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Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*: Chinese American Hybridity

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Abstract

The present study aims to explore Chinese American identity, analyzing Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* and drawing a comparison with contemporary examples of Chinese American identity. The main thesis of this research is to reveal whether Chinese American identity has evolved from the 1970s to nowadays, and discuss the factors which may have an influence on how Chinese Americans perceive themselves. The main two factors considered are the changing social environment within the United States in terms of race (internal dynamics); and the economic development and growing international influence of the People's Republic of China (external dynamics).

To this aim, I will address relevant concepts such as Gloria Andaldúa's 'border theory' and Homi Bhabha's 'hybridity', in order to position a third role within the ethnic black/white, minority/majority establishment. The State of the Art will introduce relevant research on Chinese American identity and Postcolonial theory. Ling-chi Wang will provide the theoretical framework through which to analyze some of the different stages in the development of Chinese American identity. Julia Lee and Bella Adam's work on Maxine Hong Kingston's oeuvre will be the basis to explore the themes discussed in *The Woman Warrior* as well as the historical and literary context in the second chapter. Finally, in the third chapter, I will present some contemporary examples of Chinese American identity in the United States media (film and stand-up comedy), and another set of examples of how the Chinese Diaspora is perceived in China. To conclude, I will briefly discuss how the Chinese Spanish identity is now emerging as a new reality.

This study aims to show how Chinese American hybridity was a third pole within the white and black racial binary opposition, and how Chinese American identity evolves with the internal social dynamics within the United States, alongside the external fluctuation of China-U.S. relations; and aims to understand how modern Chinese Americans navigate their hybrid identity and perceive themselves in comparison to Kingston's exploration of identity.

Key Words: Chinese American identity, Maxine Hong Kingston, The Woman Warrior, Chinese American hybridity

1.Introduction

Main Objectives

In the present paper, I will discuss Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, a keystone of Chinese American literature, focusing on the theme of Chinese American cultural hybridity. I will provide contemporary examples of Chinese American identity to trace the evolution of how Chinese Americans perceive themselves. Kingston's novel —despite the lack of consensus on its genre, I will explain the reasons why I consider it as such— offers excellent examples of cultural hybridity as well as the process of acculturation and adaptation to the target culture, with a wide range of in-between development stages of adaptation in different characters of the book. For instance, there is a generation gap between the narrator and her parents in terms of how acculturated they are, which can be analyzed through Ling-chi Wang's categorization of Chinese American identities. Moreover, Kingston uses historiographic metafiction to make a personal and social stand, vindicating the silenced voices of Chinese migration in American history through a particular blend of literary fabrication and real historical events. Today's representations in U.S. and Chinese media, as well as particular cases of Chinese American hybridity, will be used to compare Kingston's and nowadays Chinese American identity.

I will discuss the peculiarities of Chinese American migration, including racial stereotypes and legislation that particularly affected this collective, and the influence that this had on Chinese American identity and literature; following, I will discuss modern Chinese American identity and how Chinese Americans needed to 'claim America', expanding the notion of what it means to be American; and finally, I will provide a Chinese perspective on how the Chinese Diaspora and Chinese Americans are perceived in the People's Republic of China.

Thesis Statement

Individuals from multicultural backgrounds develop a complex identity between two or more societies. They are perfectly familiar with the target culture (in this case, the United States, and by default, the Anglo or Western culture —although 'the West' is by no means a cultural monolith, but stands together in contrast to Chinese culture for the purposes of this study) and their source culture, which in the present work will refer to Chinese culture. This position allows multicultural individuals to abridge both worlds, but simultaneously creates a hybrid identity where how their source culture (China) is perceived by the target culture (Anglo American) deeply influences how these individuals see themselves.

The present work aims to study how hybridity is portrayed in *The Woman Warrior*; how racism shapes the way Chinese American individuals navigate their own heritage, always comparing both worlds, and often overcoming a complex of inferiority to eventually be able to incorporate into their identity their Chinese heritage proudly; and, finally, how the evolving social context in the United States and the economical development of China might change racial prejudice in the United States, therefore influencing how hybridity is experienced in Chinese American individuals, allowing these individuals to explore and affirm their Chinese heritage differently in the future.

Relevance of the topic - Why is this important?

Following, I will expound on the reasons why I decided to explore Chinese American cultural identity in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and how this is relevant to the Master's perspective on literature and its relationship with society.

Multicultural identity is a particularly relevant theme in a country such as the United States, as it is a nation that from its foundation dissociated the State

with notions of nationality/ethnicity. Thus, during centripetal nationalist movements, many nations were born on the basis of a shared history and nationality (the Italian nationals forming an Italian State; the Germans joining territories into Germany, etc.) American national identity had to be created from scratch, and what it means to be American has proved to be a problematic theme: from a predominantly Anglo society to a conglomerate of ethnicities that exercise their right to claim themselves American. In this context, the Chinese American identity is particularly unique, as the Chinese were the only nationals who were legally forbidden to acquire U.S. citizenship by law (Chinese Exclusion Act, 1882), and China has traditionally regarded their own nationals in terms of blood lineage (*ius sanguinis*), not recognizing naturalization and acquisition of foreign citizenship until 1957.

The United States can hence be regarded as a social experiment due to its political nature: a democratic nation-state which is not based on ethnicity. Although numerous historical examples of multicultural societies exist, coexistence was typically imposed by empires and colonialism with clear hierarchies between ethnicities. In the United States case, the intent is to create a pluralistic society of equals. This accommodation of different peoples into a unified nationality is far from being complete, as recent movements such as Black Lives Matter or Stop Asian Hate/ 'I Am Not a Virus' demonstrate: despite its claims, the U.S. may remain a country where race and ethnicity matter.

Notwithstanding, cultural identity does not exclusively concern the United States but has become a relevant theme in Western societies. In our current Postcolonial world, Western once-colonizing powers received a large amount of population settling in their former metropolis after the colonies gradually obtained independence in the 1960s. During the colonial period, pluralistic societies were formed, with people of different backgrounds coexisting in hierarchical structures. It is particularly illustrating the British Empire case in places such as Singapore or South Africa, where along with the Britons came Indian colonial subjects to join the ethnic puzzle of natives, Western colonizers, and colonized peoples from other lands who accompanied them. Multi-ethnic societies are also the norm in Western Europe after the

colonies gradually obtained independence and many moved to their former metropolis.

Thus, countries such as France and the United Kingdom, and later on Western Europe as a whole, are becoming multi-ethnic States in the guise of the United States. This is a predominantly Western phenomenon, as countries in Asia are predominantly ethnic-nationalistic, tending to maintain the idea of a nation-state based on ethnicity and blood lineage, only granting citizenship to children of their nationals (*ius sanguinis*). Although with exceptions like Singapore (whose demographics were deeply influenced by colonialist coexistence of peoples), most countries tend to be restrictive to naturalizations of foreign nationals and dual citizenships: according to the European University Institute's Citizenship Law Dataset, only one-fourth of the countries worldwide grant birthright citizenship, and most of them are located in the Americas (Vink et al., 2021). This makes the multi-ethnic State a predominantly Western or American phenomenon so far, with the United States as the pioneer, and European societies following suit. According to Eurostat, "In 2020, around 729 000 persons acquired citizenship of one of the EU Member States, compared to 706 400 in 2019 and 672 300 in 2018." (Eurostat 2022) The Chinese population in the European Union was estimated at 2.15 million in 2007 (Latham & Wu 17). In light of this data, it is foreseeable that cultural hybridity will be an increasingly relevant topic, not only in the United States but in Western countries in general.

European society can see the writing on the wall, and learn from the failures and successes of the United States regarding multi-ethnic societies in order to foster coexistence and equality of individuals from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. A wide-scope study of cultural identity, and Chinese American identity in particular, will shed light on how individuals coming from migrant families shape their identities in a 'host country' that simultaneously *is* their motherland.

By learning how the United States is forming a sense of cultural cohesion between different ethnicities, we can better understand how Western societies might be able to do likewise, elucidating how these nationals who share

multicultural backgrounds perceive their own identity and constructing multicultural societies in Europe where citizens are not burdened by racial prejudice or stirred by identitarian ideologies.

Finally, an analysis of Chinese American hybridity will prove fruitful not only due to the cultural distance, which arguably may be one of the 'largest' between two civilizations —granted, cultural differences are intangible and therefore cannot be measurable—; but moreover, the ascend of China as world's second-largest economy may have an impact in the way Chinese Americans view their own identity. Traditionally ignored, when not viewed as inferior by White Anglo Americans internationally and within their borders, China has now been soaring in the geopolitical arena for decades. This may challenge the ethnocentric and complacent view of some Anglo American supremacists and may influence how Chinese Americans navigate their cultural heritage. How Chinese Americans saw and see themselves is a dynamic identity, reacting to a changing environment from the 19th Century, with the U.S. with anti-miscegenation laws and Immigration Exclusion acts, and China burdened by feudalism, internal political turmoil, and colonialism; to the present day, where racism and equality are common topics in the public debate of the United States and a China that has become the second largest power in the world. In view of all these changes, Chinese Americans are also bound to change the way they perceive themselves, as the interplay between both countries and cultures is in constant change.

Methodology

In order to analyze hybridity, the present paper will study *The Woman Warrior* from a Postcolonial perspective. Works by authors such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Edward Said, and Amin Maalouf will prove relevant to this topic, with concepts like 'border culture', Orientalism, and hybridity being key to understanding *The Woman Warrior* in terms of cultural identity. To further explore Chinese American identity, a Sinological perspective will also prove fruitful. I will draw examples of current Chinese Americans to see the evolution

of hybridity within the United States; and, on the other hand, I will discuss how Chinese Americans and the Chinese Diaspora are regarded in China.

Finally, Postmodernism will be regarded as an effective tool to interrogate official narratives or power relations in society and to analyze the influence that hegemonic thinking has on historical accounts.

2. State of the Art

Postcolonialism

Africa, Caribbean, and South-Asian literatures come from different places and different histories, and not merely different from France, but different from each other. It is this real sort of difference that disappears in postcolonial studies.

(Dirlik 1997)

I wanted to emphasize Dirlik's critique of postcolonial studies' omission of particularities before incurring that error myself: although this paper will deal with Chinese American hybridity in particular, I believe some features found in Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* can be traced back to other postcolonial works from other ethnicities, so I would like to begin discussing postcolonialism from a Black and African literature perspective, highlighting why these works are relevant to Kingston's novel.

Following the independence of colonies in the second half of the 20th Century, Frantz Fanon's vividly entitled work *Black Skin, White Masks* opened the debate of the colonized cultural identity, and how the colonial subjects could find their own sense of self as different from whites, whilst appropriating cultural attributes of the target culture. Notably, he called "doubleness" to this tension between culturally hybrid individuals who are unable to become racially white, yet feel the social pressure or expectation to act like whites, white being the standard by default, and *de facto* alienating other cultural realities. Zakes Mda in *The Heart of Redness* explores a mix of Xhosa history, myth, and colonial conflict, with a genre blend comparable to *The Woman Warrior* which can also be found in Derek Walcott's *Omeros* intermingling of history, collective memory, Caribbean patois, and Western culture. *The Invisible Man*, by Ralph Ellison, delves into the topic of social visibility and race hierarchies. Similarly, Kingston's protagonist will feel 'voiceless' and unable to make

herself heard. These social blindness and/or deafness are all but metaphors of social hierarchies where the white race and Anglo culture are the standards, rendering deviations from these norms socially ostracized and ignored.

When speaking about Postcolonialist theory, there are three figures that are unavoidable: referred to as the 'Holy Trinity' of Postcolonial Studies, they are namely Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha. Said's *Orientalism* is credited as a major and groundbreaking work of Postcolonialism, identifying all the conceptual and intellectual work that led to the creation of a collective image of the 'Orient' or the 'Other' as a myth or 'supreme fiction' (Said x). The emphasis here was on the Western gaze: the image of the colonized was created by the colonizers through a process that could be traced back and studied, and these conceptualizations were fluid and effectively changed to fit the colonizer's changing purposes. Said thus challenged how the West saw other cultures by exposing how this discourse was created historically by intellectuals, and how this endeavor had the purpose of dominating the Orient, first in the academy and ultimately on the battlefield. He also distinguishes between "the will to understand for purposes of co-existence and humanistic enlargement of horizons, and the will to dominate for the purposes of control and external dominion." (Said xii) Through his analysis of colonial discourse, Said showed its conceptual creation of an Orient which needed to be colonized through a 'mission civilisatrice', creating racist and dehumanizing stereotypes that conveniently justified the expansionist projects of the metropolis. These discourses had a deep impact on the Western psyche, to the extent that long after the period of decolonization, these preconceived ideas survived and are part and parcel of racist prejudice nowadays. Both Said and Fanon brightly expounded the crippling effect of Western imperialist discourse on the psyche of the colonized, both as individuals and as societies, effectively rendering chauvinistic Westerners with an unflinching self-perception of superiority, on one side; and ex-colonial subjects with no sense of cultural pride, on the other. Yet the colonized insecurities can be abruptly overcompensated, as the cultural nationalism wave in many postcolonial societies proved (Senghor's Négritude in Africa or Mao's exacerbated ethnic nationalistic pride in China.)

Spivak introduces the concept of the 'subaltern' to highlight intersectional hierarchies such as gender, race, and socioeconomic status. The subaltern is the oppressed with no agent voice and no awareness of their oppression, and it is precisely this purported lack of political consciousness that makes the subaltern unable to create an organized struggle to improve their situation. Her joint analysis of gender and race linked to Marxist perspectives was a step forward toward intersectionality. As it will be discussed later, intersectionality is particularly relevant to *The Woman Warrior*, with the author involved in 'pen wars' against Chinese American male writers, who dismissed her feminism as anti-Chinese or compliant to the white readership.

Finally, Bhabha would put forward yet another essential triad of concepts that would be pivotal for Postcolonial studies: 'mimicry', 'ambivalence', and 'hybridity'. According to Bhabha, hybridity is an emulation of signs and behaviors by the colonized, which challenges authority by imitating only the form but not the content. (Selden 227) Notwithstanding, in the present paper hybridity will be understood in a wider sense, following the conceptual framework of Gloria Anzaldúa, Amin Maalouf, or Canclini, among others, as a 'border culture' or 'third space' that appears when two or more cultures coexist. Thus, hybridity stands for a cultural mix in which individuals share traits of two or more different cultures, enriching cultural identity and rendering it more fluid and less classifiable into rigid categories.

2.2 Hybridity and Border Theory

Besides Bhabha, many authors have added their nuanced perspectives to this field. For instance, there are other definitions of hybridity such as "hybridity commonly refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization." (Mambrol 2016); or "a political object that is new, neither the colonizer nor the Other." (Shamshayooadeh 95). Bakhtin is credited to have discussed hybridity from a discursive perspective, with authors such as Ortega stating that for Bakhtin, hybrid consciousness evolves as a kind of narrative (Ortega ii). Kraidy sees hybridity as a "conceptual inevitability" in

the context of globalization, where "traces of other cultures exist in every culture" (Kraidy 148). Pieterse also analyzes hybridity related to a globalized world, claiming that it has existed throughout history, its current academic exposure laying on the fact that it problematizes boundaries that are trying to be preserved by anti-hybridity essentialists (Pieterse 2001). Renato Rosaldo also sees hybridization as a ubiquitous and ever-existing phenomenon by which societies engage in cultural exchange, asserting that "Hybridity can be understood as the ongoing condition of all human cultures, which contain no zones of purity because they undergo continuous processes of transculturation (two-way borrowing and lending between cultures.)" (Rosaldo xi, as cited in Fowler 63) Canclini focuses on Latin America and understands hybridity in terms of societies with different technological and social developments, such as the opposition between tradition and modernity, or the process of democratization (Canclini as cited in Ortega 98).

Focusing on Latin America as well, the work of queer and Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa stands out as a pioneering oeuvre. As mentioned above, hybridity in the present work will be also understood in connection to Anzaldúa's Border Theory, as "two worlds merging to form a third country —a border culture. (Anzaldúa 25) Hybrid identities cannot be understood through traditional binary oppositions, hence the need to create a third space, an "in-between", in Bhabha's terms, or an interstice between abstract, absolute, and 'pure' cultures. Anzaldúa's conceptual framework is particularly relevant to analyze Kingston's oeuvre: despite the evident differences in ethnicity (Chicana, Chinese) and sexual orientation (queer and heterosexual), both authors talk about the experience of being a woman writer from a non-White group in the United States. As Cheung observes, Kingston's work "reflects her disaffection from both Chinese and white American patriarchy and her engagement as a minority woman with two subcultures." (Cheung 77)

This situation allows a double consciousness (Anzaldúa calls this stage of consciousness 'nepantla', a state which people in transition undergo, or a distinct way of experiencing reality as a member of a minority in contrast with mainstream society, originated by the disconnect between self-perception and social projections onto oneself) which allows hybridity, syncretism, and a bridge

between cultures. Yet Gloria Anzaldúa points out the possibility of assimilation and alienation as well: "When we, the objects, become the subjects, and look at and analyze our own experiences, a danger arises that we may look through the master's gaze, speak through his tongue, use his methodology" (Anzaldúa xxiii). Asian Americans and Chicanos are a third space in American society not only in terms of their cultural hybridity or biracial condition (if applicable) but also because of the white/black racial bipolarity prevalent in the United States. Adams argues that "people speak of 'American' as if it means 'white' and 'minority' as if it means 'black', thereby assuming a limited conceptualization of race that marginalizes not only biracial but also Asian Americans." (Adams, 8); and "Asian American identity thus exceeds its conceptualization in a racially bipolar formation that has historically rendered it invisible (nothing, or zero) since it is neither black nor white." (Adams 96) As Chan Young's case in 1854 established that the Chinese were not white, and not black either, they were effectively positioned as a third space that belongs to neither of the parts involved in the American race binomial.

As Ortega points out, "hybridity is presented as (...) texts that tell the stories of female characters who have achieved hybrid consciousness." (Ortega, ii) Not only that, both Anzaldúa and Kingston felt the struggle of being from another culture in the White society ('nepantla'), and being a feminist within their own patriarchal subgroups, with Kingston's androcentric backlash of male Chinese American authors being particularly vicious. It is also particularly illustrative that Anzaldúa and Kingston reconstruct their identity and connection to their motherland, the United States, by linking this land to their ancestors. It is profoundly ironic that they are seen as the eternal 'Other' by a White society that often has arrived long after their own families, with Anzaldúa's having resided in El Valle, South Texas, for many generations and prior to Texas annexation to the United States. Likewise, Kingston's family background included men who worked in Hawaii's plantations and worked in the Transcontinental Railroad in the 19th Century. Even if lineage seniority should not make somebody more 'American', the authors nonetheless discuss this paradox of being treated as an outsider due to race, whilst whites whose ancestral linkage to the land is more recent are more easily accepted as part of society.

A common critique of Postcolonial Theory states that there cannot be a monolithic term such as “Postcolonial” which includes such a wide array of different cultures and incomparable colonial experiences, with groups of people that do not share either history, language, or culture. (Dirlik ix) From a Marxist perspective, Aijaz Ahmad disagrees with Critical Discourse and Postcolonial Studies, particularly against Said and Bhabha’s dismissal of Marxism and nationalism, in his work *In Theory*. He is particularly opposed to the Postmodern intellectuals’ tendency towards “eclectic borrowings and academic abstractions” (Ahmad 5) disconnected from political action in the real world. If “Any attempt to know the world (...) was to be dismissed as a contemptible attempt to construct ‘grand narratives’” (Ahmad 69), then “the radical theorist takes up the role of a professional academic in the metropolitan university, with no accountable relation with classes and class-fractions outside the culture industry” (Ahmad 6), becoming devoid of any practical implications. Although perhaps incurring in some *ad hominem* fallacies, as Ahmad attacks Bhabha and Said sometimes merely on the grounds of their economic and intellectual backgrounds, Ahmad’s critiques are a good warning against Postcolonial Studies becoming a mere group of self-indulging intellectuals with no knowledge of the material realities they are discussing.

Similarly, John Hutnyk, author of *Bad Marxism,* is another Marxist voice against Postcolonial Studies, warning against the use of ‘hybridity’ as a means of “keeping Marx out of the academy” and adds: “The ways in which hybridity displaces other languages and other ways of seeing and organizing deserve attention. (...) Hybridity and difference sell; the market remains intact. My charge against hybridity is thus that it is a rhetorical cul-de-sac which trivializes black political activity.” (Hutnyk 414)

Identity

Closely related to hybridity is identity. According to Giménez, identity can be defined as “The set of internalized cultural repertoires (representations, values, symbols ...) through which social actors (individuals or collectivities) symbolically demarcate their boundaries and distinguish themselves from other social actors in a given situation, all in historically specific and socially

structured contexts." (translated from Giménez 1) Giménez's definition will prove more useful when considering cultural identity in Maxine Hong Kingston's work, as it emphasizes identity as a distinction from other collectivities or individuals. My identity is therefore constructed regarding what characteristics bind me to some individuals, simultaneously differentiating me from others. Similarly, Horowitz refers to identity foregrounding the importance of social characteristics such as gender, race, or status in one person's self-perception as well as one is socially regarded. (Horowitz 2012)

In *Asian American Representation in Media: An Interpretive Analysis of the Consumer*, Brooke Byun points out how representation is particularly important for members of ethnic minorities, discussing, in particular, the representation of Asian Americans in media and its influence on how Asian Americans may perceive themselves as a result. (Byun 310)

Another author whose contributions have been significant in understanding identity is Lebanon-born French Amin Maalouf. His novel *Leo Africanus* is a historiographic metafiction vindicating a historical figure ostracized by the official narratives. Yet it is in his essay *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong* that he offers a detailed study of how identity should not be perceived as a homogeneous entity, but as a mixture of 'parts' within a self, each unique and incomparable. Hence, for Maalouf, identity "is not made of compartments, it is not divided into halves, thirds or stagnant zones. And it is not that I have several identities: I have only one, the product of all the (cultural) elements that have configured it by means of a singular dosage that is never the same in two people." (Maalouf 10).

According to his view of identity, 'second generation immigrants' (a problematic term in itself, it has been noted, by some who argue that the condition of the migrant cannot be inherited) do not have a 'double identity' in virtue of being an amalgam of cultures: their experiences make up one sole hybrid identity, and Maalouf emphasizes how this hybridity occurs to all kinds of individuals to some extent, regardless of their background, as personal experiences are non-transferable and account for unique individuals with 'compound or multicultural identities'. Similarly, Denys Cuche affirms that

"Each person configures his or her identity on the basis of his or her different social affiliations (sex, age, social class, cultural group, etc.). The individual who participates in several cultures elaborates from these different materials his or her unique personal identity by operating an original synthesis. The result is a syncretic identity, not a double one." (Cuche as quoted in Gavilán 205)

Finally, N. D. R. Chandra highlights the importance of writing, and particularly autobiography, to express all the anxiety of acculturation and assimilation. For Chandra, first-person narration "is used to reflect the mounting conflict between the two cultures and its ultimate resolution in the writer's mind (...) bridging the gap between the diverse cultures. A cross-cultural identity is established not by reconciling one culture to another or by subordinating one to another but by giving equal validity to both." (Chandra 218)

Chinese American Identity

I have been both Chinese and foreign, this makes me neither.

Amy Tan as quoted in Cuder & Villegas 30

Finally, for the purposes of this study, I will take into account the state of the art in the field of Chinese American identity.

The identity of Chinese Americans is inextricably linked to political history, and it explains why Postcolonialism is applicable to Chinese Americans. Firstly, Western colonization of China after the Opium Wars did create an appropriate background for Western powers to engage in Orientalist thinking, projecting onto China notions such as backwardness and lack of civilization. Although not directly engaged in the colonization of China, these Orientalist notions were deeply entrenched in the Anglo American psyche. In the cultural realm, characters like Fu Manchu, John Chinaman, and detective Charlie Chan were very popular and furthered racist prejudices and the stereotype of a barbaric, sensuous, and exotic 'other' that began with the colonization of China. Adams points out "the way in which Asian Americans are viewed in American culture, for the most part, as biologically and culturally Other or, more precisely, the threatening 'yellow peril' (Sax Rohmer's Dr. Fu Man Chu)" on the one

extreme of the Manichean prejudice; “and the controllable ‘model minority’” on the other, idealizing Chinese Americans as industrious and docile. (Adams 30) Earl Derr Biggers's detective character Charlie Chan was the archetype of this model minority, a non-threatening and assimilationist version of Chinese American, yet irremediably deemed the racially different and exotic other, a ‘hybrid’ in Bhabha’s sense. Asian American women were also subject to exoticism and hypersexualization, with tropes such as ‘Dragon Lady’, ‘China Doll’, and ‘Madame Butterfly’, portraying Asian Women as submissive and lacking any agency. (Adams 14)

On the darker side, xenophobic articles, posters, and illustrations became widespread in the 19th Century in the United States, with the campaign aiming to oust the Chinese population that resulted in the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882). Prior to that, and as Kingston illustrates reviewing her family’s background in *China Men*, many Chinese men were used as inexpensive labor, either in plantations (such as sugarcane in Hawaii); the notorious exploitation of Transatlantic Railroad workers (who were paid less than White workers, and were given the most dangerous jobs, often involving nitroglycerine, therefore suffering a higher mortality rate); and later on, as laundrymen, a market that quickly became their niche, in part due to the legal restrictions that impeded Chinese employment in many trades. All this sustains the claim that Chinese Americans saw themselves as “having been exploited in the interests of dominant groups within (the nation). Their situation has been interpreted as one of internal colonialism.” (Richmond 178)

The Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) effectively prevented Chinese immigration and the acquisition of U.S. citizenship. Thus, racial discrimination has been ostensibly influential to the conforming of Chinese American identity. The first Chinese American political entities were formed to fight back against the Chinese Exclusion Act, and have remained active throughout Chinese American history, including activism and associationism during the Great Depression, and cultural nationalism of the 1960s. Maxine Hong Kingston devoted in *China Men* an entire chapter (‘The Laws’) to expound on all the anti-Chinese laws in the United States, as a means to raise awareness and let the audience understand the effect that laws had in the shaping of Chinese American

identity. Jinyi Song has documented the importance of political activism in *Shaping and Reshaping Chinese American Identity. New York's Chinese during the Depression and World War II.* (Song 2010) Lew-Williams' *The Chinese Must Go: Violence, Exclusion, and the Making of the Alien in America* is a comprehensive study of sinophobia in the United States, from the enacting of anti-Chinese laws of the 19th Century and its subsequent racial violence, up to their influence in present day's Chinese American identity.

Pivotal in the present work's understanding of Chinese American identity is scholar and activist Ling-Chi Wang's classification into five types of identity among the Chinese in Diaspora in his article *Roots and Changing Identity of the Chinese in the United States*: "the sojourner mentality; assimilator; accommodator; ethnically proud; and uprooted." (Ling-Chi Wang 184) Wang outlines the history of Chinese Americans, from the 19th Century claims of 'non-assimilability' into American society to the 1960s prejudice of the 'model minority'. He also expounds on the importance of the interactions between both countries, as they have had an impact on "the collective experience of the Chinese in the United States and on the formation of their identities" (Ling-Chi Wang 182), yet he warns against a simplistic generalization of seeing Chinese American identity as homogeneous nor static (193) (diversity among Chinese American self-perception is also emphasized by Peter Feng's *Being Chinese American, Becoming Asian American: "Chan Is Missing"*, 1996). Thus, he lays out five types of Chinese American strategies that can fluctuate and evolve for every individual. His excellent study of Chinese history and Chinese American self-perception will be useful to analyze hybridity in *The Woman Warrior* and in the other literary and cinematographic cases that will be discussed in the present paper. For this reason, I will present in further detail his typologies.

As a means to understand Chinese American identity, Ling-chi Wang first establishes the importance of the ancestral village (that is not one's birthplace, but the family's original land), ethnic nationalism, and blood lineage to understand the Chinese notion of national identity:

Identity here is inextricably tied to and equated with one's ancestral village. The bond to one's roots is unique, sacred, and eternal. At another level, especially among the overseas Chinese, roots take on additional meanings as Chinese culture and a geographic entity called China one's 'zuguo' (ancestral nation or motherland). It is this bond between overseas Chinese and China that undergirds the unique racial and cultural identity of the overseas Chinese. With the rise of Chinese nationalism, especially since the beginning of the twentieth century, roots came to denote also a political entity —the Chinese nation-state— headed by a government, from which overseas Chinese derived their legal status as Chinese citizens and to which they owed their allegiance.

(Ling-Chi Wang 182)

According to this understanding of one's ancestral motherland, individuals with Chinese ancestry will 'eternally' be Chinese, regardless of their birthplace, their culture, or the language they speak. This is still nowadays a widespread understanding of nationality in China, and it will be discussed in further detail when analyzing current Chinese American identity from a Chinese perspective. Wang establishes that this is the principle that the 'sojourner' has in mind: a Chinese person who is abroad temporarily, with the clear determination of eventually returning to China. Wang argues that the first wave of Chinese migration to the United States was the sojourner type, with a strong influence of the traditional Chinese value of loyalty to one's ancestral land as an inextricable part of personal identity (183, 195). In the same vein, the Chinese state would claim jurisdiction over all overseas Chinese based on race (ius sanguinis), even if they were naturalized in other countries, and treated them as *de facto* colonies subject to extraterritorial rule until 1957 when the Chinese Communist government officially recognized that individuals with foreign citizenship were no longer Chinese, but forbidding double nationality. (195) Interestingly, Wang points out that the sojourners would consider any injustice in the United States as temporary, consequently not bothering to change the racist and unjust status quo. (194)

After the 'sojourner', Wang argues that a new mentality gradually emerged in Chinese Americans: total assimilation. Key to the 'assimilator'

ideology is the sharp difference that American-born Chinese perceived in race, culture, and legal status compared to their European counterparts, which led to the survival strategy of “rejection of heritage and pursuit of white values to become fully Americanized.” (196) He cites as examples of assimilation the autobiographies of Pardee Lowe and Jade Snow Wong, arguing that the assimilators sought acceptance by the white Americans by erasing their cultural heritage, and internalized a sense of inferiority derived from oppression, segregation in ghettos, and the systemic racism that permeated the dominant society. (197) King-kok Cheung does not support total assimilation, and advocates for hybridity instead:

Celebration of our marginality requires precisely that we adopt aspects of both cultures, that we not "hide our ancestry." As Aunt Emily in Obasan forcefully points out, "Momotaro [a Japanese fable] is a Canadian story. We're Canadian .... Everything a Canadian does is Canadian" (57). Asian Americans should not have to prove their Americanness by distancing themselves as far as possible from their ancestral cultures. Trying to be American by going against what is stereotypically Asian only reinforces the norm dictated by the dominant culture. (Cheung 19)

Next, those Chinese who began as ‘sojourners’ who found themselves unable to go back to China and settled permanently in the United States had to reshape their identities. Wang calls this phase ‘accommodation’, designating a strategy by which Chinese Americans resort to “adjusting to an American life-style in public without fundamentally changing their private Chinese life-style and cultural values (...) It is a survival strategy in an alien setting, a pragmatic approach widely used by Chinese in Southeast Asia.” (200) Accommodation mainly differs from the assimilationist mentality in that ‘accommodators’ do not reject their cultural heritage: they keep it discreetly in their private lives and merely adapt to social customs in public.

The fourth category enunciated by Wang is ‘ethnic pride and consciousness’, which originated in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Inspired by the black civil rights and black power movements to develop a distinct Chinese American identity and create a ‘Chinese America’ (200), the ethnic pride

movement was formed by Chinese American scholars and students who fought against racial discrimination, reinterpreting history and reexamining the problems and needs of Chinese American communities through entities such as the Organization of Chinese Americans, Chinese for Affirmative Action, Chinatown Planning Council of New York, or the National Association of Chinese Americans (NACA). (199) Ethnic nationalists were a reaction and antithetic force against assimilationists, eager to rediscover Chinese American history. *The Woman Warrior* would belong to Kingston's 'ethnic conscious' mentality, as will be discussed later. Ling-chi Wang argues that ethnic consciousness is not uncritical of Chinese culture, nor denies the Chinese American past, but instead proudly celebrates the history of the Chinese community in America and acknowledges it as distinct from other communities in China due to their particularities in terms of common past experiences in the United States, recognizing it as a new culture and a new American identity, whilst combatively asserting demands of justice and equality in the U.S.. (202)

Other literary critics such as Frank Chin and the *Aiiieeeee!: An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* editors consider that "black cultural nationalism and the black power movement enabled insights into Asian American experiences", and "criticized an Americanized Chinese vision that 'reinforces white racist stereotypes and falls short of the vision Malcolm X and other blacks had for their minority.'" (Adams 83)

Finally, Ling-chi Wang identifies as the 'uprooted' those Chinese foreign students and intellectuals who chose to stay in the United States in search of better career opportunities and standards of living. These intellectuals would choose to stay not only for economic reasons but also because of the civil liberties granted in the United States, which allow freedom of expression and freedom of the press. (203) He adds in his article's conclusion that besides the cultural aspects which influence the Chinese diaspora's identity, the role of China as a country will "continue to play an enormous, dynamic role in the formation and structuring of Chinese identity abroad. Its influence on the Chinese Diaspora can be both positive and negative, depending on China's own ability to modernize and make herself a credible nation." (Ling-Chi Wang 206)

Similar to Ling-chi Wang's argument, Stuart Hall explores cultural identity in the Diaspora, proposing that communities in the Diaspora are constantly transforming and reinventing themselves anew through an interplay of an essentialist and fixed past (the original history and culture) and a dynamic present. For Stuart Hall, once the diasporic communities recover that cultural past, they can change in the present how they position themselves in relation to that fixed past, and thus, identities evolve. (Stuart Hall 394) Cynthia S. Wong has investigated the implications of racial differences in Chinese American hybridity, claiming that there is a "racial shadow" which embodies the Asian characteristics that Asian Americans do not accept about themselves due to a crisis in self-acceptance and self-knowledge that derives in denial of their Asian features to accommodate to white standards. (Cynthia Wong as cited in Cuder & Villegas 29) Pilar Cuder and Sonia Villegas' *The Many Faces of Hybridity in Chinese/American Fiction of the 1990s* (2003) is an excellent work on Chinese American hybridity, analyzing literary works of the 1990s.

Finally, scholar King-kok Cheung has compiled renowned anthologies of Asian American literature, and much of her work on Maxine Hong Kingston's oeuvre has been extremely useful in understanding the author's context, her work, and literary influences. The present paper's analysis of *The Woman Warrior* owes much of its insights and inspiration to King-kok Cheung's *Articulate Silences: Hisaye Yamamoto, Maxine Hong Kingston', Joy Kogawa* and *Asian American Literature: An Annotated Bibliography*, 1988 (with Stan Yogi); as well as Bella Adams' *Asian American Literature* and Julia H. Lee's *Understanding Maxine Hong Kingston.*

3. Introduction to Maxine Hong Kingston

The present section aims to introduce Maxine Hong Kingston's historical context to better understand *The Woman Warrior*. Additionally, I will briefly outline Chinese American History and literature, due to its relevance to the present work and its influence on Kingston's oeuvre.

Chinese American History

In order to understand Chinese American identity, we first need to take a look at the historical setting of anti-Chinese laws and hostility that the first communities of Chinese had to endure in the 19th Century. Kingston herself emphasizes the impact of political history (that is to say, U.S. anti-Chinese laws) in the development of Chinese American identity. She made one of her most noted statements in this sense by means of artistic expression, breaking the narrative of *China Men* in the very middle of the novel and devoting a whole chapter, 'The Laws', to outline the political history of Chinese Americans. She outlined in this chapter all the anti-Chinese laws that were implemented in the 19th Century, initiating a period of systemic oppression that lasted until 1978. Starting with the 1870's Naturalization Act, by which only free whites and African aliens could apply for citizenship (and *de facto* excluding Chinese immigrants, as they were not considered white. This was settled legally in 1854 when Chan Young's citizenship application was rejected due to his race.) In 1878, there was a Constitutional Convention to address "the Chinese problem", resulting in a prohibition of Chinese barring them from entering California. Those who were not deported were held in segregated ghettos, and Chinese men "over eighteen who were not already paying a miner's tax had to pay a 'police tax' to cover the extra policing their presence required (...) No Chinese could be hired by the state, county, or municipal governments for public works. No 'Chinese or Mongolian or Indian' could testify in court 'either for or against a white man'." (Kingston153) This process culminated in 1882 with the first Chinese Exclusion Act, legally prohibiting Chinese migration into the United States, supported by 1888's Scott Act, passed by Congress, and whose historical precedent was the Nationality Act (1790), which only permitted free whites to become citizens. Although there were court cases against the Exclusion Acts, they often lost, and given the fact that the Chinese government did not recognize any status to the Chinese Diaspora, the Chinese in America could only rely on the American judiciary system for support. The Supreme Court would refer to the Chinese as a race "that will not assimilate with us (...) dangerous to peace and security. It matters not in what form aggression and encroachment come, whether from the foreign nation acting in its national character or from vast

hordes of its people crowding in upon us."; and which "continue to be aliens, having taken no steps toward becoming citizens, and incapable of becoming such under the naturalization laws" —and as Kingston would highlight, "This applied only to Chinese; no other race or nationality was excluded from applying for citizenship." (Kingston 155)

In 1898 the Supreme Court ruled in *The United States v. Wong Kim Ark* that "a person born in the United States to Chinese parents is an American" and "This decision has never been reversed or changed, and it is the law on which most Americans of Chinese ancestry base their citizenship today." (China Men 155) However, this did not curb the passing of other laws targeting the Chinese, such as an Immigration Act in 1924 aiming at banning Chinese women from migrating into the United States, on the claims that the majority of these migrants would be prostitutes in disguise. As Adams noted, in *The Woman Warrior* there is a veiled allusion to this Act, as "1924 is the year of the no-name aunt's 'hurry-up wedding' to, a hurry-up sojourner needs to leave the U.S.A before the passing of an immigration act." (91) The anti-miscegenation law was passed, and "Any American who married a Chinese woman lost his citizenship; any Chinese man who married an American woman caused her to lose her citizenship." (Kingston 156) This gender imbalance had a great impact on Chinese American society. The paucity of Chinese women and anti-miscegenation laws prevented Chinese Americans from forming families, creating a Chinese culture predominantly male and bachelor. In *Racist Love* (1972) Frank Chin and Jeffery Paul Chan discuss how these laws combined with exclusion and deportation ensured that Chinese immigrant men "would not reproduce. And eventually they would die out." (as quoted in Adams 76) The impact on demographics was ostensible: the Chinese population was reduced, from 107,000 Chinese living in the United States in 1882, to 70,000 remaining in the 1920s. (Kingston 157)

World War II had a positive impact on Chinese Americans, as the Chinese-U.S. alliance against Japan led to Congress' repeal of the Exclusion Act of 1882 —notwithstanding, the quota was limited to an exiguous 105 migrants per year. The Refugee Act of 1948 was initially only applied to Europeans who looked for a brighter future in the United States after the War. It was not until

1950 that a series of Refugee Relief Acts allowed the Chinese to enter the country in larger numbers. This policy change was motivated by the end of the Chinese Civil War, which resulted in a Chinese Communist government ruling mainland China, whereas the Nationalist government fled to Taiwan. Given the United States' stance against Communism, the policy welcomed Chinese refugees fleeing from the new regime. According to Kingston, "As a condition of entry, the Internal Security Act provided that these refugees swear they were not Communists." (Kingston 157) The ghost of Communism lingered in U.S.-Chinese relations, with Maxine's father in *The Woman Warrior* advising to tell Americans what they want to hear: "Tell them we have no crimes and no poverty… and say we have no unemployment. And, of course, tell them we're against Communism." (165) As Ling-chi Wang noted, geopolitics will have an effect on how Chinese Americans will navigate their own identity. Kingston keeps tracking all the gradual changes in legislation up to 1978 when the quotas limiting immigration were not segregated anymore according to country of origin, and instead, a global quota for immigration was set annually. In 1957, the People's Republic of China officially acknowledged that those Chinese who were naturalized in other countries would no longer be Chinese citizens, but forbade dual nationality.

Why include this extensive chapter detailing the history of the Chinese in America in the middle of a novel, breaking, as some have argued, the "narrative momentum"? (Lee 42). As Kingston put herself, "I've had to come up with tricks, even changing the structure of a genre, to try to compensate for people's ignorance and encourage them to do research." (Lee 12) Kingston's intention is pedagogical, right in the middle of the narration —not a footnote, not a preface, but the very unavoidable center— as if confronting the readers with uncomfortable facts, forcing them to acknowledge them instead of skimming those parts and go straight to the fun:

Only in interviews has Kingston described her rationale for including what amounts to a historical timeline in the center of her narrative: 'The mainstream culture doesn't know the history of Chinese Americans which has been written and written well. That ignorance makes a tension for me, and in the new book, I just couldn't take it anymore. So all of a sudden, right in the middle

of the stories, plunk-there is an eight-page section of pure history… It really affects the shape of the book, and it might look quite clumsy. But on the other hand, maybe it will affect the shape of the novel in the future. Now maybe another Chinese American writer won't have to write that history.'

(Lee 46)

The legal restrictions on employment fostered the specialization of the Chinese in very concrete market niches. Kingston reviews her family background to find out that some of her ancestors worked in every stereotypical Chinese occupation in the United States: workers in sugar cane plantations in Hawaii; in the Transcontinental Railroad; and, finally, her own parents and herself in a laundromat. The laundry is a business with significant connotations for Chinese Americans, as it is one of the earliest market niches they occupied to the point that it was considered the "stereotypical occupation of a whole ethnic group" (Jung, *Tickets to Survival on Gold Mountain* [Gold Mountain is how San Francisco is called in Chinese, and the first wave of massive Chinese migration was due to the Gold Rush. This way of referring to San Francisco is common among Chinese American writers, who frequently use this English translation of the Chinese name in their works, such as Maxine Hong Kingston and Lisa See]). Once the Transcontinental railroad was built, many Chinese redirected their careers to starting laundry businesses, and white Americans began to consider the Chinese a threat, stigmatizing them as 'cheap labor' and therefore organizing boycott campaigns urging the government to expel the Chinese from the country. In response, the first Chinese American guilds and associations to protect their own interests were precisely established by the laundrymen, such as the Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance of New York, founded in 1933. This cultural significance of the laundry is discussed by academic authors such as Paul C. P. Siu and Renqiu Yu, who in *To Save China, To Save Ourselves* explores the important nets of support of the Chinese Diaspora with their motherland during the Japanese invasion of Manchuria; and memoirs such as *Our Laundry, Our Town* by Alving Eng. The laundry is a recurrent trope in Chinese American novels and films, appearing in *Eating Chinese Food Naked* by Mei Ng, *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (Kwan & Scheinert, 2022), and *The Woman Warrior*. Johnny Thach researched the role which laundries play in

contemporary Chinese American identity and their historical and political significance in his article *Organizing Against Discrimination: The Chinese Hand Laundry Men Historical Niche and Ethnic Solidarity in America*.

Thach's personal account explains that "Like many of the early Chinese hand laundrymen and contemporary ethnic entrepreneurs who invested into laundromats, their involvement with laundry developed after immigration." (Thach vi) Chinese Americans who in their home countries practiced all sorts of professions, were melted into a uniform market niche in their new country. It can be argued that the encapsulating 'Chinese American' identity obscured personal differences. People from different professional backgrounds were homogeneously redirected into the laundry business, in a cultural melting pot where a China Mainland Cantonese scholar or a Hoa Chinese Vietnamese doctor would become yet another Chinese American working on laundry. Their differences in geographical origin, culture, and profession were obliterated. Remarkably, in *The Woman Warrior* Maxine's father is a scholar and teacher in China, but once in New York, he starts a laundry business. After being cheated by his partners, the family moves all the way to the West coast to open another laundry. Hence, Maxine's father is willing to move geographically in order to look for career opportunities but unimaginatively ends up in the same business, which signals to what extent this market niche was associated with Chinese migration.

Anti-Chinese posters: two laundry products advertise themselves as the end of cheap Chinese labor and Chinese laundrymen. They both stereotypically portray the Chinese as an exoticized other, and allegorical representations of the United States are expelling the Chinese out of the country. Image source: Library of Congress

Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*. Analysis of Themes

Many Chinese began to reconstruct their family histories in the United States and to trace them to the villages in China from which their ancestors had come; others began to express their feelings and perspectives through literary and artistic creation. A new breed of Chinese writers, poets, musicians, and artists emerged, and many —such as writers Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan, playwrights Frank Chin and David Hwang, and filmmakers Wayne Wang and Peter Wang— have achieved national prominence.

(Ling-chi Wang 201)

*The Woman Warrio*r is "the most widely taught book by a living writer in U.S. college and universities" (Shu as quoted in He 131); "the yardstick against which Asian American writers are measured"; and Kingston is considered "the most influential Asian American writer of the twentieth century" (Fonseca as quoted in He 131), ushering a new generation of Asian American writers such as Amy Tan, who would be described by *Entertainment Weekly* as "The Children of 'Woman Warrior'." (as cited by Abrams, 100) The novel is a composition that intermingles "elements of several genres, including fiction, myth, auto/biography, and memoir, in a manner that is not easily categorized" (Grice as cited in He 131), and according to the Modern Language Association, it is the "most widely taught text in the modern university education (...) taught not just in literature classes, but also in anthropology, Asian studies, composition, education, psychology, sociology, and women's studies courses." (Abrams 115) But before delving into Kingston's literary debut, let us first

contextualize her historical and literary context in order to better comprehend her oeuvre.

In Edinburgh Critical Guides' *Asian American Literature*, Bella Adams brilliantly outlines the different historical periods of the genre. The first period (18802-1920s) was marked by anti-Asian discrimination and the prevalence of the 'yellow peril' stereotype, with the Chinese to moral perversion and legally barred to acquire citizenship, amongst other legal barriers. Some of the earliest examples of Chinese American literature are the anonymous poems found in the walls of San Francisco's Angel Island Immigration Station (the Chinese equivalent of New York's Ellis Island), where Chinese immigrants were held in cells until entry to the country was granted. Poetry in the form of graffiti written on the cells' walls was compiled in *Island: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island 1910 to 1940* (published in 1989), "describing harsh immigration experiences: 'America has power, but no justice. / In prison, we were victimized as if we were guilty. / Given no opportunity to explain, it was really brutal.'" (Adams 11) Also anonymous are the *Songs of Gold Mountain: Cantonese Rhymes from San Francisco* (1915), a compilation of 220 rhymes translated by Marlon Hom with diverse themes such as sex, American bureaucracy, poverty, and alienation. Notedly, these two pioneering examples of Chinese American literature are anonymous, which can be linked to how Kingston tries to rescue from oblivion the unwritten and forgotten history, inserting in her work stories such as No Name Aunt in *The Woman Warrior* and the nameless workers in the Transatlantic Railroad in *China Men* to finally inscribe them into the official narrative.

The first published work of Asian American literature was *When I Was a Boy in China*, by Yan Phou Lee (1887), an autobiography intended for an American readership and conceived to correct misconceptions about Chinese customs and manners, emphasizing cross-cultural similarities. (Adams 36) Belonging to this period are also the autobiographical and fictional works of the Eaton sisters, who were biracial Chinese and British Canadians. Both were pioneers of Chinese American literature, although only Maude Eaton would choose a Chinese name, Sui Sin Far, and write realistically about the Chinese

American migrant experience, whereas her sister Winnifred Eaton opted for a Japanese pseudonym (Onoto Watanna) and romantic, idealized fiction.

The general tone of this early Chinese American poetry and prose is committed to realism, representing the reality and lives of common people trying to counteract established Orientalist prejudices and highlighting the similarities between both American and Chinese cultures. (Adams 46)

The second period in Chinese American literature comprises the 1930s and 1950s. The social climate did not change much, with the same stereotypes of the yellow peril as a sexual and moral hazard, whereas Communism became yet another harm the Chinese could bring in the ideological and political realm. The literature of this period thus continued focusing on realistic depictions of common Asian Americans as a way of rebuking Orientalist prejudice, combining American and Asian literary forms into a sometimes assimilationist hybrid, and offering American audiences an insight into Chinese culture. Works that can be categorized under this current are Lin Yutang's *Chinatown Family* and Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter.*

Wong's autobiography is a perfect example of literary hybridity, with the narrator using the third person to refer to herself as per the traditional Chinese modest custom. Frank Chin opines that this female autobiographical account is an assimilationist literary hybrid that "contributes to cultural extinction both formally and thematically" (Adams 76), dismissing it as propaganda and pointing out that Christianity is a form of acculturation for Asian Americans. However, it is worth noting that Kingston discussed "the importance of Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1950) to her emerging sense of herself as a Chinese girl growing up in the United States (...) 'For the first time I could see a person somewhat like myself in literature'", providing a positive Chinese American model after "most of the books she read as a child ignored or mocked Chinese characters." (Lee 12) Kingston recalls being taken aback in her childhood when she identified with Louise May Alcott's March sisters until she "came across this funny-looking little Chinaman. It pushed me into my place. I was him, I wasn't those March girls." (Lee 12) We can draw many parallelisms between Wong's autobiography and Kingston's memoir due to the latter's

influence on the former: both are Chinese American girls who struggle through the patriarchal views of their Chinese families and through the racism of white society; they take extracurricular Chinese lessons to be in touch with their cultural heritage; and they resort to literature in order to give free rein to their creativity. Wong tells how she went to college without her father's support, and similarly, Kingston's novel Moon Orchid conveys the traditional sexist mentality with her misogynistic comment: "And he's supported our daughter too, even though she's only a girl. He sent her to college." (Kingston 122)

The third period that Adams distinguishes is between the 1960s and 1970s, which includes the literary and historical context of *The Woman Warrior*. As discussed in Ling-chi Wang's 'ethnic consciousness', this period saw the rise of activism influenced by Black Power and the Civil Rights Movement in search for racial justice and the creation of a distinct Chinese American identity, with organizations such as Asian American Movements, Yellow Power, and the Third World Liberation Front concerned with 'claiming America', as Kingston herself would put it, through the emergence of a uniquely Asian American identity and political activism. (Adams 100) Asian American cultural nationalism challenged traditional narratives and stereotypes such as the 'model minority', resisted silence, and revised history; and a new wave of militant female writers such as Janice Mirikitani, Kitty Tsui, Nellie Wong or Kingston herself practiced activism in their writings following Tinh T. Minh-ha quotation: 'Shake syntax, smash the myths.' (Adams 102)

Adams ends her outline with the 1980s-2000s period, in which there is a great diversification of Asian American literature in terms of topics and styles, with some remarkable authors such as Amy Tan (*The Joy Luck Club*), Aimée Liu (*Face*) and Gish Jen (*Typical American*) addressing topics like migration, feminism, and identity; Shawn Wong's response to Amy Tan, *American Knees*; or Gus Lee's *China Boy*, a memoir of a Chinese American growing up in a Black neighborhood.

The 'Pen Wars'

The 'pen wars' refers to the controversy between Frank Chin and the Aiiieeeee! group of cultural nationalists, anti-assimilationist and androcentric writers (including Jeffery Paul Chan and Shawn Wong, among others), and feminist or gynocentric Asian American writers such as Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan, Amy Ling, or Lisa See (whose *On Gold Mountain: The One-Hundred-Year Odyssey of My Chinese American Family* is an exploration of Chinese American family roots based on oral tradition very similar to *China Men*, connecting the history of both countries through the lives of the first Chinese male migrants.) In this debate on Chinese American literature and identity, Frank Chin would categorize writers as 'fake', 'assimilationist', or 'real', privileging fact over fiction, realism over myth, and androcentrism over feminism. (Adams 100) Chin accused writers such as Kingston, Jade Snow Wong, and Amy Tan of assimilationists who catered to American audiences with a "Chinese-according-to-white" point of view. (Adams 78) Cheung notes that Kingston's work is predominantly feminist and vehemently against Chinese patriarchy whereas the critique of white norms is less important in the plot, which may have provoked androcentric writers' attacks. (Cheung 80) However, Chin's vicious attacks went to the extreme of threatening physical violence towards Kingston, to which the latter chose not to honor him with an answer ("And I don't answer it because I keep thinking I'm transcending, I'm not being reactive. But then sometimes people see this as weakness and say 'See, these women don't have an answer.' But we don't want to answer because any little thing we do to them will destroy their manhood even worse because they are already so fragile" (Perry as cited in Lee 115) Due to Chin's despicable and uncivilized conduct, Julia Lee's argued that Chin should be given less prominence in the pen wars debate as a result of his misogynistic, bullying and violent behavior. (Lee 115) Elaine Kim argues that Chin's intransigence created a limited definition of what it means to be an Asian American which emulated dominant discourses, creating an identity that is "fixed, closed, and ready-made in a desperate attempt to render [Asian Americans] voiced and visible." (Adams 101) Despite all this, Bella Adams observed similarities between both writers:

Chin and Kingston are often viewed as oppositional figures because of their respective political commitments to androcentrism (Chin) and feminism (Kingston) and because of their respective aesthetic commitments to raging satires, polemic and slapstick comedies (Chin), and semi-autobiography (Kingston) (...) [however] both question dominant American ideologies as well as seeking to construct a specifically Chinese American literary tradition. In this way, then, both Chin and Kingston differently contribute to cultural nationalism (...) Kingston's characters attempt to formulate Chinese American identity apart from the Orientalist stereotypes perpetuated in the mainstream media, specifically films, magazines and cartoons (...) [and] turn to their families and ancestors for help with self-understanding, developing an ear for Chinese American history against marginalization in history.

(Adams 86)

Lisa Lowe has recognized the importance of the pen wars, as they vividly demonstrate the ideological divergences within ethnic communities, reminding us not to assume similarities and unity based on race. (Adams 143) Similarly, King-kok Cheung comments on how the pen wars proved "divisive and reductive with respect to the relationship between gender, race, and dominant ideologies", instead of a more positive debate in which the binary opposites would be transcended and new models for masculinity and femininity could emerge. (Adams 85) Cheung is also particularly "uneasy about the hard-line distinction Frank Chin draws between the 'fake' and the 'real' Asian American literature. (...) In his concern for cultural purity, he ignores one of the most defining characteristics of Asian American literature and ethnic American literature generally: hybridity." (Cheung 20) In her essay "Cultural Misreading by American Reviewers", Kingston summarizes her position on the orientalist versus purist interpretation of her work: "The critics who said how the book was good because it was, or was not, like the oriental fantasy in their heads might as well have said how weak it was since it did not break through that fantasy." (as quoted by Adams 86)

The Woman Warrior Genre Controversy

One of the controversies related to Kingston's debut was how the novel resists categorization. Jeffrey Paul Chan, from the Aiiieeeee! group asserts that "the subject of minority literature is social history" (Chan as cited by Cheung 14), and criticizes *The Woman Warrior*'s editor, Knopf, for publishing the book as confusing fiction with facts, accusing him of marketing malpractice as the reason why the book was labeled as "biography rather than fiction (which it obviously is)" (Chan as cited by He 131). This criticism was echoed by Benjamin Tong, whose commentary on Kingston's novel was an "obviously contrived work of 'fiction passing for autobiography'" (Tong as cited by He 131). Frank Chin insisted on the Orientalist falsification of Chinese myths for white audiences and rejected autobiography as it is not a classical Chinese literary form (as cited by He 132). Adams also saw the stylistic hybridization of such a Western and American genre as autobiographical writing (with examples that influenced Kingston herself, like Jade Snow Wong or Benjamin Franklin) but praises it as an appropriation and reformulation of American autobiography with Asian talk-story, combining "Asian and American literary traditions to produce specifically Asian American forms." (Adams 187)

Katheryn Fong explains in a milder tone what might be the great concern of all these critics: that *The Woman Warrior*, with its mixture of fantasy, fact, and fiction, might result in more prejudice and misconceptions by white readers who are not familiar with Chinese culture and Chinese American history. The central issue would be, then, if Kingston should sacrifice artistic individuality and freedom of expression because she is forced to represent her ethnicity and work for the benefit of Chinese Americans, abandoning any work which risks provoking misconceptions on behalf of white readers. This role imposition onto racial minority writers was poignantly contested by Amy Tan, who dismissed it as a form of censorship:

> If you're an Asian American, you must write about modern, progressive characters, no harking back to the bad old days. Similarly, If you're gay, you must write about AIDS and explicit safe sex . . . If you're African American, you must write about oppression and racism. And who are you to question these

mandates if you're not a member of the particular minority at issue? If you are a member of the particular minority at issue, and if you do question these mandates, you risk being 'treated as a traitor, publicly branded and condemned' as 'a running-dog whore sucking on the tit of the imperialist white pigs.'

(Amy Tan as quoted by Adams 189)

As it has been noted by other authors, ethnic writers should not see their creativity coerced and feel that they must represent their ethnicity. In her letter to Shawn Wong, Kingston questions this notion: "why do I have to 'represent' anyone? ... None of these writers point out how and why this book is different, but merely point out its difference as a flaw", clarifying that she is willing to write "tragedy", not "a guide to Chinatown." (quoted by He 132)

Notwithstanding, other critics have seen in Kingston's novel something more than just a misleading mix of fact and fiction. Diane Johnson has pointed out the similarities between fiction and memoir, while Suzanne Juhasz identified *The Woman Warrior* as a typical female autobiography precisely because it mixes fantasy and imaginative life, (as cited by He 131) Perhaps the most complete definition of what Kingston achieved is Sumida's commentary:

Kingston's autobiography is perhaps "a work of 'fiction' in which the author uses a 'naive' if not 'unreliable' narrator . . . whose very misunderstandings or misappropriations ... of 'Chinese' history and culture are part of the author's critical characterization of her and of a narrow 'American' society which alienates her from seeing truly" by integrating biography and poetics, and by re-visioning Chinese myths and mythologizing American history.

(Sumida as quoted by Cheung 77)

This allows us to inscribe *The Woman Warrior* into the category of historiographic metafiction, defined by Linda Hutcheon as the "theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (...) made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past. History is not rejected but rethought, refocused, and re-presented." (as quoted in Cheung 13) It

is Cheung herself who compares Kingston's work to other historiographic metafiction Asian American novels such as *The Legend of Miss Sasagawara* or *Obasan* (13); I would include in this comparison works such as Margaret Atwood's *Penelopiad* and Amin Maalouf's *Leo Africanus*. Like Maalouf, Kingston delves into cultural hybridity by exploring and reclaiming historical figures that have been given less prominence in the official narrative; or even including personal stories and fantasy to reimagine a past that comes to us biased. Reimagining the infinite possibilities of how things really were instead of how they were told to us is what Kingston ceaselessly reflects in her novel, and her purpose is arguably misunderstood by her 'hardline historian' critics. She fantasizes about the historical past and rewrites myths to fit her own literary and creative purposes. In *The Woman Warrior*, she reinvented two Chinese myths: the historical poet Cai Yan and the legend of the woman soldier Fa Mu Lan, popularized by Disney's adaptation. Kingston's versions of these myths borrow features from others' stories in a sort of hybrid mythical pastiche. As she points out to answer critics who pointed out that Fa Mu Lan did not have any words carved in her back (this event belongs to another story): "I take the power I need from whatever myth. Thus Fa Mu Lan has the words cut into her back; in the traditional story, it is the man, Ngok Fei the Patriot, whose parents cut vows on his back. I mean to take his power for women." (Kingston as quoted by He 133); and "We have to do more than record myth .... That's just more ancestor worship. The way I keep the old Chinese myths alive is by telling them in a new American way." (Pfaff as cited in Cheung 85)

Thus, I subscribe to Cheung's understanding of Kingston's historiographic metafiction, confronting a historical silence with creativity and fantasy. It is a feminist account where women have agency and are empowered against their historical silencing; it is a vindication of Chinese Americans against the obliteration of their role in the official history of the United States. As feminist Monique Wittig advised, "Make an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent." (as quoted by Cheung 75) Confronted with both her father's and American official history's silence on Chinese Americans, Kingston needs to create an alternative history from whatever sources she can find combined with her imagination: "for lack of adult explanations we children made up what was

happening." (Kingston as quoted by Adams 93) Kingston is inventing the past to challenge it and create future realities.

Hyphenated Identity

So our dog tags had O for religion and O for race because neither black nor white. (Kingston 269 –70)

Another point of convergence between Kingston and her 'nemesis' Frank Chin is that both advocated removing the hyphen from 'Chinese American', which conveyed a sort of double citizenship and writing Chinese American instead —a type of American. The hyphen is considered divisive and "an externally imposed label that is meant to define us by distinguishing us from other Americans primarily on the basis of race rather than culture." (Elaine Kim as quoted in Feng 92) Racial differences are therefore a key factor in how someone is socially perceived, as Japanese American Mitsuye Yamada concisely puts it in the verses "People keep asking where I come from / Says my son. / Trouble is I'm american on the inside / And oriental on the outside." (as quoted in Cuder & Villegas 23) White Americans don't just see American: they see Asian first. A white American descendant of Europeans would easily become 'American', yet a totally assimilated American of Chinese descent would still be perceived as Asian. Feng quotes Manning Marable in explaining the relationship between ethnicity and hyphenated culture: "our ethnicity is derived from the cultural synthesis of our African heritage and our experiences in American society" (Feng 88); the same can be argued about the Chinese American hyphenated community.

The hyphen is a textual representation of hybridity that has been rejected by Kingston as well. Wittman Ah Sing, the protagonist of Kingston's novel *The Tripmaster Monkey* (sometimes considered her first novel, as *China Men* and *The Woman Warrior,* were semi-autobiographical), rejects the hyphen whilst emphasizing the futility of this erasure, as it can only be perceived in written texts, but orally it would make no difference:

"Chinese American" is inaccurate —as if we could have two countries. We need to take the hyphen out—"Chinese American." "American," is the noun, and "Chinese," the adjective. From now on: "Chinese Americans." However. Not okay yet. "Chinese hyphen American" sounds exactly the same as "Chinese no hyphen American." No revolution takes place in the mouth or in the ear.

(As cited in Feng 95)

In line with Anzaldúa's border theory or Maalouf's take on multicultural identity, Trinh understands the hyphen as trying to create a third space out of binary opposition: neither Chinese nor American, but a hybrid which has no stable positioning between both allegedly stable identities, not belonging to either of them; and emphasizing the inadequacy of either term, paradoxically binding yet separating both opposites. (Feng 95) Adams has argued that Kingston's resistance to traditional categorization in *The Woman Warrior* combining different genres is consistent with the problematic categorization of Asian Americans (Adams 5), and I claim that this literary pastiche can be understood as a reflection of the Chinese American lack of definition in terms of identity.

In the white and black binomial, Chinese Americans are a third identity. However, if we attend to the binary opposition of majority/minority, Asian Americans are part of the minority the same as Blacks, among other ethnic groups. In this sense, Chinese Americans have tended to emulate Black English vernacular and accent as a way to position themselves as distinct compared to whites. Kingston's protagonist of *Tripmaster Monkey* Wittman Ah Sing and the protagonist of Wayne Wang's independent film *Chan Is Missing,* Steve, are both Asian Americans who resort to Black English vernacular to reflect their status as a minority in America. However, they are challenged by other Asian Americans, who mock their adoption of Black English by comparing him to an African American comedian: "Two-faced schizophrenic Chinaman, huh? You think you're Richard Pryor or something?" (Wayne Wang 1982) Similarly, Mei Ng's novel *Eating Chinese Food Naked* portrays a Chinese American ashamed of her racial features and culture due to the racist oppression and mockery she encountered in her childhood. Struggling with her identity, she would not feel

completely Chinese, while simultaneously being denied the possibility of another ethnic identity when she enacted or 'played out' that racially stereotyped behavior: "when she got older, people would get mad at her for trying to act black or white or Puerto Rican." Among white friends, she is Chinese: 'Yes, you are my friend . . . and, yes, I am your friend, but I am your Chinese friend', even though, among Chinese friends, she felt that 'they were Chinese in a way she didn't know how to be'. (Ng as quoted in Adams 166)

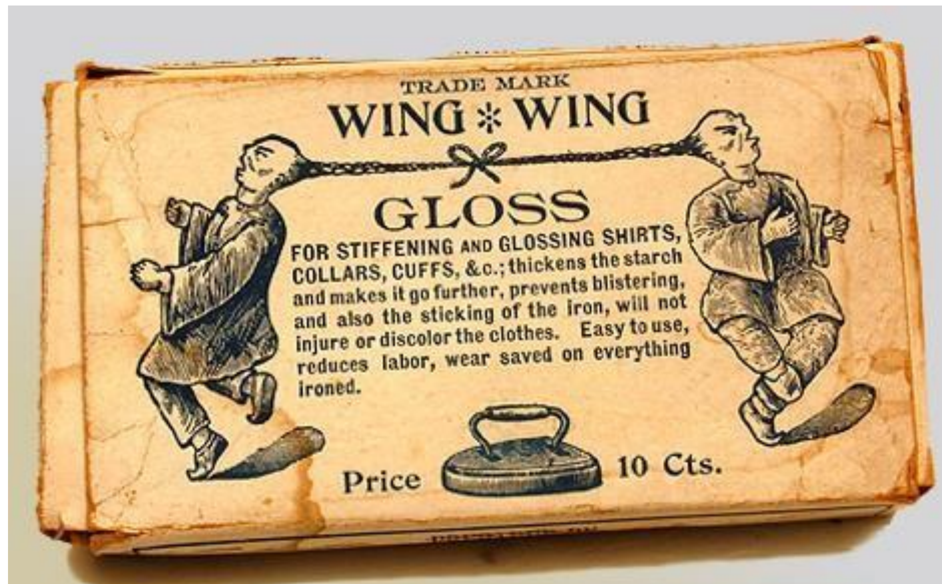
Above, I have discussed some of the themes addressed in Kingston's novel as well as the literary and cultural context of the author. In short, *The Woman Warrior* is a textual hybrid that has received American influences reinterpreted with Chinese myths that have been transformed by the author's imagination. Kingston admitted American influences such as Walt Whitman, whose 'Very well then, I contradict myself, (I am large, I contain multitudes)' suitably encapsulates the complexity of Chinese American cultural hybridity; and Jade Snow Wong's Chinese American memoir (as it has been argued, autobiography is not a Chinese canonical genre.) Kingston portrayed how she dealt with her Chinese American identity in *The Woman Warrior*, embellishing memoirs with Chinese myths that were distorted by her own creativity. This has been attacked as a sort of Orientalism that could lead to misinterpretations by white audiences, but I subscribe to the understanding of *The Woman Warrior* as historiographic metafiction that vindicates silenced characters of history; questioning official narratives; and reinterpreting myths to fit her own creativity as an individual writer, unfettered by pressures of ethnic representation. Chinese purists such as Frank Chin should have remembered that this is not unlike what Lu Xun, the prominent figure of Chinese Modernist literature, did in 1935 with *Old Tales Retold*, reformulating Chinese myths as well to fit modern purposes. As Kingston explains herself, "I wrote history that has not been written in history books. And I broke rules of form and content." (Kingston's interview, Nguyen) The reinterpretation of myths can be understood in two ways: on one hand, as the transmutation of the Chinese from China to America; but, on the other hand, as the inexorable process of myths evolving naturally within one culture, as cultures do not remain static.

3.2.4 Other themes in *The Woman Warrior*

Chinese Americans, when you try to understand what things in you are Chinese, how do you separate what is peculiar to childhood, to poverty, insanities, one family, your mother who marked your growing with stories, from what is Chinese? What is Chinese tradition and what is the movies?

(Kingston 10)

Kingston's novelized memoir is set in San Francisco, "the city where Chinese America first began" (Adams 79), describing a Chinese American family who owns a laundry, with an intergenerational conflict between first-generation immigrant parents, who are 'accommodators' socially but keep their Chinese traditions at home, and the protagonist with her siblings, who oscillate between assimilation and ethnic consciousness later in the book. Maxine's parents' identity does not remain static either: at the beginning, they were saving money to go back to China, but later on, we learn that they stopped doing that in view of the Cultural Revolution in China, in effect accepting that they will never return and shifting from sojourner to accommodation. As for the protagonist, she would evolve from feeling in between opposing cultural ideologies to creating a syncretic identity of her own. (Cheung 78) All these themes are quintessential tropes of the Chinese American experience, including the portrayal of a tense mother-daughter relationship, with the generation gap aggravated by different stages in cultural hybridity; and the 'racial shadow', or how the racial differences hinder assimilation in the white predominant American society, with second-generation Asian Americans perceiving their ethnicity as 'undesirable'.



Racism fosters self-denial and the 'racial shadow': second-generation Asian Americans would reject their ethnic features because they were ridiculed by the white majority. Image source: Library of Congress

The 'racial shadow' is the other you that you abhor but speaks of some part of your cultural background and family experience that you try to bury deep within yourself. It happens with our parents: growing up we reject the parts we dislike about them and pretend we did not inherit much of it ourselves, but only accepting that some attitudes —no matter how much we dislike them— have been transferred into our personality, will we be able to reconcile with ourselves and transcend. In the novel we can see how Maxine is initially in the assimilationist stage, rejecting her racial shadow within her family (which is reflected in the problematic relationship with her mother), and most graphically when she attacks a little girl who refuses to speak. Maxine rejects all the little girl characteristics that are stereotypically 'Chinese' and 'Chinese feminine': her "China doll haircut" (173) and her silence, which Maxine unsuccessfully tries to break by physically and verbally bullying the girl until she speaks. Cheung notes that "The gratuitous cruelty can be understood only in terms of Maxine's virulent self-contempt at being Chinese. The very words used to lure the girl to speech ("Don't you ever want to be a cheerleader? Or a pompon girl?" [180]) bespeak the narrator's aspiration to be a member of a white sorority. In equating speechlessness in the Chinese girl with the absence of a brain and of personality, Maxine has adopted the criteria of her schoolteachers." (Cheung 89-90)

Maxine, a second-generation Chinese American born in the United States, quickly assimilates into the white and Anglo society, therefore rejecting her Chinese background. The perspective that she adopts when observing her Chinese family is what Amy Ling called an "alien observer", a mixture of insider and outsider within a community. (as quoted by Cheung 91) She initially remains silent, a feature she notices in other Asian American classmates, particularly girls, in contrast with the generally more outspoken white and male counterparts. This silence both at school and at home is dramatically ended by Maxine's outburst when she screams to her parents all her dissatisfactions and grievances: how she will go away and study because she is obtaining academic recognition from American institutions, whereas she feels ignored at home; how she does not like Chinese school; how she is not willing to be married and turn into a "slave or a wife"; and finally, criticizes her mother for the way she tells stories, mixing fact and fiction in such a way that Maxine cannot tell the difference between them (interestingly, this can be read as a metafictional allusion, as she will adopt this narrative ability as a writer) (Kingston 195). In this soliloquy, Maxine is asserting independence from her parents, assimilation into American society, and rejection of Chinese heritage. At this stage of the novel, America is seen as the epitome of enlightenment, freedom, and opportunity (Cheung 91) Hence, she distances herself from Chinese culture, adopting the white Anglo point of view towards the Chinese, and again externalizes her rejection of her racial shadow when describing the language: "the way Chinese sounds, chingchong ugly, to American ears." (171); the customs: "Chinese people are very weird" (158, referring to a ritual); and the physical appearance: ""all funny-looking FOB's, Fresh-off-the-Boat's Their eyes do not focus correctly-shifty-eyed-and they hold their mouths slack, not tight-jawed masculine." (193-94)

With regards to Maxine's rejection of the Asian physical appearance, particularly in men, she concretely talks about the FOB (Fresh Off the Boat), a derogatory term to depict those Chinese migrants who recently arrived in the U.S. Feng claims that "the image of the FOB is entirely a creation of the ABC, and a creation that the ABC depends upon to stabilize his own sense of identity", suggesting that "later generations of Asian Americans have more in common

with each other than with the specifics of their cultural ancestry." (Feng 103) He cites David Henry Hwang's scene of *FOB*, where an assimilated Chinese American speaks of the FOB in these contemptuous, even dehumanizing manner, and highlights the difference in gender (and it might be assumed, in class) when resorting to this term:

> F-O-B. Fresh Off the Boat. FOB. What words can you think of that characterize the FOB? Clumsy, ugly, greasy FOB. Loud, stupid, four-eyed FOB. Big feet. Horny. Like Lenny in Of Mice and Men. Very good. A literary reference. High-water pants. Floods, to be exact. Someone you wouldn't want your sister to marry. If you are a sister, someone you wouldn't want to marry. That assumes we're talking about boy FOBs, of course. But girl FOBs aren't really as ... FOBish. Boy FOBs are the worst, the... pits. They are the sworn enemies of all ABC—oh, that's "American Born Chinese"— of all ABC girls. Before an ABC girl will be seen on Friday night with a boy FOB in Westwood, she would rather burn off her face... How can you spot an FOB? Look out! If you can't answer that, you might be one.
>
> (as cited in Feng 103)

As per Maxine's rejection of Chinese rituals, it can be claimed that this is not only the result of assimilation, but it is also based on lack of familiarity and knowledge. She complains about never getting a proper explanation on certain behaviors or punishments after breaking a Chinese taboo that either her or her sibltings were not aware of: "Never explaining.... The adults get mad, evasive, and shut you up if you ask. You get no warning that you shouldn't wear a white ribbon in your hair until they hit you and give you the sideways glare for the rest of the day." (185) I claim that this generation gap occurs in part due to decontextualization of culture: Chinese customs might not be directly taught by parents sometimes, but children would obtain an explanation through other relatives or friends if they were in China. Without other sources of information to find answers on forbidden subjects, children feel confused by certain taboos, and parents feel not comfortable to explain them. This is also related to

traditional Chinese association of speech and action: they would rather avoid to speak about certain ominous topics as a means to avoid them.

This ritualistic association of name and reality can be seen as well in the retaliation that the clan takes against her aunt, or 'No Name Woman'. After giving birth to an illegitimate son, she would kill herself, and the clan's measure to respond to the damage she caused to the family's reputation is erasing her name. This behavior needs to be understood through the prism of Chinese folklore: having a surname and a name allows you to belong in the family pantheon and be fed once you become a ghost in the afterworld by the living members of the family. Having no descendants, or being disowned by the family, meant to become an eternally hungry ghost in the afterlife. The cultural significance of namelessness in China can be seen in other examples, such as the documentary *The Dying Rooms* (1995), where an orphan baby was not given a name as she was expected to die soon.

Moreover, naming is charged with different cultural connotations in China. Names can change according to circumstances, and it can be argued that are more fluid than in Western culture. In ancient China, and also nowadays, people have different names and ways of being addressed: company positions, family relations, nicknames, or pen names, and are rarely (if ever) addressed by their first names, of which they can also have different versions. This fluidity in naming is seen in the Chinese custom of picking an English name to avoid mispronunciation, sometimes chosen from a common English name, albeit it can also be translated. This is the case of Brave Orchid and Moon Orchid, mother and aunt of Maxine.

Brave Orchid is somehow a hybrid compromise, translating the meaning of her mother's name, replacing the sound of the original. In terms of identity, this has an influence in how a person relates to their name. The phonetic aspect of a name is important: when people call me 'Javier', I am not thinking of its basque roots 'etxe berri' and its etymological meaning, "New house". I am thinking of the contingent arrangement of sounds with which I happen to identify myself with. If someone was to call me "New house" in the United States, that would be a process of acculturation particularly odd and unheard of

in Western cultures, as we seldomly translate our names, not even from their English equivalent (in my case, 'Xavier'); let alone semantically. However, this is exactly what Kingston chose to do with her relatives names. Although the novel does not specify whether her mother and aunt were addressed by these English translations in their social lives, however to refer to them like that in the novel can already be seen as a particular form of Chinese and American hybridity in namings.

Despite Maxine's initial rejection of her Chinese heritage, throughout the novel we are able to see an evolution from an assimilationist mentality to a syncretic Chinese American identity, incorporating both cultures into her own self without being constricted by either. (Cheung 94) This is conveyed through a mix of memoir and reinterpretation of Chinese myths, perhaps an allusion to the influence that her mother had in her upbringing. Hence, we can see the myths as a representation of traditional culture transmitted by her mother; yet the reinterpretation of the myth as the new nuances that this traditional culture will be subject to once it is appropriated by a younger generation, in an integration of the past and the present. As Thomas Jefferson put it, "We may consider each generation as a distinct nation"; and Michael Finscher echoes this definition and applies it to ethnicity, defining it as also "something reinvented and reinterpreted in each generation by each individual. " (as quoted in Cheung 14)

The differences and agreements between generations are also symbolized by the last myth included in *The Woman Warrior*, that of the poet Tsai Yen, who was kidnapped by barbarians. She started a new family in that barbarian kingdom, with her children speaking a foreign tongue. This allegory of how Maxine's mother must have felt due to the culture difference between herself and her children is ended with a sign of reconciliation through intergenerational mutual understanding and balanced Chinese American hybridity: "Here is a story my mother told me, not when I was young, but recently, when I told her I also talk story. The beginning is hers, the ending, mine (...) a song that Chinese sing to their own instruments. It translated well." (Kingston 206-209)

4. Fluctuations in Chinese American Cultural Identity, Chinese Spanish Hybridity, and Future Research

As proved in the historical context of the present work, American white supremacists and Orientalists perceived themselves as culturally superior to other ethnicities, at least partially by virtue of technological and economical superiority. As Said points out, this cultural chauvinism starts in the Colonial period and has largely survived until the present day.

However, the conditions that presumed such superiority are changing. It is not only that Western chauvinism has been philosophically and ideologically challenged by Postcolonialism, Postmodernism, or Cultural Studies, its prevalence in public opinion and law ostensibly diminished (from the Civil Rights Movement and the abolition of the Chinese Exclusion Act to recent social protests such as Black Lives Matter). After several generations of living in the country, Chinese Americans have changed their self-perception and can confidently assert themselves as part of the fabric of the nation. Moreover, the very economic and technological conditions that —at least allegedly— allowed an excuse for the Western world to hold prejudice against other ethnicities are also shifting. The West in general, and the United States in particular, no longer hold the monopoly of the latest technological advances, with, for instance, Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company accounting for 50% of the global market. (Chang) And the United States is now facing an economic and geopolitical adversary that has reached an unparalleled rapid development: that is, of course, China.

It is the aim of this chapter to analyze how cultural nationalism and China's perceived prestige based on economic development may have an influence on how Chinese Americans navigate their ambivalent cultural background differently. Nowadays, being Chinese no longer means being an

exotic and unintelligible Oriental that came to a 'developed country' to escape from misery, superstition, and cultural backwardness. Granted, the cultural difference remains, but with China being the world's second-largest economy, and the country itself experiencing an upsurge in nationalism, how Chinese Americans will perceive the Chinese side of their heritage may be bound to change.

Let us take a look first at how China has changed its self-perception. Long considering themselves the "Kingdom of the Center" (that is what *Zhongguo*, 'China', etymologically means), Chinese civilization flourished virtually unrivaled for millennia, and the country indulged in a sort of ethnocentrism, without excessive curiosity nor consideration to the outer world. This cultural splendor was traumatically shattered in the 19th Century: political turmoil, colonial powers' interference, and war devastated the country. The Opium Wars resulted in what the Chinese refer to as "Unequal Treaties" (in particular the treaties of Nanking, Whampoa, Shimonoseki, and Aigun), and hence, from a Chinese historical point of view, the Century of Humiliation began.

It is important to note that it is precisely during the 19th Century, when China was suffering its economical and political nadir, that Chinese migrants began arriving in the United States. Thus, those migrants did not only had to endure Western racism upon their arrival; they escaped from a country that was severely damaged by Western Colonialism (both economically and physically, as Victor Hugo's account of the destruction and looting of Beijing's Summer Palace vividly portray), and arrived in the United States only to endure racial prejudice. The Chinese American experience of migration is hence deeply marked by racism and Western chauvinism.

Nevertheless, in the last decades, the Chinese regime under the leadership of Xi Jinping is substituting the "Century of Humiliation" with the "Great Renaissance": with a strong sense of historical mission and nationalistic pride, China is supposed to be back in the position of splendor and global power that had enjoyed before the 19th Century. It is beyond the scope of the present work to further analyze the geopolitical implications that entail China's global

influence, but I will discuss the potential influence that this might have on Chinese American individuals and how they discern their identity.

By no means I am hereby trying to justify racist prejudice nor its fraudulent rationale that equates economic development with the intrinsic value and respectability that any given culture has, but I am interested in analyzing how these perceived economic disparities influenced the Western sense of superiority over China, and how, once the economic gap disappears, racist discourse is left with no ostensible excuse for justifying Western supremacy. Racism has been challenged —and hopefully, defeated— in the theoretical, philosophical, academic, and scientific arenas; but as expounded in the historical context of the present paper, the orientalist vision of Chinese as 'cheap labor' fermented anti-Chinese sentiment and racial prejudice. With the economic fallacy gone, and China a country internationally admired for its gargantuan GDP, how will Chinese Americans confront their Chinese heritage in the future?

Old vs Modern United States: Current Chinese Americans

The United States in 2023 has changed in many ways with respect to the 19th Century country enacting the Chinese Exclusion Act; nor is it the same country of Kingston's youth, immersed in a Civil Rights struggle, where Asian and Black nationalists put forward their own agendas confronting the racial establishment. The American society keeps changing and evolving, but as Ancheta and Nguyen observe, "the movement from racial dictatorship and towards racial democracy has been 'a slow, painful and contentious one; it remains far from complete' in so far as the dominant racial hierarchy now functions hegemonically.", and they claim that "many of the choices contemporary Asian Americans face bear an all too familiar resemblance to those that confronted the first pioneers of Asian American identity at the end of the [nineteenth] century." (as quoted by Adams 7)

Contrary to David Palumbo-Liu's observation that "it would be difficult to argue that Asian Americans (...) are disadvantaged in the same sense that blacks, Latinos/as, and indigenous peoples are still the objects of a virulent strain of American racism" (as cited in Adams 144), it is my claim that the anti-Asian sentiment explosion due the COVID pandemic proved Palumbo-Liu's statement too optimistic. Even if American society and media seem to be more mindful of public expression of racist prejudices, latent racism can erupt anytime. Furthermore, racism does not disappear, but seems to be periodical, like a turning wheel shifting its focus from one minority to another within the United States: anti-Asian sentiment during WWII and the Vietnam War; anti-Muslim or anti-Arab sentiment during the 'War on Terror' campaign of the 1990s and 2000s, with a rise on hate crimes against these communities (Adams 186); and the pervasive prejudice against Black people, that can be more explicit periodically depending on the latest scandal or sensationalistic piece of news. In view of all this, one cannot but feel that social hysteria is highly contagious, and humans tend to mob mentality, witch-hunting, and seeking 'Public Enemies' in the racial 'Other' with much ease.

This is well summarized in Adams' observation that "Nationality and humanity or, more precisely, their disavowal with respect to Asians and Asian Americans, are most explicitly at issue during wartime, from the Spanish-American War to the atomic bombing of Japan and the Vietnam War." (Adams, 145) This all implies that an increase in tension between China and the United States politically may result in public opinion shifts towards this collective. The Stop AAPI Hate coalition, founded by AAPI Equity Alliance, Chinese for Affirmative Action, and San Francisco State University's Asian American Studies Department, published that during the COVID pandemic (2020-2020), 11,500 anti-Asian incidents occurred in the United States, involving "harassment, bullying, and other acts of hate (...) A large number of these incidents employed anti-China rhetoric that blamed AAPI communities for the emerging COVID-19 pandemic. (AAPI 2) The COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act was enacted, and the Department of Justice has issued the Special Report *Raising Awareness of Hate Crimes and Hate Incidents During the COVID-19 Pandemic* (U.S. Department of Justice 2022) "aimed at raising awareness of hate crimes

during the COVID-19 pandemic" and providing "an overview of the rise of hate crimes and hate incidents during the pandemic, including a surge of hate crimes and hate incidents against Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander communities."

According to Yuen et al., (2016), minorities are underrepresented in the media and film industry. In their study across 1,300 films from 2007 to 2019, "only 5.9 percent of speaking characters were of Asian or Pacific Islander [API] descent, only forty-four films (3.4 percent) featured an Asian or Pacific Islander lead or co-lead, and 507 films (39 percent) didn't have an Asian or Pacific Islander character." The study analyzes interesting data such as the 1.7:1 male/female ratio, and the impact that one superstar may have in the percentages: of the 44 films with API leads, 14 were featured by the popular actor Dwayne Johnson ('The Rock').

However, claims of underrepresentation may need to be further researched taking into account the demographics of the United States. The 2020 Census data shows that "There are 20.6 million people who identify as Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander alone (not in combination with another race), making up 6.2% of the nation's population." (Monte & Shin) This underrepresentation is therefore nuanced, as the ratio of appearance in different media does not dramatically differ from the actual percentage of the API population in the country.

Representation of Asian Americans in the film industry has greatly varied, not only in quantity but in the manner as well. Next, I will expound on a few examples of how the current generations of Asian Americans have shaped representation in show business, creating an image that often greatly differs from the xenophobic portrayals of the past. Although the list is by no means exhaustive, it does offer a glimpse of the current state of affairs in mainstream media.

Turning Red (Domee Shi, 2022) is a Disney and Pixar joint production addressing Chinese Canadian identity. After *Mulan*'s remake of 2020, and the

original cartoon film of 1998 which was inspired by the same myth that Maxine Hong Kingston revisits in *The Woman Warrior*, *Turning Red* is another work that appeals to a mainstream audience, but with a Chinese perspective at the core. Canadian Chinese director Domee Shi previously featured an Oscar-winning short, *Bao,* in 2018, also addressing Chinese culture and the mother/daughter relationship. It is significant that *Turning Red* has a Chinese Canadian protagonist, instead of a Chinese American: thus, the film portrays a decentered culture in terms of Chinese ancestry but also decentered because the white and Anglo component of hybridity is in itself peripheral, if we consider that most of the cultural production in the film industry occurs in the United States, and Canada is a region whose cultural impact is not as significant. In *Turning Red*, the protagonist is called Mei, with no other 'English name'. This already signifies a change in trend, as most Chinese Americans choose an English name for themselves, partly to avoid mispronunciations. This lack of an English name is only a mere detail, but already signals a different approach to cultural identity: Mei is Chinese Canadian, but there is no need for her to find a linguistic compromise for her Chinese name.

Turning Red is a coming-of-age film and a metaphor for menarche. Mei is a stereotypical obedient daughter and a good student with yet another hackneyed representation of an Asian 'tiger mom': conservative, severe, and overprotective; and her 'panda dad' counterpart, lenient and mostly quiet in a secondary role. The tropes continue with Mei and her multicultural group of friends being fans of a boy band and portraying the usual characteristics of a Western teenager. The plot thickens when we learn that Mei will turn into a giant Red Panda every time she cannot control her emotions, due to an ancestral superpower that is inherited through matrilineal lineage and needs to be inhibited by a magic ritual (a sort of allegory for menstruation). Similar to *The Woman Warrior*'s recollection of menarche, Mei is severely admonished by her mother against the Red Panda transformation, instilling fear into the little girl, and asking her to be extremely careful until the monster is magically sealed. Naturally, Mei sees the Red Panda as a curse, but another female member of her family argues that it was originally intended as a blessing, and it is now that it is not useful that she might consider it so. *Turning Red* becomes a story of reconciliation with femininity (Mei ends up enjoying her Red Panda powers);

reconciliation with her mother (her mother also solving her own disruptive relationship with Mei's grandmother); and reconciliation with Chinese culture readapted to the individual's personal needs: Mei chooses not to inhibit her Red Panda, as the other female members of the family did, and her unorthodox decision is nevertheless validated by the clan. This symbolizes a different approach to tradition and cultural identity to fit an individual's purpose, as Mei integrates both cultures on her own terms, instead of following the family tradition. The film also intermingles reinterpretation of myth and culture in an analogous form to *The Woman Warrior*, and both are resembling in their addressing of the classical theme of teenage/youth rebellion and quest for individuality against the parents, parental expectations, and the Chinese American (or Chinese Canadian) experience, embodying two different cultures and harmoniously integrating them into oneself.

Everything Everywhere All at Once (Kwan & Scheinert, 2022) is a surrealistic and absurd sci-fi comedy, a veritable postmodern pastiche of genres from the directors of the equally bizarre film *Swiss Army Man*. The film incurs in some of the unavoidable tropes seen in portrayals of Chinese American families: women empowerment men in secondary roles with a tiger mom (severe and harshly outspoken) and a panda dad (meek and shy, quietly solving problems inadvertently), owners of laundry, the paramount symbol of the working class Chinese American experience. The film is a good example of cultural hybridity, with a mix of languages spoken (Mandarin, Cantonese, and English) and infinite dimensions coexisting, blending sci-fi and the migrant experience. The premise of endless possibilities in every individual, who would encounter multitudinous "selves" in each dimension, is partially based on one core decision: that of a young Chinese couple in love who, in view of their families being against their union, decide to elope into the United States. The movie delves into a multiverse where each detail and decision taken would create a separate timeline, and that question that haunts every individual, the 'What if I would have done that?', is a lucubration that might be thought by any second-generation immigrant: 'What if my parents would have not come here? What kind of person would I be?'

The film mainly focuses on a young Chinese American, Joy, and her complicated relationship with her mother, Evelyn. Joy feels frustrated with the lack of communication and understanding of her tiger mom, who does not accept her homosexuality and life choices. The mother expresses herself in a typically Chinese way, therefore originating cultural misunderstandings between mother and daughter analogous to *The Woman Warrior* narrator and her mother. When Joy's mother points out that Joy is getting fat, Joy feels very offended. However, this behavior is relatively common in Chinese culture, and it would be considered a casual remark often made by the parent's generation, more than a personal attack (similarly, Maxine once complained about being called ugly, and her mother ultimately explained that this is what people said in China out of humbleness). Thus, *Everything Everywhere All at Once* explores the problematic relationship between two generations, the traditional Chinese culture embodied by Evelyn against her bicultural daughter, whose identity incorporates Western elements which create friction between the two. Like *The Woman Warrior*, the film recurs to mythology, legends, and postmodernity combined with clichés (lots of kung fu), and parallel dimensions to deal with a complex reality of cultural hybridity. Reality or common life issues are interspersed with the imaginary, creating a mix of folk and sci-fi: hybrid realities and genres to portray cultural hybridity.

Everything Everywhere All at Once: Evelyn at the family-owned laundry, decorated for the Lunar New Year. Image Source. *Everything Everywhere All at Once*

Another example of Chinese American intergenerational family relationships, in this case, grandmother and granddaughter, can be found in *The Farewell*, (Lulu Wang, 2019), based on the director's life. Wang first shared her autobiographical experiences on the radio program "What You Don't Know", in This American Life, and later on, directed the movie inspired by them. The film explores, similarly to the previous examples, how communication can be hindered because of cultural differences between members of the same migrant family but from different generations. Billi (the protagonist and director Lulu Wang's *alter ego*) is a Chinese American who has a close relationship with her grandmother, Nai Nai (which means 'grandmother' in Mandarin). The generational gap in *The Farewell* is most deeply felt in the family's joint effort to keep Nai Nai ignorant about terminal lung cancer that is expected to leave her with only a couple of months left. To Billi's stupefaction, the family decides to play along and deceive Nai Nai, and even organize a wedding so that the whole family reunites in what is expected to be the last chance to see Nai Nai. Billi is the only member of the family who considers this dishonesty immoral and confronts all her relatives about their deceit. Billi, influenced by American ethics, gives honesty an absolute value regardless of the circumstances and feels guilty about hiding the disease from her grandmother. However, when the family meets in China for the wedding, a relative will offer a different perspective: acknowledging that it differs from the American ethical code, he argues that the collective lie allows the whole family to share the emotional load, instead of letting Nai Nai carry it alone. Furthermore, Billi will later on find out that Nai Nai herself proceeded in the same manner when her husband was terminally ill. Hence, Billi is confronted by cultural differences, between collectivism and individualism, absolute moral values and relativism, and she is left to navigate her own hybridity in a country (China) where she feels out of place. Interestingly, the lie is kept until the end, and the credits inform that the person Nai Nai's character was based on was still alive and uninformed of her disease six years later, perhaps hinting that the non-American way of dealing with the issue was perchance beneficial to the person concerned, recognizing the possibility that Chinese methods can be equally valid.

Crazy Rich Asians (Jon M. Chu, 2018) talks about a different kind of Asian American, the wealthy and highly educated. Both this typology of characters and the two actors cast in the film, Ronny Chieng and Jimmy O. Yang, will be discussed later on when exploring the new generation of Chinese American comedians. *Crazy Rich Asians* is a radically different portrayal of the Chinese American experience, that of those who have already achieved their 'American Dream' or did not even need to work for it because they come from wealthy backgrounds in Asia. The protagonist is Rachel Chu, a Chinese American New Yorker and professor in Economics, who despite her current socioeconomic status comes from a humble family. This will make her mother-in-law Eleanor, from Singapore, despise her and oppose her relationship with her son, both due to Rachel's family background and because she is American instead of Chinese. Once again, *Crazy Rich Asians* portrays yet another example of a tiger mom, like Brave Orchid in *The Woman Warrior*, or Ming in *Turning Red*, Evelyn in *Everything Everywhere All at Once…* showing a harsh image of feminine competition and distrust. The film boasts an all-Asian cast nonetheless, something which did not happen in a Hollywood movie since the cinematic adaptation of Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* in 1993, according to executive producer Janet Yang (Ludden, 2018).

Another important step in Asian American representation in film is Marvel's *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* (Destin Cretton, 2021). Superheroes can be understood as archetypes that serve as inspiration and reference for the audience. In consequence, the film *Shang-Chi*, written and directed by Asian Americans (script composed by Chinese American David Callaham) and featuring a Chinese Marvel superhero for the first time, is an excellent platform through which Chinese Americans can feel represented as part of the American identity and society. As screenwriter David Callaham puts it:

There's no single Asian American voice. So how do we create something that speaks to the wider Asian Diaspora? How do we make something that will be exciting and entertaining, but also personal to all these people? What [Destin and I] landed on was the very simple reality of just putting this character on

screen, at the level that Marvel does. Because when we turned on our televisions, neither of us were seeing Asian people. And we were excited to be able to change that.

Yu 2021

Moreover, Marvel was particularly careful to avoid incurring in stereotypes, and some of the Chinese cultural aspects that appear in the film are well portrayed and researched. For instance, the mythological creature Hundun is part of Chinese folklore, and appears in Chinese classics such as *The Book of Chuang Tzu* and the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*. This inclusion of mythological beasts that are ingrained in Chinese cosmology but that are more obscure to a Western audience is a sign that Marvel went beyond the obvious 'kung fu and dragons', creating a product that was truly appealing to Chinese audiences.

(...) there are subtle nods for the Asian Diaspora to relish —Shang-Chi taking off his shoes before entering Katy's home, Katy's grandmother asking Shang-Chi when he and Katy are getting married, and Ronny Chieng's mystery character telling Katy that he speaks "ABC" (American-born Chinese)— that feel never feel forced or over-played. It's a winning blend of Chinese culture mixed with the successful Marvel formula that avoids the typical Asian clichés and stereotypes of accents and bad drivers, while pointedly calling out some of the racial errors from Marvel's past. Given what's on show here, the future for *Shang-Chi* and Asian representation in the MCU [Marvel Cinematic Universe] looks bright.

(Sirikul 2021)

Hundun, a Chinese mythological creature that appears in *Shang-Chi*, reveals aspects of Chinese mythology that are less well-known to Western audiences. Image source: CBR & Wikipedia

The strategy oriented to the Chinese market also included a soundtrack produced by Chinese artist Masiwei and Chinese Indonesian Rich Brian, and a substantial use of Mandarin throughout the movie. Nonetheless, all these efforts were in vain: the movie was censored in China due to Simu Liu's (actor interpreting protagonist Shang-Chi) declarations in 2017, when he recalled how his parents would talk about Communist China as "third world" and a place where people were dying of starvation (Variety 2021). This was promptly regarded as an "insult to China", and the China Film Administration, responsible for selecting the annual quota of 34 foreign films that can be officially released in Chinese movie theaters, did not select *Shang-Chi* as one of them. According to Rebecca Davis, "The particular irony is that most Chinese viewers who have managed to actually see the film abroad or otherwise have deemed it "unexpectedly good" in post-show online reflections, with some going so far as to call it the most respectful treatment of Chinese culture coming from a Western production they've seen in years." (Variety 2021)

Finally, Chinese director Chloe Zhao must be mentioned as an outstanding figure in American cinema, awarded with two Oscars for Best Director (first Asian woman, and second woman to ever obtain it) and Best Film for *Nomadland* (2020). Although Zhao is a Chinese citizen, the Beijing-born director has spent most of her life in the United States, which *de facto* allows her

to be at least partially categorized as Chinese American. *Nomadland* is a profoundly American story and setting, with nomads roaming the roads reminiscent of hobo culture and road movies. By making such a film, Zhao vindicates the same right that Kingston once proclaimed: their cultural heritage should not define their artistic expression and limit the themes they can address; Chinese Americans should not need to feel the constant pressure of representing Chinese culture. Chloe Zhao has also directed Marvel's franchise film *Eternals* (2021), notably with a multicultural cast. However, both films have been banned in China due to Zhao's declarations deemed controversial by the Communist Party, drawing a parallel with *Shang-Chi*'s censorship as retaliation to Simu Liu's controversial remarks.

In summary, Chinese American representation in films has greatly changed, from early stereotypical representations of villain Fu Manchu and detective Charlie Chan, to more complex realities such as the immigrant experience with its ensuing intergenerational cultural hybridity, and a considerable amount of female protagonist roles. Although themes and typology of characters are more varied ranging from superheroes to millionaires, some tropes are recurrent, such as the mother/daughter relationship, the 'tiger mom/panda dad' cliché, and cultural misunderstandings. In spite of this, it can be asserted that there is an increasing number of films through which Chinese Americans explore their own identity self-reliantly and unapologetically, in sheer contrast to hackneyed projections from the predominantly white gaze.

The film industry has now a rapidly growing counterpart: online platforms for streaming content are becoming the norm, with 83% of American households having at least one of these services (Parks Associates, 2022). Representation varies also depending on the platform: Nielsen's report shows that subscription video-on-demand (SVOD) platforms such as Netflix have an 11% quota led by Asian Americans, compared to broadcast (3.2%) and cable (2.7%). (Nielsen, 2022) Thus, in platforms such as Netflix Asian Americans would actually be overrepresented if compared to the Asian American population. The screen share is also occupied by Asian American comedians: Ronny Chieng, Jimmy O. Yang, Sheng Wang, and Ali Wong are all big names

in today's American comedy, and they all feature in their own respective Netflix specials.

I would like to emphasize the cultural importance of this young generation, a new wave of Asian American comedians, which may symbolize a change of paradigm in Asian American identity. They were born long after the Chinese Exclusion Act, the Vietnam War, and the Civil Rights Movement, with the Asian American identity group as an alternative but concomitant trend. And although history does not simply vanish from one generation to another, it can be argued that the work of pioneers such as Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan changed the cultural arena creating new Chinese American referents to feel inspired and represented. In other words, to say that new generations of Chinese Americans feel as disempowered and lacking external references as Kingston did (reading novels and realizing that she could never be the protagonist, her role reduced to a secondary character), then Kingston's pioneering work would have been in vain. However, it is my claim that, despite still confronting racial prejudice, this new generation of Asian American comedians confront hybrid cultural identitywith more confidence and empowerment.

It is particularly so in the case of Ronny Chieng, whose 2019 comedy special title already encapsulates the spirit of the work: *Asian Comedian Destroys America!* (Chieng 2019). As a Malaysian-born Chinese who grew up in the United States, Singapore, and Australia, Ronny Chieng is a multicultural cosmopolitan, deeply aware of Western culture yet raised in a Chinese family who were not influenced by acculturation in the same sense as other migrant families experience it. Moreover, there is a class component to take into account. Some migrant families arrived in the United States and struggled in all sorts of occupations to achieve financial stability, whereas Ronny Chieng's case is different, moving to the United States after obtaining a degree in finance and another bachelor in law in Australia. He is not an 'accommodator' immigrant who feels forced to fit in and survive; he is an 'expat', this lousy euphemism used often as a classy alternative for immigrants, when immigrants are white and Western, or come from a developed country. The way he approaches America in his observational comedy is unapologetic and sarcastic: he confidently mocks Anglo and white culture, juxtaposing it to his own Chinese background in a

manner that the latter, although sometimes self-ridiculed, always stands better in comparison. Interestingly, Ronny Chieng also uses the trope of the "third space" in the sense of Asians not belonging to the white/black binomial:

Right now, we're like 5.6% of the population. Okay? We need to get the number right up. Need more Asian people in this country. I'll tell you why. Because we are the only objective referees… [audience laughs] …in the ongoing race war… between white and black people. Okay? Because you don't care about us… and we don't care about either of you. So you can trust us. When we tell you things, there's no bias, right? There's no agenda. And you can trust us because we don't care. Because our skin is not in the game.

(Chieng 2019)

Friendlier and less confrontational in his humor, Jimmy O. Yang's comedy special *Good Deal* also reflects on the ambivalence of being born in a Hong Kong under British rule, and moving to the United States when he was a kid. Instead of silence, insecurity, and shame, new Chinese Americans have a sense of community since the beginning; instead of being silent and feeling awkward, as Kingston recalls her infancy, Jimmy O. Yang in his teenage years experimented with American culture, exploring hip hop, and joined a multicultural group of friends while asserting his Chinese heritage. It is particularly telling to see how Jimmy O. Yang was aware of the history and racial issues in the United States but felt confident to deal with them through humor and artistic creation:

I want to be a rapper. I want to be like Jay-z in "Big Pimpin'". So I started my own rap group in high school. This is a true story. It was me, my black friend Julian, and my other friend Yugi, who was half black and half Japanese. So we are perfectly 1 and 1/2 black dudes and 1 and 1/2 Asian dudes. And we called ourselves The Yellow Panthers. I know. I wish I was making this shit up, but I'm not. The Yellow Panthers was a real rap group. And we had a real rap song. It was called, "Underground Railroad Builder."

(Jimmy O. Yang 2020)

In this brief excerpt, there are enough hybridity and humorous historical references to write an essay. The comedian is imbued in the target culture and wants to partake in the hip-hop musical scene that became part of the mainstream. Yet he feels no constraints in having a referent from another race, in this case, a black rapper, Jay-Z. He then playfully hybridizes concepts with the name of his rap group, “The Yellow Panthers”, and their song “Underground Railroad Builder”, masterfully combining Black American and Chinese American histories. Jimmy O. Yang emulates Black culture, similar to Wittman Ah Sing and *Chan is Missing* protagonist Steve. It is noticeable how Chinese Americans have seen in Black Americans an identity they can mirror in, despite being diametrically different, in terms of being ‘the other’, a minority in a society where white is the norm. Hence, minorities arguably see themselves as constituting one group, although heterogeneous, in opposition to the white norm, simplifying the myriad of identities in the binomial white/norm non-white/minority. Interestingly, Chinese Americans feel Black American culture very present, almost as if it is paradigmatically representative of being a minority in the United States, whereas Asian mirroring onto other minorities (such as Latin American or Native American) seems less common. We could make the case that since the Civil Rights Movement, Black Americans have claimed a space in the collective imagination and a space in culture and Black culture has had widespread popularity in many aspects of American society, from music (blues, rock, funk, hip hop…) to clothing and aesthetics. Some of the most popular TV shows in the 1980s featured almost an all-Black cast, such as *The Bill Cosby Show*, *The Fresh Prince*, and *Family Matters*, with their respective Black American actors who became icons of pop culture. Hollywood superstars' pantheon had a plethora of Black American successful actors and actresses. Yet neither Latin Americans, Native Americans nor Asian Americans did occupy that outstanding space in the mainstream space, and that might account for one of the reasons they looked into Black culture when searching for an identity referent as a minority in the United States. Jimmy O. Yang carries that influence in his comedy, and even his speech shows features of Black American lingo, such as certain accents and the frequent use of the word “man”. He also discusses representation and the pressure that artists and creators from ethnic minority backgrounds feel to be a symbol of their community, somehow

losing leeway to totally personal and individualistic creation, as discussed in Kingston's 'pen wars':

Representation matters, man. A lot of Asian people come up to me, very proud, very nice. They're like, "Jimmy, thank you for representing the Asians, man." I'm like, eh, you're welcome. But you do understand, it's not really a choice, right? Like, when you wake up Asian, you can only represent Asians. I couldn't just wake up one day and be like, fuck it, I'm representing Nigerians today. I'm very proud to represent Asians. But at the same time, there's so much pressure. Like, nobody ever went up to Matt Damon and be like, hey, Matt, thanks for representing the whites. It sounds weird. That's like a different conversation for some reason, you know? If somebody came up to me being like, hey, Jimmy, I'm representing the whites, I would leave that town immediately and never come back.

(Jimmy O. Yang 2020)

We see again the same themes and controversies that Kingston faced after the publication of *The Woman Warrior*. Nonetheless, it is through more examples of successful Asian American icons that artists and writers can feel free of this stigmatization and be seen as unique individuals, as the audience eventually normalizes ethnicity and looks beyond the need for ethnic representation to focus on the personal stance and style of each creator.

This room for being oneself regardless of ethnicity is what Taiwanese American Sheng Wang seems to accomplish in his comedy special *Sweet and Juicy* (2022). His observational comedy is rife with jokes about reading books, junk food, and procrastination, topics that are not culturally loaded and could be expressed by any given comedian regardless of ethnicity. As opposed to Ronny Chieng and Jimmy O. Yang, who build significant parts of their comedy on their Chinese American identity, Sheng Wang seems to care less about hybridity and more about his personal obsessions. He first mentions his background connecting it to the very core of American pop culture: "If you don't know me, I'm originally from Texas. I grew up in Houston. I went to the same middle

school as Beyoncé." (Sheng 2022) As observed with Jimmy O. Yang, Sheng Wang also speaks in Black vernacular, with extensive use of the word "man" and the 'null copula' or omission of the verb "to be": "Oh, you an architect?", "You unconscious and you loud. You the perfect prey.", "We here to delay death." (Sheng 2022)

Notwithstanding, he is not oblivious to his ethnicity and cultural background, with allusions to his Buddhist upbringing, and he fully addresses the heritage theme towards the end of his stand-up, discussing a familiar story of migrant parents' expectations and sending kids to college after a life of privations and hard work: "You know, my parents are immigrants from Taiwan. They grew up poor. As kids, they had very little (...) My childhood was very different. (...) It's pretty crazy to think about how far we've come in one generation. That's a pretty big leap forward (...) to the life of privilege that I've gotten to live." (Sheng 2022)

He also addresses the binomial "minorities/white", with all the minorities on the same front, in one of his jokes talking about his diverse group of friends, who would be perfect to pull a heist. He mentions Black, Salvadorian, and Mexican friends, each with a specific set of skills, to end up with "another dude that's got no technical skills, but he's white. He got powers I don't really understand, but… he on the team, man." (Sheng 2022)

Finally, another outstanding and remarkably popular Asian American in the media is female comedian Ali Wong, who delves into the topic of maternity and combining motherhood with a successful professional career as a scriptwriter (*Fresh Off the Boat*) and performing stand-up specials *Baby Cobra* (2016) and *Hard Knock Wife* (2018). Some of the main themes she addresses are motherhood, parenting and gender expectations, feminism, hybridity, salary gap, dating with white people, and racial stereotypes. Just like the above-mentioned Chinese American comedians, she also displays null copula and Black vernacular English features in her speech: "You homeless or you a hipster?"; as well as elements typical of Black culture, referring to Beyoncé or types of dancing originally Black: "I would just twerk, twerk, twerk the shit out of him… and do some of this shit that I learned in Atlanta." (Ali Wong 2016)

Particular to Wong are her oblique references to the United States and/or Vietnamese history: “I have some useful advice for all my Asian American brothers and sisters. Yeah! Never go paintballing with a Vietnam veteran.”; and “... my mom is from a third world country and she taught me that you can never throw away anything, because you never know when a dictator’s gonna overtake the country and snatch all your wealth. So, you better hold onto that retainer from the third grade, ’cause it might come in handy as a shovel when you’re busy stuffing gold up your butt and running away from the Communists.” (Ali Wong 2016)

Ali Wong also shares with Ronny Chieng, Jimmy O. Yang, and Sheng Wang the generational gap between their parents, and how the latter usually came from working-class backgrounds but were able to become affluent and provide their children with material luxuries and excellent education. In only one generation, they were able to radically shift the family narrative, and these young Chinese Americans are the embodiment of their parents ‘American Dream’. Ali Wong refers to her well-off husband in these terms: “But he grew up on the East Coast, going to private school, playing lacrosse, uh, you know, learning Latin and playing chess and rugby. He grew up like Filipino Carlton, OK? So, he didn’t know anything about Vietnamese people until he met me.” Notably, she compares her husband with Carlton Banks, the wealthy and snobbish Black American in the TV show *The Fresh Prince* —another example of Asian Americans projecting themselves into Black American characters and culture, as they perceive themselves together as the ‘other’ and the ‘minority’ in white and Anglo United States (interestingly, Carlton Banks was also accused of acculturated and ‘less Black’ because of his canonical and sophisticated culture, which could spark the debate whether or not can Classical music, Shakespeare and Greek theater be part of Black culture.) But there is a tension between centripetal and centrifugal minority identities: Wong binds together all minorities in terms of their otherness compared to whites, and simultaneously emphasizes the differences between Asian Americans, stating the impossibility of generalizing the myriad of identities and particularities into one single denomination. She previously commented on how her husband had never heard

of Vietnamese people before meeting her; and later on, she would discuss the differences between nationalities among Asian Americans:

I think my husband and I have a huge unspoken understanding, uh, between each other, because he's half-Filipino and half-Japanese and I'm half-Chinese and half-Vietnamese. So, we're both half-fancy Asian… and half-jungle Asian. Yeah! You guys know the difference. The fancy Asians are the Chinese, and the Japanese. They get to do fancy things like host the Olympics. Jungle Asians host diseases. It's… It's different.

(Ali Wong 2016)

Here she jokes about an alleged hierarchy among Eastern Asian Americans themselves, with the Japanese and Chinese being more prestigious than Filipinos and Vietnamese. This division could be due to economic development (Japan and China had traditionally enjoyed economic splendor compared to the Philippines and Vietnam); but also due to cultural prestige, as China is the hegemonic power in the region throughout history, and both China and Japan were less subject to colonization than their Southeastern Asian-Pacific counterparts. Wong would again underline national differences between Asian Americans in terms of nationalities: "(...) it can be nice to be with somebody of your own race. The advantage is that you get to go home… and be racist together. You get to say whatever you like! You don't gotta explain shit. My husband, half-Filipino, half-Japanese. I'm half-Chinese and half-Vietnamese. And we spend 100 percent of our time shitting on Korean people." (Ali Wong 2016)

Finally, hybridity and Asian American experience are often referred to in terms of privileged childhood and socioeconomic status. As seen above, access to high education and wealth are sometimes deemed symbols of acculturation. Wong speaks of herself and her husband as two acculturated Asian Americans, doing the same kind of activities that high-middle-class whites would, and lack of understanding of their own Asian heritage:

Him and I are both total, like, private school Asians. We both are big hippies, too. We like to backpack through Southeast Asia. We like to do yoga.

We do ayahuasca ceremonies. We do silent meditation retreats. That's right, we pay $800 to shut up for a weekend. We do shit like that. Uh, we eat gluten-free, which means we eat all that bread that tastes like free-range Chewbacca. We eat that lesbian bread that's like… a thousand percent of your daily fiber… and 20 percent spoken word poetry. (...) But sometimes, all of this hippy-dippy shit we do… makes me feel like we are white people doing an impression of Asian people. Like, we have these Chinese scrolls up on the wall… and neither of us know what the fuck they mean. We're like, "Oh, that seems to go very well with our Buddha piggy bank from Pier 1 Imports. That seems to be providing some good feng shui for the house.

(Ali Wong 2016)

The four above-mentioned Chinese American comedians, despite their unique voices and perspectives, discuss some similar topics, such as hybridity, generational gap and how they experienced a privileged childhood in contrast with that of their parents, racial stereotypes, and characteristics of the Black vernacular in their speech, as well as an identification with Black culture as the other prominent minority —references to other minorities being not as common. This non-exhaustive list of examples aims to prove that there is a shift in how Chinese Americans perceive themselves in nowadays American society as compared to Maxine Hong Kingston's youth. Modern Chinese Americans keep exploring their hybridity but seem to feel more confident about who they are, and this is reflected in how they use humor as a tool to confront and make fun of the white majority, less combative than identity nationalism from the 1960s (perhaps so because it is less insecure), but arguably more playful and provocative than Amy Tan or Kingston's faction.

As the four comedians all commented, socioeconomic status is an important factor in how an individual perceives themselves. In this aspect, there are many palpable improvements for Chinese Americans since the 19th Century. Despite the perennial risk of relapse into ethnic conflict due to constantly changing geopolitics, economy, and armed conflict, the legislative changes have made the United States move a step closer towards social and racial justice. Consequently, the socioeconomic conditions of Asian Americans have radically

improved. According to the U.S. Census Bureau 2013-15, Taiwanese Americans (Republic of China) occupy the third place in terms of median household income in the United States by ethnic group (Indian Americans in the first place, and Filipino Americans in the second). Chinese Americans (Popular Republic of China) are in 7th position, at 69,100$ per year, still above White Americans, who are in 9th place at a median income of 59,900$ per year (DeNavas-Walt & Proctor). This data shows that Taiwanese Americans and Chinese Americans are in socioeconomic terms doing better than White Americans on average. This does not automatically dismiss claims of systemic racism in the United States, and in the analysis of Chinese American history, we have already demonstrated how the United States has been a country where Anglo and white culture was predominant and tyrannical towards other minorities through the rule of law. The historical implications are nowadays being battled against, but the shadow of systemic racism is still lingering on social views and institutions: being well-off does not necessarily indicate the absence of racial prejudice. Notwithstanding, the improvement of socioeconomic conditions arguably hints towards better opportunities in access to education (51% of Chinese Americans have a Bachelor's Degree, in sheer contrast to the 28% U.S. average according to the U.S. Census Bureau), employment, and resources that the Asian community have in the United States, and Chinese Americans themselves have seen in this a major step forward and a radical differential factor compared to the previous generation.

To sum up, I believe this section has demonstrated that Chinese Americans have progressed in terms of socioeconomic status and media representation. In the 1960s, partisan ethnic nationalism was a reaction to the Civil Rights Movement in the context of an American society that was divided by race, with rampant harmful stereotypes influencing the identity of Chinese Americans. Although the contemporary United States may have not completely achieved social justice in racial terms, the above-mentioned examples show a different cultural and social atmosphere compared to that portrayed in *The Woman Warrior*. Chinese Americans seem to be able to assert their American experience and identity with confidence, navigating their hybridity on their own terms, and not seeking to please and conform to the white majority. It seems that

American society is one step closer to Ling-Chi Wang's prediction that "American society may someday choose to accept Chinese Americans as they are 'both racially and culturally' in which case we will have a form of multicultural democracy." (Ling-Chi Wang 200)

Chinese Ethno-Nationalism, the case of Eileen Gu, and Chinese Americans in China

When researching Chinese American identity, it seems to me that we have traditionally attached more importance to the American side of the topic: either from the United States society's point of view as a whole, or Chinese American communities in particular, the focus of Chinese American hybridity was within the borders of the United States. And understandably so, as this is a topic of assimilation and acculturation into the target country. However, China may have been considered a less preponderant factor when analyzing Chinese American hybridity, as if deprived of its own agency and agenda. This is increasingly less the case, with Chinese economic and geopolitical development, claiming its own voice within the Chinese American identity dialogue.

In modern China, we can distinguish several political programs each of them launched by different leaders: from Mao's promise of Communist revolution to Deng Xiaoping's aim of economic development; and finally, Xi Jinping's current effort to promote nationalism within its borders and geopolitical influence abroad. According to Hui in *The Humanities in China: History and Challenges* (2020), Xi's boosting of nationalism in China has been accompanied by more funding to the humanities: "From its establishment until 2010, the National Social Science Fund has grown from 5 million to 600 million Yuan and the number of annually subsidized projects from less than 500 to 2,285. In this period, the fund has in total provided 2,650,000,000 Yuan to a total of 24,283 projects, with a production result of more than 45,000 items. The increase in the country's investment in the humanities rose even more rapidly after 2010. An interview of officers in the NOPSS reveals that the size of the National Social Science Fund has expanded to 2 billion Yuan in 2016." (Hui

326) He also argues that the Chinese government is well aware of the imbalance between their ‘hard’ and ‘soft power’, and has decided to officially fund and promote Chinese culture abroad as a means to increase their international presence and prestige (Hui 326). One of the pillars for this purpose is China’s system of Confucius Institutes, nowadays boasting 550 schools in 146 countries (Hui 327).

Although Alastair Iaain Johnston argues that Chinese nationalism is not upsurging as much as some Western commentators might think it is in his article *Is Chinese Nationalism Rising? Evidence from Beijing* (2017), and posterior articles suggest that Johnston’s conclusions might be outdated. Brian Wong’s *The Complex Nationalism of China* contends that “the newest Chinese youth, born in the 2000s, are also different, formed by a stronger and more nationalistic China (...) Renowned IR expert and intellectual Yan Xuetong suggests that ‘post-millennial students usually have a strong sense of superiority and confidence, and they tend to look at other countries from a condescending perspective.’” (2022) Wong also points out to Chinese diplomats recurring to “war warrior diplomacy”, exacerbating the populace with bellicose rhetoric against the West in the post-Deng Xiaoping era and self-proclaiming the Chinese government the ultimate defender of the Chinese Diaspora in other countries due to racist attacks upsurge after COVID outbreak. (Brian Wong, 2022)

Recurrent political slogans pronounced by Xi Jinping such as the “China Dream” and the “great renaissance of the Chinese *ethnicity* [although officially translated in English as ‘nation’, the word Xi Jinping used in Mandarin refers to nationality in terms of ethnicity, not the country. Thus, I changed the translation of this term]” (BBC 2013), massive economic development, and diplomacy initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative, building commercial networks and infrastructures in 150 different countries and referred to as the 21st Century Silk Road, have instilled a sense of national pride among the young Chinese. Patriotism is officially endorsed and combined with censorship of dissidence. According to Brian Wong, “The party-state goes to painstaking lengths to lampoon rhetoric that it dismisses as unpatriotic – as a means both of signifying the ideological salience and weightiness of devotion to the country, but also of

conveniently dismissing non-conformist discourses that it perceives to be antithetical toward the continued stability of the regime." (Brian Wong, 2022)

As the cases of Chloe Zhao and Simu Liu demonstrated, any public figure, let it be an artist, actor, director, writer, or other, must be extremely careful in their public declarations, lest their work would be banned. Legal measures can also be taken against individuals, as the case of writer and philosopher Liu Xiaobo proves. Despite receiving a Nobel Peace Prize due to his activism defending human rights (or perhaps precisely because of the undesired international attention to these issues that he drew), he died as a political prisoner in 2017. As seen above, Chloe Zhao and Simu Liu's films were not officially released in Chinese theaters because of their comments on China and the Communist Party, deemed offensive by some. Even if these films had not been banned, it seems likely that some sort of popular boycott campaign would have been carried out. As Variety magazine comments, Chinese netizens were furious at Chinese Canadian Simu Liu's declarations supporting a Hong Kong beverage company, Vitasoy (labeled by some as 'anti-China'), which in the context of the Hong Kong protests was viewed as support to the demonstrators: "seeing him more as one of China's own, nationalist detractors have been quick to label him a 'traitor' to the motherland — accusations that China-born director Chloe Zhao also faced earlier this year." (Variety 2021)

From this, we can observe two phenomena that occur in Chinese contemporary society (besides ubiquitous censorship, which would be a governmental issue): first, the notion that members of the Chinese Diaspora and foreign citizens of Chinese ancestry are actually Chinese, envisaging a concept of a nation deeply anchored in ethnicity; second, Chinese patriots do not hesitate in engaging in boycott campaigns against individuals or corporations that 'insult China'. Other examples of this boycott campaigns include the anti-French companies boycott of 2008, which involved Carrefour, in retaliation for what was perceived as French support for Tibet independence movement; and an anti-Western brands call that hit harder H&M, due to a controversy in which some companies refused to use Xinjiang's cotton under claims of human rights violations in the region, home of the Uyghur minority.

On a personal observation, when I was a Master's degree student at Sichuan University we had a discussion in class regarding the nationality of the Chinese Diaspora, in particular, that of a Chinese American. Some of my Chinese classmate's argument was that a Chinese American is actually Chinese, as China is their ancestral motherland, and their ethnicity and blood lineage are both contributors to defining nationality. Although this is a singular event and cannot be representative, it was surprising to me the high incidence of this interpretation of nationality, which greatly differs from the current Western, multi-ethnic discourse. Moreover, these were Master's students of Sichuan University, which is in the top 15 best universities in China. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that equating ethnicity or ancestral motherland to nationality is a view held by different strata of Chinese society, including citizens with high education. It is not my particular intention to dismiss this view, but rather to highlight how the understanding of nationality can greatly differ between cultures, and how, even if Western societies decide to create multi-ethnic nations, that does not mean that other cultures would necessarily adopt the same views, as the Chinese perspective of nationality deeply based on race and *ius sanguinis* demonstrates.

This different approach to nationality and Chinese nationalism can also be seen in the case of Eileen Gu, the 2022 Beijing Olympic Winter Games and 2023 World Cup skiing superstar. I would like to discuss in further detail Eileen Gu as an example of Chinese and American hybridity; how individuals can navigate their dual identity with ambivalence; and how this puts her in the middle of a confrontation, making Eileen the target of controversies and discontent from both sides of the issue. Eileen Gu was born and raised in San Francisco in 2003. She was raised by her single mother, Chinese; and the identity of her absent father has remained undisclosed. However, her father is white American, hence Eileen Gu is mixed race. Gu first represented the United States in the Ski World Cup of Italy in 2019 but changed teams in 2019 to compete for China in the 2022 Beijing Olympic Winter Games, announcing on the Chinese social media platform Weibo that she hoped to serve as a bridge for interaction, mutual understanding and friendship among the people of China and the United States. (Branch 2022) The U.S. Ski Federation issued a statement

supporting her decision, but the controversy was served: she declined to answer questions about her citizenship, although China does not allow dual nationality and there is no official record of Gu renouncing her U.S. citizenship. She claimed that "When I am in China, I am Chinese. When I am in the U.S., I am American." Trying to avoid positioning amid U.S.-China tensions, she also claimed that she is not into politics, but only hopes to connect people. (Branch 2022)

However, it was difficult to establish neutrality, particularly in the very same Olympic Winter Games that the United States and other countries boycotted diplomatically, due to alleged violations of human rights in Xinjiang, China; and, from the Chinese point of view, it is also problematic to maintain this duality when netizens are eager to criticize any national 'traitors' among waves of exacerbated patriotism. Thus, Eileen Gu was the focus of attention from both the U.S. and Chinese media, a symbol of geopolitical tensions and different views on national identities. Yet Gu struggled to maintain her ambivalence. Coincidentally, in China she is affectionately known as 'Princess Frog', a nickname derived from a green helmet with frogs that she would wear as a child (Branch 2022). And the frog, an amphibian, an animal that can equally live in water and land, is a suitable analogy for what Eileen Gu was trying to achieve by embodying two diametrically opposed identities in the context of a political and nationalistic struggle between China and the U.S.

Gu has been celebrated in China as a powerful symbol of the Chinese Diaspora rejecting the traditional enemy (the U.S.) and embracing her ancestral motherland. In a country where colonialism is considered the 'Century of Humiliation', and which has seen an outpour of emigration towards the United States, this is considered a step forward in asserting national pride —a particularly symbolically loaded gesture in the context of U.S.-China tensions. Eileen Gu has been celebrated by the Chinese state-owned channel CCTV in a short documentary, became a Chinese social media influencer, earned substantial deals with Chinese brands sponsorships, and appeared brandishing the Olympic torch for the Winter Games spot. (Branch 2022)

Despite her success in China, there have been Chinese detracting voices against Gu, arguing that she is not 'real' Chinese. Some of the most meticulous nationalists argued that she should not say 'China' but 'motherland', as it is common for native Mandarin speakers; others have pointed out her privileged position and disconnect to Chinese reality. This was underscored when Gu commented on Instagram about internet censorship in China. As it is widely known, China has a heavily censored internet environment, ranking 5th most censored country in the world according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ, 2019), with sites such as Google or any Western social media banned. Some residents in China are still able to access the 'outer' internet with a VPN, a technological tool to circumvent the Chinese internet Great Wall. However, VPNs are illegal in China, which makes them difficult to install, and users risk penalties if they are discovered by authorities. Nonetheless, Eileen Gu's retort to someone commenting on internet censorship in China was that "Anyone can download a VPN, it's literally free on the App Store". Gu's answer begs two conclusions: first, she is using the American version of the App Store, as the content varies depending on your country's setup, and VPNs do not appear in the Chinese Mainland version; and second, she is not aware of Chinese internet restrictions nor familiar with the reality that Chinese citizens face in their daily lives, not to speak of the fact that alluding to alleged easy access to a VPN does not provide an answer to why this VPN is needed in the first place. Hence, some netizens criticized her for her lack of awareness inside the country and called her an opportunist, fans turning into critics at the first turn of events. (Qin 2022)

Another backlash from China came from Hu Xijin, former director of China's *Global Times* newspaper. According to him, "China should avoid portraying Eileen Gu as a patriot because even though the U.S.-born phenom is skiing for the Chinese team now, it's uncertain what nationality she will choose in the future"; and "China's national honor and credibility cannot be risked, and the country's room for maneuver must be greater than that of any individual." (Time 2022) Hu Xijin's suspicion of Gu's ambivalence is understandable, as Eileen Gu defined herself as Asian American when attending the Met Gala in New York in 2022, "sparking another round of online complaints in China." (Zhao 2022)

It seems that Eileen's national identity has become a public debate, and there are people on both sides of the argument who would like to force Chinese Americans to choose one country. However, as Amin Maalouf expounds in *Murderous Identities*, multicultural individuals have a complex identity that is not possible to split. Maalouf's views are in line with Gu's pretension that she is both American and Chinese, and her identity fluctuates depending on where she is at any given moment. Before we have analyzed hybridity in individuals who are Chinese Americans, but there was no debate about their citizenship: they were from the United States, but their Chinese background added a different dimension to their American experience. The case of Eileen Gu expands the possibilities of Chinese American identity, with a young woman who is reluctant to choose between countries. There can be several reasons for this: being raised by a Chinese single mother because of an absent American father could have made her closer to her Chinese identity; her constant trips to China; her fluency in Mandarin; or the fact that the China she has always known, being born in 2003, was already a developed economy which could stand in comparison with the United States. These are all speculations, regardless of which, one aspect remains clear: how Eileen Gu is navigating her Chinese American identity is a singular case that differs from other examples, and might be signaling a change in how younger generations of Chinese Americans feel about their ancestral homeland.

Finally, I would like to discuss two other typologies of hybridity from a Chinese perspective: totally assimilated Chinese Americans, who without speaking Chinese or knowing much about the culture live in China or visit the country; and Chinese citizens who lived in America long enough to experience cultural hybridity and alienation when they go back to China.

The former are colloquially called 'ABC' (American Born Chinese) or 'banana person' in China ('yellow on the outside, white on the inside'). They are what Ling-Chi Wong refers to as the totally assimilated, rejecting their cultural heritage and pursuing white values to become thoroughly Americanized. (Ling-Chi Wong 197) Daniel Hsia's film *Shanghai Calling* (2012) is set in Shanghai, and presents a group of American 'expats', two of them Chinese Americans. One of them, Sam, is a totally assimilated individual who is sent to China on a

company's mission. His stay in Shanghai will be the setting to develop some culture clash clichés to portray how out of touch Sam is with his ancestral motherland, being met with other expat's surprise at him not speaking Mandarin nor having been to China before. Sam's initial attitude towards the country is typical of the American-born Chinese who is totally assimilated and who perceives China as repressed and backward (Ling-Chi Wang 196). However, the film aims to portray his change of mind. After all, Shanghai in 2012 is an international trade hub and a modern city. Capitalism makes Sam view China with different eyes, and he finally seems to reconcile with his roots. At the end of the movie, he decides to start learning Mandarin, symbolizing this reconciliation. As the criticism of Chloe Zhao, Simu Liu, or Eileen Gu demonstrated, American-born Chinese such as the character of Sam can be judged as 'traitors' by some exacerbated nationalists in China. This can place them in a particularly vulnerable situation, as a 'third space' in which they are excluded by radical ethnic nationalistic elements from both the U.S., who consider them Chinese based on their ethnicity; and China, who deem them not Chinese enough in terms of their culture and behavior.

On the other hand, the Chinese media are beginning to produce their own films and series in which they project their own understanding of cultural hybridity and migration. It is the case of *All Is Well* (*Dou Ting Hao*, 2019) directed by Jian Chuanhe and based on the homonymous novel written by Ah Nai. *All Is Well* begins with a Chinese middle-aged man, Su Mingzhe, who started a new life in the United States after entering the country as a university student. He is a Chinese citizen who has lived now several years in the United States, and who has retained a traditional and idealized image of the country he left behind. The show, among several topics, deals with how Su Mingzhe rediscovers China, partly because his long stay in the United States has made him change, and partly because China is not the same either. We are able to see the first example of Su Mingzhe's 'Americanization' when he is met at the airport by his sister, Su Mingyu. He wants to hug her, but this behavior is not customary in China, and she rejects him. He on the other hand rejects his sister's offer to carry the luggage, which would be compliant with Chinese etiquette. There is more background to the cold reencounter scene, and as the story

unfolds, we learn that there are certain family issues that would influence this moment, but the rejected hug has certainly a cultural aspect that vividly encapsulates how Su Mingzhe has changed due to his long time in America. For Su Mingzhe, China is, in Moon Orchid's husband's words, “a book I have read a long time ago” (Kingston 139). This is China for some Chinese who return long afterward to visit their ancestral motherland, “Effectively forgotten, deliberately erased.” (Adams 89)

Captions from *All Is Well*: the eldest son Su Mingzhe comes back to China from the United States. His sister is waiting for him at the airport. He approaches and wants to hug her sister, who had not seen for years. However, hugging is not the norm in China, and she rejects the hug, which might seem like a cold gesture to Western audiences. However, she asks to carry his luggage, following the Chinese etiquette, but Su Mingzhe declines the offer. Su Mingyu takes it anyway, asserting herself to her older brother. Image Source: All Is Well (*Dou Ting Hao)*

All Is Well has been a successful TV show in China because touched upon certain topics which were relevant to modern Chinese audiences: the ambivalent relationship with the Chinese American Diaspora, or those Chinese who decided not to come back; the difficulties of caring for the elderly in modern society; the NEET (‘Not in Education, Employment, or Training’, that is, people who rely on their parents for a livelihood); and the traditional preference of boys over girls in Chinese patriarchal culture.

This last theme was deeply discussed by Maxine Hong Kingston in *The Woman Warrior* and seems to be debated now in China. According to Yuexuan Li's paper *Gender Inequality in Education in China*, despite a clear improvement since the 1980s, there is still discrimination against girls in modern China affecting their education opportunities, particularly in rural areas, even though girls on average outperform their male counterparts. (Li 910) In *All Is Well*, the matriarch clearly favors the education of her two sons, while neglecting her daughter's career despite her outstanding academic results. The series dives into how the mother's sexism creates a deep resentment in her daughter, resulting in the young girl breaking ties with the family, not unlike Maxine's resolution in *The Woman Warrior* when she decides that she will be better off away from home. Hence, we can draw a parallelism between how Kingston's autobiographical novel and nowadays Chinese media productions confront gender inequality. According to their accounts, young women still feel burdened by a tradition that undervalues them compared to men and feels the need to put some distance between themselves and their families to attain independence and success.

Another trope that has recurrently appeared in *The Woman Warrior* as well as other works cited in this paper (such as *Turning Red* or *All Is Well*) is that of the 'tiger mom', stereotypically attributed to Chinese mothers. 'Tiger mom' is a term coined by Chinese American lawyer and writer Amy Chua in her book *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* (2011) which refers to a kind of authoritarian and strict mother who expects and demands excellent academic performance from their children. These representations of Asian mothers are now being countered by 'panda parenting', as portrayed in the Chinese TV comedy *Tiger Mom* (Yao Xiaofeng, 2015) and Sha Xie & Hui Li's research '*Tiger mom, panda dad': a study of contemporary Chinese parenting profiles* (2017), which finds that highly educated and affluent young urban parents in contemporary China (and particularly fathers) tend to opt for a less strict and more supportive method of parenting, avoiding to exert pressure on children to foster self-confidence and well-being. The study's findings imply that socioeconomic status, gender, and education are influential factors in

configuring parenting styles, which are changing in Chinese society, and might challenge reductionist connotations attributed to Chinese parenting.

Finally, I would like to briefly comment on some of the topics investigated by Kun Huang, a Cornell University researcher whose field of research is race and Blackness in Chinese culture. In *"Anti-Blackness" in Chinese Racial-Nationalism: Sex/Gender, Reproduction, and Metaphors of Pathology* (Huang 2020), Kun Huang expounds that anti-Black racism and racial hierarchies in China prior to the expansion of European colonialism, the interrelation between sexism and racism, and how mixed race Black-Chinese suffer prejudice as opposed to White-Chinese individuals. She comments on the example of Lou Jing. She and her Chinese mother were attacked with racist comments, a reaction that is in sheer contrast to how Chinese audiences welcomed Eileen Gu:

Lou Jing, a young mixed-race woman of Chinese and African-American parents who appeared on Shanghai's Dragon Television's variety show *Let's Go! Oriental Angel* demonstrated that for Chinese netizens, colorism informs how they define Chinese identity. Studying the case of Lou Jing, Robeson Taj Frazier, and Lin Zhang argue that the controversy reflected anxieties regarding "who can be Chinese, who can produce Chinese children, what kinds of interracial relationships are acceptable for Chinese women, and the impact of foreign immigration by people of African descent into China."

(Huang, 2020)

Kun Huang claims that mixed-race Chinese-African people are more commonly ostracized as compared to Chinese-White. She also links ethno-nationalism to heteropatriarchy, demonstrating how some of the radical groups who are vocal against Chinese women having children with non-Chinese men are simultaneously in favor of Chinese men having progeny with non-Chinese women. So, as far as these nationalists are concerned, the nation must be racially homogeneous and is solely applicable to Chinese women, whereas men do not have that imperative of racial endogamy. Her analysis of anti-Black discourse and ethno-nationalism opens lines of investigation in which the internal dynamics of Chinese society can be researched in further detail.

I would link the above-mentioned examples of Chinese American hybridity with a relevant and perhaps prophetic excerpt from Ling-chi Wang:

> It is quite conceivable that, over time, accommodation could lead to assimilation if Chinese in the United States lose contact with China or if hostile relations exist between China and the United States. (...) Accommodation could, on the other hand, also revert back to the sojourner mentality if Chinese nationalism were to resurface. It is also possible that American society may someday choose to accept Chinese Americans as they are —both racially and culturally— in which case we will have a form of multicultural democracy.
>
> (Ling-chi Wang 200)

We have seen cases of assimilation in different degrees, such as comedian Ali Wong and the protagonist of *Shanghai Calling*; yet this assimilation is not complete nor self-imposed due to a perceived inferior status of Chinese culture, as Ling-chi Wang discussed it was the case with the first assimilators. This allows the assumption that Chinese Americans are in fact becoming increasingly comfortable with who they are in terms of their cultural background, in a country that is shaping itself as a truly multicultural democracy. On the other hand, Chinese nationalism and younger generations of Chinese Americans who have been raised closer to China have created a new kind of 'sojourner', as it can be the case of Eileen Gu; one who is born and raised in the United States and feels American but simultaneously does keep strong personal ties with China, establishing a life and an identity which comprise both countries at the same time. I claim that China's economic development, convenient modern transportation, and the internet (with social media that creates a Chinese online environment outside China) are playing a role in this new sort of hybrid identity of Chinese Americans who feel equally close to both the U.S. and China, refusing to choose between one or the other — and why would they?

Chinese Spanish Hybridity

Sé cantar canciones en un idioma que no entiendo

sé decir "te quiero" en un idioma que no siento

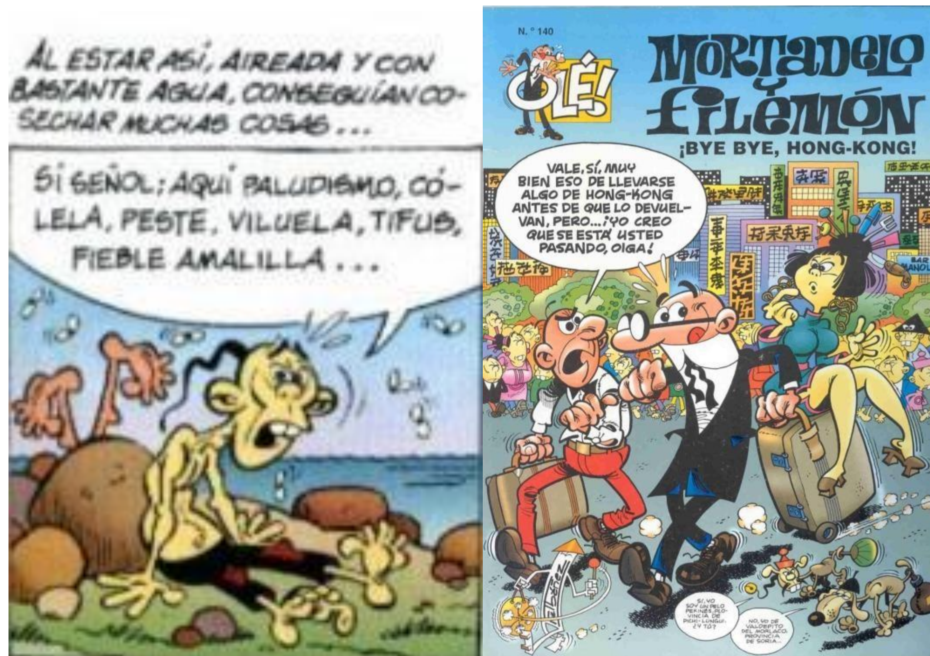
el verbo que me ha sido dado no me puede atrapar

qué sabe este diccionario de mi pueblo, mi historia o mi identidad.

(Paloma Chen as cited in Coyle, 2021)

According to the National Institute of Statistics of Spain (INE 2022), the number of Chinese nationals resident in Spain was 229,254 in 2021, and each year there are newborns whose parents or at least one parent is Chinese. However, their numbers are decreasing, from their 2009 peak of 4862 to only 1865 in 2022. This new generation of Chinese Spanish will join those who were born in China but grew up in Spain, creating a hybrid identity and undergoing a process of acculturation that may show similarities to that of the Chinese American community.

According to Gladys Nieto, author of *Reflexiones acerca de la investigación sobre chinos de Ultramar en España,* and *La inmigración china en España: una comunidad ligada a su nación*, anti-Chinese xenophobia or sinophobia exist in Spain, with "urban myths that associate them to illegal activities, strange cultural practices, unfair competition and ostentation of wealth", and the Chinese regarded as an "exoticized and stereotyped collective." (as cited by Coyle 2021)



Stereotypical representations of the Chinese alluding to diseases and female sexualization by Spanish comic artist Ibáñez, *Mortadelo y Filemón: ¡Bye Bye, Hong-Kong!*, 1997

Second-generation Chinese Spanish have started raising their voices to reflect on their hybrid identity, the experience of being a minority in Spain. Self-denial is part of the process, with some Chinese Spanish averting the Chinese aspect of their identity when growing up, as though some burden that will be detrimental to their social development; however, this ends up in accepting their own heritage, in part due to racial differences constituting an insurmountable barrier, but also because of cultural ties: “like it or not, you will continue to be Chinese.” (Coyle 2021)

Paloma Chen is one literary representative of the Chinese Spanish community: born in a small town in Spain in the 1990s, she explores her identity in her poetry book *Invocación a las Mayorías Silenciosas* (2022). In its preface, many of the topics sound familiar to Maxine Hong Kingston’s quest for finding her own voice in a third space, away from ethnic labels, in search of a personal artistic voice: “migrant women and their daughters already born in Spain have been linked to liminal spaces: those in-between places that belong to neither side. Neither to this one nor to the other. The collection of poems we have in our hands is a reflection of how complicated it is to live on the edge, where traditionally there has been no place for art and culture beyond the label of

alternative." (translated from Chen's synopsis as cited in La Vanguardia, 2022) It is after a trip to China to study Chinese when she was 21 years old that she realized the potential of mixing identities and not having to choose between them.

Paloma Chen is not an isolated case: Zhou Quan, an illustrator known as Gazpacho Agridulce, explores the same themes as an Andalusian-born Chinese Spanish in her comic strips and her autobiography *Gazpacho Agridulce: Una Autobiografía Chino-Andaluza;* and Taiwanese Spanish singer, artist, and writer Chenta Tsai's intersectional account includes gender and queer theory to the impact of immigration on cultural identity in *Arroz Tres Delicias: Sexo, Raza y Género*.

Cangrejo Pro is a performance collective of young Chinese women of the Diaspora in Spain, whose performances also vindicate the particular problems of the community in this country. Their performance *Vamos al Chino* highlights the dehumanization of Chinese workers and the hate crimes exerted on this collective due to sinophobia.

Similarly, other collectives such as the Furiasia Festival of the Asian Diasporas and the Lychee Film Festival are pioneering artistic associations of Chinese Spanish creators and writers that are configuring their own spaces and voice within Spanish society. They are a gust of fresh air in the national artistic panorama, contributing to an art scene that is more plural.

Spanish director Arantxa Echevarria, recipient of the Goya award for Best New Director in 2018 with the film *Carmen y Lola*, has recently portrayed through her naturalist lens the life of two Spanish girls of Chinese ascendancy living in Madrid in *Chinas* (2023). *Chinas* narrates the story of two 9-year-old girls who, when meeting for the first time at school, undergo the social assumption that they must become friends. However, initially, they reject the idea, as they come from totally different backgrounds: Lucía, a second-generation immigrant who identifies as Spanish, and whose parents work incessantly in a Chinese bazaar; and Xiang, who is adopted and wonders about her biological family. The movie is inspired by Echevarría's personal experience, as she met the daughter of the owners of a Chinese bazaar in her

neighborhood. From their acquaintance, she began "to take an interest and investigate what life is like for second-generation Chinese in Madrid; people who must struggle against the tradition, norms, and culture of a country of origin they barely know but at the same time are rejected in their country of birth because of their slanted eyes." (Cine con Ñ 2023)

Chinese Spanish culture has a historically brief trajectory compared to the Chinese American community; yet has already yielded valuable literary and artistic works. In the course of recent decades, Spain has become a multiethnic society, and individuals with different cultural backgrounds will keep growing and contributing to the continuous dialogue of literature, art, creativity, and multiculturalism. We are looking forward to seeing more of it.

5. Conclusion

The Woman Warrior is a mixture of novel, myth, and autobiography where hybridity and cultural identity are the key themes. In Kingston's work, we can see how the author navigates her own personal struggle to elucidate her perception of the self, jointly vindicating Chinese American history, traditionally silenced and invisibilized. History played an important role in how Chinese Americans perceived themselves within American society, usually going through different stages of acculturation, self-denial, and reconciliation. Kingston's novel is a good example of hybridity where the author claims her identity as a conglomeration of cultures, neither one nor the other, but a 'third space' within the racial binary opposition black/white; and simultaneously can claim her right to originality and individuality, refusing to be reduced to an ethnicity, her work narrowed down to the representation of minorities. Kingston rejects assimilationist and sojourner mentalities to create a Chinese American identity.

The complexities of cultural hybridity may evolve into different stages, as both American and Chinese cultures are dynamic. The United States and China are changing, and thus Chinese Americans are bound to perceive themselves differently in terms of who they are and how they navigate their cultural heritage. The rapid development of China, rising to become the world's second-largest economy and a global influential superpower, creates a different paradigm in which Chinese Americans can fluidly negotiate between their identities. As the case of Eileen Gu shows, Chinese Americans see China in a different light, compared to previous generations who escaped the Communist regime and poverty. China may become an attractive cultural competitor of the United States for these multicultural individuals; however, the United States is undergoing a public debate in the pursuit of becoming a multi-ethnic democracy. The problems and solutions that we can see in their development can be used in other countries which are following the same path to becoming multi-ethnic democracies.

In Spain, the recent arrival of Chinese immigration has already created a first generation of Chinese Spanish writers and artists looking for their own voice. Learning from cultural hybridity, the United States cases, and drawing from vivid experiences such as Maxine Hong Kingston's work, it is possible to anticipate difficulties, facilitate coexistence and hopefully reduce situations where Chinese Spanish citizens feel alienated and foreign in their own country.

6. Afterword

It is Lunar New Year, and from my apartment in Barcelona, I can hear firecrackers and fireworks celebrating the arrival of the Year of the Rabbit. It is a celebration that is becoming increasingly present in the social fabric of the city, with a New Year parade organized by the Confucius Institute and other activities. Meanwhile, the Lunar New Year is an official state holiday in California, the first time a state gives it such consideration, in an effort to recognize Asian Americans as another essential component of what constitutes the United States. It is also regarded as a measure to support Asian Americans after the wave of anti-Asian hate that shook the country during the COVID pandemic. This official status is granted after a long-established tradition of celebrations in America: the Lunar New Year has been held in San Francisco since the 1860s, and it is now finally recognized by governmental institutions.

Yet there is a bittersweet aftertaste in this year's celebration: a mass shooting has claimed the lives of ten people near Los Angeles. The gunman entered a ballroom where people were celebrating the Lunar New Year. I first suspected this was a case of anti-Asian hate. As the information unfolds, it seems to be problematic to attribute motivations: the murderer is an Asian American elder man with personal ties to that ballroom and possibly having

mental issues. Time will tell. Meanwhile, regardless of intentionality, there is a mass shooting against the Asian community the very same year that the Lunar New Year is first celebrated officially in California, and there is a certain tragic irony in these unfortunate events.

One cannot but think about this paradox, on how coexistence and conflict can go hand in hand in the same country. How we seem to observe a step forward, only to be followed by another step backward. Yet, has progress ever been linear and straightforward? I believe it is the staunch will of the majority of the United States citizens to live in coexistence and harmony between communities, and that incidents like this should not let us forget the efforts that the society and its institutions are making to achieve this goal. Notwithstanding, the outburst of anti-Asian hate during the COVID pandemic is also a warning not to feel overconfident about the progress made, and to keep alert and working towards the common goal of peace and prosperity for all.

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