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## **Situating the Essential Alien: Sui Sin Far's Depiction of Chinese-White Marriage and the Exclusionary Logic of Citizenship**

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MFS Modern Fiction Studies, Volume 54, Number 4, Winter 2008,  
pp. 654-688 (Article)

Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press  
DOI: [10.1353/mfs.0.1561](https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.0.1561)



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**Jane Hwang Degenhardt**

So what is an American?

—Walter Benn Michaels, *Our America* (1995)

There is a race so different from our own that we do not permit those belonging to it to become citizens of the United States. Persons belonging to it are, with few exceptions, absolutely excluded from our country. I allude to the Chinese race.

—Justice John Marshall Harlan, *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896)

My first epigraph from Walter Benn Michaels may seem an unlikely way to open a discussion of Sui Sin Far's Chinese characters given that *Our America* does not consider Chinese immigrants in its analysis of early-twentieth-century nativism.<sup>1</sup> Yet as my second epigraph suggests, efforts to exclude Chinese immigrants, as well as

their projection into the American cultural and literary imagination, were crucial to the project of defining "Americanness" in the decades surrounding the turn of the century. The absolute alienness of the Chinese provided a secure and certain boundary of difference at this critical juncture, when boundaries of inclusion were being renegotiated by efforts to empower women and blacks under Progressive and post-Reconstruction reform.<sup>2</sup> In particular, Chinese exclusion played a crucial role in constructing the category of national citizenship. Shaped in part by the influences of race and gender reform movements, an emerging rhetoric of citizenship sought to redraw the boundary of American inclusion by privileging national identity.<sup>3</sup> In extending citizenship rights to African Americans, the Reconstruction amendments of the late nineteenth century attempted to override racial exclusion by privileging native birth and national over state citizenship.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, in the early twentieth century, Progressive reformers sought to override gender discrimination by appealing to the privileges of citizenship in order to defend women's right to vote. Under this shifting model of American identity, the figure of the Chinese immigrant crucially defined the limit of exclusion.

This essay examines how four stories by Sui Sin Far (published individually between 1900 and 1910 and then together as part of the 1912 collection, *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*) employ strategies of gender to renegotiate the position of the Chinese immigrant in relation to the exclusionary logic of national citizenship. These strategies of gender include Sui Sin Far's depiction of Chinese masculinity and white womanhood in relation to one another, and in relation to specific anxieties about racial and gender equality that national citizenship disingenuously elides. Specifically, I examine how Sui Sin Far's representation of Chinese-white marriage challenges the logic of citizenship by responding in a particular way to white anxieties about both Chinese immigration and Progressive politics.

I turn first to "The Story of One White Woman Who Married a Chinese" and its sequel, "Her Chinese Husband," two stories that foreground a marriage between a white woman and a Chinese immigrant. In representing race and gender as mutually constitutive, rather than discrete or additive, these stories equate "Chineseness" with gender roles informed by a patriarchal family model. At the same time they destabilize any pure notion of manhood or womanhood. By associating Chinese masculinity with gentle but firm patriarchal control, Sui Sin Far contests the stereotype of the deviant and threatening Chinese bachelor and simultaneously taps into anxieties associated with the empowerment of blacks and women under post-Reconstruction and Progressive-era politics. As Sandra Gunning has argued, the increased threats of black male sexuality and black-white miscegenation at

the turn of the century bore a direct relationship to anxieties raised by Progressive reform.<sup>5</sup> Using the site of Chinese-white marriage to re-stabilize the patriarchal family structure in opposition to Progressive reform, "The Story of One White Woman" and "Her Chinese Husband" throw into relief the more deeply entrenched cultural fear of black-white miscegenation (and its subtext of black-white rape), which assumed a level of cultural hysteria in the wake of the Reform movement. In other words, Sui Sin Far strategically orients her stories against Progressive gender roles in order to situate the Chinaman's *national* difference in opposition to the *racial* threat created by Progressivism's perceived endangerment of white female sexuality. Invoking patriarchal values as a vestige of authentic Americanness that is being eroded by social Progressivism, her stories fantasize the Chinese immigrant as a recuperative agent and protector of the debilitated white family.

As I will discuss, another story that uses similar gender strategies to exploit assumptions about American authenticity is "The Inferior Woman," which constructs an analogy between the immigrant Chinaman and the self-made, working class woman who is shunned by the social elitism of Progressive activists. This story uses the leveler of class to argue that both of these "inferior" figures are in fact more authentic than the "superior" Americans who are propped up by their labor. However, in ultimately validating the Chinese immigrant's desire for the kind of native privilege that need not prove its authenticity, the story's conclusion unexpectedly undermines its own move to align Chinese and anti-Progressive interests. Its ironic undoing of the analogy between the self-made Chinaman and the "inferior woman" exposes the underlying racism that ultimately separates the Chinese immigrant from the white, working class woman. A similar use of irony is evident in the final story I discuss, "The Smuggling of Tie Co." In romanticizing the American border crossing of a young Chinese man who unexpectedly turns out to be a cross-dressed woman, the story poignantly illustrates a strategy of defusing Chinese masculinity in order to "smuggle" him across a forbidden national border. Moreover, in rewriting the narrative of illegal border crossing as a heterosexual romance, the story ironically points up the legal realities that excluded Chinese families from entering the US and, in turn, prevented the birth of children who could stake a claim to US citizenship.

Whereas access to citizenship was less relevant for European immigrants, it was the principal issue with regard to the Chinese, who were the only immigrants barred by law and name from US citizenship in the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Although the Naturalization Act of 1870 attempted to resolve the conflict between the Naturalization Law of 1790 and the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Amendments by extending naturalization to

those of African descent, it did not extend the same right to Chinese immigrants. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (as well as those of 1884, 1886, and 1888) explicitly rendered the Chinese ineligible for citizenship, declaring "that hereafter no State court or court of the United States shall admit Chinese to citizenship; and all laws in conflict with this act are hereby repealed."<sup>7</sup> The Chinese did not obtain the legal right to naturalize until the repeal acts of 1943–52. While the 1898 decision of *US v. Wong Kim Ark* allowed those of Chinese descent to claim US citizenship by native birth, the legacy of Chinese exclusion, and in particular the 1875 Page Act's restriction on Chinese women, largely preempted such claims.

As the historical work of Stuart Miller and Alexander Saxton demonstrates, Chinese exclusion quickly shifted from a local to a national issue in the late nineteenth century because of its usefulness to political parties and labor unions as well as its easy (though problematic) conflation with attempts to define the citizenship rights of African Americans.<sup>8</sup> In many ways, as Gabriel Chin demonstrates, Chinese exclusion had the same kinds of effects as race-based domestic discrimination. Hoang Gia Phan reminds us, however, of how the racialization of Chinese immigrants was rooted in particular economic concerns.<sup>9</sup> Unlike more abstract conceptual categories such as "family" or "personhood"—terms privileged by Michaels and Pricilla Wald in their influential works on American nativism—the distinction marked by citizenship both asserted and derived its authority through the law.<sup>10</sup> In the wake of the Civil War and the Fourteenth Amendment, federal citizenship superceded the authority of state citizenship in authorizing basic rights and privileges. Its utility as a conceptual category was enhanced by its broad application in defining the rights of many racialized groups (including white immigrant populations, Native Americans, Mexicans, and African Americans) as well as by the built-in limitations of its scope (by contrast, "personhood" and "family" did not explicitly imply a national boundary). I am particularly interested in how the dual application of citizenship in defining the rights of Chinese and African Americans did not generally manifest itself in formulations that conflated the two groups, but rather in formulations that defined the rights of one at the expense of the other, betraying how race and citizenship functioned at the turn of the century as competing categories for conceptualizing the essence of Americanness.<sup>11</sup>

In order to offer a specific illustration of how citizenship rights were negotiated in relation to conditions of race and native birth, I briefly examine the majority and dissenting opinions in the 1896 landmark case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. By analyzing John Marshall Harlan's dissent, in particular, as an articulation of citizenship rights

on which Reconstruction and Progressive politics relied, I expose the ways in which this model of citizenship relied in turn on the exclusion of Chinese immigrants. The increasing authority of citizenship as a category that could encompass racial and gender differences helps us to understand Sui Sin Far's strategic representations of Chinese masculinity and Chinese-white marriage. On the one hand, Sui Sin Far's positioning of the Chinese husband in opposition to black masculinity manipulates the opposition between national and racial identities in favor of the Chinese by pointing up the racial threat of black male sexuality and figuring the desexualized, patriarchal Chinese husband as protector to white womanhood. But, on the other hand, her stories also contest the emerging logic of American identity that attempted to situate racial and national exclusion on opposite sides of a hinge—a binary that critics such as Ian Hanley Lopez and Mae Ngai have persuasively shown to be disingenuous.<sup>12</sup> Ultimately, Sui Sin Far's stories argue not for Chinese inclusion, but instead reveal how the very effort to articulate a "color-blind" national identity, vis-à-vis the legal privileges of citizenship, was itself premised on a logic of racial exclusion (*Plessy v. Ferguson* 57).<sup>13</sup> What is more, Sui Sin Far exposes the mutual interdependence of racial and national logics in constituting the insuperable difference that excludes Chinese immigrants from becoming "American." Her depiction of the racism that confronts Chinese-white marriage and its mixed-race offspring reveals how racial and national identity were inextricably bound together with respect to the Chinese—the outward racial difference always signaling an alien national identity. Thus, she exposes the hidden links between racial and national exclusion as well as the hypocrisy of a legal rationale that presumed to distinguish the two in the name of a more universal access to citizenship.

### **Miscegenation with a Difference: "The Story of One White Woman Who Married a Chinese"**

"The Story of One White Woman" presents the perspective of a white woman who leaves her emotionally abusive white husband and marries a Chinese man who rescues her from destitution. In illustrating the advantages of marrying a Chinese man over a white one, the narrator, Minnie Carson, implicitly frames their differences around Progressive politics.<sup>14</sup> As I have suggested, this orientation positions the Chinese man against anxieties about white emasculation at the turn of the century and the threatened empowerment of black men and white women that fueled these anxieties. Minnie's white husband, James, aspires to write a book on social reform and resents Minnie for being "frivolous" and "behind the times" in wanting

to stay home and raise their child ("Story" 67, 70). Minnie describes her white husband and the root of their conflict as follows:

He was an omnivorous reader of socialistic and new-thought literature. Woman suffrage was one of his particular hobbies. Whenever I had a magazine around he would pick it up and read aloud to me the columns of advice to women who were ambitious to become comrades to men and walk shoulder to shoulder with their brothers. Once I ventured to remark that much as I admired a column of men keeping step together, yet men and women thus ranked would, to my mind, make a very unbeautiful and disorderly spectacle. He frowned and answered that I did not understand him. (67)

Minnie's objection to the "very unbeautiful and disorderly spectacle" of women walking "shoulder to shoulder with their brothers" is not intended to disparage her character, but to elicit nostalgia for a lost femininity that desired patriarchal subordination. The story establishes a clear position against Progressive politics by evoking compassion for Minnie's self-flagellation at being too "narrow-minded" and by villainizing and emasculating her white husband. When Minnie confides to a female friend about her inability to be the woman her husband desires, we are meant to perceive the superior value in the woman she already is: "'Oh,' I cried, 'I am a narrow-minded woman. All I care for is for my husband to love me and be kind to me, for life to be pleasant and easy, and to be able to help a wee bit the poor and sick around me'" (68). In contrast to James, Minnie's new Chinese husband, Liu Kanghi, is presented as someone who will nurture Minnie's old-fashioned femininity and prevent its loss or devaluation. Liu Kanghi rescues her from the pressures of women's reform and resituates her in a patriarchal family structure. Prior to marrying her, he provides a home for Minnie and her child with his extended Chinese family and arranges a type of employment (embroidery) that she can perform without leaving the domestic space.

At the same time that it romanticizes old fashioned femininity, "The Story of One White Woman" idealizes a kind of masculinity that is authoritative and fatherly, yet gentle rather than brutish. The opposition between James and Liu Kanghi figures largely as an opposition between failed and corrective masculinity. Liu Kanghi's embodiment of the lost Victorian ideals of masculinity and patriarchal control is situated firmly against the politics of Progressive reform that would seek to make men and women equally "ranked" (67). The story suggests the white husband's very investment in women's issues lies in his misguided assumption that a socially reformed wife will

enhance his own manhood. Chastising Minnie for her lack of desire and inability to work outside of the home, James says, "You weren't built for anything but taking care of kids. Gee! But there's a woman at our place who has a head for figures that makes her worth over a hundred dollars a month. Her husband would have a chance to develop himself" (68). Contrary to his assumptions, James's attempt to initiate a partnership with a socially reformed woman succeeds only in occasioning his further humiliation. His love proposition to Miss Moran is met with brutal rejection and a physical blow that knocks him off his feet just as Minnie walks in to witness the event. Subsequently, James is placed in the helpless position of being deserted by his wife and having to beg her to come back; his later death "of apoplexy while exercising at a public gymnasium" seals his emasculation (77). What the story makes clear in exposing James's underlying weakness and demise is that gender roles prescribed by Progressive reform empower the white woman at the white man's expense. It also suggests that James's support of women's reform issues stems from his own insufficient masculinity.

Ultimately, "The Story of One White Woman" reaffirms male patriarchal authority by associating Liu Kanghi and Minnie's marriage with the recuperation of gender roles that reflect true manhood and true womanhood.<sup>15</sup> Liu Kanghi's "true" manhood is evident from his first entrance in the story. Minnie describes, "A strong hand was laid upon my arm and I was swung around against my will" (71). The exchange that follows reveals how Liu Kanghi's "strong hand" is tempered by a softness that can properly understand and care for a baby and its mother:

"Poor little baby," went on the voice, which was unusually soft for a man's. "Let me hold him!"

I surrendered my child to the voice.

"Better come over where it is light and you can see where to walk!"

I allowed myself to be led into the light.

Thus I met Liu Kanghi, the Chinese who afterwards became my husband. I followed him, obeyed him, trusted him from the very first. It never occurred to me to ask myself what manner of man was succoring me. I only knew that he was a man, and that I was being cared for as no one had ever cared for me since my father died. (72)

Minnie's act of "surrendering" her child to the Chinese man is constituted not as a moral defeat, but as a rescue akin to being "led into the light." Her assertion of not noticing what "manner of man" he was, but only "that he was a man" capable of resuming the kind



of care once provided by her dead father, reinforces the story's associations between Chineseness and patriarchal masculinity (72). In effect, Chinese difference is explicitly recast in terms of gender. Minnie continues to return, throughout her narration, to the realization that her Chinese husband is so much more of a man than her white husband. Even in acknowledging Liu Kanghi's faults, Minnie reiterates the refrain of his enduring manhood: "My Chinese husband has his faults. He is hot-tempered and, at times, arbitrary; but he is always a man, and has never sought to take away from me the privilege of being but a woman. I can lean upon and trust in him. I feel him behind me, protecting and caring for me, and that, to an ordinary woman like myself, means more than anything else" (77).

In effect, the "privilege" that Liu Kanghi affords Minnie inverts the very "privileges" of citizenship for which women suffragists were fighting. As the quote reveals, Liu Kanghi's manhood allows Minnie to express a kind of womanhood that never aspires to join the ranks of a "column of men keeping step together" (67). In that Minnie embraces the "privilege of being but a woman," her womanhood is affiliated with a kind of authenticity that casts any woman who should want to be "more" than this as inauthentic. In this way, the Chinese-white marriage offers a standard of true manhood and true womanhood that counters the ideals of Progressive gender reform. Minnie's characterization of the feminine gender role that Liu Kanghi enables her to embrace as a "privilege" substitutes patriarchal subordination for the more commonly recognized legal "privilege" of citizenship, a move that protects the integrity of the patriarchal American family at the expense of national purity.

If Minnie's grateful submission to her Chinese husband assuages an anxiety about the sexual liberation of white women, then a large part of this anxiety has to do with growing concerns about miscegenation at the turn of the century. While the Chinese-white marriage that occupies both "The Story of One White Woman" and its sequel, "Her Chinese Husband," would have unavoidably raised the same kinds of anxieties as black-white miscegenation, Minnie and Liu Kanghi's marriage is forcefully cast in opposition to this heightened cultural threat. Their marriage offers miscegenation with a crucial difference: Liu Kanghi's Chinese difference is not cast as one of race, but one of gender and, in particular, the very kind of masculinity that is needed to protect white women from inappropriate sexual unions in the first place.

In actuality, the figure of the Chinese immigrant around the turn of the century was perceived to pose a threat to white womanhood that was not so different from that of the black male. Though black masculinity constituted a particularly visceral threat in the American cultural imagination, the Chinaman was also perceived to be a

sexual threat by virtue of the very conditions of immigration that were designed to preempt his claim to citizenship. Because Chinese women were largely prohibited from entering the US as a result of the Page Act of 1875, the Chinese population in America consisted overwhelmingly of bachelors or married men whose wives were not present.<sup>16</sup> In prohibiting and criminalizing the immigration of prostitutes, the Page Act was directly aimed against Chinese women, who were all typed as prostitutes. According to US Census figures, there were less than four thousand Chinese women in the US in 1890, whereas the population of Chinese men was around 102,000, making the overall Chinese population in America more than 96% male. As Sucheng Chen and others have analyzed, the prohibition of Chinese women from entering the US worked to preempt Chinese claims to citizenship by preventing Chinese male laborers from establishing families and having children who would be eligible for citizenship.<sup>17</sup> However, in denying the Chinese man a legitimate sexual partner, the prohibition created a perceived threat to white women. Acknowledging the mutually voluntary nature of Chinese-white unions, in 1907 Congress legislated the forced expatriation of any American woman who married an alien, thereby rendering marriage to an alien akin to treason. The Cable Act of 1922 partially repealed this, but continued to target Chinese-white unions by automatically revoking the citizenship of any white woman who married a man "ineligible for citizenship."<sup>18</sup> Until 1931, no woman married to a foreigner who was ineligible for citizenship could naturalize, even if she qualified to naturalize in every other respect. Numerous images and stories in the popular press, as well as fictional productions like Frank Norris's short story "The Third Circle" (1897) and Cecil DeMille's popular film *The Cheat* (1915), offered horrifying accounts of the entrapment of white women by male Chinese predators.

An illustration featured on the front cover of the 21 June 1909 issue of a New York newspaper called *The World* (see Fig. 1) demonstrates how the characterization of the Chinaman as a sexual threat was, in fact, quite similar to the contemporary discourse of the predatory, oversexed black man.<sup>19</sup> Part of a wave of publicity triggered by the alleged murder of a white female missionary in New York's Chinatown, the illustration depicts three "respectable" white women approaching the doorway of a building marked "Chinese Mission."<sup>20</sup> Lurking in the shadow inside the door, a lecherous looking Chinaman waits to receive them. His facial features are just barely visible in the darkness beyond the light that divides the outside world from the interior of the mission. As the title at the top of the illustration implicitly suggests, "The Real Yellow Peril" is not the threat of Chinese competition to white male laborers on the West coast, but the



Fig. 1. Robert Carter, "The Real Yellow Peril," *The World*, June 21, 1909. Reproduced with permission from Mary Lui, *The Chinatown Trunk Mystery* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

entrapment of white women in urban Chinese communities, though, of course, these two threats may well have constituted different sides of the same coin. As Mary Ting Yi Lui has discussed, the murdered white missionary, Elsie Sigel, had reportedly been involved in a sordid romance involving two Chinamen, both of whom she professed to love. An important subtext here is the linking of female social work intended to uplift, or Christianize, Chinese immigrants with the threat of Chinese-white miscegenation. A host of similar images published in periodicals such as *The Daily Picayune* and the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* also emphasized the vulnerability of white female missionaries to the inherently duplicitous and sexually threatening Chinaman (see Figs. 2 and 3). Just as the collusion of female independence and

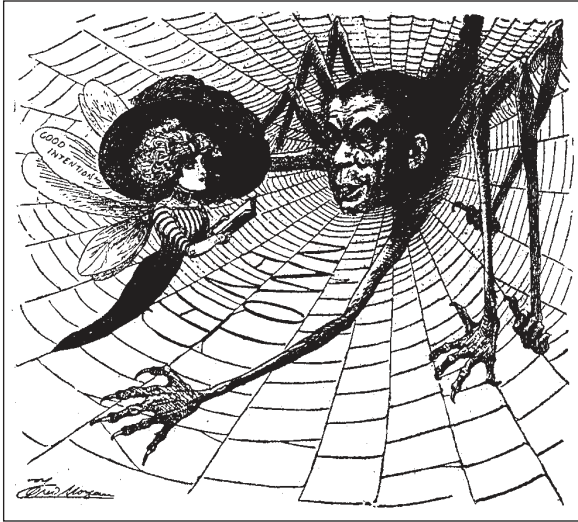


Fig. 2. "The Conversation of the Spider," *The Daily Picayune*, July 1, 1909. Reproduced with permission from Mary Lui.

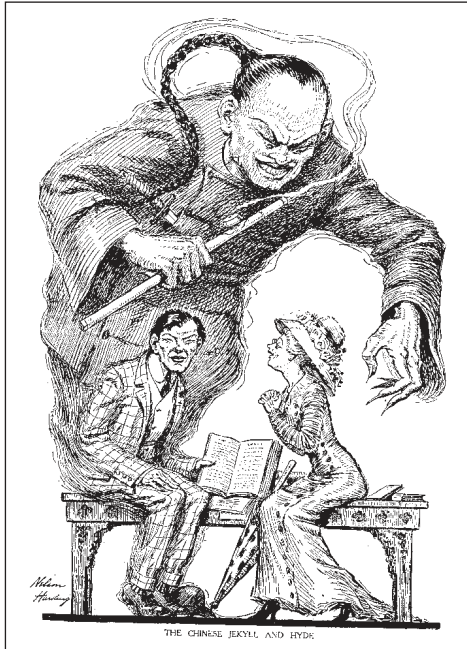


Fig. 3. Nelson Harding, "The Chinese Jekyll and Hyde," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June 27, 1909. Reproduced with permission from Mary Lui.

black empowerment was imagined to be a catalyst for black-white miscegenation, the publicity surrounding Chinatown missionary work linked social "progressiveness" with Chinese-white miscegenation. The publication of Sui Sin Far's two stories about Chinese-White marriage in *The Independent* in 1910, just a year after the Sigel murder and its attendant media coverage, suggests her conscious effort to reverse the narrative of Chinese rescue by featuring the Chinese husband as rescuer.

### Speaking for "Her Chinese Husband"

As I have begun to suggest, Sui Sin Far counters the predatory stereotype of the Chinese bachelor by setting him in opposition to Progressive ideals. And, at the same time that she aligns the Chinese husband with patriarchal values, she defuses his sexuality by playing up his genteel paternalism.<sup>21</sup> The fact that both "The Story of One White Woman" and its sequel "Her Chinese Husband" are narrated by Minnie, and that the latter is narrated after Liu Kanghi's death, ensures that Liu Kanghi's patriarchal influence is contained by Minnie's voice—a condition that conveys both her obedient submission to him and his absence. In the sequel, Minnie's extended description of Liu Kanghi enables her to reflect on his gentility and kindness in ways that were not possible when he was alive. She emphasizes how his capacity for feminine sensitivity and affection set him apart from white men, who are "above discussing" the "little troubles and perplexities" of women ("Her Chinese Husband" 78).<sup>22</sup> In a sense, Sui Sin Far strategically exchanges one cultural stereotype (that of the Chinese sexual predator) for another (that of the effeminate or emasculated Chinese man).<sup>23</sup>

In addition, she emphasizes Liu Kanghi's innate simplicity and lack of affectation: "There was nothing feigned about my Chinese husband. Simple and sincere as he was before marriage, so he was afterwards" (79). And just as he is incapable of trickery, Liu Kanghi lacks the sexual passion that made Minnie uncomfortable in her former marriage: "James Carson had been much more of an ardent lover than ever had been Liu Kanghi. Indeed, it was his passion, real or feigned, which had carried me off my feet. When wooing he had constantly reproached me with being cold, unfeeling, a marble statue" (78). By comparison, Liu Kanghi's straightforward values recognize Minnie for being the right kind of woman and draw her to him for the right reasons. While Liu Kanghi's sensitivity, lack of duplicity, and unthreatening sexuality are intended to illustrate his superiority over Minnie's white husband, they are also qualities that strategically characterize him as an inappropriate target of racism by opposing him to stereotypes of black masculinity.

Above all, Liu Kanghi is also characterized as gentle, tender, and protective of Minnie's young children. Minnie offers the example of his sacrificing his own hand to a rat trap in order to save her little girl—the child of her first husband—from being hurt.<sup>24</sup> The final episode of the story tells of his violent death at the hands of other Chinese men and of his body being brought home with two red balls in his pocket—one for each child. The final words of the story are, "Such was Liu Kanghi—a man" (83). In this way, Liu Kanghi's "manhood" is constituted not as sexual virility or physical strength, but in connection with an act that symbolically displaces his sexuality with paternalism: the two red balls, vaguely suggestive of testicles, end up in his pocket to be passed onto his two children. Thus, the passing on of the red balls enacts a kind of self-castration, resignifying Liu Kanghi's masculinity as a fatherly devotion aimed at preserving his lineage. By memorializing a man who sacrifices his life for the perpetuation of his family, or in another sense sacrifices his manhood in exchange for a place in the "American family," Minnie provides a character sketch of her Chinese husband that is both patriarchal and desexualized. While Liu Kanghi's tragic death exposes the injustice of a world that is incapable of perceiving Chinese-white marriage as anything but a racial violation, it also helps Minnie to idealize his character by subduing any sexual threat of Chinese masculinity.

On another level, Liu Kanghi's murder, which is tragically and ironically committed at the hands of other Chinese immigrants, enables Minnie to lament the failure of her community to appreciate the true social "progress" that is achieved through Chinese-white marriage. Assuming a didactic tone, Minnie explains, "There are some Chinese, just as there are some Americans, who are opposed to all progress, and who hate with a bitter hatred all who would enlighten and be enlightened" (83). Displacing blame for Liu Kanghi's death onto the Chinese themselves, Minnie elicits white sympathy and moral outrage over the senseless racism that would end such a life and destroy her family. Similar to "The Story of One White Woman," the sequel appropriates the rhetoric of social progress and enlightenment to describe a notion of family and marriage that transgresses national and racial boundaries but is oriented against Progressive gender equality. The Chinese-white union constitutes a beacon of progress, offering a vision of a future America that transcends national boundaries, yet simultaneously elicits nostalgia for a patriarchal past. In this vein, Minnie describes the birth of her son by Liu Kanghi as a visionary event: "The boy was born with a veil over his face. 'A prophet!' cried the old mulatto Jewess who nursed me. 'A prophet has come into the world.'" Her invocation of the word "prophet," as well as the "mulatto Jewess" midwife who proclaims it, evoke an ancient and yet visionary wisdom, which prophesizes the birth of a new and

better American "family" that is inherently heterogeneous (82). But, as the tragic murder of Liu Kanghi suggests, Sui Sin Far's America is not yet progressive enough to embrace such a family.

Michaels's analysis of early twentieth-century attempts to define American nativism through race and culture provides a useful context for understanding Sui Sin Far's critique of Progressive politics and how it strategically engages the logic of citizenship. Relying on John Higham's now classic model of American "nativism," he privileges European and white non-Christian immigrants on the East coast, but overlooks Chinese immigration on the West coast.<sup>25</sup> Accordingly, Michaels dismisses the role of citizenship as a critical instrument of American nativism, since it represented a "set of social and economic conditions" that could be "earned" by (white) immigrants, and thus held little value (9).<sup>26</sup> He posits a genealogy of modern notions of identity that begins at the turn of the century with Progressivism and shifts crucially in the 1920s to a "cultural" conception of identity, which while ostensibly opposed to the race-based formulation of identity from the Progressive period, was, according to Michaels, inextricably grounded in race. My reading, however, demonstrates how Sui Sin Far's stories are already responding to the inevitable exclusions of a hypothetical cultural pluralism, even from her earlier perspective in the first decade of the 1900s. Sui Sin Far complicates Michaels's conventional genealogy of national identity by presenting stories about the "Americanization" of Chinese characters during a time when Chinese immigrants were absolutely excluded from US citizenship. In doing so, she exposes how Chinese exclusion played a crucial role in reframing the boundaries of nativist inclusion. More generally, she reveals how the logic of citizenship belied a struggle to negotiate racial and national exclusion that was at the heart of American nativism.

### ***Plessy v. Ferguson* and the Logic of Citizenship**

The landmark case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) provides a compelling illustration of how efforts to negotiate the parameters of citizenship rights engendered a conceptual splitting of the logics of racial difference and national identity, in effect pitting blacks against Chinese.<sup>27</sup> As is now well known, the 7–1 majority ruling, authored by Justice Henry B. Brown, upheld the constitutionality of a Louisiana statute that required railroad companies to "provide equal but separate accommodations for the white and colored races" (*Plessy v. Ferguson* 41).<sup>28</sup> However, what may remain less visible are the specific ways that both the majority and dissenting opinions hinged on defining the relationship between race and citizenship rights. Equally opaque are how these differences occasioned oppositional

responses to anxieties about miscegenation. Brown's majority opinion interpreted the intentions of the Fourteenth Amendment as directed at enforcing "political" equality, but not eradicating "distinctions based upon color" or enforcing "social" equality (44). This interpretation of citizenship requires only that "equal" provisions be made for all US subjects; it does not override race-based distinctions and, in fact, may be seen to sustain them.<sup>29</sup> Significantly, in order to illustrate the distinction between "social" and "political" equity, Brown invoked the social taboo of interracial marriage. Arguing that a state's right to segregate railway carriages does not conflict with the Fourteenth Amendment's restrictions on the policing of social divisions by individual states, Brown offered the following precedent: "Laws forbidding the intermarriage of the two races may be said in a technical sense to interfere with the freedom of contract, and yet have been universally recognized as within the police power of the state" (45). Thus, Brown drew an analogy between "equal but separate accommodations" and laws forbidding intermarriage, which are "universally recognized" as falling under the social domain, arguing that neither infringes on the political rights of citizenship (41, 45).

By contrast, the dissenting opinion authored by Justice John Marshall Harlan sought to challenge racial divisions by extending citizenship from the political to the social realm and interpreting US citizenship as a marker of identity that transcends racial difference. Though Harlan's was but the single dissenting opinion in the 1896 case, I suggest that his particular formulation and appeal to "citizenship" reflects an emerging logic for defining American identity that increasingly came to shape appeals for reform in the Progressive period (53). These appeals sought not to distinguish rights on the basis of racial or gender privilege (referred to by Harlan as "classes"), but on the basis of an encompassing claim to citizenship that bestowed the same rights and privileges to all its members (57). Importantly, this logic of citizenship relied on renegotiating the boundary of inclusion to privilege national origin, and this boundary was drawn at the limit of Chinese immigrants. The portion of Harlan's opinion excerpted in my second epigraph warrants quotation at greater length:

There is a race so different from our own that we do not permit those belonging to it to become citizens of the United States. Persons belonging to it are, with few exceptions, absolutely excluded from our country. I allude to the Chinese race. But, by the statute in question, a Chinaman can ride in the same passenger coach with white citizens of the United States, while citizens of the black race in Louisiana, many of whom, perhaps, risked their lives for the preservation of the Union, who are entitled, by law, to



participate in the political control of the state and nation, who are not excluded, by law or by reason of their race, from public stations of any kind, and who have all the legal rights that belong to white citizens, are yet declared to be criminals, liable to imprisonment, if they ride in a public coach occupied by citizens of the white race. (58)

Harlan specifically contrasts African Americans with Chinese foreign difference in order to expose the more extreme difference of the Chinese—a difference that locates them outside the realm of citizenship. His allusion to blacks who "risked their lives for the preservation of the Union" uses an appeal of sentimentality to deemphasize black difference and enhance the logic of citizen rights that is rehearsed in the next clause. Although Harlan is ostensibly defending the rights of blacks by appealing to a notion of citizenship that is meant to transcend race, his reliance on "a race so different" reveals how the logics of race and American citizenship were deeply dependent on one another for their articulation. The same logic that proposed a race-blind or democratic interpretation of American citizenship depended on the exclusion of Chinese immigrants to establish a new boundary of otherness.<sup>30</sup> Importantly, of course, neither blacks nor Chinese benefited by the outcome of *Plessy v. Ferguson*; rather, the case succeeded in both reinscribing color divisions among citizens and reiterating the essential alien status of the Chinese immigrant.

One of the things that interests me most about Harlan's dissenting opinion is how its particular use of sentiment is aimed at contesting an accepted stereotype of the black male that largely stood in the way of his claim to race-blind citizenship rights or a seat in the white car. Specifically, his allusion to blacks who may have fought for "the preservation of the Union" and are yet denied access to the same rights they helped protect is intended to dispute the more familiar rhetoric that generally "declared [black men] to be criminals." Part of Harlan's strategy in emphasizing the citizenship of African Americans is to diffuse the racial stereotypes that continued to ensure the priority of their racial difference.<sup>31</sup> A major challenge in defending social equality for blacks lay in averting attention away from the highly-charged threat of black-white miscegenation, which was perceived to result from integration. Harlan's move to elide the threat of black sexuality by invoking the Chinaman recalls the moment in Brown's opinion when he invokes the taboo of black-white marriage to defend his case for "social" segregation. Just as black-white marriage is a "universally recognized" limit case for social segregation, the Chinaman's utter foreignness serves as a self-evident example of a "race" that is "absolutely excluded from our country," much less an integrated place on the white train car (45, 58).

The symbolic implications of allowing a black or Chinese man to sit in the same train car with white women and families were simply unacceptable. As Harlan's wording implicitly reveals, both "citizens of the black race" and members of the "Chinese race" refer specifically to males. This is evidenced by the easy slippage between Harlan's first allusion to the "Chinese" and his subsequent substitution of the word "Chinaman," as well as his invoking of blacks who "risked their lives" for the Union (that is, male soldiers). While his implied exclusion of women may not have been immediately apparent to readers in 1896, I would argue the case was largely about the perceived sexual endangerment of white womanhood by non-white men. Another elision performed by Harlan is that of the white male, whose white masculine authority was threatened by the prospect of intermarriage between a black male and a white female.<sup>32</sup> As Lynda Boose has pointed out, the first emergence of "miscegenation" as a US coinage in 1864 reveals the immediate association between emancipation and the contamination of the white race through voluntary sexual relations (46). Miscegenation was doubly emasculating for white men in that it either implied their inability to protect or control white women or the failure of their white genes to predictably override those of a black woman.<sup>33</sup>

### **The Splintering Logics of Race and Nation and the Double-bind of the Transnational, Mixed-Race Child**

That the stereotype of black men as violent, threatening, and deviant lay so close to the surface of any attempt to defend racial integration is, in my view, crucial to a reading of Sui Sin Far's deployment of Chinese masculinity. Her strategic orientation around Progressive politics can be best understood in light of the masked vulnerability of white female sexuality and white male patriarchal authority, whose elision is evidenced by Harlan in his defense of racial integration. Whereas Harlan wants to defuse the threat of black masculinity and play up the threat of the Chinaman, Sui Sin Far pursues the opposite effect by situating the Chinaman as a protector to white womanhood and an adversary to Progressive reform. Thus, she turns on its head the logic that perceives Chinese difference as a limit case that displaces the specter of black-white miscegenation. In effect, she responds to the same white anxiety Harlan elides, but instead of pointing to Chinese difference as a limit case of alterity that exceeds racial difference (on a black-white spectrum), she capitalizes on the splintering logics of racial and national difference in order to situate

Chinese foreignness in opposition to an American nationalism that ostensibly transcends racial differences.

One of the most striking things about Sui Sin Far's stories is the unqualified abundance of Chinese women. In fifteen stories that comprise the *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* collection, there are at least as many Chinese wives or love objects. This rewriting of the actual paucity of Chinese women in the US represents one way that Sui Sin Far neutralizes the sexual threat of Chinese bachelors. In addition, her characterization of Chinese masculinity resists the racial cast of black sexuality by substituting paternalism for sexual prowess. Ironically, of course, Sui Sin Far's strategy for opposing the Progressive reform that threatens both white femininity and white masculinity relies on a corrective model of Chinese-white miscegenation. "The Story of One White Woman" embraces a logic that distinguishes Chinese national difference from black racial difference in order to envision a patriarchal marriage that protects against racial contamination, but ultimately Sui Sin Far acknowledges an outside perspective that inevitably conflates national difference with racial difference. The very title of the story—"One White Woman Who Married a Chinese"—reflects a conflation of race and nationality that normalizes an opposition between Chinese-ness and whiteness. While on the one hand Sui Sin Far capitalizes on a conceptual splitting apart of national and racial identity under citizenship, on the other hand she acknowledges an overarching framework that uses race to patrol national boundaries.

It is no accident that Minnie invokes this outside perspective in relation to her second child, who is the product of her marriage to Liu Kanghi. The Chinese-white marriage provides a particularly useful site for exposing the correlation between national exclusion and racial logic in that marriage is a potential site of both cultural conversion and racial (reproductive) contamination. That Minnie's transnational marriage to Liu Kanghi results in the objectionable biological production of a mixed-race child reflects the slippage between national and racial difference that renders Chinese immigrants subject to the same racial logic that discriminates against blacks. Though the majority of Minnie's narrative is focused on painting a positive portrayal of Liu Kanghi and her marriage to him, her tone shifts to ambivalence at the end of the story when she ponders the future of her little boy:

Only when the son of Liu Kanghi lays his little head upon my bosom do I question whether I have done wisely. For my boy, the son of the Chinese man, is possessed of a childish wisdom which brings the tears to my eyes; and as he stands between his father and myself, like yet unlike us both, so will he stand in after years between his father's and his mother's people. And if there is no kindness nor

understanding between them, what will my boy's fate be?  
("Story" 77)

In imagining the small figure of her son standing literally between "his father's and his mother's people," Minnie expresses regret for a world whose national boundaries merely replicate the logic of racial distinction and exclusion. Her appeal for "kindliness" and "understanding" between Chinese immigrants and white Americans simplifies the nature of the division by boiling it down to a matter of human sympathy, recalling the initial sympathy that drew Liu Kanghi to help Minnie and her first child. On one hand, her implication that both the Chinese and the whites are equally responsible for overcoming the breach between them absolves the white racism that was actually behind Chinese exclusion. But on the other hand, it invites sympathy for the Chinese more readily by withholding blame and shifting the emphasis to the innocent child, whose "childish wisdom" makes him impervious to the differences between his mother and father. The story's appeal for a mutual "understanding" romanticizes the process of dissolving barriers; it reflects a notion of family that is divided along national and racial lines and yet united by a "natural" bond that supercedes these divisions. Ultimately, the story suggests that Chinese-white marriage constitutes a true "social progressiveness" that might be possible in a better America.<sup>34</sup>

### **"The Inferior Women" as an Analogy to Chinese Difference**

By foregrounding the category of class, "The Inferior Woman" attempts in a different way to redefine social progress in opposition to Progressive politics. Drawing an explicit parallel between the working-class woman and the Chinese immigrant, it argues that these two "inferior" figures actually possess the more "authentic" American values of hard work and self-reliance that are revered by Progressive reformers. In this story, Mrs. Spring Fragrance, the eponymous Chinese heroine of the title story of Sui Sin Far's collection, makes a second appearance in which she proposes to make a spectacle of white American culture by writing "a book about Americans for her Chinese women friends." She thus inverts the practice of muckraking journalists, like Mark Carson in "Its Wavering Image" (who seeks to make a spectacle of Chinatown) and white women like the one in "The Prize China Baby" (who talks a Chinese mother into entering her daughter in a baby contest).<sup>35</sup> As part of her "field research," Mrs. Spring Fragrance functions as matchmaker between Will Carman, "her American neighbor's son," and his love interest,

Alice Winthrop ("The Inferior Woman" 28). She operates under the pretext of capturing the "mysterious, inscrutable, incomprehensible" social practices of Americans (33). Her challenge is to overcome Will's mother's resistance to the marriage: Mrs. Carman prefers the wealthy, educated, and socially reformed Miss Evebrook, or "the Superior Woman," to Alice, who is poor, uneducated, and self-made. As Viet Thanh Nguyen has argued, Mrs. Spring Fragrance teaches Will's mother "a lesson in feminist ethics" by asking why she should not bestow on the "Inferior" Alice the same admiration she holds for Mr. Spring Fragrance, a self-made Chinese immigrant (53). Mrs. Spring Fragrance remarks to Will's mother, "You are so good as to admire my husband because he is what the Americans call 'a man who has made himself.' Why then do you not admire the Inferior Woman who is a woman who has made herself?" ("The Inferior Woman" 39). In this way, the story takes as a given the admirable qualities of the Chinese immigrant and uses this standard to argue for the virtues of the "Inferior Woman."

Alice closely resembles Minnie from "The Story of One White Woman" in that she shrinks from women's causes that seek to undermine the patriarchal authority of men and desires a marriage based around romantic love rather than politics. By contrast, the "Superior Woman" foregoes being courted by young men in order to fight for women's suffrage but secretly covets Alice's authentic womanhood. Defending Alice to her own mother, the "Superior" Miss Evebrook says,

It is women such as Alice Winthrop who, in spite of every drawback, have raised themselves to the level of those who have had every advantage. There are thousands of them, all over this land: women who have been of service to others all their years and who have graduated from the university of life with honor. Women such as I, who are called the Superior Women of America, are after all nothing but school girls in comparison. (35–36)

In this way, Miss Evebrook makes a compelling case for the authentic womanhood and true "Americanness" of women like Alice. By implication, such authenticity extends to Mr. Spring Fragrance, who parallels Alice in his self-made success. And it also extends to Mrs. Spring Fragrance, who repeatedly bemoans the one barricade to her success as a writer—her lack of education or "the divine right of learning" (33). Miss Evebrook's validation of "the university of life with honor" seeks to reveal the principles of a truly virtuous American education, and to tie the rhetoric of social Progressivism and the American dream to the unrecognized labor of working class women and

self-made immigrants (36). In recasting "Inferiority" as authenticity, the story attempts to redefine the basis of "Americanness" through class-inflected gender roles that seem to erase the significance of racial differences. Mrs. Spring Fragrance suggests that such a thing is possible when she offers the example of her own "Americanization" as proof of the possibility that Will's mother can change her mind about the "Inferior Woman." She explains to Will, "When I first came to America, my husband desired me to wear the American dress. I protested and declared that never would I so appear. But one day he brought home a gown fit for a fairy, and ever since then I have worn and adored the American dress." In turn, Will replies, "Mrs. Spring Fragrance, your argument is incontrovertible" (30).

But the story effects a series of inversions that, while ostensibly equating the Chinese immigrant with the more authentic "Inferior Woman," ultimately reveal the flaw in Mrs. Spring Fragrance's logic: the irreducibility of the Chinese immigrant's racial difference. Mrs. Spring Fragrance sets out to write a book that captures the "mysterious, inscrutable, incomprehensible" logic of the Americans that would rank the "Superior Woman" (Miss Evebrook) over the "Inferior" one (Alice) (33); she then successfully reveals the true superiority of Alice; but finally, when asked by her husband which woman she prefers as a role model for her own daughter, Mrs. Spring Fragrance chooses Miss Evebrook. She explains, "Ah, the Superior Woman! Radiantly beautiful and gifted with the divine right of learning! I love well the Inferior Woman; but O Great Man, when we have a daughter, may Heaven ordain that she walk in the groove of the Superior Woman." Mrs. Spring Fragrance's hope for her daughter suggests a form of entitlement that is not won by merit, but by "divine right"; in other words, it cannot be earned through labor, but is something innate and native to one's birth. The double irony imparted by the story's identification of Chinese labor with authentic "Americanness," and its subsequent revalidation of the "divine right" of native birth, exposes the exclusionary ideology on which American citizenship is based. Interestingly, the rhetorical strategy of this story is such that Mrs. Spring Fragrance presumes Mrs. Carson's admiration of Chinese immigrants to be a given in order to argue for the analogous worthiness of the "Inferior" working-class girl. But just as Mrs. Spring Fragrance's proposal to invert the strategies of muckraking white journalists ultimately falls flat, the confidence she invests in the "Americanization" of Chinese immigrants is undone. Her unexpected desire for her own Chinese daughter to "walk in the groove of the Superior Woman" unsettles the logic of these inversions and reveals the analogy between the Chinese immigrant and the working-class girl to be ironic (41). Whereas the "Inferior Woman" can assume the place of

the "Superior Woman," and in fact does so by ultimately marrying Will, Chinese immigrants are excluded from such a path of privilege because of the foreign nationality that renders them racially alien. In other words, simply wearing "American dress" does not make them American after all (30).

The unexpected ending of the story may prompt the reader to go back and interpret Mrs. Spring Fragrance's cryptic advice to Will in a different way. Faced with Will's dilemma over his mother's disapproval of Alice, Mrs. Spring Fragrance offers the analogy of her growing to accept and even adore "American dress" against all former expectations and prejudices (30). Her clear favoring of Alice over the Superior Woman might lead us to interpret the analogy as a suggestion that Will's mother will also eventually adjust to and adore the Inferior woman. However, we could also apply the analogy to Will's affections for the Superior Woman—suggesting that in time he might come to love Miss Evebrook better than Alice, despite his initial misgivings. This would make Mrs. Spring Fragrance's advice to Will more consistent with her unexpected preference for Miss Evebrook at the end of the story. Since the story never explains Mrs. Spring Fragrance's analogy, and in fact reinforces its obscurity through Will's response—"your argument is incontrovertible"—the message that we thought we understood remains an elusive riddle.

### **"The Smuggling of Tie Co" and the Irony of Heterosexual Romance**

A similar destabilization of meaning occurs in "The Smuggling of Tie Co," a story that seems at first to be a straightforward moral tale but carries out its bait and switch strategy in the more political context of illegal border crossing. Tie Co is a young Chinaman who seeks the help of a white smuggler in order to cross the border from Canada into the US; just after crossing into New York, however, he is promptly killed by government officers and revealed to be a woman disguised in men's clothing. Like "The Story of One White Woman" and its sequel, "Tie Co" portrays Chinese masculinity in a way that is gentle and unthreatening; however, the revelation of Tie Co's biological femininity at the end of the story also reveals "his" masculinity to have been performative. Whereas critics such as Martha Cutter and Min Song read Tie Co's cross-dressing as an act that implies an analogy between Chinese border crossing and queer sexuality, I consider the opposing ways that the revelation of Tie Co's true gender writes her into a heterosexual romance.<sup>36</sup> In discovering that the person smuggled across the border is not the person we thought he was,

we are also forced to reinterpret Tie Co's motive for immigrating not as a desire for a better life or a more advantageous economic position, but as a romantic self-sacrifice for a white smuggler. In using heterosexual romance to disrupt the political implications of the story, Sui Sin Far ultimately, and ironically, points toward the realities of Chinese exclusion that prevented Chinese men from producing legitimate families.

At the outset, the story presents itself as a simple object lesson taught to a white smuggler named Jack Fabian about the underlying humanity of his Chinese contraband. As the narrator explains, Fabian is at first utterly un sentimental and apolitical about his job, and he freely admits that the only reasons he does it are for the money and to spite the government. Fabian's Chinese contraband are worth no more to him than "a matter of dollars and cents," and he spends no time thinking about their reasons for wanting to cross the border or the difficulties of their lives ("Tie Co" 105). However, he develops a friendship with a "nice-looking" Chinese laundryman named Tie Co that begins to change his mind (106). After agreeing to smuggle Tie Co across the border into New York, Fabian subsequently learns that Tie Co is leaving a successful laundering business in Canada and has no friends in New York. Fabian soon feels "ashamed" of himself when he discovers that Tie Co has made the request only to help his friend make "fifty dollars"—a gesture that Tie Co knows will be appreciated because of the recent decline in Fabian's smuggling business (107). During their journey across the border, they are pursued by government officers and Tie Co sacrifices his life by jumping into a river in order to save Fabian from capture. It is only after the body is recovered that we learn Tie Co was a woman presumably in love with Fabian and willing to risk her life for his benefit.

Intriguingly, the revelation of Tie Co's true gender at the end of the story seems not only unnecessary to the central lesson of the underlying humanity of Fabian's contraband, but also detracts from it. For one thing, the revelation displaces the legitimate motives and conditions surrounding immigration with the orientalist fantasy of a self-sacrificing Asian woman. As Huining Ouyang has pointed out, "Tie Co" was first published in the Californian periodical *Land of Sunshine* in 1900, the same year that David Belasco's adaptation of John Luther Long's novella, *Madame Butterfly* (1898), began its run on Broadway (209).<sup>37</sup> Tie Co's similar portrayal in effect defuses the sexual threat of the illegal Chinese alien and sentimentalizes his border crossing by writing him into a narrative of heterosexual romance. In addition, the fact that neither Fabian nor the reader suspects Tie Co's true gender normalizes a construction of Chinese masculinity that is indecipherable from a stereotype of Oriental femininity—a subjectivity



subservient to white manhood and sexually submissive rather than menacing. As Min Song observes, the effeminate Tie Co "had been quiet and reserved among his own countrymen; had refused to smoke tobacco or opium, and had been a regular attendant at Sunday schools and a great favorite with Mission ladies" (313). The fact that these characteristics are not meant to lead the reader to suspect Tie Co of being a woman—thus enabling the surprise ending—clearly illustrates David Eng's contention that "the sexual and racial difference" of the Chinaman are constituted "in relation to one another" (5).<sup>38</sup> In writing against the predatory threat of the Chinese bachelor, Sui Sin Far strategically reinscribes a different, though probably interrelated, stereotype of Chinese masculinity. The revelation of Tie Co's actual womanhood seems to only replace this stereotype with that of the submissive Asian woman.

And yet, unlike the butterfly story, Tie Co's self-sacrifice is conveyed with a degree of self-conscious irony that hints at its disingenuous and ultimately performative nature, even bordering on parody. The story presents Tie Co's romantic love for Fabian in direct opposition to any need or desire to cross the border into America: "'I like you,' said Tie Co [to Fabian], his boyish voice sounding clear and sweet in the wet woods. 'I like you so much that I want go to New York, so you make fifty dollars, I no flend in New York'" ("Tie Co" 107). In addition to lacking friends or financial security in America, Tie Co's reliance on the assistance of a smuggler is negated, we are told, by a recent legal development. According to the narrator, other "legal" methods have recently displaced the need for smugglers like Fabian: "Some ingenious lawyers had devised a scheme by which any young Chinaman on payment of a couple of hundred dollars could procure a father, which father would swear the young Chinaman was born in America—thus proving him to be an American citizen with the right to breathe United States air" (105). Given this development, it seems highly ironic that Tie Co should sacrifice everything, even his life, to help support a white man's obsolete smuggling business. However, the story goes so far as to suggest that Tie Co's very desire to help Fabian is prompted by his pity and compassion for the dwindling smuggling business.

The gravest irony lies in the fact that the business of smuggling was in fact not displaced by legal methods of Chinese immigration and citizenship; in 1900, when "Tie Co" was first published, strict enforcement of the Chinese Exclusion Act prevented Chinese individuals from entering the US or from becoming naturalized. Sui Sin Far's casual allusion to how Chinese men are now able to purchase legal proof of citizenship by procuring a father who "would swear the young Chinaman was born in America" most likely alludes to the 1898

decision of *US v. Wong Kim Ark*, which granted citizenship to people of Chinese descent who were born in the US. However, the story's oblique reference to the phenomenon of paper sons conspicuously elides the illegality of this tactic, which made it both deceptive and highly risky. Moreover, it elides the role of the mother, who, if she were Chinese, would have most likely been barred from entering the US, and if she were not Chinese, would have been party to an illegitimate Chinese-white union. Clearly, immigration restrictions such as the Page Act worked to preempt Chinese claims of American birth by preventing Chinese immigrants from marrying and having families. As Ouyang implies, the revelation of Tie Co's female sex is relevant in this regard, in that its unlikelihood would pose a challenge to Chinese female exclusion (211). Together immigration restrictions and the absolute outlawing of Chinese naturalization constituted an airtight mechanism for enforcing nativist racism through the category of citizenship. Such a reality certainly undermines Tie Co's self-sacrifice, given that he (or she) was not in fact sacrificing himself for something that could be easily attained by other means. Rather than merely detract from the legal injustices surrounding the Chinaman's plight to immigrate, the revelation of Tie Co's womanhood points up a particular aspect of these legal injustices through its ironic suggestion of a would-be female immigrant. Ultimately, it is not the moral lesson of Chinese humanity that is disingenuous here, but the story's attempt to undo this lesson.

### **Registering a Duel Exclusion**

Importantly, "The Smuggling of Tie Co's" disavowal of the Chinese immigrant's need or desire for entry into the US constitutes an ironic inversion of the legal logic of citizenship that relied on the Chinese immigrant's essential alien status for its construction of native privilege. By drawing attention to legislation that prevented Chinese immigrants from "simply" earning or acquiring citizenship, this essay has argued that the turn of the century produced a distinct form of legal nativism that relied on the absolute alienation of the Chinese immigrant. Far from egalitarian in intent, the debate surrounding citizenship masked a complex negotiation of racial, gender, and national hierarchies. Given this backdrop, the stories of Sui Sin Far respond to the national logic that excluded Chinese immigrants by construing Chinese difference in such a way that triggered white anxieties about white female empowerment, black male sexuality, and white male emasculation—ultimately bringing racial difference into view so as to downplay the national difference of the Chinese. However, as the outcome of *Plessy v. Ferguson* reveals, the concep-

tual differences between exclusions based on race or foreign origin were, in practice, largely irrelevant. The case successfully showed how both blacks and Chinese were excluded from American identity regardless of the splintering logics of race and citizenship.

I want to suggest that Sui Sin Far's stories register this dual exclusion by revealing how the distinctions of race and foreign origin were, in practice, largely indecipherable and by critiquing the nativist rhetoric that equated American "authenticity" with national/racial purity. In doing so, I am suggesting that Sui Sin Far simultaneously capitalized on a racist logic that equated racial difference with blackness *and* resisted the disingenuous distinction of national identity as anything but a recapitulation of racist logic. Her equivocal position reflects a challenge to the bifurcation between complicity and resistance that critics such as Nguyen, Tomo Hattori, and Dominika Ferens astutely identify at the heart of Sui Sin Far scholarly criticism and Asian American studies more generally.<sup>39</sup> While on the one hand, Sui Sin Far is strategically complicit in constructing an opposition between race and nationality, on the other hand, she deconstructs this opposition through irony or through her depiction of mixed-race subjects that undermine any notion of racial or national purity. As critics have long been tempted to speculate, Sui Sin Far's own mixed-race ancestry may have heightened her awareness of these contradictory perspectives.<sup>40</sup>

Certainly, for Sui Sin Far, the mixed-race subject provides a crucial site for exploring the contradictions inherent to a logic that privileges national identity. It is no coincidence that the nurse who helps deliver the "half-breed" son in "The Story of One White Woman" is described as a "mulatto Jewess"—herself a unique product of miscegenation (82). In a sense, the midwife's role in delivering the child suggests an analogy to the relationship between the specter of black-white miscegenation and Chinese-white marriage in Sui Sin Far's stories, the former anxiety shaping the depiction of the latter. However, the story presents the midwife's particular racial hybridity as equal in status to that of the Chinese-white child, offering her hybridity as a detail that enhances the child's social and biological "progressiveness." As his mother's concern for her son's fate suggests, the Chinese-white child's racial difference reveals his subjugation to the same racist logic that constructs black racial difference. That the recuperative patriarchy of the Chinese male reveals its triumph through the creation of a biracial child illustrates the implicit contradiction by which national identity is defined against what it excludes.

Named a "prophet" by the midwife, the child deconstructs the myth of the "purity" of American identity and signals a future vision of America that is shaped around his Chinese-American heterogeneity,

rather than shaped by its exclusion (82). Even in arguing for a redefinition of "purity" and "authenticity" that demonstrates the Chinese immigrant's rightful claim to "Americanness," Sui Sin Far seems to acknowledge the constructed nature of these concepts. Ultimately, her strategic representations of gender and race argue not for Chinese inclusion under the current terms of American identity—or for their racial similitude relative to black difference—but rather expose the disingenuous logic that makes Chinese difference a function of "color-blind" citizenship.

## Notes

This article is dedicated to Julia H. Lee. Like so much of my work, it reflects the fruits of our collaborative thinking. Many thanks to Nancy Bentley, Laura Doyle, Lise Sanders, Asha Nadkarni, Hoang Phan, Floyd Cheung, Josephine Park, Jennifer Higginbotham, Jessica Rosenfeld, Elizabeth Williamson, Jean Howard, and the anonymous readers for *Mfs*, who offered comments or encouragement.

1. In privileging white southern- and eastern-Europeans that immigrated to the East coast, Michaels overlooks the significance of Chinese and other Asian immigrants to the West coast as crucial to nativist conceptions around the turn of the century.
2. For historical treatments of anti-Chinese sentiment and US policy, see Stuart Creighton Miller and Alexander Saxton. For an illuminating legal analysis of how congressional debates on the Reconstruction amendments were partly informed by the perception of Asian Americans as intrinsically foreign, see John Hayakawa Torok.
3. On the universalizing of citizenship privileges and the impact of the Reconstruction amendments, see James Kettner. For an opposing view that looks at how the logic of citizenship perpetuated racial and gender hierarchies, see Rogers Smith. My own essay tends to side with Smith but also complicates his argument by focusing in particular on the implications of Chinese exclusion from citizenship.
4. The Thirteenth Amendment (1865) abolished slavery. The Fourteenth Amendment (1868) extended the rights of citizenship to all persons born or naturalized in the US and outlined these rights in terms of privileges and immunities, due process, equal protection, apportionment of representatives, and Civil War disqualification and debt. The Fifteenth Amendment (1870) declared that the right of citizens to vote was not to be denied on the basis of "race, color, or previous condition of servitude." See *US Constitution*, Amendments XIII–XV. An important example of how efforts to centralize government authority impinged on the legislation of citizenship was the Naturalization Act of 1906, which relinquished the authority of separate state courts to naturalize citizens and established a federal division to standardize the procedure and supervise the process.

5. Gunning demonstrates how the unprecedented rise in lynching and public alarm about the rape of white women by black men in the 1890s and 1900s was coterminous with the movement for women's suffrage and a "growing demand among various groups of white women for higher education and an increased level of sexual and social freedom" (3–4). Gunning also notes the confluence of a distinct outpouring of a post-slavery generation of African American writers/reformers who threatened to empower blacks in similar ways (4).
6. On the Chinese Exclusion Act and ineligibility for citizenship, see Sucheng Chan, Charles Gordon, Andrew Gyory, Bill Ong Hing, Milton Konvitz, and Lisa Lowe.
7. Specifically, I am referring to the Act of May 6, 1882, 22 United States Statutes at Large 58, Section 14. As Saxton notes, restriction was renewed in 1892 for ten years and again in 1902. In 1904, all existing laws against Chinese entry were reaffirmed without time limit (Saxon 178). For a useful discussion of the range of privileges denied to Chinese immigrants, see Milton Konvitz. On Asian American discrimination and the law more broadly, see Angelo Ancheta.
8. On the history of Asian American immigration and exclusion, see also Ronald Takaki.
9. In opposition to Chin, Phan argues that the hierarchy of race that determined citizenship law in the nineteenth century was inextricably bound to a hierarchy of labor regimes. He traces a genealogy of indentured labor through the *Slaughterhouse Cases* (1873), *Yick Wo v. Hopkins* (1886), the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882), and *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) in order to illustrate how the cultural formation of the Chinese as an absolutely unassimilable race belied an investment in racialized labor hierarchies. By extension, if Phan illustrates how the racialization of the Chinese was inextricable from issues of labor, then critics such as Lisa Lowe and David Eng show how it was also mutually constituted through constructions of gender and sexuality.
10. Michaels argues that the rewriting of race and nation "as family" corresponded to the shift in racial logic from Progressivism to cultural pluralism. Pricilla Wald privileges the term "personhood" in *Constituting Americans*.
11. One might argue the Chinese were excluded either way on account of being both racially marked and irrevocably foreign; however, the logic of race-based classifications tended to set blackness in opposition to everything else. See chapter 3 of Ian Haney Lopez's book, *White By Law*, for a discussion of how Asians attempted to negotiate their place in the black-white binary by claiming whiteness in the prerequisite cases.
12. Lopez argues that the legislation of citizenship often serves "as a proxy" for racial exclusion (35). His analysis of the prerequisite cases between 1878 and 1952—prompted by the Naturalization Act of 1790 and its restriction of citizenship to "white persons"—illustrates how the legal struggle to define the category of "whiteness" resulted in

the reification of racial categories. See Lopez, *White By Law*, chapters 1–2. Ngai draws a similar conclusion in her analysis of how the Immigration Act of 1924 adopted a formal logic of national origins that actually served as a mechanism for enforcing racial exclusions. Ngai argues that the 1924 Act disingenuously employed national origins quotas, themselves based on skewed census data, to legally enforce racial privileges and restrictions. The consequence was not only a reification of national origins as a pure and ascertainable category, but also the exclusion of "persons ineligible to citizenship," namely all Asiatics (Ngai 80).

13. My quotation refers to Harlan's famous characterization of the US Constitution as "color-blind." See *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 US 540–42 (1896). This and all subsequent quotations from the case rely on Brook Thomas's edition. For a critique of how the metaphor of a "color-blind Constitution" has functioned in US case history to foster white racial domination, see Neil Gotanda.
14. Sean McCann offers a more straightforward explanation for Sui Sin Far's critique of Progressive politics. He argues that the stories oppose Progressive reform because of its complicity with an "ethnic nationalism" that was both implicitly and explicitly racist (79). For McCann, the stories advocate "the private rights and personal freedoms central to classical [as opposed to progressive] liberalism" and embrace Victorian patriarchal ideals as an alternative means of legitimizing Chinese immigrants outside the restrictive boundaries of national democracy (81). By contrast, I argue that Sui Sin Far's appropriation of an anti-Progressive stance constitutes a strategic move to position Chinese masculinity against racial anxieties raised by Progressive reform.
15. Sui Sin Far's strategy of recasting Chinese difference as patriarchal masculinity was in fact consistent with a strong bias reflected in federal legislation at the turn of the century. The few Chinese laborers who were successful in gaining approval for their Chinese wives to join them in the US did so by appealing to their "natural" rights as husbands and men. The Court's defense of the husbands' rights in these cases suggests that an allegiance to patriarchal notions of marriage and family unity overrode foreign nationality and racial mandates. For example, see *US v. Gue Lim*, 1899. For a thorough review of case history and its exemplification of the competing claims of gender privilege and racial exclusion, see Todd Stevens. In effect, the tying of citizenship status to notions of coverture represented a direct affront to women's suffrage and equality movements. See Chapter 6 of Nancy Cott's *Public Vows* on the relationship between marriage, immigration, and the gendering of citizenship rights between 1890 and 1920. Given this context, it is possible to see how marriage between a Chinese man and a white woman presented a crisis of authority in that the status of the husband conflicted directly with assumptions about white superiority.
16. For complete description see the Page Act of 18 February 1875, chap. 80, 18 Stat. 318. As Nancy Cott notes, the Page Act represented the

- "first federal step by Congress in US history to restrict immigration" (136). For her discussion of the Page Act, see *Public Vows*, 136–39. Male sojourning traditions in China also contributed to the paucity of Chinese women who immigrated to the US.
17. On the exclusion of Chinese women, see Chan (105–7) and Bill Ong Hing (21–6). See also Stevens, who provides a useful analysis of case law involving the immigration of Chinese wives and how petitioners attempted to appeal to husbands' rights to challenge the exclusion of Chinese women. For a social history of Chinese women in San Francisco, see Judy Yung.
  18. For a discussion of legislation aimed against Chinese-white marriage, see Megumi Dick Osumi. For a discussion of popular outcry in response to Chinese-white miscegenation, see Mary Ting Lui's *The Chinatown Trunk Mystery*.
  19. See Chapter 1 in Lui's book for a discussion of these and other images depicting the sexual threat of Chinese masculinity in the wake of the Elsie Sigel murder. Lui uses these images to segue to a discussion of how tourist guidebooks, newspapers, and magazine articles depicted New York's Chinatown as a particular kind of racialized and gendered space.
  20. Similar images provoked by the murder include those depicted in the September 1909 issue of *Munsey's Magazine* (number 41), which featured articles such as William Brown Meloney's "Slumming in New York's Chinatown" and Lawrence Burt's cautionary "Woman's Love of the Exotic." Accompanying Meloney's article were several incendiary photographs, including those captioned "A Chinese with his two sons, the children of a white mother" (823), "White Wives of Chinatown" (824), and others.
  21. Lorraine Dong and Marlon Hom have also drawn attention to the traditional patriarchy and lack of romantic appeal exhibited by Sui Sin Far's male Chinese characters. However, whereas Dong and Hom identify these as negative and simplistic portrayals that reveal Sui Sin Far to be a product of the anti-Chinese racism of her period, I interpret Liu Khangi's characterization in a much more strategic vein.
  22. Jinhua Emma Teng has also focused on the "effeminate" qualities of the Chinese husband in these stories. She argues that the contrast between Minnie's white and Chinese husbands constitutes a difference between "a masculinity of the body and a masculinity of the soul" (74). Rather than interpret this distinction in relation to Progressive ideals and the sexual/racial anxieties they raised, Teng concludes that the Chinese husband's "superior feminine qualities" perform a critique of patriarchy that affirms the "Victorian image of the Christian Gentleman," revealing Sui Sin Far's ties to the rhetorical tradition of "Alfred Lord Tennyson, Coventry Patmore, and John Ruskin" (75).
  23. On the latter—the stereotype of the emasculated Chinese man—see David Eng's *Racial Castration*, which employs psychoanalytic theory

to make visible the ways in which sexuality and race are mutually constitutive of Asian masculinity. For a related discussion, see also Richard Fung.

24. Inexplicably, the child who is here referred to as a girl seems to be the same child who is identified by a male pronoun in "The Story of A White Woman"; s(he) is the only child produced by Minnie's first marriage.
25. Higham defines nativism as "intense opposition to an internal minority on the ground of its foreign (that is, 'un American') connections" (4). He asserts the impact of Asian immigrants constitutes a "somewhat separate phenomena, historically tangential to the main currents of American nativism" (iii). Michaels and Higham's shared East Coast bias discounts the extent to which "local" West Coast politics assumed national importance around the turn of the century. This was due in part to the centralization of government and emerging authority of bureaucratic organizations, which sought to impose new unity and order on the country. On the centralization of government, see Robert Wiebe.
26. Michaels states, "Citizenship, like money, can be earned," in order to draw a distinction between "a set of social and economic conditions" that can be acquired by anyone (who is white), and a more authentic American identity "that exists prior to and independent of those conditions" (9). Part of my goal here is to complicate this assumption by showing how citizenship could not be "earned" by Chinese immigrants, and how the legal parameters for citizenship also reflected a complex negotiation of nativist logic.
27. I thank Julia Lee for suggesting the usefulness of *Plessy v. Ferguson* in illustrating the points of this argument. My essay speaks to some of the same issues addressed by Lee in a recent essay in *ELH* that considers the significance of the train car as the setting for Chinese-black encounters in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, Charles Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901), and Wu Tingfang's *America Through the Spectacles of an Oriental Diplomat* (1914).
28. Brown quotes from an act of the General Assembly of the State of Louisiana (1890), No. 111, p. 152.
29. For a persuasive discussion of how Brown's opinion "revived the spirit" of the Dred Scott case (1857), which denied citizenship to blacks, see Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 198.
30. Lowe's influential *Immigrant Acts* demonstrates how the exclusion of Chinese immigrants from citizenship served a vital economic purpose that contradicted the democratic principles of citizenship. Lowe exposes the ideological fracture produced by the concept of democratic citizenship and the conflicting needs of a capitalist state, which necessitates the denial of citizenship rights to some in order to supply cheap labor to others. According to Lowe, any immigrant who becomes a "citizen" is required to accede to "a political fiction of equal rights that is generated through the denial of history, a denial



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that reproduces the omission of history as the ontology of the nation" (27).

31. This racial stereotype of blackness to which Harlan responds is the same one that prompted a contrasting response from a city court judge of Albany, New York in the 1894 case of *In re Po*. Inverting Harlan's statement of regret, the judge concluded, "A Congo negro but five years removed from his barbarism can become a citizen of the United States, but his more intelligent fellowmen . . . of the yellow races . . . are denied the privilege." The decision of *In re Po* barred a Burmese petitioner from naturalization on the basis that he did not qualify as a "white person."
32. Gail Bederman takes the destabilization of white masculinity as the starting point for her examination of how whiteness was used to remake manhood and secure its dwindling authority at the turn of the century. She argues that "between 1890 and 1917, as white middle-class men actively worked to reinforce male power, their race became a factor which was crucial to their gender" (5).
33. As Boose has argued, the biological outcome of miscegenation directly threatened patriarchal authority because it suggested "that not only was black more powerful than white and capable of absorbing and coloring it, but that in this all-important arena of reproductive authority, black women controlled the power to resignify all offspring as the property of the woman" (46).
34. For a discussion of Sui Sin Far's mixed-race characters that reads their conflicted identities as a critique of "multiculturalist narratives of assimilation and amalgamation," see Carol Roh-Spaulding (173).
35. On the title character's echoing of the ideology of muckraking and new womanhood, see Martha Patterson.
36. According to Cutter, Tie Co's cross-dressing suggests the "radical possibility of a desire that is both homosexual and miscegenating" (152).
37. Giacomo Puccini's famous opera, *Madama Butterfly*, followed soon after in 1904.
38. See also Daniel Kim for a cross-racial study of how Asian American and African American writers perpetuate homophobia in their responses to the racist constructions that emasculate them or that construct their sexuality as deviant.
39. Nguyen, Hattori, and Ferens critique the bifurcation of Asian American writers that labels them as either "complicit" or "resistant" by discussing the writing of Sui Sin Far and her sister Winnifred Eaton (who wrote under the penname Onoto Watanna) as well as the critical attention they have each received. Hattori argues that this bifurcation elides a "discourse of exchange value between race and capital in cultural studies" and obscures how the Asian American subject is constituted by "her pragmatic manipulation of herself as a human form of racial capital" (230, 231). Nguyen argues for an Asian

American "ethics after idealism" that sees beyond the idealization of cultural resistance and accommodation as "good" and "bad." He urges us to recognize both strategies as "viable" and "valid" options for Asian Americans in a minority culture that "is neither unified nor stable in any political sense" (58). Dominika Ferens's biographical study of the Eaton sisters resists the "celebratory story of Edith Eaton" that has been promoted by Amy Ling and Annette White-Parks. She emphasizes instead the "dexterity with which [Sui Sin Far] balanced" the expectations of her audience with her own prerogatives (53).

40. See, for example, Annette White-Parks's biography of Sui Sin Far.

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