

NOTE FROM FAYE HAMMILL: I am attaching my materials for a two-hour seminar focusing on the theme of 'Chinatown', which includes some relevant material. It is part of a masters-level course that is described here:

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/postgraduate/taught/americanmodernliterature/?card=course&code=ENGLIT5116>

PLACE (3) - Chinatown

We will explore Chinatowns in different North American cities, looking at a series of (very) short texts, including some writing from the turn of the twentieth century and some from the early twenty-first century.

Set reading (required)

Edith Eaton [Sui Sin Far], "Mrs Spring Fragrance" and "The Wisdom of the New", two short stories in the collection *Mrs Spring Fragrance* (1912). Access the title story with a contextual introduction via the Library of America [here](#), and the whole book at archive.org [here](#).

Winnifred Eaton and Sara Bosse, Preface to *A Chinese Japanese Cookbook* (1914). Access via the [Winnifred Eaton Archive](#) under 'Playing Japanese' or directly [here](#).

Garry Engkent, "Eggroll" (2019), in *Ricepaper* magazine [here](#).

Preparation Moodle Page: "Chinatown" Seminar

BACKGROUND: The following information and links should help you orient yourself in this topic before you explore the primary texts:

Defining Chinatown

"A section of a large town, especially a sea-port, in which Chinese live as a colony and to a great extent follow their own customs." (OED)

Chinatowns exist all around the world, and the best introduction I have found to the international concept of "Chinatown" is, for once, a Wikipedia entry, so you might start with this for background: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinatown>

For an introduction to the history of Chinatowns in the US, I recommend the short [article](#) by K Scott Wong, listed under 'Further Reading'.

Chinese immigration to North America

These websites give a brief outline of the historical conditions that led to immigration and the establishment of Chinatowns in major cities in the US and Canada

<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1866-1898/chinese-immigration>

<https://thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/chinese-canadians>

Authors of primary texts

The seminar will centre on four short primary texts. First, we'll look at the work of three sisters: Edith Eaton, Winnifred Eaton, and Sara Bosse. They were born to a British father and Chinese mother, and lived at various times in New York, Montreal and other cities.

- Winnifred Eaton also wrote under the Japanese pen-name Onoto Watanna
- Edith Eaton also wrote under the Chinese pen-name Sui Sin Far

For brief biographical descriptions of Winnifred and Sara, see

<https://library.ryerson.ca/asianheritage/authors/eaton/>

For Edith, see: <https://library.ryerson.ca/asianheritage/authors/sui-sin-far-edith-maude-eaton/>

We will also look at one contemporary Chinese-Canadian author, Garry Engkent, whose short biography appears at the bottom of his story, "Eggroll".

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE YOUR READING

CONTESTED TERRAIN: "On the metaphorical and literal level, the residential, business and cultural space of the Chinese in America or Chinatown has been a contested terrain. The dominant white culture sees it as a foreign ground, and the visiting Chinese see it as not Chinese enough." (K. Scott Wong). In what ways does Chinatown emerge as "contested terrain" in the set readings? Are there any other conflicts or tensions, in addition to the one that Wong mentions? Do these authors present a balanced view, or do the texts align themselves with one side or another of the debates explored in the stories?

FASHIONABILITY: Chinatown scenarios were very fashionable in North American popular culture of the early 20thC (film, fiction, magazines) and Chinese clothing and ornamentation were also appropriated in white culture. How do the early 20thC texts respond to or exploit this 'oriental' vogue, and to what extent do they critique it? (Here, you might look at the Ruth Mayer article listed under 'Further Reading').

MARRIAGE: What is the effect of the juxtaposition of the two stories from 'Mrs Spring Fragrance'? How do they modify one another via their perspectives on love and marriage?

FOOD: Compare the presentation of white attitudes to Asian food in the cookbook and in "Eggroll". What has changed and what has not, over the intervening century? How is food used to focus broader debates about immigration and cultural hybridity?

STYLE: What do you think of the way each of the four texts captures speech and dialogue? How are second-language speakers of English represented?

FURTHER READING PAGE

Further reading: critical articles

- Dominika Ferens, "[Native Americans, Chinese, and White Progressivists in the Land of Sunshine, 1895-1909](#)", *ATQ: 19th-century American Literature and Culture* 15.4 (2001): 305-316.
- Zhen Liu, "[Asian Canadian Communal Literary Enterprise](#)", *British Journal of Canadian Studies* 31.1 (2018): 81-103.

- Ruth Mayer, "The Glittering Machine of Modernity: The Chinatown in American Silent Film." *Modernism/modernity*, vol. 16 no. 4, 2009, p. 661-684. *Project MUSE*, [doi:10.1353/mod.0.0144](https://doi.org/10.1353/mod.0.0144).
- Karen Skinazi, "[As to her race, its secret is loudly revealed](#)": Winnifred Eaton's Revision of North American Identity", *Melus* 32.2 (2007): 31-53.
- Min Hyoung Song, "[Sentimentalism and Sui Sin Far](#)," *Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers* 20: 1-2 (2003): 134-52.
- K. Scott Wong, "[Chinatown: Conflicting Images, Contested Terrain](#)", *Melus* 20.1 (1995).

Further reading: additional primary texts and reflections

- Explore the 'resources' section on the Winnifred Eaton Archive site, and the 'fiction', 'poetry' and 'non-fiction' selections available on the [Ricepaper](#) magazine site. See also:
- LiLynn Wan's account of Jim Wong-Chu's *Chinatown Ghosts* [here](#).
- YiYun Lee's story "A Flawless Silence", published in *The New Yorker* in 2018, [here](#).
- Winnifred Eaton [Onoto Watanna], "Li Ching's Baby" (1898). Access via the [Winnifred Eaton Archive](#) under 'Early Experiments' or directly [here](#).