



Identity Negotiation of Chinese American's Twoness in Lisa Ko's *The Leavers*: Postcolonial Approach

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Abstract

As second-generation Chinese Americans living in the multiracial American society, negotiating their twoness or multicultural identities have been a crucial issue, both in day-to-day life and in postcolonial discourse. This study aims to examine the Chinese American's twoness identity negotiation as portrayed in *The Leavers* written by Lisa Ko. To investigate the main character Deming Guo's process in negotiating his twoness as Chinese American, Bhabha's postcolonialism theory, Said's orientalism and Dubois' concept of twoness are deployed. The findings show that Deming's identity negotiation was influenced by several important factors, which are family and the society he lived in i.e., the different cultures of parenting and the American community's prejudices towards Chinese American. It is also revealed that the second-generation Chinese immigrants often mimic and imitate the dominant culture in order to be assimilated with the community. This act of imitation typically generated the feeling of ambivalence when the American culture they adopted clashes with their native Chinese values. They also suffered from racial bias and discrimination from the American community. Nevertheless, Deming ultimately succeeds in negotiating his multicultural identities and settle his twoness by hybridizes his clashing Chinese and American identities. This hybridity creates a balanced identity within him, thus solving his identity ambivalence caused by his twoness.

INTRODUCTION

In postcolonial discourse, the discussion of immigrants' identity is one of crucial issues, particularly how these immigrants negotiate and construct their twoness or multicultural identities. Their multiple identities, both as immigrant and as American often positioned them in "in-between" space, where they are forced to navigate and negotiate these identities as they construct their true identity.

Enduring multiple problems as immigrant upon arriving in U.S., such as legal status, language barrier, cultural differences, prejudice, racism, employment opportunities, housing, education, and internal problems, such as identity, isolation, and integration, enforce them to struggle in daily basis to overcome these problems. To survive and to be accepted by the society, they have to adapt the new cultures, while at the same time preserving and maintaining their "old" culture from their homeland. Oftentimes, this put them in ambivalent position as the two cultures clash with each other, creating fears, anxiety, and affect their sense of belonging, which influence the way they perceive themselves and thus complicate the proses of negotiating their identity. Racial discrimination also plays a significant role in influencing how they negotiate their identity, since it is practiced by the society in almost every aspects of life, which forcefully positioned them in the lower rank of American society, being the subordinate of white domination. This binary creates "Us" (White) and "Them or Other" (immigrant), which make them questions "Who am I?" and "Do I belong here?" Two important questions that represent the position of immigrant in the midst of American society, which need to be addressed in postcolonial discourse.

The focus of this research is identity negotiation of Chinese immigrant or Chinese American's twoness in Lisa Ko' *The Leavers* (2017). Hall (1994: 222-225) argues that identity is a never-ending process, focusing on one's becoming rather than being, which always incomplete, and unfinished. It is not a fixed state of affairs constructed in the past but it undergoes "constant transformation" affected by history, power, and culture. Cultural classifications such as nationality, ethnicity, race, religion and gender also play a role in the construction of identity and furthermore manifested in shared collective knowledge such as "traditions, heritage, language, aesthetics, norms and customs" (Chen, 2014). A sense of belonging can occur when an individual recognizes that these traditions, heritage, language, etc. are shared with people of the same background thus indicating the importance of communal identity to an individual identity (Liu, 2015: 2-3)

Furthermore, identity negotiation is a set of strategical processes that someone, tangled in multicultural background, conducts in constructing who they are, undergoing decisions on what to absorb and exude (Ting-Toomey, 2015: 2). By negotiating and compromising the different cultures they possess, multicultural individuals can position themselves in certain cultural environments. For instance,

the differences of values between Asian culture and European culture may be hard to balance for multicultural individuals, but by negotiating these two identities and finding an equilibrium, an individual can be easily assimilated to distinct cultural environments (Ting-Toomey, 2015: 2).

W.E.B Du Bois (1903) defined this duality of identity as "twoness" i.e. the state of having two cultures and being of multiple different heritages. Twoness creates a feeling of confliction within one's self since leaning towards one of the two identities meaning letting the other identity to be lost. Thus, Du Bois advised that one has to balance the two identities they possessed for just a miniscule instability can create conflict and crisis in one's identity. Twoness, then, is a problem that many Chinese Americans are prone to suffer as simultaneously being Chinese and American is difficult since there are many opposing traditions and values between the two cultural identities. For instance, the Chinese family cultural values are very different from its American counterpart as the former highly regard collectivism while the latter believe in individualism (Zhang, 2016: 769). This difference causes family relationship to operates in different fashion between the two cultures, thus, for individuals who possessed the two cultural identities this issue may create conflicting feeling of identity. Consequently, Chinese Americans are having a hard time on deciding their true identity as the two identities that they possessed clashed and conflicted.

The postcolonial concepts of mimicry, ambivalence, and hybridity as postulated by Homi K. Bhabha are fitting to analyzed the exact ways that Deming negotiated with his identity. A practice of imitation, Mimicry, is the colonized's act of imitating the colonizer's culture in the hope of reaching the same level of power (Bhabha, 1994: 86). Ambivalence, on the other hand, is a state that occurs in an in-between space of individuals of multicultural identities. For the colonized, ambivalence means having contrasting feelings of repulsion and attraction towards the colonizer as they simultaneously detest and admire the colonizer's culture. Since multicultural individuals possessed both the colonized and the colonizer's culture within them it can create a crisis of identity as they have mixed feelings toward their own selves (Bhabha, 1994: 75). This ambivalence ultimately may resolve in hybridity i.e. an independent new identity that is birthed from the balance met between the once-contrasting cultural identities (Bhabha, 1994: 154). Hybridity, thus, is an ideal

resolution for the identity negotiations conducted by individuals of multicultural background.

Edward Said's orientalism is fitting to complement Bhabha's theory. Orientalism is the West biased narrations of the East to construct the western superior persona in comparison to the inferior East (Said, 1978: 2). A dichotomy of superior-inferior relation is constructed between the West and the East; The East then is assigned with negative attributes such as barbaric, backward, irrational to serve as a juxtaposition to the more superior West of advanced and civilized characteristics (Said, 1978: 7).

This issue of identity negotiation of Chinese American's twoness is apparent in the novel *The Leavers* by Lisa Ko and is exactly what the main character of the novel is going through. It follows a coming-of-age story of a Chinese-American Deming Guo, a son of an undocumented Chinese immigrant. Born in New York City and gained citizenship by the *ius soli* law, Deming has to work out his cultural identities of simultaneously being Chinese and American. After got separated from his mother who was deported back to China, Deming had to live with his new adoptive white American parents and had to learn being American as a whole. Despite trying his best to adapt to the all-white American community, Deming always felt out of place. Thus, he constantly negotiating his identity throughout his life to figure out and overcome the conflicting identities within him; his twoness of being, contrastingly, both Chinese and American.

A number of researches concerning identity negotiation have been conducted by several researches. Toomey, Dorjee & Ting-Toomey (2013) analyzed the negotiation of bicultural background conducted by Asian-Caucasian individuals who relate to others using communication strategies. By employing Ting-Toomey' identity negotiation and Giles' communication accommodation they found that English language slangs are often used by Asian Caucasians as a mean to relate to others communicatively. The utilization of slangs can create a feeling of solidarity and belonging towards their Caucasian peers. Conversely, they also still use their Asian language to maintain solidarity towards their Asian peers. By conducting this communication strategy, a fluid and culturally flexible identity is constructed within the Asian-Caucasian individuals. In their identity negotiation, then, they chose a communication as a mean to construct an equal identity and to settle their bicultural background.

Zohdi (2018) analyzed a main character who migrated to the land of the colonizer and gradually lost his native cultural identity in the novel *Season of Migration to the North* written by Tayeb Salih. By utilizing Bhabha's concept of hybridity and ambivalence he found that the hybridity of the main character rather resulted in irony. The main character migrated to the colonizer's land with the intention of learning the colonizer's advanced ways and in the end to come back home to help his colonized homeland. However, he gradually obtained the colonizer's culture and identity which resulted in ambivalence and ultimately hybridity. This new hybrid identity of his caused him feeling out of place when he finally came back home to his homeland. Mustafa Saeed's hybridity, then, forced his native identity out of him which ultimately lost.

Differing from previous related researches regarding identity negotiation, this research investigates identity negotiation of Chinese American's twoness in the novel *The Leavers* written by Lisa Ko. This research employs postcolonial concept of mimicry, ambivalence, and hybridity as postulated by Bhabha and Du Bois' concept of twoness to investigate how the Chinese-American main character negotiates his twoness. Additionally, this research utilizes orientalism theory as postulated by Edward Said to analyze how ideological prejudice affects the main character's identity negotiation. This research aims to investigate how the Chinese-American character in the novel *The Leavers* negotiate with his twoness identity by exploring internal and external factors influencing Deming Guo's identity negotiation of twoness as Chinese American, Deming Guo process of mimicry, ambivalence, and hybridity, and orientalism and Deming Guo's identity negotiation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a descriptive analytical method in examining identity negotiation of Chinese American's twoness. The descriptive-analytical method involves identifying and exploring particular phenomena to describe, explain, and interpret data in creating a critical evaluation concerning the issue (Kothari, 2004: 3). The narrations and dialogues in the novel *The Leavers* by Lisa Ko were taken as the data source of this study to represent identity negotiation of Chinese American's twoness. To support the analysis, this study deployed Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonialism concepts of mimicry, ambivalence and hybridity as well as Edward

Said's orientalism theory also complemented with Du Bois' twoness concept in identifying the collected data from the novel that indicate identity negotiation of Chinese American's twoness. The collective data were then classified and taken based on the characteristics of the issue to further being analyzed and interpreted with regard to the given theory.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Internal and External Factors Influencing Deming Guo's Identity Negotiation of Twoness as Chinese American

It is important to notice the effect of internal and external factors towards Deming's identity negotiation. Factors namely family and society play significant roles in Deming's negotiation of his opposing Chinese and American cultural identities. Family, for instance, has a pivotal impact in the construction of one's identity (Miller & Lee, 2009). Since Deming was living with his biological mother for half of his childhood and the other half he spent living with his white American adoptive parents, Deming was practically brought up by two distinct families of two distinct cultural values i.e. his mother's Chinese values and his adoptive parents' American values. Chinese parenting and general family values regard collectivism as the ideal family culture while western parenting style believe that individualism and the freedom of privacy may work best in the familial environment (Zhang, 2016: 769). Most crucially, treatment of Deming's Chinese identity differed between the two parenting styles; Deming's adoptive parents always felt uncomfortable to talk about Deming's native cultural identity.

“Like when a Chinese maid had appeared on a TV show, a woman in a light dress with garish eye makeup speaking a botched version of Mandarin, and Kay had stopped talking, the silence in the room was so loud it faded a dark red curtain, and Kay had flushed and quickly changed the channel, blabbing about winter and skiing as the TV played a commercial with a blonde lady putting a plate of fish sticks in a microwave. If Leon or Mama or Vivian had been there they would have all laughed at the Chinese maid together, made a joke about what province she was from how could they get the job” (Ko, 2017: 72).

Their different reactions towards the media portrayal of Chinese individuals confused Deming on how to actually react to this certain issue. Chinese-Americans are indeed misinterpreted in mainstream media with offensive stereotypes and also underrepresented with Chinese characters only making 3% of the total cast in prime-time television shows (Ramasubramanian, 2011), but the two parenting attitudes

towards this issue perplexed Deming. Deming's adoptive parents are uncomfortable talking about the offensive depiction of Chinese individuals in televisions; they rather changed the topic thus elude the potential to explain Deming about Chinese identity. Conversely, Deming's biological mother would laugh and took the media representations as mere comedy. These contrasting attitude towards the depiction of Chinese identity made Deming's unsure to react to his own cultural identity, let alone to construct one. These opposing values that he learned from the different parenting cultures caused confliction within him and challenge his cultural identity at an early stage in his life that ultimately may prove to be a stimulus for conducting his quest of identity negotiation.

Society is also a major external factor that affect Deming's identity negotiation. Stuart Hall (1996) argues that the interactions between individuals and their societal environment, however small they may be, are able to influence their ultimate identity construction. Deming felt the hostility of the community he lived in when he moved to an all-white suburban neighborhood of Ridgeborough with his new white American adoptive parents. The population of Ridgeborough are all white Caucasian Americans and almost sees few to none people of color settlers; Being Chinese in that particular communal space, Deming felt the unsettling treatment of alienation from the dwellers.

At a nearby table sat a mother with two boys around his age, all of them soft and oversized—even their teeth were big—doing diligent damage to a pizza. He accidentally made eye contact with one of the boys, who glanced at his brother and snickered. Their mother stared at Kay and Deming as if they were standing on the street with their butts exposed (Ko, 2017: 54).

Even in school, Deming was alienated and considered as an anomaly because of his Chinese heritage: *"Deming sat ... alone at a cafeteria table. Everyone he saw was the same color except for him, and their silence seeped lob the air like a threat"* (Ko, 2017: 54). Peer-to-peer interactions are crucial for second-generation immigrants in their developing their comprehension of the concept of multicultural identities (Liu, 2015: 2-3) and since Deming was avoided by his friends at school, this crucial stage may elude him and caused him identity confusion. However, the unkind treatment Deming received in school environment did not only come from his peers; his school headmaster, Principal Chester, also behave towards Deming's Chinese heritage with a certain measure of hostility.

*"Where is he from? Originally?"
"I already told you," Kay said. "New York City."
"But originally?"*

"His mother, I guess, was Chinese." "China. interesting."

Principal Chester shuffled papers. "His English may need a little brushing up on. I'm afraid we don't have enough foreign students in this school district to warrant an English as a Second Language class."

"His English is perfectly fine. He was born here."

"It would be beneficial to let him be with the fifth graders. Kids can get discouraged easily.

We don't want him get him started off in his new country on the wrong foot."

"As I mentioned, he was born in the United States," Kay said.

"And you can hear him talk, he's fluent. I don't agree with holding him back. It will only impart low expectations. Kids are adaptable, they learn fast. He belongs with the other kids his age, in the sixth grade." (Ko, 2017, p.51).

Although Deming was a rightful receiver of American citizenship due to the jus soli law, the school headmaster discredited Deming's academic ability and saw Deming's Chinese ethnicity as an anomaly and a sign of inferiority. These malicious treatments from the society towards Deming's, whether it was at school or on the neighborhood, disprove his feeling of belonging thus led him to feel alienated due to his Chinese identity. These treatments, however, only drove Deming to question his true cultural identity and ultimately led him to further negotiate his twoness. These major external factors of family and society, thus, play important roles in prompting Deming to question his true cultural identity and to ultimately led to his ultimate quest of identity negotiation.

Deming Guo Process of Mimicry, Ambivalence, and Hybridity

In conducting his identity negotiation, Deming underwent numerous acts of imitation or mimicry. Mimicry is the colonized act of imitating the colonizer's culture to reach the same level of power as the colonizer (Bhabha, 1994: 86). For Deming, mimicry is manifested in many of his performances of imitating the dominant American culture in order to assimilate with the majority. One of the prime acts of mimicry that Deming performed is to Americanized his Chinese name to a more white-sounding name by the endorsement of his adoptive parents. "Good morning, Daniel," It always took a second to realize they were talking to him. When school started, they said, it would be easier with an American name." (Ko, 2017: 48). The act of name changing, whether it was official or unofficial, is a typical and mass-conducted practice for Chinese immigrants living in the United States. Commonly, the Americanized names are not too far off from the original Chinese names as they are usually just phonetic renditions of Chinese dialect sounds (Louie, 1998). For instance, a Chinese Christian missionary originally named Jee Man Sing, changed his name to J.M. Singleton when he came to America in 1872. Another example

would be the name "Lily" which has been adopted by many Chinese immigrants. The name is possibly a derivation of Chinese names such as "Lian" 蓮 which the literal meaning is "lotus, water lily" or "Li" 麗 that means "beautiful". Similarly, Deming's new name "Daniel" was mainly chosen for the similar initial "D" sound, so it did not sound too unfamiliar or foreign. This name changing phenomenon is essentially an act of mimicry by the Chinese immigrants and also in this case Deming in hoping to be integrated into the majority.

Kay's eyes flipped from Daniel's face to the wall to the kitchen window. "We were so afraid of doing something wrong. We thought it would be better if you changed your name so you would feel like you belonged with us, with our family. That you had a family." (Ko, 2017: 241).

Another act of mimicry that Deming performed is the way he dressed himself based on the preferred style of outfit of his adoptive parents. Deming adoptive mother took him to buy clothing in Hollister and Abercrombie & Fitch, which are well-known American lifestyle retailers for casual wear. Deming saw life-sized cardboard cutouts of American teenagers are scattered inside the shops.

"She took him to the mall to buy what she called a proper back-to-school wardrobe... "Let's see," Kay said. "What would an eleven-year-old boy wear?" She stopped in front of Hollister, Abercrombie & Fitch. "Do you like these stores?" "I don't know," Deming said. Inside Abercrombie & Fitch were life-sized cardboard teenagers romping on a beach, girls with sun-streaked hair laughing in bikinis and boys holding surfboards against their muscled torsos." (Ko, 2017: 52)

This imagery of the American teenagers is a representation of the group of people who shops and belongs there, thus, whoever wears the brand belongs to the American lifestyle and community. Despite this effort, however, Deming was still felt out of place. *Heart pounding, he zipped on Cargo Pants. He looked in the mirror and felt weird, misshaped (Ko, 2017: 52).* Bhabha (1994: 86) argues that mimicry does create ambivalence within its performers. These clashing cultures within Deming unable him to define his true cultural identity thus generated a state of confusion within Deming. One of the main reasons of ambivalence is the suppression of one's original cultural identity caused by mimicry (Bhabha, 1994: 86). By mimicking and adopting the American identity, Deming had to push his native cultural identity to make room for the new one.

For two weeks they dominated the top scores for all the games, beating their own records. No matter what game you played, you'd only see two names, DWLK and RFUR. At first, Deming had typed DGUO, but Roland had asked, "What's Dee Coo Oh?" and it was too complicated to explain. (He'd written "Deming Goo" on his worksheet the find day of school and Mrs. bumpkin had

called him up to her desk after class: "Is there a problem? Is this a joke?" (Ko, 2017: 62)

Capturing a perfect example of identity suppression, the passage above describes the events of Deming stopping to use his native Chinese name because it only led him to complications with his peers and teachers. This suppression of native cultural identity along with a prolonged act of mimicry can risk one's original identity to be abandoned and gradually lost (Bhabha, 1994: 86). Mimicry, thus, despite all its benefits in assimilating with the majority, has a fatal consequence of identity disappearance. The state of instability within one's identity can further create confusion and ambivalence; Deming's identity imbalance between his Chinese and American identity, thus, placed him in a fragile position to suffer from ambivalence.

Having embraced both Chinese and American culture, but never settled between the two, Deming are prone to suffer from imminent ambivalence. Bhabha (1994) describes ambivalence as essentially a state of cultural confusion within one's self that happened in an in-between space. Juggling between two cultural identities, Deming's uncertainty only caused him cultural identity confusion that created a main source of ambivalence. Deming indeed possessed American and Chinese identities, but he never felt like he completely belonged in either cultural environment. He always felt different and failed to fit in the American neighborhood, and furthermore, he learned that he also felt alienated in a Chinese cultural surrounding. When he went to Fuzhou, China, in search for his long-lost mother, he had hoped to finally feel at home and belonged in an environment of his native culture. Nevertheless, the opposite occurred; Deming effortlessly stand out and felt unconnected with his surroundings. *"Being surrounded by other Chinese people had become so strange"* (Ko, 2017: 21). His loss of ability of speaking fluent Chinese did not help him either.

"Where you from?" the driver asked, as the fields gave way to taller buildings.

"America."

"Ha!"

"New York."

"Chinese?" the driver asked. "Y es."

"Cantonese?"

"Fuzhounese."

The driver made a sound like pshaw. "No." "Yes. My mother is from Minjiang."
"Hrm, you speak funny." (Ko, 2017: 251).

Deming's feeling of not belonging indeed was caused by the loss of his culture as a consequence of his preceding acts of mimicry. Bhabha (1994: 86) explains that the colonized in adopting the dominant culture will suppress his native culture out of the way, and this loss of culture is a main potential source of ambivalence. Deming's ambivalence occurred to him as he constantly suppressed his Chinese identity to let his American identity considerably expressed; living in the United States, out of fear being racially discriminated, forced Deming to frequently performed exactly just that:

Junior year of high school, he had seen a Chinese woman in the Littleton Mall. Thin, with permed hair, gripping plastic bags with the handles twisted around each other. She'd honed there was no hiding his face, and when she spoke he understood her Mandarin. She was lost. Could he help? She needed to make a phone call, find a bus. Her face was scared and anxious. Two teenage boys, pale and gangly, had watched and mimicked her accent, and Daniel had said, in English, "I can't speak Chinese." Afterwards, he tried to forget the woman, because when he did think of her, he felt a deep, cavernous loneliness (Ko, 2017: 22).

Deming was forced to lie about his ability to speak Chinese out of fear of being marginalized and endorsed by his necessity to be assimilated. This suppression of his native cultural identity ultimately led to ambivalence within him since he failed to define and perpetually hesitant about his own cultural identity. Bhabha (1994: 75) also describes that the state of ambivalence generates a contradictory feeling of admiration and resentment towards the colonizer's culture, thus, Deming, who possessed both the identity of the colonized and the colonizer, had conflicting feeling toward his own multicultural identity. When Deming went into China, he noticed that his American identity made him popular with his Chinese peers: *"Being from America made him object of desire, which was both flattering and strange; girls flirted with him when they found out he was from New York"* (Ko, 2017: 295). Despite the acclaim he received, this treatment, in fact, only made him uncomfortable. Deming discerned that the admiration from the people came only for his American identity; the part of him that people adored was rooted in the culture of the colonizer. This issue generates mixed feeling of opposing sentiments towards his own identity. Ambivalence, however, played a crucial role in Deming's quest of identity negotiation; the agitation compelled him to look for a way to negotiate his twoness and he found it in hybridity.

Deming's suffering of ambivalence came to an end when he realized that he can combine both of the Chinese and American identity he possessed. Bhabha

(1994) defines this as hybridity; the mingling of multiple cultural identities within an individual of multicultural background that construct a brand-new independent identity. Deming concluded that he may never belong to neither cultures entirely, but he did not have to; he can equally be both American and Chinese simultaneously without having to choose exclusively between the two. He acquired this illumination after an interesting event happened to him when he went out with his colleagues to have a lunch in an Italian restaurant in China.

Tammy said she'd heard that the restaurant served the best American food in Fuzhou.

"This food isn't, American," Eddie said.

"Well, it's Italian," Daniel said. "But the dishes are more of an American style. They would call it Italian American"

Tammy said, "But is it Italian or American?"

"It's both."

"But Italian aren't American," Eddie said.

"Sure, they can be Italian American. Like if your parents were born in Italy, but you were born in America."

"Then you'd be American," Tammy said. "Because you were born in America."

"Well, you can be Chinese American. I'm Chinese American because I was born in America."

"But you have a Chinese face so that makes you Chinese," Tammy said.

"Americans can have Chinese faces. They aren't only white people." (Ko, 2017: 293).

When his colleagues debated whether the menu in the restaurant were authentically Italian or authentically American style, Deming argued that the food could be both; they could be simultaneously authentically Italian and American. *"This food isn't American," Eddie said. "Well it's Italian," Daniel said. "But the dishes are more of an American style. They would call it Italian American."* Tammy said, *"But is it Italian or American?" "It's both."* (Ko, 2017: 293). Inspired by this example, Deming realized that the opposing cultural identities that he struggled with could be peacefully unified into one without having to lean towards neither identity. He overcame his twoness and all the problem it entailed and accomplished in claiming an identity that is simultaneously, yet in harmony, Chinese and American. When the balance between clashing cultural identities has been reached, a hybrid identity is expected to emerged (Singh, 2009) and that exactly what Deming experienced. Thus, Deming identity negotiation of his twoness – his American and Chinese cultural identities – came to an end when he found the equilibrium between the two opposing identities and successfully hybridize himself.

Orientalism and Deming Guo's Identity Negotiation

Edward Said (1978: 2) describes Orientalism in his 1978 book of the same name as western biased narrations of the East to construct a superior identity when juxtaposed with the inferior eastern world counterpart. Assigned with negative attributes such as savage and uncivilized, The East is forced to serve as a contrasting image to the superior western of advanced and civilized characteristics (Said, 1978). In relation to Deming's case, this ideological discrimination played an important part in Deming's quest of identity negotiation and how he perceived his Chinese identity in a western societal space. Living in the all-white neighborhood of Ridgeborough, Deming suffered frequently from racial discriminations from peers and neighbors alike.

Or the time Kay asked him to run to Food Lion and pick up a gallon of milk while she waited in the car, and Deming swore he'd heard someone make a noise like they did in kung-fu movies: hi-ya! When he told Kay about the sound, she had said "Maybe you misheard? Maybe they were singing a song, or telling a friend about a movie?" Or eating shiny Chinese takeout at Roland's house, gloppy chicken in nuclear red sauce, and Roland had poked at the meat lumps and asked what it was and his mother joked that it was cat or dog, was that a tail they saw there, and Deming felt chilled, implicated. He is careful. They're not on your side. It's important to be strong (Ko, 2017: 73).

These offensive racial fallacies are exaggerated generalization that are not true and often used as derogatory insults (Makalintal, 2020). Another major source of prejudice and discrimination was located in Deming's school environment. Wang (2010: 108-109) argues that discrimination towards Chinese students in the United States often comes from their own peers, and Deming experienced exactly that as he suffered from constant verbal abuse by his schoolmates; *"What are you looking at? Chinese retard." Deming walked away. "Retard," Cody repeated. "Chinese Retard." It sounded like a bawl, fleshy and raw, an animal turned inside out"* (Ko, 2017: 60). Not only in schools and neighborhood, however, Deming suffered from ideological discrimination in his home; although Deming treated his white adoptive parents with mutual respect and affection, ideological superiority still cannot elude people as well-intentioned as his adoptive parents. Deming's adoptive parents filled Deming's need of parental love and caring that Deming evidently lacked, but the ideological superiority of the Occident still unconsciously rooted in his adoptive parents' minds.

He recalled how she and Peter had insisted on English, his new name, the right education. How better and more hinged on their ideas of success, their

plans. Mama, Chinese, the Bronx, Deming: they had never been enough. He shivered, and for a brief, horrible moment, he could see himself the way he realized they saw him—as someone who needed to be saved. (Ko, 2017: 311).

Said (1978: 3,7) argues that the West sees the East as a subject to be saved; the West is obsessed of being the superior savior of the backward East. Deming discerned that for his adoptive parents, he was never more than a subject of saving. They taught him to act based on the Western norms and forced Western cultures to him; Chinese version of Deming would never suffice. Deming's suspicion for his adoptive parents' believe in their ideological superiority also evident when they first met Deming biological mother through a long-distance video call from Beijing to New York. Deming observed that his adoptive parents must have perceived his biological mother as an inferior Orient. *"He hated that he could see her the way Peter and Kay must be seeing her, a mute Chinese woman with a heavy accent. Their tense smiles were making him angry"* (Ko, 2017: 300). Although subtle and possibly involuntary, his adoptive parent's feeling of superiority distressed Deming as he learned that the Occident's ideological superiority cannot eluded even his own adoptive parents albeit they may occupy it unconsciously. These examples amplify the ideological notion of superiority possessed by the Occident towards the Orient, and consequently led Deming to question the validity of his Chinese identity. Deming's Chinese identity, seemingly worthless and undervalued in the western eyes, generates a feeling of confusion within Deming as the two identities that he possessed—the American and Chinese identity—were perceived as starkly contrasting from another. However, this confusion serves as a stimulus for Deming to challenge the true nature of his identity and led him to conduct identity negotiation, thus, Orientalism played a pivotal role in Deming's ultimate construction of his hybridity.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Lisa Ko' *The Leavers* portrays identity negotiation of Chinese American twoness by conveying the journey of Chinese American life in the Western world and how he reacted to the cultural clash in the surroundings outside and within the self. By deploying Bhabha's mimicry, ambivalence, and hybridity concepts, Said's orientalism and Bois's duality concept of twoness, it is found that in the lives of Chinese immigrants today, living in a western cultural environment such as the

United States almost certainly means that the issue of identity ambivalence is imminent. The stark contrast between the Chinese norms, values and cultural attributes and its American counterpart may leave them in an in-between space of cultural confusion. Just like Deming in the novel, many Chinese immigrants are trying to assimilate with majority and adopted the American culture although they often have to pay the price in a form of a cultural loss of their native Chinese identity that could led to ambivalence. In resolving this ambivalence, immigrants could acknowledge and accept their multicultural identities. The key to settle Chinese immigrants' identity ambivalence, thus, may lay in their ability to negotiate their twoness into hybridity. Other than employing postcolonial approaches, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis theory could also be deployed to explore further the internal turmoil within Deming's mind.

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