of adoption, the trends in American race, identity and family have to inevitably be analyzed. Especially, transracial adoption has been a key source for exploring the changing contemporary American issues of family, race and ethnicity. Before the acceptance of interracial adoption, most of the families who had adopted children preferred children whose racial and physical features were similar to themselves as if they were the biological parents of the child. Adoption from the same race also disguised the infertility of white parents before the 1960s. “Despite the fact that adoptive families were created ‘artificially’ by a legal procedure, however, most adoptive families gave the appearance of having resulted from sexual relations between the parents” (Shanley, 2001; 15). Transracial adoption was very rare before the 1960s, because the adoption system in the United States worked for the creation of white nuclear families. “In fact, historically it has developed as a means of reproducing White middle-class families headed by heterosexual married

couples” (Patton, 2000; 85). Adoption from the same race continued until the legislation of adoption among races in 1996:

Unlike earlier adoption practices that tried to make adoptive families resemble a biologically related family as closely as possible and made a ‘clean break’ between the family of origin and the adoptive family, both transracial adoption and open adoption suggest that adoptive families may have a form of their own that does not mimic the biological nuclear family. (Shanley, 2001; 8)

In most cases, the white couples adopted white children so that they could hide that they were infertile. “The underlying ideology was rooted in naturalizing and normalizing the state’s reproduction of White nuclear families. . . . This was a means of making the sexual deviance of White unwed mothers and infertile White couples invisible” (Patton, 2000; 20).

China is the leading country of foreign adoption in Americans. Factors such as “fertility rates, the legal status of abortion and of birth control, social attitudes toward single and unwed motherhood, tolerance of mixed race families and children” (Tessler, 1999; 6-7) determine the rates of international adoption in the United States. Since 1989, China informally allowed international adoption and legalized it in 1992. Due to the “one-child” policy, there have been many children, mostly girls who have been abandoned by their families to orphanages. The reason why mostly daughters are abandoned by Chinese families is related with the Chinese family structure. There is a traditional preference for sons in the Chinese culture because parents connect the continuance of the family name and the economic future of the family with their sons. Daughters are perceived as the temporary members of the family who will eventually get married and become a member of their husbands’ family. Since daughters in China are not seen as permanent members of the family, in most cases they are left to orphanages rather than the sons. Therefore, “adoption of Chinese children were accounting for about 22 percent of all international adoptions into the United States and had come to represent the single largest source of adoptions abroad” (Tessler, 1999; 4). Inevitably, adopting from China attracts attention from literary circles and has increasing representations especially in

Chinese American literatures as exemplified by some of the novels studied in this dissertation. There are many ramifications of the theme of adoption in these novels.

The significance of adoption in mixed-race families and how adopted children contribute to the clash between consent and descent will be discussed with references to *The Love Wife* and *Eat Everything*. The theme of adoption is more important than the theme of mixed-race marriage in *The Love Wife* since adopting a Chinese baby is the incident which leads to Carnegie Wong and Blondie's marriage. In other words, the idea of adoption is what brings the possibility of a mixed-race marriage on the consent of individuals. After Carnegie coincidentally finds the baby, he believes that adopting the baby is his primary purpose in life whether he is married or not. It seems as if Carnegie's marriage to Blondie is a secondary concern for him because his first consent relationship involves not his marriage but his adoption of "this young lady" (Jen, 2004; 63). Carnegie thinks that by adopting this baby he will have a life of his own by taking the responsibilities of the baby. For him adopting the baby also means that he is going to cut off his attachments to his mother. For him, this young baby becomes "[a] way to meet life head-on. A way to live my own life . . . This baby was bringing us all into the world" (Jen, 2004; 64). However, adopting a baby is not going to be a solution to the conflict that he is going through. His sense of dividedness between his familial obligations to Mama Wong and the desire to decide upon his personal life choices continues after he adopts the baby.

In *The Love Wife* problems arising from adoption are significant. The consent ties of adoption almost always meet resistance from "the ghostly presence of descent," which in this particular instance of adoption is represented by a strong curiosity about biological ties. Lizzy, questions her place in the family. She insistently questions her past, her biological parents. Lizzy becomes curious about who her biological mother is and believes that she will someday go back to China and find her biological mother. She thinks that she does not belong to the Wong family and creates a parallel with the Chinese nanny Lan's situation: "I'm like a visitor, like Lanlan" (Jen, 2004; 55). Like many adopted identities, Lizzy is in search of her past since this part of her is her descent ties to life. There are questions they cannot answer, and this gives them a sense of incompleteness. For an adopted child,

living in a family of consent is a slippery ground to which she cannot safely hold on. Lizzy is curious about her biological parents because her present family does not provide her with the roots of descent. She has doubts about whether she is really wanted in the family or if she was adopted because Carnegie and Blondie could not have a biological child for a very long time. The reason why Lizzy feels that she is not wanted in the family is because she is aware of the fact that Blondie and Carnegie's first preference for the second baby is a biological one. Being unsuccessful in their efforts to have their biological son leads them to adopt a second baby. Lizzy says, "Nobody wanted me exactly. Really they wanted their own baby, I was their second choice" (Jen, 2004; 105).

The most important difference between Lizzy and Wendy is that Lizzy is adopted in the United States but Wendy was adopted from China. This situation makes Lizzy jealous. Wendy can speak Chinese and at least knows that she has a past in China. Lizzy, however, she feels as if she does not belong anywhere, she feels completely lost. She says: "It's not fair that Wendy's adopted from China and speaks Chinese, while nobody even knows what I am or where I came from. I hate being soup du jour" (Jen, 2004; 211). The reason why Lizzy is jealous is that, Wendy at least knows that she has a past in China. It is very probable that her biological parents were from China and if she had the chance to look for ties of descent, she will have to search for them in China. However, Lizzy has no clue about her past or about where she belongs to, where her biological parents are from. Since she was adopted in United States, she is not sure about where she originally comes from. The construction of an identity of an adopted person is closely related to unchangeable past information that reveals who they are. In the situation of adopted children, descent is a factor which anchors a person to safety zone, providing for her a sense of belonging somewhere. Since race has an important place in American society, even in the adoption of children, the power of descent attracts the attention of the adopted person. Lizzy is tired of the questions she is asked at school about where she is from. Blondie tries to console Lizzy by giving herself as an example which turns out to be the wrong thing to do when we hear Lizzy's striking retort:

[Blondie speaks:] Like me, I come from a lot of different countries. I don't have a simple label, like German-American or Scotch-Irish American. I'm soup du jour, too.  
[Lizzy speaks] Yeah but it doesn't matter as much because you are white and not adopted. Nobody wonders where you're from, nobody asks you. (Jen; 2004, 213).

Blondie could not even imagine the identity crisis that Lizzy goes through not only because she is not an adopted child but because she is white, the true child of American racial discourse. The second child that Carnegie and Blondie adopt from China is Wendy. The most important difference between Wendy and Lizzy is that, Lizzy was adopted in the United States and Wendy was adopted from China. The reason why Lizzy is so curious about her past and biological family is because she knows that she was somehow connected to a Chinese family. On the other hand, Wendy is not like her sister. She is not curious about her past because she does not have the hope to find out where she really belongs to. Lizzy's situation is thus more blurry compared to her sister because Lizzy does not know if she was abandoned by an American or a Chinese family. As long as descent is something blurry for adopted children, it becomes a source of more attraction because, lack of information about their past provides them a sense of curiosity that can only be explained when their ties of descent are revealed.

Mama Wong does not approve of Carnegie's behavior of adopting the baby which is ironical because at the end of the novel it is revealed that Carnegie was also adopted by Mama Wong and this has been a family secret for years. Mama Wong's argument that the baby should not be adopted depended on the assumption that the baby could have had a mother who was a drug addict or a prostitute. Since Mama Wong is a traditional Chinese woman, she opposes her son's adopting Lizzy. Her opposition also stems from her idea that an ideal Chinese son should have followed the descent line and should have married a "proper" Chinese girl. Adopting a baby girl will nothing but bring more trouble to the already confused life of Carnegie as his mother Mama Wong states her opposition in the following lines:

Something the matter with you, need to do something crazy, she said. How you going to concentrate on your career? You do not know what baby is. Baby is a lotta work. Lotta money too. I tell you, adoption can be big mistake. You are too young even to know what big mistake is. You do not know what life is, you think it is like college, everybody end up with degree, more or less the same. But I tell you, is not like college. Nobody love a man who is nobody. . . . Why you have to do such crazy things. As if people will love you for that! . . . But Blondie did. Blondie loved me *for that*. (Jen, 2004; 66)

The different attitudes toward adopted children between the American and the Chinese culture is presented through Mama Wong's reaction to the adoption of Wendy. While Mama Wong is angry enough with the adoption of Lizzy she insists that there is nothing special with babies "You go to China, can just pick one off the street" (Jen, 2004; 103). Even after the adoption of Wendy nothing changes in Mama Wong's stubborn attitude. Actually, Mama Wong is very inconsistent in her reaction towards the issue of adoption. First of all, she doesn't want her son to adopt a child in America while there are many orphans in need of adoption in China. Later, when Carnegie and Blondie to adopt another daughter from China, Mama Wong still reacts to their second adoption.

Besides opposing the adoption of the two girls, Mama Wong cannot accept the fact that Bailey is her biological grandson. Since Bailey has no signs of Asian features, she feels betrayed by Carnegie for not marrying a Chinese girl. If Carnegie had followed her mother's advice, his children would have had Asian features. In that case, Mama Wong would be proud of her son for following the descent line of the family both in terms of race and tradition. Mama Wong cannot stand Bailey's Anglo-Saxon features and thinks that he is adopted too. However, Blondie says, "He's real. Your real grandchild" (Jen, 2004; 174).

In contrast to their adopted daughters, the Wong family's biological son has no sign of Asian features. He has a totally Anglo-American look. The doctors are amazed to see Carnegie caring for the baby because they suspect that he may not be the father of the baby. Even though Blondie and Carnegie have a mixed-race marriage, Blondie, after giving birth to her son, does not deny that a child of her own racial features

attracts her. Before she gives birth, she thinks that rather than being a biological mother, teaching the right values to a child is more important to her. Later, however she states: “How hopelessly idealistic, to imagine love and values might count more than genes! But truly I did. . . . I watched him in a different way than I had watched the girls” (Jen, 2004; 155-156). Blondie clearly states that her biological son is different from her adopted daughters. Blondie who has formed a relationship of consent with Carnegie is attracted to descent after she gives birth to her son. Her biological son and her adopted daughters create a clash between consent and descent, and descent arises as the more powerful factor because it provides safety zone knowledge that they belong somewhere.

The complications related to adoption and search for identity are not only exemplified by Wendy and Lizzy; they are also revealed by Carnegie’s curiosity about his past. After the death of Mama Wong, a distant relative in Hong Kong tells Carnegie that Mama Wong has left the family book to her. Carnegie is curious about the family book since that is the only way he can create a past and an identity for himself. He has very little knowledge both about himself and the family adopted. The family book for Carnegie will be a tool that will help him create a past for himself. He desires this so much because as in the case of other adopted children, he will feel safe if he discovers that he has a past: “It’s all I have, he said. I have no sisters, no brothers, no uncles, no aunts. I am as on a darkling plain. Of course the book matters to me. I have no family” (Jen, 2004; 200). All of Carnegie’s previous knowledge referring to his past shatters when he finds out that there is a family book which provides the information that Mama Wong has adopted Carnegie. Until the time Carnegie learns about the existence of the family book, he thought that his family was the only source that he can depend on. Now, finding out that Carnegie was adopted, his situation is not very different from that of Lan.

Lan’s discussion with the adopted daughters of the family on what a family is stresses that adopted children cannot ever have real families. Lan believes that her situation in the family is similar to the adopted girls. She says “I am like you, have no real mother. Have no real family” (Jen, 2004; 223). Lan sees this similarity because she has left a past full of difficulties in China and her mother died when she

was very young. It was her father who brought her up. *The Love Wife* is a novel which shows how the racial lines of the American family have blurred with mixed-race marriages and with interracial adoptions. The adopted characters face ensuing complications in their struggle to find out where they truly belong.

The common problem in adopted characters is that they suffer from the sense of belonging to a past. Such adopted characters in the novels, even if they have a family, never feel secure enough as if they have a rooted past. Likewise, in *Eat Everything*, Chris states that his life was an “invention” (Chan, 2004; 32). This novel discusses the complications of being adopted and being racially different from the mainstream culture through the metaphor of orphanhood. The problems of being an orphan and how such identities must cope with their inner struggles of who they really are is the main conflict of Christopher Wong. He describes himself as one of the orphans left to the diasporas of Chinatowns to invent their identity. There is a double displacement for orphans. First, they are left alone by their biological parents, and second, the person who has adopted them has provided identities for them out of papers. The orphans of the Chinatown do not have a past but are supposed to create a future for themselves on their own. However, like other orphans, they have the inevitable tendency to relate themselves to a particular past: “[T]here is that gnawing desire, always, to link ourselves to some past, to figure more immediate if less substantial than, say the Great Wall of China, forever disconnected, a defense against nothing, but incorporated, certainly” (Chan, 2004; 4).

From time to time, Chris remembers scenes from his childhood. Since he was an orphan, the scene that he remembers from his childhood keeps repeating to him that he is an orphan: “. . . my clearest impressions of childhood [were that] I was the Indian, a papoose, the orphan Indian child” (Chan, 2004; 104-105). There are images of childhood in Chris’s mind, and these entire memories boil down to the fact that he is an orphan. Even as a little boy, imagining that he was an Indian, he envisioned himself as an orphan. In his imagination before the racial categories had become carved in his identity formation, he could not change the fact that he was an orphan. In a conversation with Melba, Chris tells her that since he was an orphan, he grew up believing that they were members of a lost Indian tribe. He identifies being an orphan with the lack of information about his past: “American-born, orphans, possibly

illegitimate. Chinatown It was homebase. Internment. The reservation” (Chan, 2004; 180). These are the only keywords by which he defines himself as an orphan. Chris has no other information about his past. It is ironic that Chris in his childhood identifies himself with the Native Americans. Rather than identifying himself with another racial or ethnic group, Chris chooses to identify himself with Native-Americans. In a sense there is a parallelism between his state of orphanhood and the perception that Native-Americans are the orphans of the American continent.

In the alternative family structure, Chris and Peter adopt for themselves mother and father figures. Their mother figure stands out as Auntie Mary since there is no other option. However, Chris and Peter combine the state of fatherhood from Wick and Lincoln. Though Uncle Lincoln could be Christopher’s father, the reader never finds out what the truth is. However, though Uncle Lincoln could be the father of Chris, the person whom Chris sees as a father to himself is Theodore Candlewick an ex-priest defrocked because of pedophilia. Bringing orphans from China has become Reverend Candlewick’s lifestyle. However, his love for young boys continues although he states that: “Orphans don’t have answers for themselves or for others, much less for the sons of orphans.” (Chan, 2004; 36). Even if Reverend Candlewick was defrocked, Chris still loves him as a father never denying his attention for young boys: “. . . Wick and his unfortunate addiction for embracing young boys too closely—no haven for some of our generation of cultural orphans, but he saved me, saved Peter, even Auntie Mary, although I didn’t know how or why at the time” (Chan, 2004; 39). Reverend Candlewick’s pedophilia left aside, Chris believes that Candlewick has been a true father both to Peter and to himself.

In *Eat Everything*, an alternative definition of descent is provided by Lincoln. Since he is not the biological father of Chris, he defines fatherhood as something not determined by biology; instead, he defines fatherhood and descent by loyalty. Being an orphan is a traumatic experience for Chris. Although he tries to accept Lincoln as a father, there is a gap in his mind which is never fulfilled with a real or biological father. Besides, Lincoln never tells Chris whether he is his biological father or not. What keeps them connected to each other, is their loyalty to their assumed father-son relationship and both being brought up as orphans: “Never telling me that he was my father or that I ever had one, Lincoln let me inherit the legends of orphans, told me

stories about his orphan past” (Chan, 2004, 42). Lincoln never accepts the fact that he is Chris’s father and we never find out what the truth is. Sometimes Lincoln tells Chris that there is no likelihood of being his biological father. Instead Lincoln teaches Chris that being a father does not occur by birth, it occurs by loyalty:

He taught me how to view paternity in his world, the way he had been taught by the man who had claimed him. But I understand that for him being a father wasn’t a matter of the heart, but of loyalties, of oaths sworn and broken, of experiences that had taught him to be responsible to himself alone since in this mean country he had very little opportunity to care for more than himself. (Chan, 2004; 50)

Most substance relationships of adopted children take place with their mothers. In Chris’s situation, he has no connection with a biological mother whereas, at least at a symbolic level, he has a father. Besides not knowing who Chris’s father is, who his mother is also a mystery. Sometimes he asks questions to Lincoln about who his mother was. However, the answers that he gets further complicate the situation since Lincoln keeps repeating that he has had relationships with many women just to console Chris. Lincoln keeps telling him that he liked his mother the best. The stereotypical definition of motherhood is related to biology. In most of the cases among adopted or orphan children, it is usually the father that is left mysterious or inexplicable. However, Lincoln makes a new identity definition. Since motherhood could also represent ties of descent, this new identity is not related to one’s past, but it is closely connected to the future.

Unlike other parents who stress the importance of the ties of descent, Lincoln is not a typical father figure for Chris and Peter. A typical father would want his children to feel safe and be connected to his past and his family. However, since Lincoln was also brought up as an orphan, he thinks that trying to connect yourself to memories or being in search of a real father and mother is useless. He advises Peter and Chris to be open to new opportunities and not get stuck in their past: “Be free, open to opportunities, never look back. Memories drag you down. That’s what I keep in mind always. Not the people. Not even my ma and bah. I mean, what were they? Nothing, real nothings” (Chan, 2004; 48). Lincoln is a man who has made forgetting

and not looking back his lifestyle, since thinking about his past is something very painful for him. Also, his past is full of questions that he can never find answers to. Being brought up as an orphan forces him to act like that: “Your Auntie likes to say forgive and remember. I say forget it and you have nothing to forgive. They couldn’t be anything else. They only had poor times, bad for Chinese people, bad for everybody in a country of orphans” (Chan, 2004; 48). Lincoln, rather than being emotional, has reckless observations about the situation of Chinese-Americans in American society. Trying to overcome economic difficulties in their mother country becomes useless after they understand that they are perceived as orphans of American society. The metaphor of being an orphan represents their isolation and their perception as aliens or outsiders. Their only hope from American society is to provide them a future since they do not have a past.

The relationship between Chris and Peter bring a new aspect to the definition of brotherhood. Although Chris and Peter are not biologically connected, their common features of being orphans and their curiosity about their past make them brothers. Peter and Chris share an unknown past. Both of them probably have different stories but what keeps these brothers together is that from childhood they have started sharing a life together as orphans. Once again, Peter is the one who expresses openly the condition of their life as orphans. “Don’t you see we’re lost. We’re divorced from our history, our fathers. We should never have been . . . The fact that we can’t keep our lovers should tell us” (Chan, 2004; 252). Peter and Chris have no sense of a rooted past. That is why they cannot create a future for themselves out of consent when they lack descent. They are completely torn apart from their history and their biological ancestors. Even being unsuccessful in their relationships is a proof that they will always be losers in finding out their biological past. Not being able to connect themselves to a past and a family creates for them a sense of insecurity. This feeling of insecurity leads Chris and Peter to believe that they will never have the chance to know who they really are. Lacking a past, they believe that their identity will always be incomplete.

In the novels analyzed, it has been observed that, besides the curiosity about identity and past, descent anchors people to a “safety zone” and provides them a sense of belonging. To conclude, the theme of adoption in the contemporary

Chinese-American novel, while exploring issues related to race and identity conflicts, also explores the clash between consent and descent, brings up new definitions of fatherhood and brotherhood. Adoption is a complex sociological issue that is connected to one's search of an identity, past and heritage. What makes this process more complicated is the increase in interracial and international adoptions. The clash between consent and descent becomes clear in the comparison of biological and adopted children. The theme of adoption also suggests that concepts such as fatherhood and brotherhood are not defined according to ties of descent, such concepts are defined according to loyalty and creating a common future, since they share no past history. The metaphor of being "orphans" is parallel to the isolated condition of Chinese-Americans in American society. As is they are doomed to be orphans, the characters in the novels analyzed are connected to each other with the fact that they are orphans. Lastly, by explaining the theme of adoption in contemporary Chinese-American novel, we have tried to explore the complications of being adopted and how racial differences categorize people as different from the mainstream culture.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Crevecoeur's famous definition of who an American is an early statement that the American society will be a mixed-race nation. He states that America will one day be a melting pot where immigrants of different nations and races will create the American nation. The American was for him, "a new man," an amalgamation of different nations-albeit all European, but the expectation that other nations and non-European races would soon contribute to the making of this new man was a common sense deduction. This dissertation has discussed whether mixed-race relations really have been perceived with such great optimism or whether the existence of mixed-race relationships has not created any decrease in the sense of racial prejudices.

Proceeding from the fact that there has been a significant increase in mixed-race relationships between the Chinese and white Americans, the central focus of this study is on contemporary Chinese American novels in order to question whether mixed-race relationships have created any sense of decrease in racial prejudices and whether the existence of mixed-race relationships are unproblematic as long as they are based on the consent of the individuals. The analysis of the novels has shown that the development of mixed-race relationships is not really free of problems. Instead, even a marriage or a relationship of people sharing the same race has concerns and sacrifices to make whereas mixed-race relationships carry an extra load of responsibility and obstacles to overcome. In order to prove that mixed-race relationships in American society are prevailed by descent rather than consent, we have referred to three major themes discussed with a variety of examples provided from five different contemporary Chinese American novels. If the multicultural "ideal" were in practice in the contemporary American racial scene definition was in practice, Chinese-Americans would have marriages of consent and racial prejudices would be disregarded. Moreover, attitudes towards children born out of these marriages would not be based upon their racial features. Instead of an ideal multicultural society where individuals freely choose their racial and ethnic identities, ties that one cannot choose and change, however, the reality reveals a society where descent is the most powerful factor that shapes the lives of people. Although, documents of great importance such as the "Declaration of Independence"

emphasize consent, descent has been and is still a pull factor governing the lives of Americans.

The unique characteristics of the Chinese people in the racial diversity of immigrants in American society have been their hard working character and the resulting myth of the Chinese as the “model minority.” The reasons that have historically led the Chinese people to leave their mother country and immigrate to United States are mostly economic. They hoped to find in America a looser class structure that will allow them to rise in the social ladder. Nonetheless, their arrival in America has not created a sense of relief in their lives; instead it opened the way to new struggles such as racial discrimination and the desperate and unending effort to be a part of the American society. The arrival time of the Chinese immigrants’ clashes with that of the Southern and Eastern European immigrants. This competitive clash between the arrival of immigrants of different races led to the emergence of classes among immigrants based specifically on race. The mainstream culture favored white European immigrants rather than the Asian immigrants since they found the white European immigrants’ racial features similar to what an “American” was. Such racial discrimination in turn created in the Chinese community in the United States an introverted tendency, resulting in resistance to American culture and language, which is already a far cry from the mother tongue. Even under such circumstances, the Chinese immigrants did not hesitate to contribute to the development of America as a nation. They were the major work force in the construction of railroads, and the popular “model minority” myth was attributed to Chinese Americans. The perception that Chinese-Americans are forever foreigners has not changed despite all such contributions. Because “model minority” is but a myth, it is in fact used as another way of covering hypocritical beliefs about Chinese-Americans and enhances racial discrimination. Sometimes the Chinese are described as the “model minority” because of their hard working character, while at other times they are accused of stealing the jobs of real Americans. Different periods of history produce their own racist patterns, and “model minority” as a myth is thus one of these patterns that reflect the resisting undercurrent of racism in all periods.

In fact, this chapter takes its stand from the fact that American society is structured upon race. Throughout American history, race has been of utmost

importance for categorizing people and in the workings of institutions. American racial definitions were based on white and non-white binary according to which there is a hierarchical classification around the concept of whiteness, which itself is the pure norm. Historically, the Chinese have been excluded from the white European immigrants, since they were racially identified as Asians. The definition of whiteness has not always been stable, however, it has shown changing patterns throughout time. The early definition of whiteness only considered Anglo-Saxon immigrants. Later this group was widened to include other European nations such as the Irish, the Italians, the Poles, and other Eastern/ Southern Europeans. American people whose racial heritage is Asian, such as the Chinese were therefore left out of the category of whiteness, which is in fact an expression of privileges of class.

Theories about the function of race in America are empowered by colonialism. The meeting of different cultures increases colonialism and racial prejudices or classifications; in fact the emergence of race as a concept which flourished long before the colonization of America, created sharp differences between European and non-European people with the increase of colonial efforts in Europe. The etymological roots of the word race go back to the fourteenth century. Racism has gained pace in the eighteenth century while nations of Europe were trying to dominate each other. Colonizing weak nations on the basis of race was their first argument to prove that they were powerful. The definition of race has changed through world history. In the eighteenth century, for example, scholars of race defined race by biological traits. This practice led to strict categorizations of people, where each group was strictly classified according to physical characteristics, and it was thought that people who had non-white physical characteristics were also deficient in terms of intelligence. This view, which came to be called biological racism, considered mixed-race relationships as leading to infertility and the birth of children of mixed-race relationships as defective. Even Charles Darwin, the father of the theory of evolution species assumed that mixed-race relationships were racist in nature. Scholars of the colonization period assumed that mixed-race people did not have the capacity of endurance and intelligence to put up with the survival conditions of life. Representing the contemporary views on race Omi and Winant provided instances from world history to make clear that people of European ancestry have

created a worldview in which they distinguished themselves from the rest of the world. According to this worldview, whites were born with power and freedom whereas the other races were born to be enslaved by the whites. Scientific racism, which arose out of such Eurocentric considerations, supported the superiority of the European white race with the conduction of scientific experiments.

Nevertheless, recent theories such as Omi and Winant's theory of racial formation define race as a social construction, not as scientifically proven and biologically supported entity. According to these recent views, the distinction between white and non-white is actually a cultural difference. The people who are defined as white are the products of social, cultural and historical factors that equate whiteness with a set of privileges. The shift from biological and scientific racism towards race as a cultural construction has covered a long span of time in American history from the colonial times to the contemporary period. For example, during the colonial days of America, race was a matter of white and non-white categorization. The Native Americans and the African Americans were inferior in the eyes of the European immigrants. The white immigrants, who descended from European roots, helped the Anglo-Saxon establishment in early America, to exert power over other laborers. This solidarity around "whiteness," one that cut through class divisions, created a discourse that the non-white races were subordinated and resulted in the formation of America as a race-conscious society where class divisions are marked by the white/non-white hierarchy. It is then not surprising that in America from its earliest days, mixing of the white race with non-white races was considered problematic at best and illegal and cause for lynching at worst. The most important reason for considering mixed-race relationships illegal was to protect the purity of the white race. Most of the frustration about the mixing of races was due to the idea that the white race is inherently superior to any other racial group, and the mixing of races would mean that the white race would lose its purity. Thus, the American society has historically been obsessed with trying to limit racial mixing by passing anti-miscegenation laws. These laws were in fact a recognition that mixed-race relationships were actually taking place in America in spite of all the legal and social sanctions. Regarded from a different perspective, such laws were already made obsolete by the time they became laws but, the recognition that they were not only

obsolete but also unconstitutional took long periods in history. The anti-miscegenation laws stayed in practice for years and even after abolishing them, the American society was slow in implementing the changes.

As one of the defenders of mixed-race relationships, Maria P. P. Root has stated that the existence of mixed-race relationships has been disregarded in American society. A turning point to this consideration has been the 2000 Census which included a mixed-race category. The illegality of mixed-race relationships has not strictly been able to stop such relationships. Unfortunately, however, the recognition of and the visible increase in mixed-race relationships has not diminished racial prejudices; instead such racist views have changed shape, leading to more intricate categorizations of races.

Next to the theories of racial formation in America, Werner Sollors's concepts of consent and descent have also guided my analysis of mixed-race relationships. The evaluation of these concepts in terms of mixed-race relationships has proven that mixed-race relationships, which are supposedly structured upon the consent of individuals, are still dominated by descent-based concerns. Idealistically relationships should be based on the consent of individuals where everything is decided by personal choice and freedom. However, the analysis of the novels has demonstrated the American society as one in which mixed-race relationships continuously struggle between the values of consent and descent. In this struggle for domination descent has intruded upon relationships especially between mixed-race couples. The term consent conveys the typical romantic American relationship. However, consent emerges as a kind of privilege of the white to white relationships, not the right of the American citizens of all races. In other words, the freedom of choice of a spouse of a white race is only reserved to the whites. Moreover, consent is also described as the norm in a society in which the pursuit of happiness is central regardless of these individuals physical appearances, color, and race. However, as the novels have testified mixed-race relationships in American society, instead of carrying the optimism of "pursuit of happiness," contest against the forces of descent.

As opposed to the idealism of consent, descent stands for more concrete values such as the continuation of the bloodline, biological children and lastly marriage to a

person of the same race. Descent relationships are those of substance and based on biology. From an American perspective, descent relationships are valued in the Old World where one's ancestors determine one's identity and social standing. The foundation of the American society, on the other hand, is based on the defiance of Europe and, therefore, descent. Sollors exemplifies the identity between consent and American founding ideology in many political and literary documents, but he also demonstrates that when the mixing of the white and non-white races becomes the issue, consent in America gives way to descent, because the whole racial system in American society is centered upon the preservation of the purity of the white race.

Omi and Winant state that if a society defines a person's identity by his/her race, it can be rightly called a race-conscious society. Rather than approaching race as a biological category where people are classified according to their skin color, Omi and Winant's theory of racial formation suggest that race is subject to change and is controlled by social forces where, "the racial order is organized and enforced by the continuity and reciprocity between micro-level and macro-level of social relations" (Omi and Winant, 1994; 67). This intricate web of preconceived notions about race govern our understanding of race, while our notions of race are controlled by our families, friends and on a greater level, we are also controlled by social structures and common ideologies.

What is most unique about Omi and Winant's theory of racial formation is the argument that racial formation investigates race as a dynamic social construct where individual conceptions of race are blended with ideologies. Disregarding the discursive and constructed categorizations of race poses problems for mixed-race individuals who cannot fit the supposedly concrete and unchangeable race categories. Whiteness, a discursive phenomena that has great social and cultural constraints, is protected against non-white groups such as African-Americans, Asian-Americans and Native Americans. For mixed-race identities cannot strictly be categorized as white, Asian or some other racial group. The concern here is beyond a categorization of color. The racial dynamics that govern American society are beyond color; the web of social forces keeps on recreating race as a part of personal identities.

Yet another theoretical concern, whiteness as the racial norm and its social construction has shed light upon the discussions of mixed-race relationships, in the

selected Chinese-American novels. Besides creating Americans' preconceived notions of race, whiteness also defines who an American is. The American society, with its laws and legislations, creates the notion that whiteness is the social and legal norm of race and the criterion of Americanness. Far from being stable, however, whiteness itself has historically been defined by changing standards in different decades. Whiteness as a part of racial categorization is thus socially, culturally and historically constructed. Through American history, the enforcers of laws have used "scientific evidence" and "common knowledge" as ways to rationalize and isolate whiteness from the rest of racial categories. Notably, Americans have excluded Asians from being legally accepted into the white category. Consequently, this theoretical analysis of whiteness has guided us to observe that in the discussion of mixed-race relationships in contemporary Chinese American novel, mixed-race relationships are challenged by values of descent especially with the inclusion of a white person. Hence, examples provided from the novels reveal that whiteness is equalized with being American and the racial limits of each group are defined by the whites. This situation is more troublesome in mixed-race relationships, because mixed-race identities do not fit into one pure category of race and this fact challenges the privileged sense of whiteness.

The three theories mentioned above provide insights in to the analysis of mixed-race relationships. The forces of consent and descent rule relationships, the new generation's liminal identity problems, and, lastly adoption, the newest form of extending the limits of mixed-race relationships. The first theme has provided the opportunity to reflect on how mixed-race relationships have to fight against forces of descent whereas consent does not provide mixed-race relationships the power it needs to resist the traditional hegemony of descent. It has also been observed that in most of the novels analyzed, old generation Chinese American characters, whether they reconcile with the decisions of their children or not, force them to follow the traditional values of descent. According to the expectations of parents, young generation of Chinese Americans should follow the traditions that their parents have so far followed. That is, the Chinese American characters should get married to a person from their race, have biological children and complete their filial duty by the continuation of the family name. These are proper values attached to descent.

Instead, these characters choose to have a relationship with a person from a different race, and their most important delusion is that their free choice about who they will have a relationship with will suffice to maintain a stable relationship. Various examples show how mixed-race relationships have been agitated with conflicts of descent. Hence, descent seems to be a very strong expectation of the parents and ultimately proves to be the “safe” choice when compared to so many consent marriages that go sour.

First of all, then, Chinese-American characters had to endure the conflict between consent and descent. Secondly, on a more personal level, Chinese American characters had to reconcile Chinese and American aspects of their selfhoods, to resolve that they their identities consist of both the characteristics of Chinese and American aspects. Characters, who have tried to identify themselves as totally American or Chinese have a hard time trying to come to terms with who they really are. For instance, characters who go through a process of reconciliation with their identities understand that they are never recognized as Americans because of their racial features; they are not even believed to have been born in the United States. Ironically, many characters who are American-born Chinese, cannot speak Chinese, are foreign to China as a culture while their parents expected them to have an awareness of the Chinese culture. The only thing that could make a Chinese American character peaceful is if s/he could find a way to reconcile their Chinese and American identities.

Theories of whiteness are closely linked to the three themes that have been discussed here. To begin with, whiteness is a central concern in mixed-race relationships between a Chinese character and a white--or white-looking mixed race-character. Such relationships struggle with the dominant norms of American society. For such a mixed-race couple, getting themselves accepted as legitimate in America's racial structure is not as easy as it is for a couple composed of two white persons. Often the white-centered racial dynamics of America would frown upon the non-white ingredient in this relationship as the intruder and tainting factor in a pure form. In reaction, non-white side has its own defensive mechanisms to protect its ways and culture as a minority. Therefore, especially resistance from older generations to the mixing of races is in fact a direct result of the American racial

politics of whiteness. Besides mixed-race relationships, whiteness is also a major topic that influences identity conflicts. For instance, most of the Chinese-American characters, before their reconciliation with their Chinese heritage, try to act as if they are white-Americans. Most of the time, they eat American food, act and dress like white-Americans as if they can disguise their Asian background. Of course merging into the mainstream white culture is easier for the Chinese American mixed race children if they are born with Caucasian physical characteristics. That does not mean, however, that these characters adapt themselves to the mainstream culture without any problems. Often they are targets of irritating questions and comments as to their racial and ethnic identity. The exclusive definition of whiteness leaves them in the racial limbo from where they can emerge neither as white nor as Chinese. Lastly, whiteness is a problematic issue in adoption. Transracial adoption has complicated the family structure of American families in the contemporary Chinese-American novel. For example, the adopted Chinese or Chinese-American children meet the challenge of finding themselves a place in the white dominated American society. Their sense of isolation in society is echoed in their alienation from their family as alien looking children especially with their white parent(s). This may as well be a challenge for the parent with Chinese features if the adopted or mixed-race child happens to have white features. To make matters worse for the Asian looking adopted child, the mixed-race couple may decide to have a child of their own who may look white and deepen the isolation of the adopted child. Whiteness thus occupies a central position in all levels of relationships that pertain to mixing of races.

Similarly, in mixed-race relations the social construction of race becomes evident. The definition of race in America and in the Western world has shown drastic changes based on the socio-historical conditions. The establishment of whiteness as a social and economic privilege in America is determined by specifically American social, economic, historical, and cultural determinants. If, for example, the immigration of Chinese people had not coincided with that of the Eastern and Southern Europeans, the social acceptance of the Chinese might have been less problematic since the other major group that they would have been compared with would have been African Americans, who are themselves not held in

high esteem. In a society where racial definitions are thus historically confined within white non-white dichotomy, the Chinese occupy the marginal status of the non-white. Thus excluded from the center of whiteness, their mixed race relationships with whites and the Chinese-white mixed race children threaten and complicate this racial duality and throw the constructedness of race right in the face of the privileged group. These children in particular become the living testimony that the definition of race depends not on essential categories like biology but on fluid and changing categories of culture and history. Transracial adoption is the final frontier that challenges race as an essential category; for it is in here that one can observe most strikingly that cultural behavior is free from biology and "race." As a result of increasing rates of interracial adoptions, it is possible to see more Chinese-looking people who have no cultural ties with China and whose sense of belonging falls with exclusively white American society while at the same time more white people seem to develop cultural ties with non-white cultures and ethnicities. Therefore, mixed-race relations of all kinds show race rather as a matter of culture than of biology and essence.

Adoption is where many concerns based on consent and descent center on. In the relationship between parents and the adopted child, the clash of consent and descent becomes strikingly evident. Adoption adds a new confrontation to relations of consent. Yet being an adopted identity is closely linked to the conflicts between consent and descent. Adoption in contemporary American society creates further layers of consent and mixed-races in families. Being adopted brings a feeling of insecurity and unsafety. Concepts such as family and bloodline have a function which anchors a person to a society and culture. While their parents are struggling with how to resolve the power struggle between consent and descent, adopted identities are keenly in search of their descent. For they want to find a concrete unchangeable anchorage in relations of descent, family, and bloodline. In other words, they think descent provides them with the shelter and definition of who they really are. Some of the adopted characters embrace their given American identity because they have no other option to hold on to. Some characters, however, do not accept their given identity as an American unless they find out who they "really" are. The investigation of their descent provides, if possible, answers to the questions they

ask about a past. Hence, a sense of rootedness in a familial cultural past seems to be a determining factor in reconciling with an identity that feels comfortable to the adopted characters.

The investigation of mixed-race relationships in this dissertation supports the argument that in mixed-race relationships in American society descent prevails upon the promise of consent. Therefore, it is hard to assert that much headway has been made since the inception of anti-miscegenation laws. On the evidence of contemporary Chinese American novels we may rightfully argue that, whiteness still protects itself against “blemishes” and lumps together all other non-white categories as the other. With the theme of adoption as the big metaphor the Chinese-Americans emerge as the orphans of American society. In a society where the definition of whiteness exclusively isolates Chinese-Americans, they feel like orphans, and this situation is represented through works of literature.

To conclude, with this study, I have tried to open an area of discussion for future researches on the sociological concept of being mixed-race and mixed-race literature. I also hope that this study can contribute to the development of other comparative studies of mixed-race relationships and how this is reflected in the works of literature. With the intention to broaden the scope of mixed-race studies, I believe the investigation of mixed-race studies will provide us with new tools to reach comparative cultural conclusions related to human relations.

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