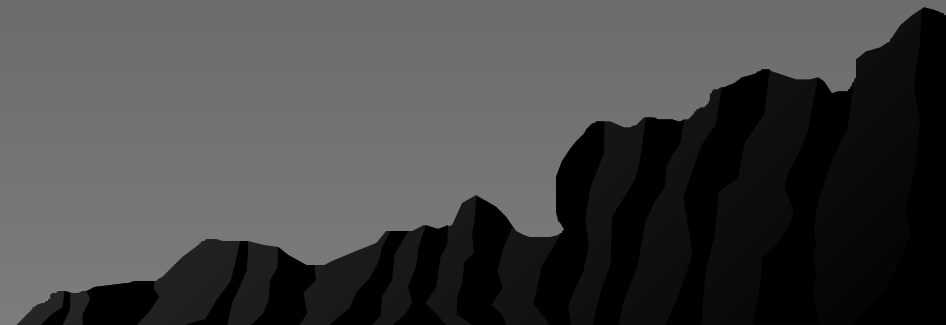



# Chinese American Literature



# Chinese American literature

is literature produced in the United States by writers of Chinese descent.


The genre began in the 19th century and flowered in the 20th with such authors as **Sui Sin Far, Frank Chin, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Amy Tan.**

A dark silhouette of a mountain range is visible in the bottom right corner of the slide.

**Chinese-American literature** refers to fictions written in English by Americans of Chinese origin. As Chinese began to immigrate to the United States during the gold-rush age, and most of them have been struggling at the bottom of the American society, **the representative image** of Chinese-Americans described in American literature used to be a weak female.

In the eyes of Westerners, they were always “outsiders.” Under such circumstances, even America-born Chinese writers went against their mother culture in their creations.

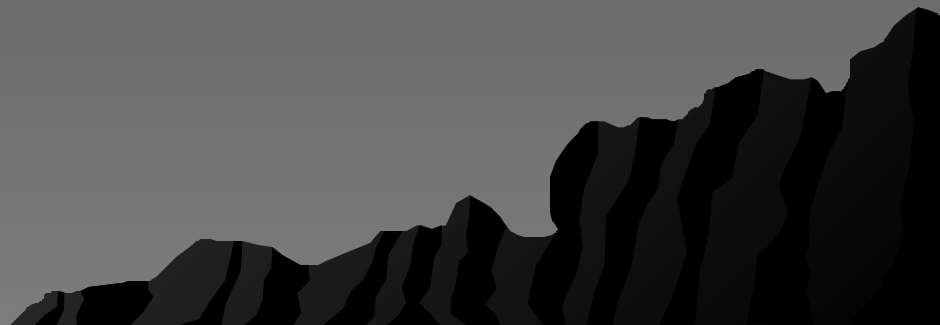
In the 1970s, when more and more people accepted the idea of globalization, they also accepted the Chinese-American writers whose works focused on the Chinese culture but also subjected to fighting against authority and centralization. Meanwhile, these writers' unique viewpoints and writing skills, as well as the profound background of Chinese history and civilization, had a strong compact on the American readers, making them feel refreshed.

A dark silhouette of a mountain range is visible at the bottom right of the slide, set against a dark grey background.

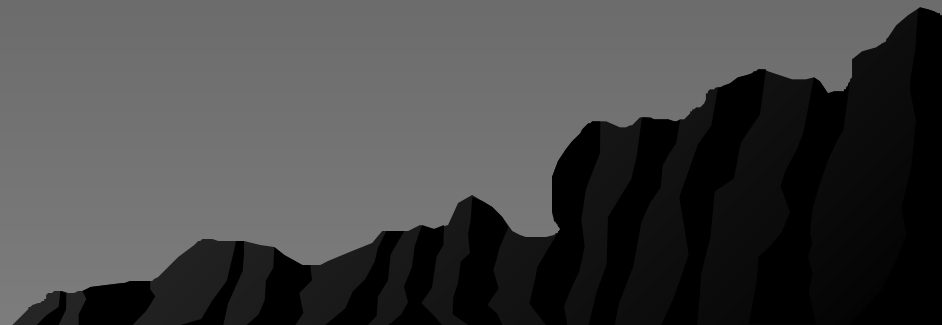
Nevertheless, Chinese-American writers are a very unique group. To the American culture, they are Chinese who followed the Chinese tradition, but in front of the Chinese civilization, they are also outsiders. Living as “outsiders” of both cultures, their interpretation of the “China image” may not be as accurate as it is supposed to be. It is natural that they have to follow the American cultural trend and aesthetic taste.



Therefore, in their literature, Chinese immigrants cannot get rid of the image of “outsider” and “the weak” while their knowledge about the Chinese civilization is far from enough. This is the dilemma for Chinese-American writers.



A common topic is the challenges, both inner and outer, of assimilation in mainstream. Another common theme is that of interaction between generations, particularly older, Chinese-born and younger, American-born generations. Questions of identity and gender are often dealt with as well.





## *Sui Sin Far*

(born **Edith Maude Eaton**)

1865 –1914

was one of the first Chinese American authors to publish fiction in English. Her well-known stories and writings: “Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian” (1909), “In the Land of the Free” (1909), “Mrs. Spring Fragrance” (1910), “The Inferior Woman” (1910), “Her Chinese Husband” (1910), and “A White Woman Who Married a Chinaman” (1910).



# Mrs. Spring Fragrance

- ◆ In *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, a collection of her short stories published in 1912, she portrayed different pictures of Chinese men and women in the United States and of mixed-race women, challenging the stereotypes of Chinese immigrants





## *Eileen Chang*

(1920 – 1995)

was one of the most influential modern Chinese writers.

Chang is noted for her fiction writings that deal with the tensions between men and women in love. Chang's portrayal of life in 1940s Shanghai and Japanese-occupied Hong Kong is remarkable in its focus on everyday life and the absence of the political subtext which characterised many other writers of the period.



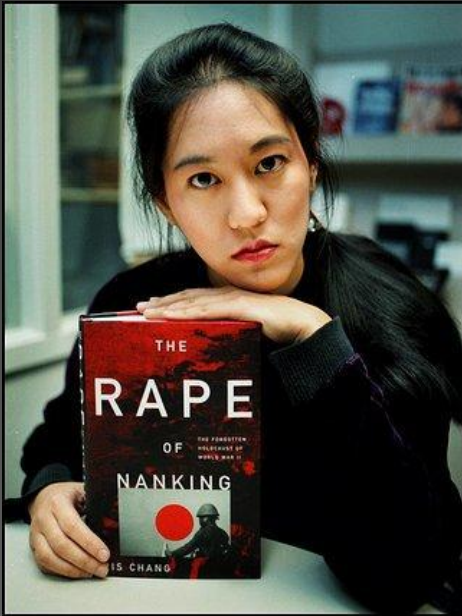
## *Iris Shun-Ru Chang*

(1968 –2004)

was an American author and journalist.

Author of historical, non-fiction books. She is best known for the *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II*, a bestseller which many thought a necessary reminder of a painful event although doubters questioned its inaccuracy. She is also the author of *Thread of the Silkworm*. Her last book was *The Chinese in America: A Narrative History*.

# The Rape of Nanking



In December 1937, the Japanese army invaded the ancient city of Nanking, systematically raping, torturing, and murdering more than 300,000 Chinese civilians.

This book tells the story from three perspectives: of the Japanese soldiers who performed it, of the Chinese civilians who endured it, and of a group of Europeans and Americans who refused to abandon the city and were able to create a safety zone that saved many.

# *Frank Chin*

(1940)

is an American author and playwright.



Chin is considered to be one of the pioneers in Asian American theatre. He founded the Asian American Theatre Workshop, which became the Asian American Theater Company in 1973. He first gained notoriety as a playwright in the 1970s. His play *The Chickencoop Chinaman* was the first by an Asian American to be produced on a major New York stage.



Stereotypes of Asian Americans, and traditional Chinese folklore are common themes in much of his work. In addition to his work as an author and playwright, Frank Chin has also worked extensively with Japanese American resisters of the draft in WWII. His novel, *Born in the U.S.A.*, is dedicated to this subject. Chin is also a musician. In the mid-1960s, he taught Robbie Krieger, a member of The Doors how to play the Flamenco guitar.



## *Gao Xingjian* (1940)

is a Chinese émigré novelist, playwright, and critic who in 2000 was awarded the **Nobel Prize for Literature** “for an oeuvre of universal validity, bitter insights and linguistic ingenuity.”

He is also a noted translator (particularly of Samuel Beckett and Eugène Ionesco), screenwriter, stage director, and a celebrated painter.

In 1998, Gao was granted French citizenship.

Gao's drama is considered to be fundamentally **absurdist** in nature and avant-garde in his native China. His prose works tend to be less celebrated in China but are highly regarded elsewhere in Europe and the West.

# *Famous works:*

## ◆ **Dramas and performances:**

*Signal Alarm, 1982; Bus Stop, 1983; Wild Men, "Savages", 1985; The Other Shore, 1986; Shelter the Rain, Dark City, 1988, Nighthawk / Nocturnal Wanderer, 1999; Snow in August, 2000.*

## ◆ **Fiction**

*Constellation in a Cold Night, 1979; Such a Pigeon called Red Lips, 1984; Buying a Fishing Rod for My Grandfather, 1986–1990; Soul Mountain, 1989; One Man's Bible, 1999.*

## ◆ **Poem**

*Sky Burial, 1986.*





## *Gish Jen* (Lillian Jen) (1955)

- ◆ is a contemporary American writer and speaker.


Gish Jen is a second generation Chinese American. Her parents emigrated from China in the 1940s, her mother from Shanghai and her father from **Yixing**. Born in **Long Island**, New York, she grew up in **Queens**, then **Yonkers**, then **Scarsdale**.

She graduated from **Harvard University** in 1977 with a BA in **English**, and later attended **Stanford Business School** (1979–1980), but dropped out in favor of the **University of Iowa Writers' Workshop**, where she earned her **MFA** in fiction in 1983.

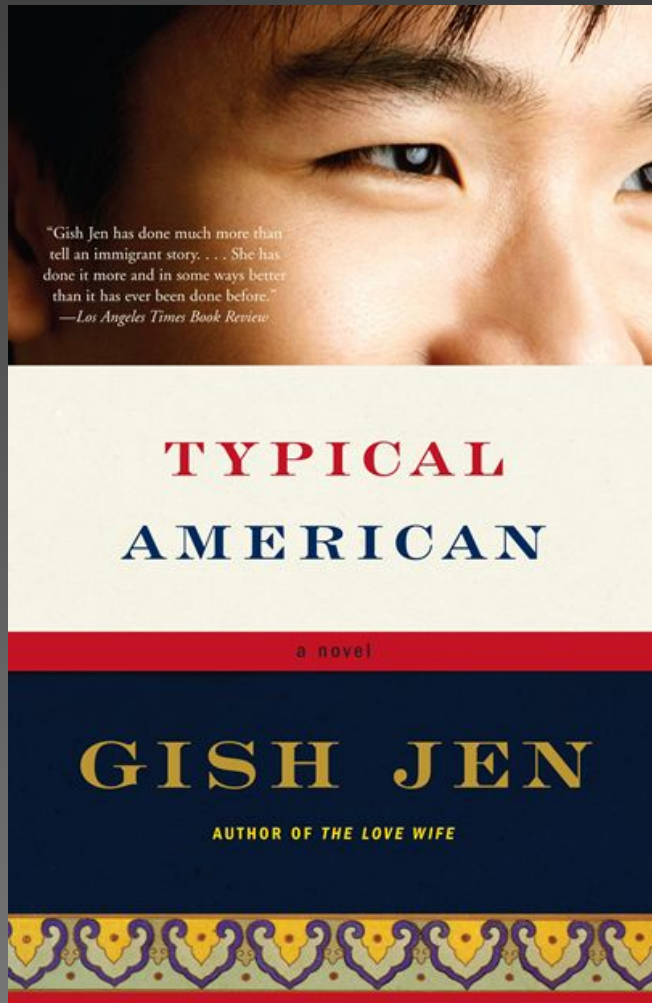
# Notable works

- ◆ Several of her short stories have been reprinted in *The Best American Short Stories*.
- ◆ Her piece "Birthmates", was selected as one of *The Best American Short Stories of The Century*.
- ◆ Her works include four novels: *Typical American*, *Mona in the Promised Land*, *The Love Wife*, and *World and Town*. She has also written a collection of short fiction, *Who's Irish?*.
- ◆ Her first novel, *Typical American*, was nominated for a National Books Critics' Circle Award.
- ◆ Her second novel, *Mona in the Promised Land* features a Chinese-American adolescent who converts to Judaism.
- ◆ *The Love Wife*, her third novel, portrays an Asian American family with interracial parents and both biological and adopted children.

# *Non-fiction*

- ◆ In 2013 Jen published her first non-fiction book, entitled *Tiger Writing: Art, Culture, and the Interdependent Self*.
  - ◆ Jen's second work of non-fiction is "The Girl at the Baggage Claim: Explaining the East-West Culture Gap," to be published in February 2017. This is a provocative study of the different ideas Easterners and Westerners have about the self and society and what this means for current debates in art, education, geopolitics, and business.
  - ◆ Jen has also published numerous pieces in the New York Times, The New Republic, and in other venues.
- 

# Typical American



- ◆ This brilliant novel explores the joys and tribulations of one family's pursuit of the American Dream.

# *Major Themes*

- ◆ Migration
- ◆ American Dream
- ◆ Family
- ◆ Wealth

