

Elionne Belden. *Claiming Chinese Identity*. (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997). 175 pp., \$51.00 cloth.

Thirty years ago, when the field of Asian American studies was in its infancy, identity was one of the subjects that received much attention. Since then, a good deal of research on or related to identity has been conducted, and, in the past few years, several significant pieces of work have been published. *Claiming Chinese Identity* is not among the latter.

Belden's book is a poorly written examination of Chinese ethnic identity based on her anthropology doctoral dissertation. Her basic perspective is that the Chinese are shaping their collective identity out of what they perceive they share in common from Chinese history and culture, especially traditional Confucian values, and in opposition to key differences they see in Western/American values and practices. The Chinese maintain their identity through language and social relationships with kin and peers. They do develop new styles of being Chinese to fit in with their lives in the U.S., but they do not compromise the core elements of their identity. Belden views the Chinese as a paracommunity that lives beside nonChinese but, in their own minds, remains set apart and that prefers segregation except in matters where they can benefit themselves by going beyond their closely-knit social perimeters.

Belden's perspective primarily is derived from observations and conversations with children attending one class in a Houston Chinese language school along with input from their parents and others associated with the school or the local Chinese community. Most of the children's families are from Taiwan but originally fled from the Chinese mainland when Communist forces took over in 1949, and they apparently exhibit some of the characteristics of exiles. The children are attending the language school because they and their parents want to retain their Chinese language and traditional attitudes and behaviors. The children are in the most advanced language class, speak Chinese at home and during their social activities, tend mainly to associate with other Chinese, and are very involved with various Chinese cultural groups or programs. Therefore, Belden's research concentrates on only a segment of the Houston Chinese community, and she makes only passing reference to others. In addition, she collects little information about these children in nonChinese community or cultural contexts.

Belden readily acknowledges the limited focus of her study, but this focus leads to the development of a constrained perspective on identity that does not adequately address its complexity and fluidity or even its continuity in the face of increasing adaptation to American culture and society. Also, her perspective does not contribute to existing work on Asian American identity. Finally, Belden's focus, perspective, and dis-

cussion in general will for many readers reinforce one prevailing stereotype of Asian Americans as “perpetual foreigners.”

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Julie Brown, ed. *Ethnicity and the American Short Story.* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1997). xx, 252 pp., \$50 cloth.

Replete with essays, all excellent in diverse ways and covering a broad range of American ethnicities, this cutting-edge text successfully answers questions about claims of uniqueness and difference for ethnic American short stories as the grounds for inclusion in critical discussions of the genre.

For one thing, major differences do not derive from the traditionally taught American lineage, but rather from individual ethnic ancestral archetypes. Madolyn Jablon claims that for African American writers it is “oral narratives” and Gail Y Okawa, that for Hawaiians it is “talk story.” But what about each individual ethnicity’s unique cultural myths? Myths provide sources of commonalities between minority and mainstream short story writers, as well as differences. Instead of focusing entirely on differences, the editor might also have included essays on similarities to and influences by mainstream writers, as well as on differences. Also, as strong as all the essayists are in showing how “politics” (i.e., racism and sexism) impact on the work of ethnic “minority” writers, the essayists, except for Okawa, are weak in identifying class issues. Further, Brown might also have expanded this fine work to include essays on more American “minorities,” or perhaps might consider doing this in a second work.

Essayists such as Bill Mullen and John Streamas focus on the political as sources of inspiration. Mullen shows how pervasive racism impacted on the writing and publication of Richard Wright’s and Chester Himes’s powerful short stories, but fails to mention Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston (who took on racism and sexism). Streamas discusses “The Invention of Normality in Japanese American Internment Narratives” during World War II, but omits R. A. Sasaki’s *The Loom and Other Stories*. Other essayists take a feminist perspective. Margot Kelly analyzes the Chicana Tejana Sandra Cisneros’ *House on Mango Street*, while Susan E. Griffin finally breaks the pattern of critical work restricted exclusively to that text with an analysis of Cisneros’ true masterpiece, *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*. Hardy C. Wilcoxon analyzes Chinese female student’s responses to Amy Tan and Maxine Hong Kingston. Interesting, but not germane to the topic of this text. Susan Koppelman’s “The Naming of Katz” links complex responses of Jewish Americans to “whitening” and passing in the dominant culture with those