Like many other Chinese children of the time, I thought of myself as American. I can remember watching an old black-and-white cartoon on television—I think it was about a character called Scrappy. In it, he quarreled with a group of Chinese laundrymen so that he and they got into a comic-pitched battle.

The caricatures with the exaggerated slanted eyes and characters clad in black pajamas seemed fantasy creatures; and I remember putting my fingers up by the sides of my eyes to slant them like characters in the cartoon and running around making high, sing-song noises. My horrified mother said to me, “You’re Chinese. Stop that.”

Since that amounted to harsh words for my mother, I slunk off ashamed. Later, I dragged a chair over to the fireplace and climbed up so I could look at myself in the round mirror that hung over the mantle. My mother was right. Though my eyes were not slanted, I had folds at the corners of my eyes that created that effect.

I stopped doing imitations of cartoon laundrymen; but I still didn’t particularly want to be Chinese. In my neighborhood, I had grown up thinking that I was as American as all the other children. In the 1950s, few people wanted to be strange and different—let alone foreign. (41–42)

I did my best to show that I was different, becoming one of those obnoxious children who had to have a fork instead of chopsticks at a banquet in Chinatown—I didn’t learn how to use chopsticks until I was twelve. I also insisted on having Coca-Cola instead of tea.

There are so many things that I did as a child that I regret now. My father gave me the wooden box with the cunning lock that he used when he came to America. On the bottom were the original customs stickers; but I managed to scrape most of them off.