

The jade peony–seklung is a marginal character



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

A strong, intelligent, independent boy is what every traditional Chinese family wants. Unfortunately, Sek-Lung is not such an ideal child. In the novel, *The Jade Peony*, Sek-Lung is a marginal character. He is rejected by the dominant group, first being made to feel insignificant and second to feel uncomfortably visible. Sek-Lung is born in Canada, with a sick body, being considered inferior and unimportant. To begin with, he gains a reputation because of his brainlessness. Referring to his own feeling, “everyone knew [...] I was brainless” (Choy 145). For example, “I would say ‘Third Uncle’ instead of ‘Great Uncle’ ” (Choy 145).

That is because he is stuck between two cultures. In English, kinship terms are simple, but in Chinese, they are complicated, and Sek-Lung is so confused. Another reason is because he is not allowed to go to school due to a lung infection, and he cannot receive proper education, neither from English school nor Chinese school, which restricts his knowledge. Every time he uses improper Chinese, he is insulted by being called brainless. In addition, the lung infection makes him very weak, and he has to stay at home, while “everyone in the family is caught up with work and school” (Choy 186).

In fact, “Kiam was fifteen and was getting all A’s at King Edward High; Jung was twelve and was learning how to box [...] at Hastings Gym” (Choy 148), and his sister can “read rapidly” (Choy 176). His siblings impress him so much with their amazing abilities. In contrast, Sek-Lung can do nothing, which makes him feel inferior. Furthermore, he recognizes that he is a burden in his family. He thinks, “I did everything to ruin their time with me,

if they stayed around at all" (Choy 224). For instance, each family member needs to take turns to teach him.

He notices that he is wasting their time, and actually they do not like spending time with him. In brief, Sek-Lung is brainless, not as good as his siblings, and he is treated as a waste. Sek-Lung, growing up in an unusual background, is made to stand out, because he is different from others. First, he is insecure, and he is afraid that he will not get along with other students. When he first goes to school, " Jung's tough-guy reputation protected I from the school bullies" (Choy 174). A marginal character is always unconfident.

Because of his weakness, brainlessness and different cultural background, he worries about getting into trouble. Second, Sek-Lung, spending all his childhood with Poh-Poh, is the only person who sees her ghost. For example, after Poh-Poh dies, every time the windows mysteriously close or make noises, Sek-Lung insists, " It's Grandmama" (Choy 181), "[...] and everyone [glares] at [him]" (Choy 181). Poh-Poh is his closest family member, and he cannot get over her death. He believes that Poh-Poh's soul will come back and protect him. However, in his family's eyes, he is acting strange, and no one believes him.

Besides, his family thinks he will shame their name. For example, sister Liang refuses to take him out because people will see or hear him. Similarly, " Chinatown people turned away, muttering behind my back" (Choy 178). He is not only noticeable in his family, but also well-known all over Chinatown. People think he may be crazy or he really sees a ghost, which shows that he is unlucky, and either point of view will make him be rejected by society,

because no one likes abnormal persons at that period. To conclude, Sek-Lung becomes marginal by being treated as insignificant and distinctive.