Abstract

The very titles of the two Chinese American autobiographies that will provide my points of focus throughout this essay, place in question the subject of the life to be told: Pardee Lowe’s Father and Glorious Descendant (1943) and Jade Snow Wong’s Fifth Chinese Daughter (1945/1950). Each begins by questioning the relationship between the teller and the told, a relation which really ought, in an autobiography, to be the least problematic aspect of the text. Father and Glorious Descendant and Fifth Chinese Daughter both destabilize the concept of the autobiographical genre as a set of expectations or values, as cultural norms, that assume the existence of the universal or self-identical subject. In these texts, the generic conventions of autobiography have been racialized through the innovative use of narrative point of view. The manipulation of narrative perspective and the disruption of any easy identification of the narrator with the autobiographical subject challenges the interpretive competence of the reader by challenging hegemonic conceptions of "Oriental" and "Chinese" and "American" and "Occidental". This [...]

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The Discursive Dynamics of Chinese American Life Writing:
Pardee Lowe and Jade Snow Wong

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The very titles of the two Chinese American autobiographies that will provide my points of focus throughout this essay place in question the subject of the life to be told: Pardee Lowe’s *Father and Glorious Descendant* (1943) and Jade Snow Wong’s *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1945/1950). Each begins by questioning the relationship between the teller and the told, a relation which really ought, in an autobiography, to be the least problematic aspect of the text. The narrator and the narrated should be identical, forming a single coherent and self-identical self, separated only by the space of years that keeps the young self apart from the old. But Jade Snow Wong tells her life story in the third-person, as if she were alienated from herself. Pardee Lowe tells his life story by telling that of his father, hence the priority given to his father in the title. But he refers in this title to himself as "glorious descendant", an appellation that he uses for the purposes of wry humor and self-deprecating irony in the narrative. In each case, we begin these narratives with an uncertain, destabilized sense of the life story that is about to unfold.

In this essay, I explore these uncertainties which stand in opposition to classic theories of American autobiography yet are in agreement with the contemporary postmodern consensus that autobiographies, and ethnic autobiographies in particular, are always characterized by a multiple subject. In specific formal ways these Chinese American autobiographies can be seen as "fractured" and as riven through with competing racialized discourses of self that cannot allow an image of coherent, universal subjectivity to dominate. These formal strategies are deployed in such a way, as I hope to show, that we are invited to reconceptualise Chinese-American life writing as a hybrid literary form. These strategies operate through generic conventions. The conventions of autobiography constitute the formal textual properties that are actualized in reading to produce a particular meaning structure that corresponds to some cultural encoding of subjectivity. Through the device of narrative point of view, competing discourses of Orientalism and Occidentalism set up a dynamic that cannot be adequately resolved by the text alone.

The dyad Orientalism/Occidentalism has not been extensively engaged in literary terms but in anthropological and sociological theory the concept of Occidentalism has proved fruitful for exposing and offering for analysis assumptions about the West that inform studies of colonial contact and Western influence in village or tribal societies or that inform the ways in which non-Western communities imagine themselves in contrast to stylized images of the West. In the introduction to his 1995 collection of essays, *Occidentalism: Images of the West*, James Carrier develops his definition of Occidentalism through a discussion of Edward Said’s book, *Orientalism* (1978). Carrier observes that in Said’s argument, western Oriental Studies constructs an image of the Orient that is "essentialized, is reduced to a timeless essence that pervades, shapes, and defines the significance of the people and events that constitute it" (1995, 2). But this Oriental essence is constructed in direct contrast to simplified images of the West by Orientalists who "promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, ‘us’) and the strange (the Orient, the East, ‘them’)" (Said quoted by Carrier 1995, 2). It
is this same dynamic, calling upon the complex interplay of stylized Chinese and American identities in Chinese-American autobiography, that unleashes the subversive power possessed by the entire genre to question the conventional representation of a self-identical ethnic subject and so to undermine stable and prescriptive definitions of racial identity.

**Autobiographical Selves**

Many early Chinese American autobiographies are written in an apologetic style that attempts to provide an ethnographical account of Chinese culture, akin to Mary Louise Pratt’s concept of "auto-ethnography", to dispel American racial anxieties. This was one of many attempts to resist the impact of discrimination that was expressed most harshly in anti-Chinese legislation. Dominant among the effects of this legislation upon the Chinese community in the United States was the polarization of the educated versus the laboring classes by these Exclusion laws. This polarization produced specific literary consequences, notably the dominance of the apologetic mode of autobiographical writing. These writings attempted to represent the Chinese perspective on American racism by recognizing, and responding to, white fears and prejudices. In order to do this, writers often adopted the narrative point of view of racially prejudiced Americans, whose fears ironically were treated as the justified products of rational thought.

Writers such as Chiang Yee and Yung Wing attempted to take the mystique out of Chinese customs, habits and rituals by explaining the rationale and history behind these cultural practices, so revealing that beneath superficial cultural differences, Chinese and Americans are basically the same. Jade Snow Wong, in the introduction to her autobiography, *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, explains her intention: "At a time when nothing had been published from a female Chinese American perspective, I wrote with the purpose of creating better understanding of the Chinese culture on the part of Americans. That creed has been my guiding theme through the many turns of my life" (vii). Sau-ling Wong has characterized these texts as "guided Chinatown tours" which emphasize the continuities between middle-class Chinese and American cultures. Not only do these texts create and emphasize false commonalities, they place Chinese "superstition" and American racism on the same logical footing, assuming that if one can be explained away, so can the other. These apologetic texts assume a set of stable and fixed national, ethnic, and cultural differences. They argue not so much for assimilation but for cultural pluralism and mutual tolerance. The self in these narratives is treated as what Rob Wilson, in his discussion of American biography, argues is: "the self [as] the site and ground of affirmative socialization" (1991, 108). This affirmative self is, however, given over to normative values to an extent that cultural apology cannot provide the grounds for any kind of effective socialization. Sidonie Smith has written cogently about the universal subject of autobiography, with its normative masculine individuality, in her 1993 study of women’s autobiographical practices, *Subjectivity, Identity and the Body*. Of course this autobiographical subject is also normative as Occidental, white, European. This, Smith argues, is the sanctioned subject of autobiography, which enacts those experiences that are sanctioned for autobiographical representation. The universal self is "desocialized" (6), defined by an interior essence, separate from social roles and relations. Smith continues,

> Despite myriad specificities or contingencies of geography, history, culture, economic circumstances, etc., this self is conceived as persistently rational. As such, it is an ahistorical or transcendent phenomenon and remains autonomous and free. From this autonomous site the self comes to identify,
classify, and know the world in a monologic engagement that establishes individual consciousness as the center and origin of meaning (7).

It is ironic to realize in this context that early Chinese American autobiographies engage rationally with American racism and anti-Chinese sentiment. Reason is the tool of Chinese exclusion from the realm of the universal subject but still it is this of all the master’s tools that has been chosen to break down the structure of discrimination and exclusion. For the consolidation of this "universal subject" requires for its logical definition the exclusion of essentialized Others, the "abject" who are situated on the margins of the dominant culture. However, the alienation of the "abject" may be, Smith suggests, the very cause of their engagement with autobiographical practices, to "write back" or "talk back" (20) to the universal self that is the cause of their abjection. Writing in the earlier study, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography* (1987) about Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*, Smith argues that this text "exemplifies the potential for works from the marginalized to challenge the ideology of individualism …" (150). If individualism, the sovereignty of the "universal subject", is undermined by this ethnic subject, this racialized and gendered subject, then the subject of the entire autobiographical genre is placed in question. For the subject of autobiography is the autobiographical subject, the universal subject of Western phallogocentric thought.

**Autobiographical Conventions and Competences**

Alastair Fowler in *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (1983) explains the role of genre in the construction of meaning: "Traditional genres and modes, far from being classificatory devices, serve primarily to enable the reader to share types of meaning economically. … understanding is genre bound". Exactly how understanding can be shaped and determined by genre can be explained, at least in part, by the structuralist concept of interpretive "competence". In his now classic study, *Structuralist Poetics* (1975), Jonathan Culler explains how "The [literary] work has structure and meaning because it is read in a particular way, because these potential properties, latent in the object itself, are actualized by the theory of discourse actualized in the reading" (p. 114). So reading actualizes a theory of discourse that engages formal properties of the text to produce specific kinds of meaning. This "theory of discourse" is a shorthand for the situation of the writer of a literary work who uses language upon the assumption that readers will possess the necessary interpretive competence to understand that the text they are reading is literary – a poem for example – and not merely factual – not an entry in the telephone book. The conventions of autobiography, then, constitute the formal textual properties that are actualized in reading to produce a particular meaning structure that corresponds to some cultural encoding of subjectivity. The autobiographical subject is the construction of language used to actualize cultural and linguistic expectations of the "universal subject".

I want to explore how these generic conventions of autobiography have been racialized in the specific cultural terms of the ideologies of Orientalism and Occidentalism. I want to argue that such concepts as "Oriental" or "Chinese" or "American" or "Occidental" are subject to the same kind of interpretive competence as any other linguistic convention, and that this competence is engaged through generic conventions such as the conventions of autobiography. In this context Culler describes genre as "a conventional function of language, a particular relation to the world which serves as norm or expectation to guide the reader in his encounter with the text" (ibid, 136). It seems to me that it is by these generic means that the autobiography perpetuates what James Clifford has called "the myth of coherent personality" (Clifford, 1978, 44), what Sidonie Smith calls the "universal subject". The close
study of this subject or personality exposes the autobiographical "I" as "a speaking subject inscribed by multiple discourses, positioned in multiple subjectivities and situated in multiple historical contexts" (Betty Bergland, quoted by Wong, 1991, 160). Chinese American autobiographers engage our competence to understand what is signified by "Oriental" or "Occidental" by representing these as competing yet at times complementary discourses that are inscribed upon the hybrid Chinese American subject. The conventions of autobiography are racialized in this way as the narrative point of view switches from "Chinese" to "American" and back again. This unsettling of discourses is an unsettling of racial difference which is no longer perceived to be a rational reaction on the part of Anglo-Americans but is seen to be an effect of the discourses that "speak" all racialized subjects, be they Oriental or Occidental.

This approach leads the study of Chinese American autobiography away from the pronounced tendency, identified by Elaine Kim, of critics and readers to "define Asian American realities through literature", as she argues in the essay of that name. She describes how Asian identities are essentialized through literature, which is assumed to give privileged access to "real" Asian lives. Asian American literature is, she argues, assumed to be "authentic" like the subjectivities it represents. Of course autobiography is the genre that most openly invites the assumption that subjectivity and narrative are to be read as identical. The assumption is based upon discursive correspondences between the texts themselves and a set of Orientalist images that readers expect to find in Chinese American (and other Asian American) texts. This kind of reading is the product of Orientalism, an imposed construction by the Occident of its Oriental Other, in terms of which the Chinese-American community must negotiate its own hyphenated position: in relation to a putative homeland on the one hand and the mainstream culture on the other. What this means is that Chinese American autobiography is characterized by two dimensions of meaning: while the writer authenticates his or her life as an ethnic Chinese subject, he or she also uses aspects of the foundational American narrative to authenticate his or her experience in the American context – and so prove his or her Americanness. Rather than an unproblematic access to Chinese American realities, Chinese American autobiography is riven with competing discourses of cultural and racial difference, as writers seek at the same time to authenticate a Chinese ethnicity and also an American nationality or citizenship. The result is the questioning and subversion of hegemonic definitions of racial authenticity. These texts refuse ontological certainties; rather, they offer an unstable postmodern conception of subjectivity as written by cultural discourses of race (Chinese-American, Oriental-Occidental) rather than as writing these discourses. Here we have another explanation for the ambiguous titles of texts such as Father and Glorious Descendant or Fifth Chinese Daughter. These texts represent autobiographical subjects that are written by discourses of race. Similarly, the construction of narrative voice through the use of the third person, for example, refuses any simple ontological identification of narrator-protagonist with the subject(ivity) represented in the text.

Oriental/Occidental Points of View

Annette White-Parks has argued that Occidentalism, the rhetorical placing of the white Westerner as the "Other", serves not to mediate between cultures but to create in art, what she calls, "a visibility, a voice and, ultimately, an hegemony for Chinese North Americans … that they were denied in their lives" (White-Parks, 1995, 18). But the use of Occidentalism is rather more subtle than a tit-for-tat reversal of discriminatory Orientalist discourses. For example, Pardee Lowe’s representation of the Stock Market Crash of 1929 uses a careful modulation of Chinese and American perspectives. He begins by describing the losses
experienced by friends of his family and observes, from a "Chinese" perspective, how "bewildered Chinese capitalists, shorn of their apartment houses, businesses, and automobiles, wondered" (223). But he follows this description with an objective observation, delivered from the perspective of one who sees from outside the confines of the Chinese community, "Too much of Chinatown’s buying had been on a speculative and not an investment basis" (223). In this way, Pardee Lowe uses his ability to shift perspectives to underline the fact that he is both Chinese and American, Oriental and Occidental, and these two dimensions of his subjectivity cannot be separated from each other or from the discourses that speak them.

Pardee Lowe begins his autobiography with an account of his father’s life in America. However, the very first word of the text is "I": "I strongly suspect that my father’s life is a fraud" (3). In this way, Lowe asserts his ownership of this life story that is about to unfold even though his father is the ostensible subject of the narrative. Throughout the text, Lowe uses his father’s life to contextualize his own, enacting his own subjectivity in a dialectical interplay with that of his father. Both men characterize themselves as Chinese-Americans, though Lowe is able to represent himself as rather more American by emphasizing his father’s enduring connections with the ancestral village in Canton and, indeed, by opening the story with an account of his father’s transformation from a "sojourner" who intended to return to China after making his fortune in America, to an American-identified subject. Certainly events intervene to shape his life and sense of self in this way: his Chinese bride dies and, rather than return to China to marry again, he is fortunate to find an eligible woman in San Francisco’s Chinatown, and he acquires the formal education he could not afford in China by attending an English-language missionary school. This introduction to Lowe’s life story is narrated from an American point of view, as Lowe explains all that a Caucasian reader might find puzzling about his father’s early life in America. This perspective modulates into a curious Orientalism when Lowe describes his father’s refusal to wear a queue, even to his wedding: "It was a dirty, outlandish Manchu habit, derided by Americans and fit only for slaves. ‘And I am not a slave!’ father indignantly exclaimed" (13). This is curious because Lowe shifts from reported to direct speech in order to include his father in this Orientalist perspective. He shows his father to be American in his thoughts and speech. But in the following chapter, his father reveals his Occidentalist when, considering the names he should bestow upon his children, he rejects those names that could be rendered jokes in pidgin English: "He had had enough, he said, of Sing High, Sing Low, Wun Long Hop, Chng Chong, Long Song" (16) and Lowe reflects shortly after, "Father ... appreciated the importance of a good Barbarian name" (17). Lowe represents his father as fully aware of both Orientalist and Occidentalist stereotypes, categories that he as a Chinese-American continually negotiates. This distinction between Chinese and American is experienced by the youthful Lowe when he visits Chinatown where he and his siblings are addressed by their Chinese names and not the American names by which they are called at home: "it gave us a weird, uncomfortable feeling as though someone other than ourselves were being addressed" (19). This sense of alienation from themselves occurs in the interstices between Chinese and American perspectives upon experience. And from these two perspectives comes a double obligation, to prove worthy of both the Chinese and American names Lowe bears. He recalls how, as a schoolboy, he is reminded continually by his American teachers of the proud name he bears while he also observes, "It was a lifetime job, I was later to discover, to be a ‘Glorious Descendant’" (20).

Throughout the narrative Lowe alternates between Occidentalist and Orientalist perspectives. The San Francisco earthquake is described as the trembling of the "Earth Dragon" but this Orientalist description is balanced by Lowe’s account of the predicament of
the Chinese refugees which is described from an Occidentalist perspective informed by the expectation that they will be seen through the lens of anti-Chinese prejudice. This is a significant moment in the life of Lowe’s father and, by extension, his own life; as he remarks, "When the Earth Dragon trembled, a curtain fell upon the old Chinatown that Father and Mother knew and loved. A new world was being tossed into view, a world neither wholly Chinese nor wholly American – but both" (29). Lowe is a product of this hybrid world, as is his autobiography. Not only is the America inhabited by Lowe double, there is no simple concept of "Chineseness" or "Americanness" that prevails in this world. Lowe discovers this when he confesses to his father that he finds the seafaring life attractive. His father’s reaction is emphatic: "Only Tan people lived that sort of life, Father sniffed. The Tan people who infested the rivers and bays of South China in his mind were pariahs. They were no better than lepers. He didn’t intend his son to be one, he added with finality" (33). Again, Lowe shifts from direct to reported speech and back to direct speech in order to include both himself and his father in this Orientalist perspective. In this way he underlines the fact that there is no monolithic "Chineseness" that informs his subjectivity. He reinforces this point by describing the ways in which he and his father are perceived by Americans as being other than Chinese: "Somehow I could see we did not fit into their conception of a Chinese gentleman and son" (32). The culmination of the narrative in Lowe’s career success and his father’s acknowledgement of it is also a culturally hybrid or multiple triumph. His work for the Chinese civilian relief project and with the China Institute of Pacific Relations, and his public lectures at the San Francisco World’s Fair, earn his father’s approval. "It was a source of profound regret to him that I had not followed him into Sun Loy [the family business], but that was more than compensated for, he thought, by my services to the United States and China" (292).

In *Fifth Chinese Daughter* Jade Snow Wong also represents herself in terms of an indivisible hybrid of Oriental and Occidental perspectives. The figure of the father also dominates this narrative although Jade Snow Wong tells her own story in which her father is a player, rather than tell her own story through the character of the father as does Pardee Lowe. Yet she chooses to narrate her life story in the third person, suggesting a degree of self-alienation that is comparable to that generated by Pardee Lowe’s narrative strategy. Wong explains her choice in the preface to the first edition: "Although a ‘first person singular’ book, this story is written in the third person from Chinese habit. The submergence of the individual is literally practiced. In written Chinese, prose or poetry, the word ‘I’ almost never appears, but is understood. … even written in English, an ‘I’ book by a Chinese would seem outrageously immodest to anyone raised in the spirit of Chinese propriety" (xiii). The name that appears as author then appears to be alienated from the name of the protagonist, yet we know they are the same. Jade Snow Wong places in question from the very moment one opens her book the concept of a self-identical autobiographical subject. Indeed, the subject of her book is the evolving racial and gender consciousness of herself as subject.

The narrative begins with a description of the proximity of San Francisco’s Chinatown ("this China in the West") to Nob Hill and to Caucasian America. To emphasize the close connection that exists between the two, she describes how "[t]he same Pacific Ocean laves the shores of both worlds, a tangible link between old and new, past and present, Orient and Occident" (1). Jade Snow represents her own subjectivity as a similar link between the Orient and the Occident, as she internalizes the cultures of both. But she explains only what her younger self knows of each culture. In the early chapters, her instruction in Chinese propriety takes a negative form: she is punished when she does wrong but is never clearly told what is right and what is wrong. This failure to explain the motives of her parents’ actions underlines the Orientalist perspective from which this part of the narrative is told. Jade Snow’s parents appear cruel yet inscrutable as they punish their daughter for her lack of propriety. For
example, she tells of her confusion when she is reprimanded by her father for wearing slippers in the living room. He punishes her for immodestly wearing "bedroom attire" outside the bedroom. She reflects, "Such an interpretation should have occurred to her, but it had not. She could only remain silent" (83). From her "American" point of view she had failed to read the "Chinese" cultural encoding of this experience, which is her father’s point of view. Jade Snow represents the episode from an Orientalist point of view but this is the perspective she adopts as she submits to her punishment. She represents her self in this way as a Chinese American, no less Chinese than American. Similarly, the ritual performed by her grandmother after Jade Snow has been profoundly scared by her first sight of a live turkey is represented as being as mysterious as it is efficacious. The "scare" induced by the American turkey is exorcised by the ritual but it is from an Orientalist perspective that this episode is narrated.

As the text proceeds, the narrator is careful to provide a gloss for many of the details of everyday life among Jade Snow’s family. The exotic or Oriental elements of life are carefully detailed and explained. For example, she lists precisely of what her breakfast would consist: "fresh-cooked rice, boiled salt fish sprinkled with peanut oil and shredded ginger root, soup with mustard greens, and steamed preserved duck eggs with chopped pork" (18). This dimension of the narrative, the "autoethnographical" dimension, which includes detailed descriptions of learning to cook in the Chinese style and to shop for appropriate ingredients, culminates in Jade Snow’s description of the Chinese dinner she cooks while at college for a visiting group of musicians. This is an interesting episode because of the way in which the narrative point of view is complicated in the telling of this event. The episode of the musicians’ party must be read in contrast to the party given by Jade Snow’s employers, the Simpson family, for which she must cook an American style meal which is completed by a fancy meringue cake dessert. Jade Snow finds the preparation of this Western meal. Her first attempt to bake this special cake fails because she is unable to ask for advice from her employer, Mrs Simpson. Jade Snow is acutely aware of her role as a servant (which is ironic, given that she leaves home to work in order to gain independence) as she stands in her maid’s uniform paralyzed by her inability to interrupt the party to ask for help. The narrator adopts an Occidentalist perspective to portray the "tortuous nightmare" (124) that is Jade Snow’s experience of this American party. She concludes, "How she wishes she had been asked to cook a Chinese dinner instead of this interminable American meal, especially that cake!" (124). In contrast, the Chinese dinner prepared for the visiting musicians at Mills College is not so much an Oriental versus Western occasion but rather is represented as becoming a multicultural event, when a Russian musician finds a Russian samovar in the living room and determines to make tea to complete the meal. He uses Jade Snow’s mother’s cleaver to chop the wood to fire the samovar and the narrator comments upon how this cleaver: "split kindling to heat a Russian samovar, to help make Chinese tea for a party honoring a string quartet" (172).

The dominant Orientalist perspective of the early part of the narrative is unsettled as Jade Snow encounters alternative modes of propriety, which force a shift in the narrator’s point of view. For example, at school, Jade Snow is injured during a game of baseball and finds to her surprise that her teacher holds her close for comfort. Jade Snow cannot ever remember either of her parents behaving in this manner and for the first time the perspective from which she views the world of Anglo-America shifts. She reflects,

- she was now conscious that ‘foreign’ American ways were not only generally and vaguely different from their Chinese ways, but that they were specifically different, and the specific differences would involve a choice of action. Jade Snow had begun to compare American ways with those of her mother and father, and the comparison made her uncomfortable. (21)
It is through the "choice of action" that Jade Snow must continually make as she navigates her way through the Chinese world of her parents and the American world of her contemporaries that eventually gives expression to her hybrid Chinese-American subjectivity.

In the middle section of the story, when Jade Snow Wong attends college, she lives a divided, double, life, which is reflected in the shifts of narrative point of view from Oriental to Occidental perspectives. The conflict she experiences with her parents over the question of her independence is partially resolved in this doubleness. She reflects, "She no longer attempted to bring the new Western learning into her Oriental home. When she entered the Wong household, she slipped into her old pattern of withdrawal, and she performed her usual daughterly duties ... in the role of an obedient Chinese girl" (168). Jade Snow perceives her own family in Orientalist terms and herself, outside the home, in Occidental terms. At the end of the narrative, however, she has brought together in her developing sense of self a hybrid of Chinese and American cultures. This Chinese-American subjectivity is literally performed by Jade Snow, as she sets up her pottery business in a shop front window on Grant Avenue in Chinatown. She surprises the passers-by with her Chinese appearance: she wears her hair in traditional braids rather than a fashionable permanent wave, which surprises her spectators. And in conjunction with her pottery wheel, she is a spectacle that stops the traffic! The narrative point of view in these concluding pages of the text shifts dramatically from Orientalist to Occidentalist in a complex interplay of perspectives. Jade Snow scandalizes the Chinese community for her public disregard for propriety and for embracing Western values of independence and self-reliance:

Chinatown was agog. A woman in the window, her legs astride a potter’s wheel, her hair in braids, her hands perpetually messy with sticky California clay, her finished products such things as coolies used in China, the daughter of a conservative family, running a business alone – such a combination was sure to fail! (244)

And indeed, only Caucasians buy her ceramics but, as the narrator makes clear, a large part of her appeal is her Orientalism. The narrator tells how one day two Caucasian Army officers are overheard discussing how she operates the potter’s wheel. They agree that she must kick it with her feet and conclude "That seems unnecessarily primitive ... But that’s just the trouble, you can’t teach the Chinese anything new!" (245). What they cannot see, though it is in plain view, is the motor that drives the wheel. The Orientalist prejudice of these men prevents them from seeing what is literally before their very eyes. At the end of the narrative then, Jade Snow is able to identify and to manipulate the Orientalist and Occidentalist prejudices of the communities between which she moves. She occupies a privileged subject position as a "westernized Chinese" or "Orientalized American" which lends her a privileged narrative perspective upon her own life events.

*Father and Glorious Descendant* and *Fifth Chinese Daughter* both destabilize the concept of the autobiographical genre as a set of expectations or values, as cultural norms, that assume the existence of the universal or self-identical subject. In these texts, the generic conventions of autobiography have been racialized through the innovative use of narrative point of view. The manipulation of narrative perspective and the disruption of any easy identification of the narrator with the autobiographical subject challenges the interpretive competence of the reader by challenging hegemonic conceptions of "Oriental" and "Chinese" and "American" and "Occidental". This challenge is made through the specific cultural discourses of Orientalism and Occidentalism. Pardee Lowe and Jade Snow Wong change the discursive dynamics of Chinese-American life writing in order to write the dynamic and hybrid lives of Chinese-Americans.
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