

# The construction of chineseness

Business



Ha Jin writes of the complex situation faced by Chinese immigrants in the United States as they try to construct a Chinese culture in a society that considers its culture superior to that of the Chinese. In his latest short story, Ha Jin exposes the brutal reality of the life of an immigrant of Chinese origin in America. He typically uses satire to elucidate the anxiety that Chinese immigrants have in America as they feel completely out of place.

In the story "The Bridegroom", the "other" refers to an individual who has been completely dismembered from the community for disobedience of cultural rules for being a homosexual. For instance, Baowen underwent the process of "othering" due to the fact that the society considered him a criminal who must have been suffering from a disease. Thus, his entire family, including his wife and father-in-law, lives in constant fear of being lynched by the community because of their association with Baowen. Indeed, this sent Baowen into a state of sickness because the social pressure on him exceeded the acceptable limits. Although not pathologically sick, he started to feel sick to the extent that the state booked him up a place in the hospital. Essentially, such an incident exposed the social fear that immigrants got whenever they started living in a new society.

Although the story revealed the reality of social strangers in a strange land, it became satirical when the fear was passed on to the family and friends of Baowen. In addition, the fact that the incident made Baowen to become psychologically sick even when there is no pathological sickness is satirical (Ha, 1). In "Saboteur", a group of people is arrested by the police and charged falsely in the court of law. According to the literature, he is only released when he accepts to sign against self-incriminating evidence.

However, it was his decision to seek revenge that spoilt the party for him. Though a stranger from China, he loses his cool about the incidence of police harassment and opts for revenge.

This was completely unwarranted as he was deep in a society that was not as tolerable to immigrants. The only purpose that his acts of retaliation achieved was to incite the American society of the potential danger posed by immigrants like him. In choosing to incorporate this incident into the story, Ha Jin succeeds in ridiculing the Chinese immigrants and the fact that they have imported their repressive tendencies to the United States. Acts of revenge are also prominent in “Flamerdquo; where Hsu Peng promises to get his revenge against Jiang Bing due to the planned marriage between Jiang Bing and Nimei. The incident, however, takes a new twist when Nimei showed willingness to speculate about the impending visit by Hsu Peng, oblivious of his ill intentions.

Indeed, it technically shifts attention away from Hsu Peng who had been wronged to Nimei who appears innocent and vulnerable. The major distinction between the acts of revenge in the two books is basically where the reader’s sympathy goes to. In “Flame”, Nimei gets the sympathy instead of Hsu Peng who was a victim of circumstances while in “Saboteur” the victim of circumstances gets the sympathy. Essentially, the world has become complex for the Chinese because they technically belong nowhere. The Chinese people consider them outcasts when they adopt Western culture as it happens in “The Bridegroom”. Conversely, the American people consider them aliens who should be treated with contempt when they don’t conform to their social norms (CNN Entertainment 3).

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The Chinese society becomes less rigid as it allows people to pursue entrepreneurship so that they can make money for themselves and even travel widely as seen in "An Entrepreneur Story" as well as in "The Woman from New York". The narrator greatly focuses on his supposed social elevation soon after he acquired money in his new business ventures.

Ideally, he tries to prove a point that after all, people love money than they love the individuals behind the money. However, this theory is disapproved in the "The Woman from New York" where the woman in question gets hardly any respect due to her newly acquired economic status. Instead, she is disrespected for having gone to the United States to create the wealth.

The fundamental difference in the people's responses to the two incidents is definitely a source of satire.

For instance, it is clear that the society wanted economic success to escape the abject poverty that prevailed in the society. Indeed, it was the reason that some people went as far as New York to create wealth for them and for the society. However, the society does not seem to appreciate this as it treats these people with contempt instead of respect. The other idea that also appears conspicuously is the reality clash in Chinese traditions with the American traditions. In the story "After Cowboy Chicken Came to Town", the Chinese laborers are angered with the behavior of their boss, especially after discovering that one of their own has been sucked into practicing capitalism. Basically, it portrays the extent to which social beliefs can thwart the people's desire to pursue a happier life.

Satire seems to stem from the fact that Chinese immigrate to the United States in search of a better life yet they are not keen on adopting their social

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practices. It reveals a lot about the clash between human feelings and the pain that is usually brought about by bureaucratic interventions. It also explains the belief that homosexuality has its origins in the West and that Chinese people become outcasts in their own society if they adopt the practice. The idea that the society would consider taking their son-in-law to a mental hospital to be cured of a mental disease tends to ridicule the Chinese belief. This is the level of satire that makes the story memorable as well as morally relevant (Ha, 1). In the story "A Tiger-Fighter is Hard to Find", the situation gets absurd when the television production team purportedly receives a letter from the provincial governor.

According to the letter, the television production team ought to engineer motivation in human soul by creating more heroic characters to act as role models in the revolution. The governor emphasized that media had a role to disperse human fear and assure them that they have the noble power in their hands to change their destiny. The television production team seemed to have picked up the cue when they proceed to film a violent scene in which appeared a live Siberian tiger. However, it is the writer's insinuation that the incident landed the lead actor in mental incapacity as the feeling that he could be the mythical tiger overwhelmed him. This obvious exaggeration was certainly meant to create humor out of a serious story, making it appear a typical case of satire. Although the television production team acted in patriotism in accordance with the governor's request, the portrayal of the lead actor as uncivilized and naive seems to create an element of humor and satire in the story (CNN Entertainment 3).

In conclusion, Chinese immigrants face a lot of challenges as they try to construct a Chinese culture in the United States. The people of the United States look at them with contempt because they don't fit into their social set up. On the other hand, their Chinese counterparts disown them if they adopt the American culture. In the end, they end up at a social crossroads that is undoubtedly their biggest challenge.