Cultural Interaction in Lisa Ko's The Leavers

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the challenges of cultural interaction in Lisa Ko's *The Leavers* (2017). It adopts Homi Bhabha's theory of cultural interaction to expose the critical concepts of mimicry, ambivalence, hybridity, and third space, presented in *The Location of Culture* (1994). Ko explores the complex construction of cultural identity across variations in race, class, gender, and cultural traditions. The research confirms that the Chinese population mimic the American Other, which leads to their ambivalence in forming their hybrid identity. Their native and new culture meet in the melting pot and create a new hybrid culture.

Keywords: Ambivalence, Chinese American immigrants, Cultural interaction, Hybridity, Identity Negotiation, Melting pot, Mimicry.

التفاعل الثقافي في رواية "المغادرون" للكاتبة ليزا كو

الباحثة صفاء رعد قاسم

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الخلاصة:

يتناول هذا البحث تحديات التفاعل الثقافي في رواية "المغادرون" (٢٠١٧) للكاتبة ليزا كو. يتبنى البحث نظرية التداخل الثقافي لهومي بابا. قدمت نظرية بابا المفاهيم الأساسية مثل المحاكاة، والتناقض، والتهجين، والفضاء الثالث في كتابه "موقع الثقافة" (١٩٩٤). يدور البحث

في اسباب البناء المعقد للهوية الثقافية عبر الاختلافات في العرق والطبقة والجنس والتقاليد الثقافية في رواية "المغادرون". يؤكد البحث أن السكان الصينيين يقلدون الآخر الأمريكي مما يؤدي إلى ازدواجيتهم في تشكيل هويتهم الهجينة. تلتقي الثقافة الأصلية والجديدة في بوتقة الانصهار وتخلق ثقافة هجينة جديدة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التناقض، المهاجرين الأمريكيين الصينيين، التداخل الثقافي، التهجين، التفاوض على الهوية، بوتقة الانصهار، التقليد.

1. Introduction

Cultural interaction is a valuable means of exchanging practices and ideas between different cultures. It promotes a great understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures while facilitating the development of new cultural practices and ideas through cultural synthesis. Kevin Avruch defined "culture" as" the socially inherited, shared and learned ways of living possessed by individuals in virtue of their membership in social groups" (2019: 4). Where as Herbert Arlt defines "culture" as a means of society remembering. It enables populations to use other people's knowledge. It reflects the cultural interaction between people and the transmission of culture to future generations. Arlt suggests that cultural interaction is a multifaceted process involving various people within different shapes and formations. It presents an interactive communication between two or more partners (2-4).

Additionally, Alexi Danchev defined "cultural integration" as the "process of interacting local cultures with others" which depends on the adaptability of the native culture to other cultures. He suggests that the concept of "cultural integration" reflects preserving local cultures while enriching the individual culture of community members to achieve a sufficient level of self-consistency. He proposes that cultural integration addresses the problem of cultural goods shifting to other minority cultures, resulting in the preservation and development of minorities with host cultures, which passively influences cultural integration and assimilation. Sarah E. Simons stated that assimilation is

the process by which people of different races adjust and accommodate each other in prolonged contact and under certain psychological conditions. Therefore, the groups become more homogeneous. This process can be thought of as transforming the mixture of different groups into a chemical compound, where the parts become integrated and unified. (1901: 791-92)

Danchev tackles the negative cultural interactions that lead to disintegration and increased hostility. In his explanation of cultural coexistence, he highlights that immigrant cultures or minorities are initially isolated from the host culture. However, over time, the minority culture begins to adopt some of the host culture's values, such as celebrating national and religious holidays. When the minority culture adopts enough of the host culture's values, it becomes integrated. This process involves losing some aspects of one's cultural identity while gaining other aspects of the host cultures (2008: 90-3).

Cultural interaction contributes to economic and social development between cultures, increasing prosperity and exchanging ideas. By breaking down cultural barriers and promoting harmony and understanding between different groups, cultural interaction encourages greater tolerance and acceptance of the Other. However, cultural interaction influences participating cultures, potentially leading to the loss of cultural traditions and practices among minority groups. In contrast, cultural interaction sometimes results in conflict. Conflict occurs when immigrants encounter tensions and difficulties due to differences between native and host cultures. Language is one of the significant factors that creates barriers and impedes connection with others. The immigrants face discrimination, exclusion, and marginalisation. Avruch defines "conflict" as "a feature of all human societies, and potentially an aspect of all social relationships". He states that cross-cultural conflict happens between individuals separated by cultural restrictions (2019: 1-

5). Mohsen Ghamidi emphasises that the technological, political, and economic changes in the twenty-first century generate cultural changes. Globalisation is prompting cross-pollination, which leads to significant cultural cross-pollination. Therefore, cultures do not operate as uncorrelated independent variables. It depends on various factors like the occasions or modes of cross-cultural contact, the instigator(s) of participation in the contact, the place of the contact, the intellectual and material products which present goods and ideas exchanged and moved through the contact, and the ramifications and effects of cross-cultural contact (2014: 5-6).

Sonia Gsir defines "socio-cultural interactions" as "a locus for identity formation" (2014: 4-5). She investigates how immigrant-origin cultures influence and impact migrants' socio-cultural integration in multicultural European societies. Socio-cultural integration appears through different social interactions between immigrants and the host society: interethnic friendship, intermarriages, encounters in the neighbourhood and interethnic relations in workplaces. These social interactions depend on an assortment of factors related mainly to the destination country, such as the degree of racism and acceptance, opportunities for encounters and neighbourhood effects, residential segregation, and on individual factors related to the migrants, such as demographic characteristics, migration trajectory, length of residence and work position (2014: 2). Sonia asserts the use of co-integration instead of integration because it reflects a two-way integration process. It depends on how the host culture allows the immigrant to be accepted and be part of the society. The immigrant chooses to marry whether a native marriage to preserve his culture or intermarriage to allow cultural interference. Intermarriage encourages assimilation and cultural interaction, reduces group boundaries, and creates conflict with his family. Interethnic friendship contributes to cultural interaction and assimilation; it creates

opportunities for better mutual knowledge and brings migrants and natives closer. It allows the exchange of socio-cultural codes, practices, and languages. It also reduces reciprocal prejudice. Interethnic relations in the workplace have an essential role in cultural interaction. Amin Ashir defines "the workplace" as the site for addressing ethnic differences. Daily encounters in the neighbourhood allow religious, socio-economic, and linguistic diversity and increase cultural interaction and assimilation (Gsir, 2014: 1-13).

Homi Bhabha emphasises the importance of border circumstances as the places where identities are formed and negotiated, as opposed to polarities.[1] The third space challenges essentialist notions of identity by stating that each individual or setting is a "hybrid" of their unique combination of identification variables. It is an example of how the first space and the second space have been combined into a networked location inhabited by numerous variables interacting with each other (*LoC*: 25). The immigrant's native and new cultures meet in the third space. The third space breaks the fixity of cultures. It allows the interaction of local and foreign values and ideas to generate new and diverse cultures (Michaelin, 2017: 4).

Hybridity was used to describe biology and botany to represent crossing between species by crossing-pollination that gives birth to a third "hybrid" species. Mikhail Bakhtin claims that hybridity is formed by mixing two languages:

It is a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation, or by some other factor. (Guignery, Pesso-Miquel and Specq, 2011: 2)

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[1] H. K. Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge. 1994. P. 12. Subsequent references to this text will be cited by short title *LoC* and page number parenthetically.

Moreover, Nestor Garcia argues that hybridisation is the blend of elements from different cultures and societies whose peoples are seen as sets of potential consumers of global products. Further, Jan Nederveen Pieterse criticised the concept of hybridity, saying that it "is trivial, without roots (6).

Negotiating cultural identity involves converting cultural acts, leading to a shared understanding of cultural diversity. He argues that the development of cultural significance occurs in a "liminal" or "hybrid" location, where representations of diversity should not be seen as expressions of pre-existing ethnic or cultural traditions. Bhabha contends that from the perspective of minorities, the social interpretation of diversity is a complex, ongoing struggle that aims to explain the cultural hybridity […] during historical transitional periods (*LoC*: 2). He claims that hybridity is "new, neither the one nor the other" and that no contending civilisation is authentic or pure (25).

Moreover, Dr. Soma Guha Das claimed that cultural hybridity represents the individual's association with diverse cultures and their struggle to adjust themselves to other cultures; they encounter the plight of dual identities while struggling to assimilate into the multicultural society (2020: 37). Bhabha affirms that hybridity is the creation of transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonisation", which combines two cultures. Hybridity tackles "a third space of resistance, negotiation, and articulation of new meanings in the face of ambivalences" (Michaelin, 2017: 8-10).

Bhabha defines a "liminal space" as the zone between two typically well-defined times, identities or spaces. In this space, converging attitudes intersect, careless boundaries and eliminating distinctions that support regulatory systems. This idea has been used in postcolonial theory to show the presence of a cultural space between the colonised and the coloniser. In such liminal zones of transcultural contact, the

colonised person finds means and methods for changing their identity, challenging the rigid polarities of colonial society. Bhabha asserts that singular and inclusive narratives define Third World countries to perpetuate their subordination. He states that cultural identity (national identity) is a constructed narrative resulting from the complex interaction of competing national and cultural forces. The essentialist division between countries should be replaced by cultural liminality (*LoC*: 148).

2. The Challenges of Cultural Interaction in Ko's *The Leavers*

Ko was born in New York. She was the first of her family to be born in America due to her parents moved from the Philippines to the United States of America. She was one of the only children in her neighbourhood. Emily Wood affirms that Ko encountered hardships and challenges because, being Asian, she felt she must "adjust to life as a person of colour" (2021). Various reasons encouraged her to write *The Leavers*. First, she recognised a lack of stories that expressed her experiences growing up as the only minority in her neighbourhood. Wood affirms that Ko reflects people like her and immigrants in her tales. Bernstein Nina's "Mentally Ill and Immigration Limbo" (2009) inspired Ko to write her novel about a Japanese lady named Xiu Ping Jiang who came illegally from China to the United States. Before coming to America in 1997, she lived in hiding because she was pregnant with her second child. In China, a law prevents women from having more than one child. She fled to America, where she expected to have the best life with her children (Wood, 2021).

Ko's novels have been inspired by real-life stories reflecting the suffering of illegal immigrant women. The American government took away their children and allowed American citizens to adopt them. The government put mothers in prison or deported them to their homeland. She asserts that "nearly a quarter of those deported are parents of

U.S.–born children who remain in the country, so you have all these families that have been permanently fractured". [2]

During Leslie A. Lindsay's conversation with Ko, Ko affirms that *The Leavers* is for everyone: children, mothers, and adoptive parents. Deming is the protagonist and adoptive child. Kay and Peter adopted him after his mother disappeared. Music affected Ko's writing; she gave Deming music to make him happy and help him shape his identity (2017:1–2). Miwa Messer states that Ko's talks with Kaitlyn Greednidge inspired her novel by the shocking reality when she started finding out about illegal immigrant parents. The American government exploited them, deported or detained them, took away their children and gave them American citizenships. Through her compelling story, she expresses how the immigrant's children grow up in adoptive families in these real–life stories. They realise that their parents wanted them to take them, but they cannot. Ko writes about the immigrant's conflicted sense of identity, displacement and how they grow up in these white communities (2017:1–2).

Cultural immigrant interaction depends on a sense of belonging to a specific group. The immigrant's scattered identity is not fixed to represent the past or the present, but it undergoes a consonant transformation influenced by culture. Vivian Hsueh and Hua Chen state that:

Cultural identity is constructed and maintained through the process of sharing collective knowledge such as traditions, heritage, language, aesthetics, norms and customs. As individuals typically affiliate with

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[2] A Conversation with Lisa Ko and Barbara Kingsolver A Better Life: An essay by Lisa Ko Questions for Discussion, 2018: 343. Available online:

https://d17lzgq6gc2tox.cloudfront.net/downloadable/asset/original/9781616208042_rg.pdf?1524314270 [Accessed 4/4/2024].

more than one cultural group, cultural identity is complex and multifaceted. (Hsueh and Chen, 2014: 1)

Ardi Oromahi and Kurani Ningsih argue that the immigrant's cultural interaction appears through their behaviour, reflecting "the character's reaction towards others or his behavior as a result of his attitude" (2019: 187). Peter is Deming's adoptive father; he asserts that Deming's assimilation and cultural interaction will be difficult as other populations struggle with belonging. "I'm not going to say it'll be easy," said Peter. "But white, black, purple, green, kids of all races have struggled with belonging".[3]

Deming loses the trust of others, as Tyrone Beason states, due to Polly giving up her son twice after his birth, and when she disappeared (2017: 1). Oromahi and Ningsih agree with Beason's point of view of Deming's inability to trust others and face hard in socializing as a consequence of his family giving up on him multiple times. He is suspicious of the society; he believes no one likes and needs him. He asks his mother: "Are you going to leave me again? "Never". His mother took his hand and swung it up and down. "I promise I'll never leave you" (*TL*: 35). Deming claims nobody loves him now, and Leon and Vivian are gone, too. Nobody wanted him He feels abandoned and alone (Oromahi & Ningsih 2019: 183). "He becomes lack of socializing" (187– 89). He prefers to spend his time online poker games rather than connecting with others. "He'd played the next day, or the day after" (*TL*: 98).

Shuang Liu tackles the immigrant's cultural interaction and how they recognise that they share customs, language, and heritage with others from different backgrounds; this creates a sense of belonging that

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[3] L. Ko. The leavers. New York: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hil, 2017. P.57. https://www.amazon.com/Leavers-National-Book-Award-Finalist/dp/1616206888. Subsequent references to this text will be cited by short title *TL* and page number parenthetically.

facilitates their assimilation. The integration of the first generation, who arrives as an adult in a new society, happens through various levels. They struggle with the host culture to be accepted as members of the mainstream society. The second generation realises they must move between their parents and American cultures to be bicultural (2015: 2–3). Elaine is Angel's adoptive mother. Elaine tells Deming, whose name now has been changed into Danial as a symptom of being assimilated into the Wilkinson family, the new host family, to read "The Red Thread story" and create a connection between the adoptive child and the family.

Elaine said: "We were already bound by a red thread." She over-enunciated the words. "You must know the story of the red thread, Daniel. It's an ancient Asian story." "Never heard it." "The red thread story"! It says that the people who are destined to be with one another are bound with an invisible red thread. And that's how Angel and Jim and I were all connected with red thread, and how we found each other in our forever family. (*TL*: 90)

According to Stella Ting–Toomey's "identity negotiation theory, Crossing Cultural Boundaries" (2015), individuals have complex identities related to their cultural, ethnic–religious, social class, gender, role in their family and relationships, and personal images derived from self–reflection.

The term negotiation in the INT refers to the exchange of verbal and nonverbal messages between two or more communicators in maintaining, threatening, or uplifting the various socio–cultural group–based or unique personal–based identity images of the other in situ. (١)

Multicultural immigrants situate themselves in specific cultural contexts by compromising and negotiating the various cultures they possess. It applies to immigrants who face difficulties with the disparities in values between Asian and European cultures. However, people can readily adapt to different cultural contexts by navigating these two identities and

achieving a balance (1–2). Deming balances his Chinese and American cultures; he transformed between Polly and Kay countries. "Kay and Peter? This is my mother, Polly." "Hello," his mother said in English. "It is very nice to meet you, Polly," Kay said" (*TL:* 319).

Deming balances his dual identities with two cultures. Gu¨lseli Baysu, Karen Phalet, and Rupert Brown defined "dual identity" as a strategy that is "a two-edged sword, leading to more positive performance outcomes in low threat contexts and to more negative outcomes in high threat ones" (2011: 135). The immigrant passes many stages to reach the cultural interaction. According to Bhabha, these stages are reflected in his critical concepts of mimicry, ambivalence, and hybridity. Colonial mimicry is the need for change, recognising others as the focus of a variation that is nearly identical but not quite (*LoC*: 86–9). This means that ambivalence is the foundation for the discourse surrounding mimicry. Mimicry is developed because the colonised people mimic the colonisers while feeling inferior. Mimicry provides the colonial subject with a partial existence, as though the "colonial" depends on the ambivalence in mimicry for its portrayal. Bhabha asserts that ambivalence creates a rift in the identity of the colonised, which permits people to gain a hybrid cultural identity that combines their culture and that of the coloniser. Consequently, the colonial presence still has a duality, manifesting both as duplication and variation and as something original and dominant (*LoC*: 86).

"Ambivalence" is defined as an implication that generates better thinking of both negative and positive as separate dimensions rather than opposite ends of a single dimension ranging from positive to negative, and ambivalence never reflects different thoughts that appear simultaneously but can represent the contrast feeling towards society (Fitria, 2020: 3). When Roland and Angel ask Deming if he still thinks of

his mum, he replies no but inside him, he wishes to see her. Deming and Angel took a taxi to where his family there as Deming said: "University and W. 190ᵗʰ", [….] "My family is there". He walked fast and never slowed down for a second. He knocked on the door and hoped his mother would open it but his hopping flashed (*TL*: 92-3).

Bhabha focuses on Edward Said's claim that Oriental knowledge was valuable and worked successfully when practicing it. He adds that colonial discourse works according to the ambivalent protocols of desire and fantasy. Ambivalence, "which he takes from psychoanalysis, was first developed to describe a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and its opposite. It has a "simultaneously attraction toward and repulsion from an object, person or action" (Young 1995: 161). Deming attempted to call his mother but his call was never completed "he had called his mother's cell phone for the first time in over a month and got the same message. The call could not be completed" (*TL*: 82). Ko writes that until adolescence, Daniel slept in Deming. He realises he cannot be Deming and the hopeless control of him. When Angle asks him if he wishes to find his mum, he answers no "he said no, not anymore" (*TL*: 97). Nevertheless, he still thinks of a connection with the Chinese; he meets his Chinese childhood friend, Michael. He imagines he could meet his mother. He answered Michael's e-mail by writing you have got the right person. Michael invites Deming to dinner. Deming blames Vivian because she gives up on him and never goes back to take him as she promised. He insisted on telling him where his mum was. "What do you know about my mother? Where is she?" (*TL*:109). He has two characters: Daniel, who never cares about his mum's absence, and Deming, who wants to meet his mum.

When Deming was alone at home one day afternoon, he dared to open the cabinet door. For Deming, the recorder's covers were bright and throbbing as they called him to a new beginning full of hope. These

black disks were like "alien trees [that] sliced their trunks open" (*TL*: 67) When Peter observes Deming's act, Peter orders Deming to choose the disk to listen to it. Deming chooses "Jimi Hendrix's Are You Experienced". The cover brings Deming attention; on it is a picture of a Black man standing with two white men. Ko describes how the music filled the room with colour, a punch with a grin, "Deming felt a breeze stream into the house as if the guitars were fanning him" (*TL*: 67). Deming attempted to turn up the radio, but the signs were weak and spotty. He misses the music he needs and craves. The city was like one long song, endlessly shading, vivid, train drums, a massive dance mix of bus beats, and passing stereos, "in Ridgeborough [street], the absence of the music was flagrant (*TL*: 68). Peter gives Deming headphones. These old headphones transformed him into a new beginning in life.

The blank streets and large trees became comical when paired with a soundtrack, made him an action hero instead of an abandoned boy, and Planet Ridgeborough blew up. Platinum flowers morphed into oscillating lines and dancing triangles. (*TL*: 68)

The music enters Deming to new fields. He and his friend Roland form a musical team. They listened to a mixtape Roland's mother had made for Roland's father before Roland was born. The shades of certain chords made Deming feel like he was

cupping a tiny, golden bird. It wasn't just music, but also rumbling trains and rainstorms, occasional voices, and a collective din. Colours and textures appeared in front of him, bouncing in time to the rhythm, or he'd get a flash of colour in his mind, an automatic sensation of a tone, innate as breathing. (*TL*: 71)

Deming chooses music, which means everything to him, unlike others. He learns how to create music, "matching tones to shades to feelings and translating them back to melody" (*TL*: 72). It represents the best

and purest form of communication with the world around him. He expresses what he wants to say through his songs and declares that only he can understand the music.

The differences between the two cultures, i.e., the Chinese and the American, caused conflict in immigrant culture. To reach cultural interaction, the immigrant must accept the host culture with the native culture through imitating the coloniser's acts. Bhabha affirms that the colonised are almost the same, but not quite (*LoC*: 89). In contrast, ambivalence is a state in which people have diverse experiences when they are in–between cultures. It refers to the colonised people's conflict and contrasts feelings of attraction and disgust towards the coloniser's culture. Simultaneously, the colonised people admire and detest the coloniser's culture. Due to their multicultural background, they carry elements of the colonised and coloniser culture. It leads to an identity crisis because they feel conflicted about who they are (*LoC*: 75). Therefore, "If [Deming] couldn't feel at home in China, if he didn't belong in Ridgeborough, then where did that leave him?" (*TL*: 333).

The hybridity replaces ambivalence, which occurs in balance between contrasting identities (*LoC*: 154). Deming is an immigrant son who engaged in a lot of imitation and mimicry during his identity negotiation. In line with Bhabha, mimicry refers to the colonised behaviour of mimicking and copying the coloniser's culture to equalise their power level. He imitates the prevailing American culture. His new name facilitates his interaction with the American culture:

He liked to whistle tunelessly. "Good morning, Daniel." It always took a second to realise they were talking to him. When school started, they said it would be easier with an American name. (*TL*: 49)

Peter and Kay changed his name from Deming to Daniel to help him feel more like a family member. Kay expresses her desire for Daniel to

integrate and assimilate into the majority. Kay's eyes flipped from Daniel's face to the wall to the kitchen window.

[Peter and Kay] 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. (*TL*: 255- 56)

Deming's Chinese name caused him problems with his teachers and peers. One runs the risk of abandoning and eventually losing the original identity when one represses one native cultural identity and engages in a lengthy act of mimicking (*LoC*: 86). Despite all of its advantages of blending with the majority, mimicry has a deadly side effect of causing identity to vanish. A person who experiences identity instability becomes confused and ambivalent. Deming has been put in a precarious situation where ambivalence arose due to his imbalanced Chinese and American identities. The loss of his culture due to his earlier mimicking acts was undoubtedly the cause of his sense of alienation as the colonised absorbed the dominant culture. Bhabha affirms that one primary possible source of ambivalence is the colonised loss of culture as they push their culture aside (*LoC*: 86). Ambivalence is unwelcomed by the coloniser because it disrupts the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised:

Ambivalence disrupts the clear-cut authority of colonial domination because it disrupts the simple relation between the coloniser and the colonised. [It] is, therefore, an unwelcomed aspect of colonial discourse for the coloniser. (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 2007:10)

Lois T. explains that ambivalence represents the relationship between the colonised and the coloniser, as the colonised wants to be equal to the coloniser by mimicking or imitating them. "Mimicry (the attempt of the colonized to be accepted by imitating the dress, behavior, speech, and lifestyle of the colonizers)" (Tyson, 2006: 427). He portrays how individuals struggle for cultural identity and feel that one has no cultural

"home" or sense of cultural belonging, double consciousness, and their emotions torn between the psychological and social demands of two opposing cultures. Their culture will mix with other cultures and generate a hybrid culture which reflects "experiencing one's cultural identity as a hybrid of two or more cultures, which feeling is sometimes described as a positive alternative to unhomeliness" (Tyson, 2006: 427). The dominant culture replaces the vulnerable culture, and the latter appears to imitate the former. Bhabha affirmed that hybridity developed within the conditions of colonisation, in which the colonised were forced to merge and accept the hegemonic coloniser's culture. It occurred when two or more cultures interacted in the third space (Michaelin, 2017: 4). Because he was afraid of facing racial discrimination, Deming was obliged to routinely carry out the following actions to make his American identity stronger than his Chinese identity, which caused him to experience ambivalence. In his

junior year of high school, he had seen a Chinese woman in the Littletown Mall. Thin, with permed hair, gripping plastic bags with the handles twisted around each other. She'd honed in; 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 and 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. (*TL*: 21)

Deming lies about his ability to speak Chinese out of fairness of being marginalised and making it difficult for him to affirm his identity. Bhabha mentions that this condition of ambivalence forms a contradictory feeling of admiration and resentment towards the coloniser's culture. He had the colonised, and the coloniser's identity generated conflicting

sensations in his multicultural identity. When he visited China, he recognised his American identity, which made him famous with his Chinese peers. "Being from America made him an object of desire, which was both flattering and strange; girls flirted with him when they found out he was from New York" (*TL*: 315). Although his American behaviour in China made him uncomfortable, he noticed that it was the only important thing at home that made people admire him because he had the coloniser culture. However, it instigates a mixed contrasting feeling on Deming's part. His ambivalence forms his hybridity, and his suffering of ambivalence ends when recognises that he can combine the Chinese and American cultures. His Eastern and Western cultures are mixed, which affirms Singh Amardeep's conception that hybridity is the mixing of Western and Eastern cultures (2009: 3).

Deming acquired Chinese and American cultures together, equally, and they met in a melting pot. As an immigrant son and a second-generation immigrant, he mimics the American culture to assimilate. He reconciles his multicultural identities, which consequently produces his hybrid identity. He smiled because Kay was beside him. He and Angel are adoptive children who take photographs with their adoptive parents to reflect their love for each other: "Elaine wrapped her arms around Angel, Peter and Kay's arms around Deming" (*TL*: 87). Deming decides to leave China and come back to New York. His decision makes Polly too sad. He justifies that her decision was not for Kay and Peter. His adoptive parents tell him their house felt empty without him.

It's good to have you back. I mean, I'm glad you had the opportunity to explore your roots, but I'm also glad you've come home. The house felt lonely without you here. (*TL*: 333)

Ko describes Deming's situation as "this apartment with Michael. This city. His best home" (*TL*: 335). His positive cultural interaction produces his assimilation with two cultures. He balances his native and new

identities and connects with his Chinese mum, Poly, and American adoptive mum, Kay.

3. Conclusion

Ko's *The Leavers* exemplified the idea of Chinese-American cultural interaction. It portrays Deming as an immigrant son of identity negotiation in the United States of America. If the cultural interaction between the immigrants and the host culture is based on a healthy basis, it results in assimilation; if not, it leads to resistance. *The Leavers* reflects Deming Chinese American's changeable stages in his cultural clash by adopting Bhabha's hybridity, mimicry, and ambivalence concepts to analyse second-generation immigrant cultural integration in the West. The immigrants mimic the American culture, give up their native culture and coexist with the host culture. Ko reflects the immigrants' suffering in their struggle to assimilate into the host culture. Deming's new name, Danial, and the contrast between his Chinese and American cultures generate ambivalence. This ambivalence leads to his hybrid identity in which his two cultures meet in the third space of in-betweenness, which affirms his coexistence and assimilation with the host American culture.

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