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Journey from Cultural Assimilation to Acculturation: Negotiating Identity in Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese*

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Abstract

This article scrutinizes the enduring nature of Orientalist stereotypes, identity, the assimilation pressures experienced by Asian Americans, and the internalization of racist accounts in Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese*. It contends that Yang exemplifies how stereotypes restrain subjectivity and falsify the pursuit of genuine belonging in the interrelated storylines of Jin Wang, the Monkey King, and Chin-Kee. For this purpose, this article employs the standpoints of the scholars Cheryl Harris, Richard Delgado, Jean Stefancic, and Derrick Bell's Critical Race Theory (CRT) to critique racial power dynamics in the novel. Harris's perspective of 'whiteness as property,' Delgado and Stefancic's notion of 'counter-storytelling,' and Bell's viewpoint of the persistence of racism epitomize Yang's critique of systemic racism and the cultural irreconcilability existed in the American society. This article concludes that the racial hierarchies prevalent in American society dehumanize Asian American identities and emphasizes the necessity of recuperating cultural identity as a means of resistance and self-affirmation. It expects to encourage scholars to study young adult fiction as a way to address racial inequality, redefine belonging, and challenge the biases that propagate injustice globally.

Keywords: Belonging, cultural assimilation, identity, racial stereotypes, whiteness

Introduction

Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese* (2006), a graphic novel, weaves the interconnected narratives of Jin Wang, the Monkey King, and Danny to explore themes of race, identity, and cultural belonging within the context of Asian American experiences. Yang uncovers the widespread impact of racial prejudice and social preference for whiteness by blending three apparently unrelated stories of the novel. These accounts comprise the Monkey King's mythological journey, Jin Wang's practical problems, and Chin-Kee's sarcastic presence. This novel urges reader to reassess the formation of cultural identities within a system that downgrades non-white characteristics while privileging whiteness. Cathy Schlund-Vials asserts that Asian American literature "continues to

grapple with the dual constraints of visibility via stereotype and invisibility through erasure" (112). This article explores the importance of Asian American literature in revealing concealed assumptions within the American imagination. It exemplifies the dual issues of visibility through stereotypes and invisibility due to erasure, providing sufficient grounds for analyzing racial stereotypes and cultural integration through Critical Race Theory (CRT) in the selected novel.

CRT offers a critical lens to analyze systemic racism that functions in institutions and cultural fabrics. CRT scholars such as Cheryl Harris contend that "whiteness functions as a type of property that guarantees privilege and access" (1713), and Derrick Bell argues that "racism is a permanent aspect of American culture rather than an exception" (9). In *American Born Chinese*, Jin's desire to swap into Danny, a white boy, emphasizes the cultural capital of whiteness as a sign of acceptance and a rejection of his ethnic identity. This transformation illustrates how Cheryl Harris' idea of "whiteness as property" grants him social acceptance and mobility that his Chinese American identity does not.

Additionally, Yang's representation of Chin-Kee acts as a grotesque personification of orthodox Asian stereotypes. Deep-rooted prejudices that have influenced Asian American life in American society, like Chin-Kee's recall an exaggeration of demeanor and appearance for the "Yellow Peril" and the "perpetual foreigner" (Lee 4). Yang challenges readers to acknowledge the harmful enduring nature of racist stereotypes by purposefully portraying Chin-Kee as a parody of them. In this context, Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic clarify that "cultural images and stereotypes are among the most effective tools of racial subordination" (63). They affirm that cultural metaphors and typecasts constitute some of the most potent instruments of racial subjugation. Consequently, Yang's application of Chin-Kee acts as both caricature and assessment to unfold how Asian Americans encounter stigmatization in the circuit of American cultural perception.

Furthermore, through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT), this article employs counter-storytelling to amplify the voices of subaltern groups, challenging the dominant narratives upheld by American society. Here, Delgado underlines that counter-stories serve to "cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority" (44). Delgado intends that counter stories stand instrumental to raise the voice against so called myths supported by the majority. Corresponding to the counter story perspective, Jin's acceptance to his Chinese identity parallels to the struggle with Monkey King's own identity. Initially, Monkey King rejects his true nature of identity in search of his divine recognition. Later he recognizes a significance of authentic self just as Jin realizes an importance of cultural root. This figurative fiber upholds an importance of counter narrative for the process of assimilation and success in new domain. Yang affirms that any individual's cultural self-acceptance demonstrates a significant role to condemn the racial hierarchies and Asian Americans acknowledge the connections of various narratives for the route of assimilation.

This article investigates how young adult literature shapes readers' understanding of race, identity, and cultural belonging. *American Born Chinese* shapes these perceptions in heterogeneous cultures. Since the novels written by Yang, particularly the one under scrutiny here, have been taught immensely in schools and universities, Yang's work offers an important framework to examine an impact of racial stereotypes and whiteness in contemporary American society. The racial stereotypes shape the perceptions of minorities or racial groups by essentializing identity through cultural, linguistic, and physical markers, whereas whiteness reflects an invisible social norm that structures power, privilege, and representation. The examination of the novel provides an enriched understanding of the ways systematic racial stereotypes are embedded in institutions and society. This article reveals how literature exposes, criticizes, and challenges racial hierarchy systematically. The scope of the study reinforces the contested prevailing myths of assimilation and the invisibility of minority identities by employing opposing narratives. This research underscores the cultural and pedagogical value of Yang's narratives, focusing on racial stereotyping and the construction of whiteness.

Literature Review

Race, identity, and sense of belonging stand out as crucial issues in literary and cultural studies for the representation of minorities in America. Asian American literature addresses core issues faced by US minorities. It emerges as a significant field in the contemporary discourse to expose the tension between the hyper-visibility and the invisibility of Asian American identities. To unearth these crucial issues in Asian American Literature, CRT offers a powerful theoretical framework. CRT uncovers persistent and prevailing aspects of race and cultural texts. It interrogates Bell's perspectives on racism's permanence, Harris's whiteness as property, and the notion of counter-storytelling of Delgado and Stefancic. Young adult literature unfolds the concerns of adolescents like assimilation, belonging and disparity prevailing in the everyday activities. In this juncture of negotiations, Yang's graphic novel *American Born Chinese* scrutinizes the Asian American identities and racial caricatures by blending the issues of satire, allegory, and visual narrative.

CRT provides a valuable outline to inspect the racial hierarchies amalgamated into the texts of culture and race. The founding CRT scholars Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, and Jean Stefancic emphasize that racism is "ordinary, not aberrational and deep-seated in American culture" (7). They state that American culture systematically intersects with issues of race. CRT accentuates cultural representation as a venue to resist and reproduce systematic injustices prevailing in society. To acknowledge and evaluate racial perspectives and challenges of assimilation, this study incorporates the key ideas of Bell about race, Harris's interpretation of "whiteness as property," and the function of counter-storytelling as theoretical concepts. Along with offering alternate narratives of racial identity and belonging, these reflections provide interpretative frameworks for comprehending the primary text as a critique of the enduring nature of stereotypes.

Academics of the Asian American studies have noted that Asian Americans being invisible as individuals but hyper-visible through stereotypes for a long time. Asian Americans, according to Robert G. Lee have been historically characterized by "a repertoire of images" including the "model minority," the "perpetual foreigner," and the "Yellow Peril" (8). These representations both exclude Asian Americans from the national narrative and exploit their presence to maintain racial hierarchies, ultimately reducing them to exaggerated portrayals. In continuing this conversation, Cathy Schlund-Vials points out that Asian American literature frequently faces "the double bind of visibility through stereotype and invisibility through erasure" (112). Yang's character Chin-Kee aggressively demonstrates the visibility of racial hierarchies and the invisibility of the Asian American identities.

Graphic novels have become increasingly significant in the discussion of race and identity by blending textual and visual storytelling. Hillary Chute acknowledges that comics are particularly well-suited to "layer representation and critique because they blend text and image in ways that subvert linear narratives" (452). Chute means that graphic novels subvert linear narratives of race and identity. The metamorphosis of Jin into Danny visually enacts the assimilationist pressures faced by Asian Americans. Yang employs the visual grotesqueness of Chin-Kee to parody racial caricatures in the novel. Frederick Luis Aldama argues that comics offer a "critical space to reimagine identity" (15). The comics offer underrepresented voices a platform to challenge prevailing cultural narratives. CRT stresses counter-storytelling as a means of foregrounding marginalized expressions and perspectives. In the same way, the graphic novel format mostly underlines the unheard notions and perspectives.

Specifically, young adult literature has emerged as a vital space for navigating questions of race, identity, and belonging. Roberta Seelinger Trites explicates that young adult texts often focus on "the adolescent's negotiation of power within social institutions" (3). Racialized youths frequently struggle with internalized oppression, racism, and cultural assimilation as part of this negotiation. Min Hyong Song notes that American young adult fiction consistently reveals "the subtle, often invisible

ways racism structures everyday life" (57). The racism structures are best illustrated by Yang's novel, which demonstrates how racism is both internalized and externalized, influencing Jin's wish to be white like Danny.

Echoing a story of self-acceptance as well as a critique of stereotypes on *American Born Chinese*, Jen-Scot P. Lee admits that Yang's usage of Chin-Kee "both reproduces and destabilizes racial caricatures, making readers face the fact that they still exist in American society" (89). She means that racial caricatures still exist in American society by reproducing and destabilizing them. Sophia Tatiana Sarigianides also emphasizes how the text provides "an allegory of racial formation" (64), presenting how societal expectations of integration influence Asian American identity. These readings collectively position Yang's work as a foundational book in Asian American and young adult studies by demonstrating how graphic novels can critically engage with structural racism. While also exposing the construction of whiteness as a social construct, this article uses CRT to contend that *American Born Chinese* challenges racial stereotypes through allegorical narrative.

Enumerating reflections about stereotypes, Melissa Schieble claims that "Chin-Kee's character embodies imagery from multiple historic and present-day categorizes" (48). Schieble further adds that "Cousin Chin-Kee is a merging of labels directed at Asians and Asian Americans over centuries" (47). Elaborating on the concepts, Schieble elucidates that "*American Born Chinese* is one work of Asian American literature that offers rich and academically rigorous opportunities for cultivating students, to be racially literate, active, and dynamic participants in a democratic society" (49). It signifies that *American Born Chinese* is a major work of American literature that offers considerable and intellectually rigorous opportunities for enhancing students' racial literacy, empowering them to be active and involved participants in a democratic society.

Despite having previous research on *American Born Chinese* regarding stereotypes, identity formation, and narrative techniques, substantial deficiencies persist concerning the text's explicit incorporation into the framework of CRT. The scholars have anticipated novel's comprehensive analysis on assimilation, Asian American portrayal, and educational applications in multicultural classrooms. Fewer studies, nevertheless, examine how Yang's narrative actively creates and challenges whiteness as a racialized attribute and how the novel uses counter-storytelling to contest structural racial hierarchies. Specifically, there is a dearth of consistent discussion of CRT ideas like Harris's articulation of whiteness as property in connection to this work, Delgado and Stefancic's theory of counter-storytelling, and Bell's permanence of racism. In order to bridge this gap, the present article examines *American Born Chinese* through the lens of CRT. In addition to challenging racial stereotypes, it exhibits how whiteness serves as a normative ideal that shapes assimilationist demands in young adult fiction.

Theoretical Framework

This article employs Critical Race Theory as its primary theoretical framework to analyze Yang's *American Born Chinese* from the perspectives of cultural assimilation, acculturation, and identity. CRT, which arose from legal studies in the 1970s and 1980s, questioned the notion that systematic racism could be eradicated by civil rights laws alone. As a founding member of CRT, Derrick Bell claims that racism is "a permanent, indelible component of American life" (9). This viewpoint moves the analysis of race away from discrete instances of discrimination and toward a look at the systemic and structural aspects of inequality. CRT unfolds the condition of how literature mirrors and defies the social system that maintains racial hierarchies.

Another CRT theorist Cheryl Harris underlines how racial identity can confer systematic advantages and privileges. Harris develops the notion of whiteness as a form of social and legal property. She argues that whiteness "conveys the absolute right to exclude and grants social and economic advantages that are not available to people of color" (1713). She emphasizes that being white appears to ensure social acceptance and belonging. These issues are echoed in *American Born Chinese* when Jin wishes to transform into a white boy. The transformation of Jin reflects how

whiteness is constructed as a cultural property in American society. Underlining this perspective of whiteness, this research scans the efforts made by Yang to challenge the space provided to whiteness character. It further examines detrimental impacts on Asian American identity formation.

Correspondingly, Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic present counter storytelling to a key CRT idea. They define that counter story telling is as "a method of telling the stories of those whose experiences are not often told" (44). According to them, the main intend of counter stories is to defy prevailing narratives that construct identities based on race. The counter narratives are reflected in the novel when Jin embraces cultural identity and the Monkey King's mythological journey happens. This concept challenges the context and logic for assimilation in the main stream American society. Yang provides unconventional frameworks of identity and assesses the continued use of racial caricatures by juxtaposing counter stories with the satirical character Chin-Kee.

Drawing on Derrick Bell's assertion that racism is "a permanent, indelible component of American life" (9), the article examines how Jin's experiences of marginalization and stereotyping reflect broader structural inequalities rather than isolated acts of discrimination. Building on Cheryl Harris's notion of whiteness as a form of social and legal property, Jin's desire to transform into a white character is analyzed as evidence of the cultural and symbolic advantages that whiteness confers, as well as the exclusion it enforces on Asian Americans. Finally, the article applies CRT's emphasis on counter-storytelling to highlight how Yang amplifies marginalized Asian American perspectives, using narrative strategies and mythological elements to contest dominant racial scripts. Together, these concepts are operationalized to demonstrate how the text both mirrors and challenges social structures that maintain racial hierarchies, revealing the complexities of assimilation, identity, and resistance in contemporary American society.

CRT enables a deeper examination that moves beyond surface level readings of stereotype and assimilation. This application leads toward an understanding of how racial hierarchies are constructed, maintained, and resisted in literature. CRT not only offers a framework to examine the systematic aspect of racism, it also underlines the role of narrative to illuminate and disrupt race-based myths. Employing CRT as a theoretical lens contributes to the broader discussions of race in young adult literature. Moreover, this article endorses the role of graphic novel to critique whiteness and racial injustice prevailing in American society.

Deconstructing Racial Stereotypes and the Illusion of Whiteness: An Analysis

Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese* offers a convincing examination of Asian American identity, racial stereotypes, and the pressures of cultural assimilation in contemporary American society. Through the intertwined narratives of Jin Wang, the Monkey King, and the exaggerated figure of Chin-Kee, Yang uncovers the persistence of systemic racism and the social and psychological costs of aspiring to whiteness. The novel utilizes satire, allegory, and visual exaggeration to critique long-standing anti-Asian stereotypes, revealing how popular culture and educational settings reinforce racial hierarchies while simultaneously shaping internalized perceptions of identity among Asian Americans. Drawing on Critical Race Theory (CRT), this article studies the novel through three key lenses: the permanence of systemic racism, the concept of whiteness as property, and the power of counter-storytelling to amplify marginalized perspectives. By analyzing Yang's strategic use of humor, metaphor, and linked storytelling, this article demonstrates how *American Born Chinese* not only critiques racial prejudice and the myth of assimilation but also reclaims narrative space for Asian American voices, underlining young adult literature's potential to resist dominant cultural ideologies and foster more inclusive understandings of identity, belonging, and empowerment.

American Born Chinese portrays multiple contexts as hideous representation of long standing anti-Chinese stereotypes. Among them, the representation of Chin-Kee stands most striking anti-Chinese element in the text. In the same vein, Robert G. Lee explicates that "Chin-Kee's exaggerated

accent, cartoonish demeanor, and exaggerated actions are reminiscent of the perpetual foreigner stereotype, which portrays Asian Americans as outsiders irrespective of their citizenship, cultural proficiency, or level of assimilation" (4). Lee believes the imitation of Chin-Kee reflects the practice of assimilation in American cultural arena. The novelist acknowledges the continuing presence of racist stereotypes in American popular culture and media. Chin-Kee functions as a thoughtful aggravation. He represents the accumulated legacy of racial caricatures that stretch from nineteenth century "yellow peril" propaganda to modern Hollywood stereotypes. Instead of letting these images remain passive or hidden, Yang heightens these concerns to hideous level by revealing their spiteful influence on how Asian Americans view themselves and how they are viewed by others. Yang further employs premeditated intensification and exaggeration to build the character of Chin-Kee. Chin-Kee functions as both satire and critique, using the technique of exaggeration. He unfurls diverse milieus of racism for identity formation. The activities of Chin-Kee illuminates how external stereotypes can produce internalized shame, guilt, and alienation. Doing so, this interpretation elucidates how Chin-Kee acts as a critical lens to unfold the psychological effects of systematic racism and racial hierarchies on minorities in the American society.

Yang projects Chin-Kee as a grotesque misrepresentation to unfold satire. This misrepresentation divulges how popular culture and comedy can strengthen racial inequality under the guise of entertainment. When Chin-Kee appears firstly, then he loudly proclaims, "HARRO EVELYBODY!!" (49), displaying grossly exaggerated features such as buck teeth and slanted eyes. Associating with this idea, Derrick Bell affirms that "racism is an integral, permanent, and indestructible component of this society" (ix). This narrative of Yang illustrates visual effect of racism by applying Chin-Kee to represent how racial prejudice undergoes between generations. Further Chin-Kee answers every question in the classroom scene with flawless knowledge. He speaks in exaggerated "accented English" (116) but all the people present in the classroom laugh loudly. He feels embarrassed that highlights the persistence of racial stereotypes in educational and social context. Likewise, Yang underlines the unavoidable battle between racial sidelining and cultural acclimatization by projecting visual and psychological prejudices in his graphic novel. He claims that Asian Americans are still viewed through the prism of mimicked variance. Chin-Kee further underlines how racial stereotypes are internalized and shape identity of Asian Americans when Jin articulates, "I only wanted to remind you of who you are" (214). The revelation of Chin-Kee suggests the presence of institutional racism and racist rhetoric in contemporary American society. Extending racial stereotypes, Yang projects vividly how whiteness stands as an asset within American cultural frameworks. He dissects the wish of Jin Wang to transform into the white adolescent Danny as a dominance of whiteness. As Harris validates that "being white has historically served as a form of property, securing and conferring benefits and when he states that I would be happier if I were someone else" (198). Here, Harris confirms that the whiteness grants social and cultural privileges whereas nonwhite does not have such privileges. As an Asian American boy, Jin does not enjoy the same rights as the white Danny experiences. Racial humiliation becomes a daily reality in the American cultural context. In the novel, Jin is teased with remarks such as "You are in America. Speak English" (30) to underline the supremacy of whiteness.

In contrast, Danny being white receives effortless approval, validation, and social visibility as presented in the novel. His presence is never questioned in the society. This stark disparity between Jin and Danny elucidates the prominence of whiteness and something to be "possessed" in order to secure belonging and identity in the milieu American society. However, Yang ultimately reveals the futility of pursuit for obtaining proper judgment and validity for Asian Americans. Even after transformation of Jin into Danny, Jin grapples with the deeper alienation and emotional dislocation. Then, Jin resents that, "I don't know who I am anymore" (212). It implies that the given narrative thus validates that aspiring to whiteness cannot erase racial difference. Instead, it intensifies trauma and shows the sense of fractured identity.

Echoing the problem of cultural assimilation, racial hierarchies exert psychological cruelty by means of compelling marginalized individuals to forsake their heritage in exchange for conditional acceptance. Coining this idea, Jin's desire to abandon his Chinese identity showcases how Asian Americans experience psychological pressure for cultural assimilation. To assimilate himself, Jin retorts that "I don't want to be Chinese anymore" (179) to be like Americans. Here he expresses his desire to be American in the cost of abandoning his root. However, he confronts with the exclusion in the American cultural social norms. As Derrick Bell asserts that "racism is a permanent component of American life" (ix). It implies how racial stereotypes navigate constantly in American life. Cheryl Harris argues that whiteness operates historically as "property," granting power and protection only to those who can claim it (1713). The whiteness prevails everywhere as a power and property. Jin looks like white, however, emotional disorientation penetrates immensely. Then he evokes that "I don't know who I am anymore" (212). He does not identify himself in a new circumstance. Thus, Yang critiques the myth of assimilation where the privilege associated with whiteness comes only through self-erasure and complicity in a society characterized by racial inequality.

Besides difficulties faced by Jin in the assimilation process, Yang also presents the narrative of the Monkey King to illustrate more about structural pressures and internalized conflicts arising in the dominant culture during his assimilation attempts. Monkey King suppresses his true nature in an effort to gain recognition among the celestial deities of the white American culture. In the opening episodes, the Monkey King arrives at the heavenly banquet only to be dismissed because "you may be a king-but you are still a monkey" (22). He feels humiliated, he spends for years mastering the "Twelve Transformations" and "Four Major Disciplines of Kung Fu" (28) in order to transcend what he perceives as a shameful identity. As Richard Delgado considers "counter-storytelling technique as the means of overturning prevailing cultural beliefs by emphasizing underrepresented viewpoints" (44). It challenges and disrupts the beliefs of the dominant culture. The Monkey King accept his own true self and acknowledges that "I would rather be who I am" (141). Such narratives collectively underscore the possibility of resisting assimilationist demands.

Extending the aspects of racial hierarchies and cultural assimilation, Cathy Schlund-Vials states that Asian American narratives often confront "the double bind of visibility through stereotype and invisibility through erasure" (112). The Monkey King initially embodies the paradox of assimilation. He endeavors to evade marginalization by assimilating to phenomenon of the divine standards of the dominant culture. However, he does not obtain this conformity of divine standards. He only regains his self –erasure. It elucidates that identity does not only possess liability but also reframes a source of empowerment. By juxtaposing the Monkey King's journey with Jin's transformation into Danny, Yang critiques the assimilationist approach to diasporic identity. The novel emphasizes that freedom does not restrain within a framework of adopting "marks of whiteness" (10) but with the assimilation of cultural heritage. Thus, it underscores the counter story telling technique to resist systematic racial hierarchies.

American Born Chinese embodies metaphor and humor to challenge racial inequalities. They build the narrative of novel that is remarkably strong and contextual to dissect the racial stereotypes and cultural assimilation. In the same vein, Chin-Kee's hyperbolic pronunciation, invasive behavior and performative laughter of "HARRO AMELLICA!" (48) acts as a satirical critique of the racist stereotypes prevalent in the Asian American community. Tuning with it, Federick Luis Aldama argues that "comics can visually amplify racial ideologies, making their operations visible on the page" (67). Yang employs the comical behavior and amplification to sort out absurd extremes of the characters of the novel. He believes that racial stereotypes are deliberately in existence in media, film, and everyday discourse. Jin discloses his frustration by stating, "I wish he was not my cousin" (53) when Chin-Kee emerges at his school. It reveals that how metaphor and humor expose deeply internalized racism, self-perception and the desire to dissociate from one's cultural roots.

Similarly, the mythical journey of the Monkey King parallels with the struggle for self-acceptance in the face of assimilationist pressures. Subsequently, he does not get entry into the heavenly banquet because he is a “monkey” (22). He spends a long time to “transcend his form” (30). Correspondingly, Cathy Schlund-Vilas calls “the double bind of racial hypervisibility and cultural erasure” (112) the tools for cultural assimilation pressures. The Monkey King finally admits that he was never truly ashamed of being monkey, rather, he discloses that “he was ashamed of himself” (138). This narrative illustrates that identity stands in the self-recognition rather than value systems imposed by dominant culture.

Together, these narrative techniques align with Critical Race Theory's emphasis on counter-story telling. Delgado and Stefancic delineate the narrative techniques as the method of “challenging dominant assumptions by foregrounding marginalized experiences” (44). In the novel, the use of visual satire and allegorical storytelling disrupts the normalized logics of racial hierarchy. It reinforces the recognition of structural injustice and reimagine identity beyond the boundaries of assimilation. In this context, *American Born Chinese* critiques racial stereotypes and negotiates for cultural assimilation.

Delgado and Stefancic validate that Yang's story interlinks closely with CRT's goal of “understanding how a regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained” (7). *American Born Chinese* utilizes comedy, allegory, and linked storytelling to critique the roles of stereotypes in sustaining white supremacy. It also highlights the inventive ways how they can be subverted. Yang reclaims narrative space for Asian American voices in his graphic novel. He also claims the space for Asian American by contrasting affirming stories of cultural identity with the terrible realities of racism to critique the system of exclusion. Utilizing these narrative techniques, this article draws the conclusion about young adult fiction's role as a place of resistance and empowerment to challenge racial hierarchies and unlock wider space for more inclusive possibilities of identity, belonging and assimilation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this article, employing Critical Race Theory (CRT) as its primary analytical framework, has examined the complexities of racial hierarchy, assimilation, and the supremacy of whiteness in American society as represented in *American Born Chinese*. By analyzing the novel's three interwoven narrative strands—the Monkey King's allegorical journey, Jin Wang's painful transformation into Danny, and Chin-Kee's satirical embodiment of racial caricature—this study demonstrates how Yang exposes the structural forces that sustain racial inequality. The novel reveals that Jin's identity crisis is not merely an individual adolescent struggle but a manifestation of broader institutionalized racism. The privileging of whiteness operates as a systemic force that displaces marginalized identities, compelling characters like Jin to internalize self-doubt and cultural shame. Furthermore, this study highlights the psychological consequences of internalized racism, particularly the self-rejection and suppression of cultural heritage that accompany assimilationist pressures. Jin's transformation into a white persona underscores the emotional fragmentation and alienation produced by the pursuit of socially sanctioned belonging. However, Yang does not end with despair. Through the Monkey King's eventual acceptance of his true form and Jin's reconciliation with his Chinese identity, the novel offers a vision of recovery grounded in cultural affirmation. These moments function not simply as personal resolutions but as collective declarations that challenge dominant racial narratives.

The counter-narrative structure of the novel resists assimilationist ideology by affirming ethnic identity as a source of empowerment rather than deficiency. In doing so, Yang redefines belonging as a dialogic and negotiated process rather than one achieved through self-erasure. The recovery of cultural roots becomes an act of resistance against the regime of whiteness as property and the permanence of racial hierarchy described by CRT scholars.

Finally, *American Born Chinese* illustrates the capacity of young adult literature to engage deeply with systemic injustice. Through satire, allegory, and visual storytelling, Yang dismantles the illusion of whiteness as a universal norm and critiques the racial stereotypes that structure American cultural consciousness. The novel reframes identity formation not as assimilation into dominant norms but as acculturation—an adaptive, self-aware, and resistant process that enables marginalized subjects to negotiate belonging without surrendering cultural integrity. In this way, Yang's work stands as both a literary intervention and a political statement, expanding the possibilities for more inclusive understandings of identity and community in a racially stratified society.

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