

## INVESTIGATING THE EVOLUTION OF CHINESE AMERICAN LITERATURE THROUGH THE LENS OF CHINESE AMERICAN IMMIGRANTS

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## XITOIY-AMERIKA ADABIYOTI RIVOJLANISH TARAQQIYOTINING XITOIY-AMERIKA MUHOJIRLARI PRIZMASI ORQALI TAHLILI

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## ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ ЭВОЛЮЦИИ КИТАЙСКО-АМЕРИКАНСКОЙ ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ ЧЕРЕЗ ПРИЗМУ КИТАЙСКО-АМЕРИКАНСКИХ ИММИГРАНТОВ

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**Abstract:** This article explores the evolution of Chinese American literature in tandem with the historical experiences of Chinese immigrants in the US. Through an analysis of key events such as the Chinese Exclusion Act and the Angel Island Immigration Station, as well as the contributions of notable authors like Amy Tan and Maxine Hong Kingston, this article highlights the resilience and cultural richness inherent in Chinese American literature.

**Key words:** Chinese American literature, Immigration history, Amy Tan, Cultural identity, Diaspora experiences, Socio-political landscapes, Resilience and adaptation.

**Annotatsiya:** Mazkur maqolada Xitoy-Amerika adabiyotining rivojlanish taraqqiyoti Qo'shma Shtatlarda istiqomat qiluvchi xitoylik muhojirlarning tarixiy tajribalari bilan uzviylikda ko'rib chiqiladi. Ushbu maqolada Emi Tan va Maksin Xong Kingston kabi taniqli diaspora yozuvchilarining Kongressning "Xitoyliklarni istisno qilish to'g'risida"gi qonuni va Anxel orolining Immigratsiya stansiyasi tekshiruvi kabi muhim tarixiy voqealarni o'z badiiy asarlarida tasvirlash va xolisona tahlil qilish orqali Xitoy-Amerika adabiyotiga xos bo'lgan xususiyatlarni tadqiq etiladi.

**Kalit so'zlar:** Xitoy amerika adabiyoti, immigratsiya tarixi, Emi Tan, madaniy o'ziga xoslik, diaspora tajribasi, ijtimoiy-siyosiy landshaftlar, chidamlilik va moslashuv

**Аннотация:** В этой статье исследуется эволюция китайско-американской литературы в сочетании с историческим опытом китайских иммигрантов в Соединенных Штатах. Благодаря анализу ключевых событий, таких как Закон об исключении китайцев и иммиграционной станции на острове Ангел, а также вкладу таких известных авторов, как Эми Тан и Максин Хонг Кингстон, эта статья подчеркивает устойчивость и культурное богатство, присущие китайско-американской литературе.

**Ключевые слова:** Китайско-американская литература, история иммиграции, Эми Тан, культурная идентичность, опыт диаспоры, социально-политические ландшафты, устойчивость и адаптация.

**INTRODUCTION.** The evolution of Chinese American literature intricately intertwines with the experiences of Chinese American immigrants, which are inherently shaped by the political, economic, and social landscapes of the United States. Chinese American immigration history is punctuated by significant milestones and locales, each bearing profound implications for the community's trajectory. Key events include the Gold Rush era, characterized by a surge in Chinese migration to the West Coast; the construction of the transcontinental railway, which relied heavily on Chinese labor; the implementation of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, marking a pivotal moment of institutionalized discrimination against Chinese immigrants; legislative acts such as the War Brides Act, Immigration Act of 1952, and Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which each delineated varying policies impacting immigration patterns and dynamics. Additionally, landmarks such as the Angel Island Immigration Station and Chinatown serve as emblematic sites reflective of the immigrant experience and cultural resilience within the Chinese American community.

*“From 1850 to 1882, before the enactment of the Chinese Exclusion Act in the United States, there were three climaxes of Chinese immigration to the United States: the California Gold Rush in the 1850s; The construction of a railway across the North American continent in the 1860s; The great development of agriculture in California in the 1870s [1]. The so-called climax was only compared to the past. The proportion of Chinese people in the total population of the United States was still very tiny. The first significant Chinese immigration to North America began with the California Gold Rush of 1848–1855 and it continued with subsequent large labor projects, such as the building of the first transcontinental railroad. “During the early stages of the gold rush, when surface gold was plentiful, the Chinese were tolerated by white people, if not well received” [2]. However, as gold became harder to find and competition increased, animosity toward the Chinese and other foreigners increased. “After being forcibly driven from mining by a mixture of state legislators and other miners (the Foreign Miner's Tax), the immigrant Chinese began to settle in enclaves in cities, mainly San Francisco, and took up low-wage labor, such as restaurant and laundry*

*work” [3]. This period of history is reflected in many works of Chinese American writers, showing the hardship and contribution of the first generation of Chinese American Immigrants. With the continuously accumulating hateful and repulsive sentiment and attitudes and even anti-Chinese violence towards Chinese immigrants in American society, The Chinese Exclusion Act was finally passed through Congress. It was signed by President Chester A. Arthur on May 6, 1882, prohibiting all immigration of Chinese laborers for 10 years [4]. The act was initially intended to last for 10 years but was renewed and strengthened in 1892 with the Geary Act and made permanent in 1902. Later, the Immigration Act of 1924 restricted immigration even further, excluding all classes of Chinese immigrants and extending restrictions to other Asian immigrant groups. The law remained in force until the passage of the Magnuson Act in 1943, “which repealed the exclusion and allowed 105 Chinese immigrants to enter the United States each year” [5].*

**MATERIALS AND METHODS.** Several literature from both Chinese authors as well as worldwide have been taken into in-depth study in order to derive solutions based on the research questions and subsequent objectives. The primary materials for this study encompassed a comprehensive collection of various authors' literary works from Chinese Americans and authors around the world from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present era. These literary works were selected to demonstrate the distinct stages in the evolution of Chinese American literature and included novels, short stories, autobiographies, essays, and poetry. Highly recognized works of Amy Tan, Maxine Hong Kingston, Grank Chin and so on and so forth have been taken into this careful study. In order to explore the evolution of Chinese American literature, this study has employed various methods such as Literary Corpus compilation, by authentic publishers who are originally Chinese Americans like Amy Tan and Maxine Hong Kingston. Having studied literary corpus the contents were thematically analyzed to identify recurring motifs and themes such as identity, culture, conflict, discrimination, assimilation and intergenerational dynamics. Besides, historical context, critical synthesis, scholarly engagement and qualitative data coding were also used to bring fourth new knowledge in this research paper.

**DISCUSSION.** It is recorded that “*from 1910 to 1940 the Angel Island Immigration Station on what is now Angel Island State Park in San Francisco Bay served as the processing center for most of the 56,113 Chinese immigrants who are recorded as immigrating or returning from China; upwards of 30% more who arrived there were returned to China*” [6]. During World War II, China and the United States became anti-fascist allies, and the China Exclusion Act became an obstacle to the relationship between China and the U.S. On the proposal of President F.D. Roosevelt, the United States Congress passed the Magnuson Act, also known as the Abolition of the Exclusion Act, on December 17, 1943, thereby abolishing all Exclusion Acts. This bill allows Chinese who have already resided in the United States to become naturalized citizens without the threat of expulsion and allows for an annual immigration quota of 105 Chinese. On December 28, 1945, the United States Congress enacted The War Brides Act to allow alien spouses, natural children, and adopted children of American troops stationed overseas to immigrate to the United States and achieve family reunification without being restricted by the ethnic immigrant quotas at the time. “*However, this legal provision mainly targets European and white brides, while Asian brides were excluded. Subsequently, in 1946, the United States enacted laws such as Public Law 471 and Public Law 213, extending the exemption from ethnic quotas to Asian brides. Among the Asian war brides, Chinese brides occupied the largest proportion, with approximately 6000 war brides from China entering the United States*” [7]. *To many girls, getting married to an American is a promising way to change their fates. “Among the Chinese immigrants who entered the United States from 1944 to 1953, women accounted for 82%. Therefore, the number of Chinese women and Chinese families had significantly increased for the first time in American history*” [8]. This period of history can be verified in Amy Tan’s novels by the time mothers came to America. However, it was not until the passage of the Immigration Act of 1952, that Asian people began to immigrate to the United States on a large scale.

**RESULTS.** However, a large-scale influx of Chinese immigrants did not appear until the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. This new law completely abolished the nationality quota

system and replaced it with a quota for the Eastern and Western Hemispheres: “*about 170 thousand in the Eastern Hemisphere and about 120 thousand in the Western Hemisphere, while the annual quotas for any country is 20 thousand, some immigrants without quota restrictions based on some provisions*” [9]. At this point, the Chinese began to receive the same treatment as other countries formally. It is worth mentioning that on June 18, 2012, with a unanimous vote in the House of Representatives, the United States officially apologized in legislative form for the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, which marked a new chapter in the history of Chinese Americans in the United States. Correspondingly, Chinese American literature evolves in tandem with the history of Chinese immigration. However, the exact definition of Chinese American literature is the subject of considerable controversy. Frank Chin offered a definition of Chinese American writers “*that was restricted primarily to those who are American-born of Asian parents, though with an exception for those like Edith Maude Eaton who migrated to America in early childhood. To limit Chinese American writers to those born in America excludes the first generation of immigrants who traveled from China to the United States and who wrote in Chinese*” [10]. “*Xiaohuang Yin argued that (Chinese American Literature since the 1850s, 2000) literary work written by Chinese Americans should be included in the category of Chinese American ethnic literature, whether it is in English or Chinese*” [11]. Amy defined Chinese American literature as “*the works created by those people who are influenced by dual ethnic attributes and cultural traditions, striving for equality and proudly depicting the experiences of Chinese and their descendants in the United States*” [12]. The term “Diaspora” originates from Ancient Greek “*diaspeir*”, meaning “dispersed” or “scattering”. It is a botanical term that describes the dispersal of plant seeds in one or several areas. Later, Greek scholars used it to describe Jewish cultural history with negative connotations. “*‘Diaspora’ was initially used to describe the migrations of Jewish people after the fall of Jerusalem in the sixth century B.C.E. It has since been used to describe other instances of mass migration or forced relocation*” [13]. Then, the term expanded to include the



Armenian and African diaspora, but since the 1980s it has ballooned even further.

Diaspora culture is actually not something that can be summarized by a simplified term like “immigrant literature”. It reflects a cultural tension between the homeland and the present living country: mutual confrontation and infiltration. *“Populations living in diaspora frequently maintain strong cultural ties to their homeland and their community members. These links serve to emphasize their membership in their ancestral ethnic or religious community. However, members of populations in the diaspora also participate and create ties within the overarching cultural group they find themselves in. This can lead to a dual identity, where both cultural or religious contexts affect the way, the individual perceives themselves”* [14].

Said explores the concept of diaspora with a focus on personal empowerment rather than mere dispersion in time and space or the preservation of collective memory. He emphasizes the creation of individual authority, drawing from his work in Orientalism. Diaspora, according to Said, is a perpetual negotiation between the familiar and the unfamiliar, a state of being out-of-place that involves continuous adaptation and exploration. This paradoxical reality has led him on a journey of uninterrupted wandering and displacement, shaping his identity and worldview [15]. Probably, his consciousness of exile comes from his realization that what characterizes his life is the endless travel into many different places, cities, abodes, languages, and environments: *“to me, nothing more painful and paradoxically sought after characterizes my life than the many displacements from countries, cities, abodes, languages, environments that have kept me in motion all these years”* [16]. *“Generally, Chinese American literature can be roughly divided into three stages: the pioneering stage was from the late 19th century to the 1960s; The turning point appeared in the 1970s and 1980s; Then it entered a stage of prosperity from the late 1980s to the early 1990s”* [17]. However, the evolution of the Chinese American novel can be divided into three key stages. Initially, before the 1960s, these novels emerged but gathered limited attention due to the uncertain relationship between China and America. From the 1960s to the early 1990s, Chinese American

literature gained distinction, drawing inspiration from the civil rights movement and establishing a significant presence in American literary landscape. Since the mid-1990s, Chinese American novels have expanded their thematic scope, reflecting assimilation into American culture and the weight of multiculturalism, offering readers a diverse and unexpected perspective [18]. *“The majority of these Chinese shopkeepers, restaurant owners, and hired workers in San Francisco Chinatown were predominantly male”* [19]. Due to the political environment and social situation, the life of the first generation of Chinese American immigrants was quite hard both on the material and spiritual levels. *“For example, in 1851, the reported Chinese population in California was about 12,000 men and less than ten women”*. (Dobie, Charles Caldwell: 41) [20]. The serious imbalance in the gender ratio has brought about many social problems. The life and experiences of Chinese immigrants and their descendants are reflected in various works, sharing some common characteristics of diaspora literature. What are the main characteristics of diaspora literature? According to the widely quoted definition proposed by William Safran, the key components of this classical diaspora paradigm are *“(1) dispersal from a homeland; (2) collective memory of the homeland; (3) lack of integration in the host country; (4) a ‘myth’ of return and a persistent link with the homeland.”* [26].

**CONCLUSION.** Chinese American literature has evolved alongside the experiences of Chinese American immigrants, reflecting various significant historical and socio-political changes in both China and the United States. Starting in the late 19th century, early writers addressed several issues of identity, discrimination, and cultural preservation amidst types policies. The mid-20th century marked a turning point with the elimination of the Chinese Exclusion Act, leading to a surge in literary output from authors like Amy Tan, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Frank Chin, who explored complex identity and intergenerational themes. In the contemporary era, the literature has become diverse, addressing cultural assimilation, ancestral heritage, and identity negotiation. Overall, Chinese American literature has served as a platform for cultural expression, resistance, and resilience, offering profound insights into the Chinese American experience and

contributing to the broader discourse on identity and cultural exchange.

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