

Wendy and Min:
A Theatrical Response to British Chinese
Acculturation, Identity and Cultural Hybridity

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requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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SUMMARY

This PhD thesis comprises two components. The first part, *Wendy and Min*, represents the creative practice, a theatrical play dramatising the lives of the under-represented, diverse British Chinese community. The play explores inter-generational tensions arising from different degrees of acculturation and assimilation, cultural identity, and hybridity, as well as intra-racial tensions, intra-racial hierarchies, and intra-ethnic othering. The second part is a supporting essay divided into four main sections. The essay provides historical context for the play and offers a historical review of the settlement of the Chinese in Britain and the representation of the British Chinese on stage. In addition, it details a review of dramatic and literary sources that helped shape artistic decisions in the play's plot, characterisation, dramatic structure, and style.

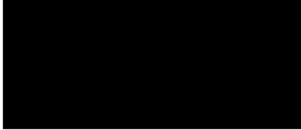
Wendy and Min uses a character-driven, three-generation structure to interrogate the tensions arising from different degrees of generational acculturation and assimilation. The grandparents are first-generation immigrants from Hong Kong and Singapore/Malaysia. The second-generation parents are British-born or substantially brought up in the UK. The daughters, Wendy and Lisa are third-generation and British-born. Using the setting of a wedding and its various rituals, the play examines how different degrees of acculturation create ambiguity and fluidity in the British Chinese identity and how it is negotiated and articulated within the family when Wendy (Min), the protagonist, chooses to marry Peter, a mainland Chinese PhD student.

Given the diversity of the British Chinese community, my own experience as a second-generation British-born Chinese of Malaysian descent living in Singapore would have been insufficient to create authentic, complex, and compelling characters. I did not want to resort to mythical, stereotypical, or hackneyed representations. I wanted to create characters that were contemporary and real and resonated with the audience. Therefore, in creating *Wendy and Min* in addition to my personal experience and those of my family and friends, I also used historical, social, and cultural studies, social media, anecdotal evidence, radio and informal interviews, and historical and contemporary British Chinese literary and dramatic works. This comprehensive approach detailed in the supporting essay gives me some confidence that although the creative piece is fictional, my myriad artistic choices are grounded in substance. In this way, I hope to create a piece that offers a more nuanced and complex representation of the British Chinese community, specifically, the second and third-generation British Chinese whose narratives are under-represented and seldom documented.

DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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Date: 15th July 2023

STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in footnote(s). Other sources are acknowledged by explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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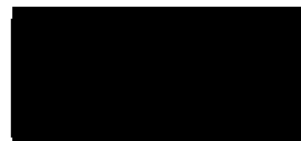
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PART ONE: Wendy and Min (a stage play)

Please see attached PDF

PART TWO: The Exegesis

Introduction

On October 31 1991, at the age of twenty-six, dressed in a leopard-print jumper and large hooped earrings, I boarded a flight from London to Singapore, my first stop on a one-year trip that included Malaysia, Hong Kong, China, Taiwan and Japan. When I told friends and acquaintances about my trip, they automatically assumed I was trying to trace my ancestral heritage and described it as a ‘back to your roots trip of a lifetime’. My real motives were less lofty and included a mixture of failed relationships, boredom and youthful restlessness. However, in retrospect, more than thirty years later, I concede there may have been some truth in my friends’ assumptions. Perhaps I wanted to experience what it would be like to live in a place where everyone looked like me.

My parents immigrated to the UK from Malaysia in the early 1960s, before Enoch Powell's divisive ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech in 1968 and when Commonwealth citizens still had automatic settlement rights in the UK. Born in London, I grew up in the home county of Hampshire and had never been outside the UK for more than a few weeks until this trip. As I have extended family in Malaysia and Singapore, I visited these two countries as a child; they were familiar to me. However, China was a place I knew only by name. My paternal grandfather's father (my great-grandfather) immigrated to Malaysia from China in the early 1900s. However, my mother's Chinese ancestors arrived in Malaysia several generations ago. When she first came to England, my mother, fluent in Mandarin and Cantonese, spoke only rudimentary English. In the early days, she relied heavily on my father, who was fluent in English, having studied Malay and English at school. As he spoke neither Mandarin nor Cantonese, we spoke primarily English at home with the odd smattering of Hokkien, a Chinese dialect originating from Fujian, a province in China and commonly spoken in Kedah, the Malaysian state where my parents lived.

My parents often held two jobs at once, which meant their days began on an empty stomach at 6 am and ended at 11 pm with a bowl of instant noodles. Except for Christmas, when we had turkey and roast potatoes, we ate rice with a stir-fry, curry or soya-sauce dish from a plate and with a fork and spoon. We only patronised Chinese takeaways to buy fish and chips. We rarely bought from the Asian sections of Tesco or Sainsbury's, preferring to buy our essentials from London's Chinatown. We always celebrated Chinese New Year, even if it fell on a school day. We would go into Chinatown for dim sum. Afterwards, my parents would give

my brother and me a customary red packet with money ('ang pow') and an uncustomary giant bar of Cadbury's Dairy Milk. Like many British Chinese, my parents made great efforts to keep their culture and traditions alive, to anchor their children to their Chinese heritage. At the same time, they were unafraid to adapt these customs to suit their adopted country.

These memories I have shared represent how one Chinese immigrant family lived and worked in Britain. However, it is not a definitive representation, as the Chinese in Britain are a diverse community, 'divided by class, language, place of origin, period of arrival and reason for coming, as well as by physical segregation within Britain...the community is heterogeneous and individual identities are increasingly hybridised' (Benton & Gomez, 2008, p. 4).

Most of Britain's Chinese come from the New Territories of Hong Kong and work in the catering industry (Luk, 2008, p. 49). Hence the familiar and dominant narrative of British Chinese is one of Cantonese-speaking takeaway owners. Less is known about the lived experiences of Chinese from Southeast Asia, such as Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, and, more recently, mainland China. Second and third-generation British-born Chinese add another layer to this rich and complex community. This diversity in background and degree of assimilation means that although British Chinese share some cultural similarities, they are a heterogeneous community. As Luk expounds, 'The Chinese are by no means a homogenous ethnic group. It is instead a complex, compound group that shelters under a single umbrella census term of "Chinese"' (2008, p. 209). Arguably, then consistent with this suggestion, 'Chineseness', or the concept of being Chinese, 'is not a category with fixed content—be it racial, cultural, or geographical—but operates as an open and indeterminate signifier whose meanings are constantly renegotiated and rearticulated in different sections of the Chinese diaspora' (Ang, 1998, p. 225).

According to the 2021 Census of England and Wales, 445,619 people are categorised as Chinese in England and Wales; this represents 0.7% of the total population (Office for National Statistics, 2022). Although the 2021 Census does not detail what percentage of these Chinese were born in the UK, the 2011 Census revealed that of the 393,141 Chinese recorded, 23.7% were born in the UK (Gov.UK, 2018). Despite this, few sociological and cultural studies focus on Britain's Chinese immigrants and their British-born offspring. Representation of the British Chinese community in arts and culture, including theatre, film and television, is also limited. Knox recently noted that 'there is a long-standing absence and invisibility of British Chinese identities in British television' (2019, p. 126). British Chinese representation in film is

marginally better. However, as Chan and Willis lament, ‘two of the more widely distributed British films of this century with Chinese characters and storylines are films about recent Chinese migrants to Britain, rather than second or third-generation settlers who were born here’ (2018, p. 156).

Against a backdrop of discourse on diversity and inclusivity, more content is being created that reflects the lives of British Chinese and their descendants. For example, *Wok*, a family sitcom created by British Chinese actors Bruce Chong and Chris Chung, is set in a family-owned takeaway in East London. Inspired by Chong's life story, ‘[it] centres around a family-owned takeaway and the cultural challenges facing Bruce and those around him’ (Resonate Team, 2018). However, although a crowd-sourced pilot was released, no further development has occurred. More recently, UK theatre has seen more British Chinese plays with self-representation written by British-born Chinese playwrights. These include; *Jin Shan Gold Mountain* (Yip, 2010); *Yellow Gentleman* (Yeoh, 2018); *Mountains: The Dreams of Lily Kwok* (Chappell, 2018, adapted from the 2007 novel *Sweet Mandarin* by Helen Tse); *Citizens of Nowhere* (Ho, 2019); *British Born Chinese* (Mok, 2019); *Ghost Girl//Gwei Mui* (Tang, 2019); and *Inauspicious* (Tang, 2020).

The inspiration for my play *Wendy and Min* came from the desire to add to this growing body of work, to represent the lived experiences of British Chinese, especially second and third-generation British-born Chinese. The play examines the ambiguity and fluidity of British Chinese identity and how it is negotiated and articulated within the family when Wendy (Min), the British-born Chinese protagonist, decides to marry Peter, a mainland Chinese PhD student. *Wendy and Min* uses a multi-generational framework of first, second and third-generation British Chinese. The grandparents (first-generation) come from Hong Kong and Singapore/Malaysia, former British colonies. The parents (second-generation) are born or at least substantially brought up in Britain, and their Chineseness is a response to the tension between their parents and their Western British environment. Finally, the daughters, Wendy and Lisa, are third-generation British Chinese who must decide where they belong on the British Chinese spectrum or create their own ‘third’ identity. As the characters have different origins, languages, and cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, the play explores cross-generational tensions and, more uniquely, cross-sub-ethnic tensions, intra-racial hierarchies, and inter and intra-group racism.

I hope that by presenting a more nuanced narrative of British Chinese, the play counters existing stereotypes and tropes that hinder a deeper understanding of British Chinese experiences and complex identities. Offering stories with authentic and relatable British Chinese characters instead of mythical stereotypes such as the ‘yellow peril, evil genius’ *Fu-Manchu* (Rohmer, 1922), made famous in the TV series, *The Adventures of Dr Fu Manchu* (Adreon, 1956), or the ‘inscrutable outsider’ Kwai Chung Caine from *Kung Fu* (Thorpe, 1972-1975) is validating to the British Chinese community. It is an essential weapon against othering and racism. As we have seen during the Covid-19 pandemic and heightened Sino-Western geopolitical tensions, a better understanding and knowledge of the British Chinese are needed to avert racism and rising hate crimes. As Gregory B. Lee (2021) observes following the racist attacks against the Chinese in the USA and the UK during the Covid-19 pandemic:

Recent hate crimes, both in the USA and the UK, against people of Chinese appearance are not simply a knee-jerk reaction brought on by the reporting of Chinese people eating bat soup in Wuhan...The negative image of ‘the Chinese’ has been anchored in the British popular imaginary, fuelled, reinforced and readily redeployed by the popular press, popular entertainment, “low-brow” fiction and elite history for over 150 years.

(2021)

The play also provides a platform for British Chinese artists to perform work that enables self-representation. Knox (2019) states, ‘a more nuanced expression of and a wider range of perspectives on British Chinese culture, must surely involve a greater degree of self-representation’ (p. 140).

In the early development of *Wendy and Min*, I considered using various theatrical styles, including magical realism. In her PhD thesis, *Seeing in Unordinary Ways: Magical Realism in Australian Theatre* (2008), Ricci-James Evangeline Adams argues that magic realism is powerful for exploring marginalised identities. However, after further research and discussion, I felt this style might alienate or detract from the portrayal of British Chinese lived experiences and selfhood and that a representational play in a naturalistic style would better serve my objectives. As Zola passionately argues in Cole (2001), naturalism returns the playwright to ‘the source of science and modern arts, to the study of nature, to the anatomy of man, to the painting of life in an exact reproduction more original and powerful than anyone has so far dared to risk on the boards’ (p. 6).

There are four sections to the remainder of this essay. The first section delineates the history of Chinese migrants, their experiences and their impact and interactions with the autochthonous population in Britain, helping to contextualise the heterogeneous cultural

backgrounds of *Wendy and Min*'s inter-generational family. The second section discusses Chinese representation on the British stage since the eighteenth century, highlighting how dramatic narratives and artistic choices are often less about attempts at authenticity and more about the political dynamics of Sino-British relations. The third section examines literary and dramatic works on migrants and their descendants and shows how acculturation and assimilation determine character choice and action. Finally, the essay considers literary and dramatic influences shaping *Wendy and Min*'s dramatic style and structure. This approach compares contrasts and locates *Wendy and Min* in the existing literature. The textual analysis also shows how these works inspired and shaped artistic choices, forming the framework for the construction of the play, including style, story structure, setting, characterisation, dialogue and theatrical devices.

History of Chinese Settlers in Britain

Although the broader questions of who is Chinese and what is Chineseness have been discussed and debated extensively by academics such as Wang Gungwu (1991), Rey Chow (1998), and Allen Chun (1996, 2017), a full exploration of these sometimes-contentious questions is outside the scope of this work. In simple terms, Chineseness describes what it is to be Chinese. A concept that is not easily defined because of migration and geopolitical differences. For example, “Chineseness” in mainland China would be vastly different from those defined in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and other Chinese-speaking communities’ (Qian & Ho, 2020, p. 94). This suggests that Chineseness is a fluid, adaptive concept which is not monolithic or static. Wang argues that ‘our understanding of Chineseness must recognise the following: it is living and changeable’ (1991, p. 2). It is likely that this argument also applies to the Chinese community in Britain.

In this essay, I follow the definition used by Luk in *Chinatown in Britain*, which describes the Chinese in Britain as:

All persons who self-identified in the [UK] census as having an ethnic Chinese origin, whether in their own generation or in their ancestral past...[these include] Chinese immigrants who were born outside Britain (*Huaqiao*) and individuals with Chinese ancestry (*Huayi*). The former includes Chinese immigrants from mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan, whereas the latter contains UK-born Chinese and remigrants of Chinese descent.

(Luk, 2008, p. 6)

Before the early seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, few Chinese travellers and would-be migrants came to Britain. One of the earliest documented Chinese to arrive was Catholic missionary Shen Fuzhong, who came in 1683 as part of a European tour to promote the Jesuits' China mission (Benton & Gomez, 2008, p. 23). Shen's visit created such a stir among Britain's scholars and elite that King James II commissioned Sir Godfrey Kneller to paint Shen's portrait (Price, 2019, p. 12). In the eighteenth century, other Chinese visitors arrived, including Loum Kiqua, a Portuguese-speaking Chinese merchant, and Tan Chitqua, an artist who crafted clay portraits with ‘detachable wigs made of the subject's own hair’ (Price, 2019, p. 15). Benton & Gomez (2008, p. 23) suggest that Shen and other Chinese scholars and artists helped fuel the Chinoiserie style popular in the eighteenth century. ‘China was seen as exotic, and its images of fantastic landscapes, fabulous birds and dragons inspired designers and craftsmen to create their own imaginary versions of the East’ (Price, 2019, p. 12).

William Macao, a servant brought to Britain in the 1770s by a Scottish surgeon working for the East India Company, was likely Britain's first Chinese resident. Macao was intelligent and capable and rose to become an Excise accountant, church elder, active community member, and 'Britain's first Chinese gentleman' (Price, 2019, pp. 17-28).

Except for these few documented Chinese visitors, it was not until the late eighteenth century that more Chinese arrived on Britain's shores. The first wave of British Chinese settlers were mainly seafaring men who worked for the East India Company (EIC). The company monopolised trade routes in parts of India, Southeast Asia and China and needed seamen to man ships trading and transporting tea, silk, spice, ceramics, opium and sometimes enslaved people, playing a significant role in British imperialism. In the mid-eighteenth century, Canton (now Guangzhou) was China's only port open to foreign trade. Although the ruling Qing dynasty (1636-1912; 1917) forbade the Chinese to leave without permission, many Chinese men, driven by internal conflict, poverty, and foreign aggression, boarded EIC ships from Canton illegally. However, the number of Chinese seamen travelling to Britain remained small until the Napoleonic wars forced EIC to employ Chinese and Indian seafarers to replace enlisted British seamen.

When the Chinese seamen arrived in Britain, EIC housed them in unfurnished rooms 'to spend months in London waiting to return to China ... not allowed to work' (Price, 2019, p. 30). Left to drink and debauch, some men ended up penniless on the streets, begging or committing crimes. The tragic condition of the men led to an outcry by the British public, forcing EIC to build barracks in Shadwell (Benton & Gomez, 2008, p. 66). Later, when EIC lost its monopoly and the shipping industry expanded, the recruitment of Chinese seamen grew, and the barracks proved insufficient. This shortage of accommodation led to a growth of boarding houses in the East End and newly built streets with names like Ming Street and Canton Street (Price, 2019, p. 35). This development charted the beginnings of a Chinese community and a mini-Chinatown.

Perhaps, the two most significant events affecting Sino-British trade and its demand for Chinese seaman were the Opium Wars. The British imported opium into China to pay for China's exports of tea and silk. A highly addictive drug, opium created many addicts within Chinese society, weakening social stability and causing social and economic disruption. Consequently, successive emperors sought to ban the drug and declared it illegal. Nevertheless, the British continued to smuggle it. In response, the Qing government confiscated and

destroyed British shipments of opium, leading the British to send their military to demand economic reparation. The first war (1839-1842) ended in China ceding Hong Kong and signing the Treaty of Nanjing, increasing treaty ports from one to five. The second war (1856-1860) against the Franco-British military saw China signing more treaties, ceding Kowloon (next to Hong Kong), legalising opium, and opening more ports to Western trade. Opening China's ports created new trade routes for British merchants and increased market demand for Chinese goods and seamen to transport them.

The Chinese seafarers needed lodgings, meals, clothing, and other necessities ashore. This demand created business opportunities, and some seamen abandoned life at sea for settlement on the land. By the late century, the Chinese community settled in Limehouse, on the bank of the river Thames (Luk, 2008, p. 3). Other Chinese communities grew from seafarers settling around maritime port areas like Liverpool and Cardiff. These early settlers were primarily Siyinese seafarers from the four counties of Taishan, Xinhui, Kaiping and Enping in Guangdong's Pearl River Delta region (Benton & Gomez, 2008, p. 32). After the Opium War, seamen from Hong Kong, now British subjects, joined them (Daunton, 1978, p. 193).

Early Chinese settlers in Australia and the United States worked as 'craftsmen, market gardeners, laundrymen, shopworkers, boarding-masters, timber-men, shepherds...' (Benton & Gomez, 2008, p. 65). However, restrictive British immigration and labour laws limited early Chinese settlers in Britain to businesses serving Chinese seafarers and laundering. By the early twentieth century, British seamen saw the cheap underpaid Chinese seamen as a threat to their livelihoods. In addition, fear of miscegenation and the visibility of Chinese boarding houses, laundries and shops angered townspeople. This Sinophobia was further exacerbated by the racist and xenophobic rhetoric known as the 'Yellow Peril', first coined in the 1880s, popularised in film, fiction, magazines, tabloids and comics, and exemplified in Sax Rohmer's famous Dr Fu Manchu books. As Gregory B. Lee in his book *Chinas Unlimited: Making the Imaginaries of China and Chineseness* laments, 'the Chinaman was represented as dirty, impure, sick, decaying, decadent, mentally different, cunning, wily and biologically and morally inferior, and ridden with vices, such as opium smoking' (2003, p. 28).

Echoing this racist ideology, the Liverpool Courier, a Conservative newspaper, ran a series of articles on the 6th, 8th and 11th of December 1906, warning the public of the 'debauched and villainous' Chinese (Waller, 1970).

‘It is with a shock that one sees such names as Mary Chung and Norman Sing. It is at once sorrowful and sickening to observe apparently decent British woman succumbing to the attractions of the yellow man, but it is to be seen not alone in Chinatown, but wherever Chinese laundries are established, that is to say, all over Liverpool. Young girls are fascinated with these dark-eyed Celestials’.

(Liverpool Courier, 1906, quoted in Waller, 1970, p. 92)

As a result of these allegations, the British public readily believed press reports of Chinese opium dens and English girls held in bondage (Daunton, 1978, p. 194). The Liverpool Courier also claimed that Chinese-run laundries competed and displaced female labourers, widows or wives who supplemented their husband's wages by taking in washing.

‘It must not be forgotten that of all the races in the world the Chinaman is considered the worst enemy of the British working classes. He not only accepts conditions of labour to which they decline even to listen, but he is foe to the trade unions...’.

(Liverpool Courier, 1906, quoted in Waller, 1970, p. 93)

Labour unionists such as the National Sailors' and Firemen's Union (NSFU) exploited this unhappiness with the Chinese by instigating protests and race riots in 1911. Price states, ‘in the worst incident, British seamen rampaged through Cardiff, attacking and setting fire to all thirty Chinese laundries in the city and to a number of lodging homes’ (2019, p. 140).

Contempt for Chinese seafaring men continued until the First World War (1914), when Britain declared war on Germany, and many foreign seafarers were classified as ‘enemy aliens’. As a result, merchant ships had no choice but to turn to Chinese seamen to crew ships and maintain supply lines. Unlike earlier seamen from Southern China who spoke primarily Cantonese and Hakka, these men from Shandong, Northern China, mainly spoke Mandarin. Over one hundred thousand formed the Chinese Labour Corps (Parker, 1998, p. 71). Their duties included catering, trench digging, machine repair, and other ancillary roles at the western front. By the end of the war, it is estimated that around twenty thousand of them had died (Kennedy, 2014). Buried in France, Belgium and England and absent from any tribute among Britain's forty thousand war memorials, these men are often described as ‘the forgotten of the forgotten’ (Kennedy, 2014).

During the war, the NSFU continued to oppose the employment of Chinese crews but suspended protests out of national interest, resuming them when the war ended and calling for the repatriation of Chinese seamen despite their bravery, contributions, and loss of lives. The government responded by introducing voluntary repatriation and additional restrictions on foreign labour employment, for example, the 1919 Aliens Act, the 1920 Dangerous Drugs Act

and the 1925 Special Restrictions (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order (Parker, 1998, p. 73). The increased governmental pressure and persistent verbal and physical abuse from unionists were sufficient enough to encourage most battle-weary Chinese seamen to return to China, shrinking the Chinese population in Britain from 2,419 in 1921 to 1,934 in 1931 (Census Reports for England and Wales, extracted from Ng, 1968, p. 6). Although their number remained small, Chinese settlers were not spared from racist attacks, and in 1918 violent protestors attacked Chinese migrants and their property in London, Cardiff, Glasgow and Liverpool.

The Second World War saw a repeat of this pattern of recruitment and repatriation, and ‘in 1939, around 5000 Chinese seafarers were employed on British-registered ships, rising to between 10,000 and 20,000 in the war’ (Benton & Gomez, 2008, p. 76). The Chinese seamen recruited to support Britain's Second World War efforts from Eastern China, Jiangsu and Zhejiang were known as ‘Shanghaiense’ (Benton & Gomez, 2008, p. 208) and, because of language barriers and imported intra-ethnic conflict, did not successfully integrate with earlier Chinese settlers, primarily Siyinese, Hubeinese, Hong Kong Cantonese or Hakka. However, this significant influx of Chinese seafarers helped revive British Chinatowns' flagging fortunes and made some Chinese settlers wealthy.

At the end of the Second World War, the British government made plans for the compulsory repatriation of Chinese seamen, despite decorating some for courage and bravery.

Official papers do not reveal the exact number of Chinese deported in 1945 and 1946 and deny newspaper reports of the deporting of Chinese men married to local women...By 1946, 800 had been repatriated and some 1900 remained in Liverpool and Glasgow...Only a few hundred remained in Liverpool by the late 1940s, and the number of permanent residents was about 400 in the early 1950s.

(Benton and Gomez, 2008, pp. 30-31)

After the Second World War devastation, most of East London's Chinese community moved from Limehouse to Soho. Some set up shops and eateries to serve their communities; however, those more entrepreneurial opened Chinese restaurants to serve non-Chinese diners, ‘among the first were The Chinese Restaurant in Glasshouse Street, Piccadilly; the Cathay, off Piccadilly Circus; and Maxim's, in Soho’ (Price, 2019, p. 168).

According to Ken Hom, a Chinese chef, author and TV presenter, food served at these earlier restaurants was ‘plain and utilitarian as the owners were quite poor. They served chop suey, some curry dishes and even chips’ (Sukhadwala, 2018). One of the more popular restaurants, Ley-On, on Gerard Street, however, was often frequented by celebrities, including

Frank Sinatra, Clark Gable and Elizabeth Taylor (Price, 2019, p. 170). From these humble beginnings, Chinese Cantonese cuisine has grown to become ‘one of the UK's top five cuisines’ (Sukhadwala, 2018), a consequence of an increasing post-war appetite for Chinese food and an influx of Hong Kong labour.

In the 1950s, Hong Kong's colonial government began importing cheap rice and encouraged farmers in the New Territories to switch to vegetable farming. Agricultural land was also needed for urbanisation, further reducing available farmland. This agrarian policy shift benefited the landowners but marginalised impoverished farmers, especially the Hakkas. In addition, civil conflict in China between the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party added additional pressure as refugees poured across the border. This confluence of factors caused a collapse of the agricultural community leading to widespread rural unemployment and poverty in Hong Kong. Meanwhile, in Britain, Germany's heavy aerial bombing destroyed many of Britain's towns and cities. Consequently, Britain needed manpower to rebuild, reconstruct, and support infrastructures like the Transport system and National Health Service. To alleviate this labour shortage, the British government passed the 1948 Commonwealth Immigration Act affirming all Commonwealth citizens the right to immigrate to Britain and claim full British citizenship rights. Seizing this opportunity, the Hong Kong colonial government encouraged farmers from rural areas to immigrate to Britain to alleviate the growing economic and social crisis. However, these Cantonese and Hakka-speaking farmers were poorly educated and ill-equipped for British life (Luk, 2008, p. 49). Most of them spoke little to no English and knew nothing of Britain. In addition, ‘they had no relatives abroad, except for a handful of villagers scattered across different parts of Europe. The few contacts they did establish were with other Chinese, in whose restaurants they went to work’ (Benton & Gomez, 2008, p. 37).

Unable to recruit from their communities in China because of the ongoing civil war, Chinese restaurant owners in Britain welcomed the influx of sojourners from Hong Kong. These sojourners dreamed of working hard, saving hard and returning to their families in comfort. However, life in Britain was hard; living conditions were unsatisfactory, prospects poor, and wages low. Moreover, intra-ethnic conflict was high. Many dreamed of setting up catering establishments, and Britain's post-war appetite for Chinese cuisine enabled this dream. Some formed business partnerships, while others decided to go it alone (Benton & Gomez, 2008, p. 38). This entrepreneurial drive meant that ‘in 1961 the Association of Chinese

Restaurants estimated there were 100 Chinese restaurants in Britain and that around 100 more were opening annually' (Price, 2019, p. 174).

The accelerating pace of Chinese catering establishments required a greater demand for workers. However, instead of employing more staff, some single men sought out arranged marriages, while men with families relocated their wives and children to create family-run restaurants and takeaways. These arrangements were facilitated by the 1962 and 1968 Commonwealth Immigration Acts, which limited primary immigration to high-skilled workers but allowed secondary immigration for dependants of existing migrants. This development radically changed the character of the British Chinese community from the male-centric Siyinese to the family-centric Cantonese and Hakka-speaking Hong Kongers, and 'by 1971, the number of Chinese takeaways in Britain was said to be growing at the rate of three a week... takeaways became part of the street scene in every suburb and small town' (Benton & Gomez, 2008, p. 121).

In response to Britain's demand for labour and the 1948 Commonwealth Immigration Act, the 1950s and 60s also saw Chinese immigrants from Southeast Asia, including Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines (Luk, 2008, p. 57). Some, like my mother, joined the National Health Service as nurses or doctors. Others like my father saw Britain as a 'land of opportunity', where their hard work and determination would be rewarded. Post-independent Singapore and Malaysia saw increased political, racial and religious tensions. One of my father's friends left Singapore for Britain because he feared Singapore would fall to Communism. Love was another reason. Two of my mother's friends met their husbands, British servicemen in Malaysia during the Malayan Emergency, and followed them to Britain. Many migrants from Southeast Asia came as students. During its colonial rule in Singapore and Malaysia, Britain introduced many legal and administrative policies, institutions, infrastructure, technology, and lifestyle. These policies continued after independence, giving the English educated a comparative advantage. The affluent understood that a British education would secure their children well-paid jobs, leadership roles, and high socio-economic status post-independence. Opportunities to contribute to nation-building encouraged many to return home. Luk (2008, p. 58) notes that 'proportionately fewer Chinese from Singapore and Malaysia have settled in comparison to those from mainland China and Hong Kong'. Although more Malaysian Chinese (15,153) than Singaporean Chinese (4,858) chose to settle between 1951 to 1991 (Luk, 2008, p. 60). Malaysian Chinese may have believed Britain offered them better political stability and less discrimination and hostility. Ethnically Chinese students also came

from other former British colonies such as Mauritius, Burma, India, Guyana and Jamaica. Like their Southeast Asian counterparts, some returned home; however, some stayed under the British Nationality Act of 1948 (Benton & Gomez, 2008, p. 41). This includes, for example, Meiling Jin, author and poet, of *Gifts from my grandmother* (1985) who was born in Guyana and came to England in 1964.

In the 1970s, a new wave of Chinese immigrants came from Vietnam. The fall of Saigon marked the end of the America-Vietnam war, and with increasing tensions between Vietnam and China, many Chinese Vietnamese chose to flee by land or sea. Most had low transferable skills: 'farmers, fishermen, artisans, hawkers, and semi-skilled workers' (Luk, 2008, p. 59). Those who escaped by sea became known as the 'boat people'.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, nearly 20,000 Vietnamese refugees were admitted to Britain. By 1990, the figure had reached around 22,000...An estimated 70-85 per cent were ethnic Chinese from North Vietnam, while the rest were either ethnic Vietnamese or ethnic Chinese from South Vietnam...The British government spent £21 million on resettling the refugees...to reception centres, of which there were up to forty.

(Benton and Gomez, 2008, p. 44)

Refugees from South Vietnam were better educated and could speak English, enabling them to integrate into mainstream British society more quickly than those from the North who spoke only Vietnamese or Chinese dialects like Cantonese, Teochew, Hokkien or Hainanese. Unable to speak English and unfamiliar with British culture, most Vietnam-born Chinese gravitated towards Chinese-speaking enclaves, seeking employment in Chinese restaurants and establishments. However, although the Vietnam-born Chinese 'took pride in their heritage, many Hong Kong Chinese considered them culturally corrupted...[and] catering workers saw them as rivals on the labour market' (Benton & Gomez, 2008, p. 46).

These differences in socio-cultural heritage and competition for resources and employment meant the Chinese and Vietnamese communities identified as different and distinct. This difference has often resulted in tensions and misunderstandings between the two communities.

Mr Le, a Vietnamese Chinese, quoted in a study conducted by the Runnymede Trust, sums it up as follows,

'In terms of the Chinese, apart from having Soho, they also have a very strong business network. And because they are not refugees, they are immigrants mainly from Hong Kong – and there are also Chinese students – they have very close contact with the Chinese Embassy. Last year for the New Year they had quite a lot of financial support

from the government. This is something that would never happen in the Vietnamese community’.

(Sims, 2007)

Despite government efforts to disperse them throughout Britain, Vietnam-born Chinese have primarily settled in the London boroughs of Lewisham and Southwark (Luk, 2008, p. 61), creating Vietnamese communities.

In the 1980s, a new wave of Chinese immigrants arrived in Britain from China. In 1978, China's leader Deng Xiao Peng initiated bold economic reforms, resulting in China's opening up and enacting more liberal emigration policies. Consequently, central and county-level governments actively encouraged entrepreneurs and industrialists to emigrate and establish a presence in Britain to create channels for communication, commerce and investment flows. Scholars, researchers, and students were encouraged to attend British universities and research institutions. Often their stay was extended if the Home Office deemed them highly skilled or exceptionally talented. However, migrating to another country was still lengthy and complicated for the less-educated Chinese. In addition, Britain's strict immigration laws meant many Chinese migrants resorted to syndicates of migrant brokers or ‘snakeheads’ to transport them illegally and undocumented into Britain. These migrants from Fujian, Guangdong and Zhejiang (Benton & Gomez, 2008, p. 55; Pai, 2008) were primarily rural Chinese, adversely affected by China's economic reforms and shared the same sojourners' dream of earlier migrants. However, unlike the earlier Chinese, who were limited to the catering trade, these new migrants worked in mainstream industries like factories or farms (Pai, 2008). Illegal, undocumented, and open to exploitation, these invisible migrants were unprotected by the authorities, sometimes leading to tragic consequences. For example, in June 2000, fifty-eight dead Chinese stowaways were discovered in the back of a lorry on its way to Dover (Benton & Gomez, 2008, p. 55), and in 2004, twenty-one illegal Chinese labourers drowned picking cockles in Morecambe Bay (Oliver, 2004). In 2019, thirty-nine dead Vietnamese were discovered in an articulated lorry in Essex, suggesting such incidents still occur (Humphrey & Busby, 2019). However, with tightened immigration and labour laws, fewer illegal migrants come to Britain. Minority Rights Group International indicates ‘that there may be 100,000 undocumented Chinese in the UK, but that the new undocumented arrivals are about a tenth of what they were in 2004’ (Minority Rights Group International, n.d.). More recently, most mainland Chinese in Britain are students of UK universities. In 2022, UCAS reported that

China is the largest non-UK student market, comprising 26% of all international applicants or 28,930 applicants (UCAS Press Office, 2022).

Over the last two centuries, different waves of Chinese have reached Britain's shores from East and Southeast Asia, at different times, under different socio-economic circumstances and with different aspirations and opportunities. Although all are ethnically Chinese, they are culturally and linguistically distinct. Ng (1968) provides an example of how the various sub-groups of the Chinese view one another.

Unlike the seaman, [the] professional and intellectual group have little in common except that they are Chinese by 'race' and speak the English language, for in this group several different dialects are spoken and its members originate from different countries... It is of interest to note that each sub-group in this category regards the other sub-groups as 'different'; for example, Malaysian Chinese students regard Hong Kong Chinese students as 'different' and vice versa.

(Ng, 1968, p. 3)

Benton and Gomez suggest that this heterogeneity among British Chinese has created tensions and indifference and has prevented the creation of a cohesive and united Chinese community in Britain.

The Chinese in Britain are divided along numerous lines, including lines of class and sub-ethnic difference, evident in the intra-ethnic relations among Chinese in the labour market and in relevant economic sectors. These cleavages hinder attempts by Chinese to mobilise collectively against discrimination and racism they have met in Britain.

(2008, p. 2)

Despite their differences, first-generation Chinese migrants share some similarities, such as struggles of assimilation, belonging, language and communication issues. However, their children's struggles are different. For example, second-generation British-born Chinese grapple with syncretising their Chinese ethnocultural heritage with their British socialisation. As a result, they are often labelled 'bananas'. A 'banana' describes someone as 'yellow on the outside and white on the inside'. Nevertheless, some British-born Chinese do not see the interplay of their dual identities as clear-cut and discrete. In a YouTube video recorded by SOAS University of London (2017, 12.35 mins), one British-born Chinese interviewee described being second-generation Chinese as a spectrum, where one end of the spectrum was 'super, super Chinese' and the other, 'super, super British'. He said he preferred to be 'in the middle and get the best of both... a balance of [being] British [and] Chinese'. The implication that individuals with dual identities sometimes feel they do not belong anywhere is echoed in Parker's research on young British Chinese.

Sui: In England you never feel a sense of belonging because... it's like the white people's place isn't it? And if you look at yourself and think about it, you're not one of them. But then if you think about it are you a Chinese person? The Chinese people reject you because, like, you're westernized. So you don't really belong to any slot. You belong in a slot of your own in the middle... I think we have to establish our own identity. (1998, p. 87)

Many of the first group of second-generation British Chinese were from mixed marriages of seafaring Chinese fathers and local English women. These include personalities like the footballer Frank Soo and the actor David Yip. Soo was the first football player of Chinese ancestry to play in the English Football League, and Yip played the lead role in the 1980s series, *The Chinese Detective* (Williams, 1981- 82). Both were from Liverpool. Benton & Gomez (2008, p. 331) suggest that their English mothers influenced members of this first group of second-generation British Chinese more than their Chinese fathers. Therefore, schooling them in the Chinese language or culture usually failed. Liu Kwong, a seaman who arrived in Britain in 1915 and married an English woman, shared this frustration in an interview with Ng when he complained '*fan tsai mo yung*' [i.e. the offspring of Chinese-Anglo parentage are useless]; they cannot speak a word of Chinese' (1968, p. 75).

Post-war Hong Kong migrant families often left their children with their grandparents in Hong Kong. A practice called 'granny socialisation'. However, this practice was stopped when parents recognised that their children faced educational disadvantages and alienation when they returned to Britain. So instead, parents sent their children to mainstream British schools on the weekdays and Chinese culture and language classes on weekends. Aside from schooling, parents also expected their children to help at the family takeaway or restaurant.

Most post-war Hong Kong Chinese migrants emigrated to Britain with poor English and limited skills and resources. Initially, these migrants leveraged familial, clan or village connections to gain employment in catering enterprises set up by earlier Chinese migrants. However, the pay was poor, the hours long, and the work menial. Nevertheless, they tolerated these difficult conditions to save sufficient capital to start their businesses. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the introduction of American fast-food companies into Britain, such as McDonald's and Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), challenged the economic model of British and ethnic restaurants, initiating radical changes to the British catering industry. Takeaways required neither large premises nor much staffing. They could be operated from a converted house or fish-and-chip shop, and rental or bought premises cost around one-third the price of a restaurant. These lower costs meant that a combination of personal savings and bank loans was

sufficient for a husband-and-wife team to set up a business (Benton & Gomez, 2008, p. 123). The takeaway model was particularly advantageous for Chinese catering, where most work is preparation. Few takeaway proprietors hired part-time staff, preferring to rely on their older children or extended family members for help. Takeaway working hours are long, with a typical day beginning before 7 am and ending only after midnight. Living accommodation was often 'over the shop'. This arrangement made managing the household and supervising younger children more convenient. Older children were expected to help with food preparation in the kitchen or take orders at the counter in the front.

Takeaways offer Hong Kong migrants financial independence and security as a catering enclave. It also limits their need to interact with the government, economic and social institutions, and the wider British public. However, their prevalence and visibility throughout Britain also make takeaways targets for racial stereotyping and harassment. Ethnic-food establishments are vulnerable to 'eat and run' customers and 'after-hours' drunks who often physically and verbally abuse them (Benton & Gomez, 2008, p. 128). A tragic example of racial harassment is that of Michael Chen, who died after he was 'kicked, punched, stamped on and battered with wooden clubs' after trying to protect his takeaway from a gang of up to 12 youths ('Teenagers jailed for takeaway killing', 2005). Months before the attack, Chen and his girlfriend Jia had made several reports to the police of antisocial behaviour, racial abuse and damaged property. However, Jia said the police officers had failed to respond (Pai & Lewis, 2005).

Despite the hardships and difficulties, many Chinese migrants persevere because entrepreneurship is preferable to taking low-paying jobs rejected by local people. Moreover, it provides a route to social advancement and a higher socio-economic status. Once Hong Kong Chinese migrants increase their wealth and socioeconomic status, they hope their children consolidate 'this success by entrenching themselves firmly in the middle class through academic and occupational attainments' (Pang & Lau, 1998, p. 866). Many takeaway owners prefer their children to pursue a professional path rather than inherit the family takeaway. Therefore, they emphasise the value of education and instil the importance of hard work, diligence, perseverance and sacrifice to achieve academic success.

While more studies are needed to conclusively ascertain if intensive parental engagement explains the educational success of British Chinese students (Coughlan, 2014), data from education statistics show that British Chinese pupils are very successful within the British

education system. Recent data on GCSE examinations for English and maths in the academic year 2020 to 2021 show that ‘pupils from the Chinese ethnic group had the highest score out of all ethnic groups’ (Department of Education, 2022). British Chinese students are also among the highest proportions to enter higher education. This achievement starkly contrasts findings from studies in the late 1980s when few British Chinese students pursued higher education (Francis & Archer, 2005, p. 497). This rapid progress in educational achievement and its contributions towards British Chinese representation in white-collar professional careers has resulted in second-generation British Chinese being described as a ‘model minority’. This stereotype, coined in America and other Western countries like Australia (Fukui, 2018), describes a minority community that is well assimilated, hard-working, quiet, obedient, academically high achieving (especially in Mathematics and Science), with a high income, family stability, and low criminality. The ‘model minority’ label is contentious and is often said to contribute to the invisibility of the British Chinese (Ping, 2022). However, Wang’s research on young second-generation British Chinese found that some participants take pride in the label and value the associated positive attributes. Others see it as creating pressure to ‘live up to others’ expectations of ‘Chineseness’ (Wang, 2016, p. 235). Scholars like Yeh see the label of ‘model minority’ as ‘one of the specific ways in which those ascribed as Chinese are racialised’ (2014, p. 1198). Yeh suggests that the social construct of ‘model minority’ is no less detrimental, reductive or marginalising than that of the ‘Yellow peril’, and ‘rather than opposing one another, discourses of the “Yellow Peril” and “model minority” operate within the same racial schema’ (2014, p. 1199).

Without a fuller, more nuanced and more authentic representation of British Chinese on stage, on-screen, and in social media, Lee asserts they will continue to be marginalised and othered as caricatures in the psyche of mainstream British society.

The negative image of “the Chinese” has been anchored in the British popular imaginary, fuelled, reinforced and readily redeployed by the popular press, popular entertainment, “low-brow” fiction, and elite history for over 150 years. A history of the way *the Chinese* in the UK have been represented would necessitate an examination of the language and the imaginary through which today’s anti-Chinese sentiment and violence is expressed. Thus, keywords and phrases found today in the popular press we first find used in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century texts. Such terms have been used over a long period to stoke fear of contagion, contamination, and sickness portrayed as arising from a unique difference in lifestyle and daily practices, especially cooking and eating habits – “issues” that will sound familiar to any member of any ethnic community, but especially so for those that are “visible”.

(Lee, 2021)

In addition, without a genuine understanding of the community, the British Chinese will continue to be unfairly scapegoated and blamed during crises, as seen in 2001, when they were blamed for the ‘foot-and-mouth outbreak’ (‘Chinese fight foot-and-mouth’, 2001), and more recently for the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in a significant rise in racist attacks on the community (Lindrea & Gillett, 2020). These attacks can be violent, for example, the assaults against Jonathan Mok in London (‘Coronavirus: Boy sentenced’, 2021) and Peng Wang in Southampton (‘University of Southampton lecturer’, 2021). ‘The number of such crimes reported to police in London alone tripled at the start of the pandemic’ (‘Asian hate crime in UK’, 2021).

Better representation of the British Chinese gives them visibility and voice. It helps to delineate the relationship between the community and Britain, specifically how the British Chinese contribute to modern British national identity (Chan & Willis, 2012). Chan and Willis (2012, p. 28) find that ‘there are very few feature films that might be specifically identified as “British Chinese”, that is made by or about the experiences of British-born Chinese produced in the United Kingdom’. Knox notes that self-representation of the British Chinese community is needed to provide ‘a more nuanced expression and a wider range of perspectives of British Chinese culture’ (2019, p. 140).

Some second-generation British Chinese are aware of these shortcomings and are becoming more political and dissatisfied with being labelled ‘good, quiet and assimilated’. For example, a group of British Chinese campaigned to create a permanent memorial in London for the Chinese Labour Corps to honour their support for British forces in World War One. Furthermore, BEATS (British East & South-East Asians in Theatre & on Screen) demand better representation on stage and on-screen.

Lucy Sheen, a founding member of BEATS, explains the motivation for the group.

We want to see narratives that centre the British East and South East Asian life experience, contemporary and historical. BESEAS don't have that cultural experience, yet. We see storylines, themes, content based on East and South East Asian works. Dramas set against an East Asian backdrop featuring UK BESEA talent. But more often than not, they're not portraying BESEAS, but East and South East Asians (ESEAS) some representations are better than others. But the norm is very much still a stereotype or a story told through a western lens. Those representations don't relate to any lived experience that I and many other BESEAS have.

(Sheen, 2021)

British Chinese actors and other creatives have also mobilised to protest against discriminatory casting in theatre, as in the play *Orphan of Zhao* (Trueman, 2012) and *The Golden Dragon* opera. The latter was due to end its tour at the Hackney Empire, London; however, casting non-Chinese singers as Chinese characters resulted in the London venue cancelling the performance ('Theatre cancels Opera', 2017).

A non-profit group, End the Virus of Racism, 'a group of East and Southeast Asian (ESEA) community leaders, activists, academics, and migrants in the UK', formed in direct response to racist attacks during the COVID-19 pandemic, recently raised over fifty thousand pounds from a crowdfunding initiative to address systemic racism faced by people of East and Southeast Asian heritage.

This essay's first section provides a brief and broad outline of the history of Chinese migration to Britain. It also discusses how the diversity and heterogeneity of these migrants and their intra-ethnic tensions may have hampered the development of a strong and cohesive community. However, recent developments show this is changing. Confident, younger, better-educated, second and third-generation British Chinese are rallying together to engage in civil discourse on socio-political issues, self-representation and injustice. British-born Chinese are an integral part of the modern British national identity. However, their narratives, stories, and lived experiences are given little recognition and representation in British media and literature. Without better visibility and appreciation of British-born Chinese, the Chinese community will continue to be misunderstood and othered.

Brief Review of Chinese Representation on the British Stage

The first Chinese play staged in England, *The Orphan of Zhao*, loosely based on historical writings, was written in the Yuan Dynasty by thirteenth-century Chinese playwright Ji Junxiang (Liu, 1953, pp. 197-198). Set in the Zhou dynasty (6th century B.C.), the play tells in five acts the tragic story of minister Zhao Dun's family, who, except for Zhao Dun's pregnant daughter-in-law, Lady Zhuang, a princess, are all slaughtered by rival minister Tu'an Gu. After giving birth, Lady Zhuang pleads with her physician, Cheng Ying, to smuggle the baby out of the house and then commits suicide. Determined to kill Zhao Dun's grandson, Tu'an Gu passes a decree to kill every child under six months unless the orphan is delivered to him. Cheng Ying, who has a son the same age as the orphan, swops his son for the orphan, sacrificing his real son to Tu'an Gu. Grateful for Cheng Ying's loyalty, Tu'an Gu adopts Cheng Ying's son, i.e. the orphan, as his son. After twenty years, the orphan discovers his true identity and, in the final act, kills Tu'an Gu and restores the Zhao family estate (Thorpe, 2016, pp. 28-29).

The Orphan of Zhao, a tragic play of revenge, loyalty and self-sacrifice, arrived on British shores in the eighteenth century via various European translations and adaptations. The first translation of *The Orphan of Zhao* from Chinese to French was written by Father Joseph Henri Marie de Premare, a respected Sinologist and Jesuit missionary living in China. It was called *L'Orphelin de la Maison de Tchao* and was meant to have been given to a member of the French Academy, Etienne Fourmont (Liu, 1953, p. 201). Instead, it was mistakenly given to Jean Baptiste Du Halde, who published it without permission in 1735 in his third volume of *Description de la Chine*. Halde's book was subsequently translated into English several times, resulting in three English versions by Richard Brookes, Edward Caves and Thomas Percy. The first English adaptation of the play by William Hatchett, a stage performer, in 1741 was *The Chinese Orphan: an Historical Tragedy*. This adaptation was not staged but was published in London. The second English adaptation of *The Orphan of Zhao* was written by Irish playwright Arthur Murphy, who claimed his adaptation, *The Orphan of China*, was from Premare's original translation. However, Liu (1953, p. 209) and Thorpe (2016, p. 37) suggest that Murphy's version is more closely modelled on Voltaire's *L'Orphelin de la Chine* staged to wide acclaim in Paris in 1755. In 1759, at the height of the Chinoiserie craze and four years after Voltaire's staging, Murphy's *The Orphan of China* was staged at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane. Performed and produced by David Garrick, an influential theatre actor, playwright and producer, the first Chinese play performed in London was 'well received in the literary circles of London' and 'won the praise of critics' (Liu, 1953, p. 211). Murphy's play did not depict the

original story and characterisation of the Yuan drama. Instead, he changed the play's setting from the sixth-century Zhou dynasty to the thirteenth-century Yuan dynasty, when the Mongols and Tartars conquered China. Murphy also replaced Tu'an Gu's character with Timurkan, the Emperor of the Tartars, a villain whom Zamti, a learned Chinese Mandarin, ultimately overcomes. There was little attempt at authenticity in staging the play, with English actors playing the Tartars styled in Turkish clothing. This choice may have been because of poor aesthetics or ignorance; however, Thorpe (2016, p. 40) suggests that dressing the barbaric villains as subdued Turks could also be interpreted as an expression of Islamophobia and the decline of the Ottoman Empire. Thorpe further asserts in his detailed analysis of *The Orphan of China* that the play was less about providing an authentic representation of China and the Chinese and more a commentary on 'the British monarchy, the absolute monarchy in France and the decline of Islamic empires' (2016, p. 25). Yang, however, sees Murphy's adaptation as more of a 'theatrical rendering of ethnography's investment in curiosity, novelty, and origins, the objectification of culture, [and] is productive of a symbolic real – conquered yet spectacular China' (2002, p. 333).

In the middle of the eighteenth century, British Sinology and the scholarship of China's culture and literature were still in their infancy. Much information and knowledge about China came via European Jesuit missionaries, second-hand and filtered through a religious lens. By the early twentieth century, historical and political events such as the Industrial Revolution, British Imperialism and the two Opium Wars meant that Sino-British power relations had changed. With this 'change of tide in power relations, there came a shift in approaches to studying China. Britain began to move away from a reliance on the secondary translations of texts by missionaries towards first-hand information' (Hillemann, 2009, as cited in Thorpe, 2016, p. 54). One of the more noteworthy British Sinologists includes Sir John Francis Davis, the son of an East India Company director living in Canton, who had acquired sufficient competency in the Chinese language to translate Chinese novels, poetry and drama into English. Davis contributed to British knowledge of Chinese plays by publishing two plays: *Laou -Seng-Urh: Or An Heir In His Old Age, A Chinese Drama* and *Han Koong Tsew: Or the Sorrow of Han: A Chinese Tragedy* (Thorpe, 2016, p. 55).

The Chinese diaspora community in America provided another source for Chinese drama, and in 1913 *The Yellow Jacket*, a play inspired by Chinese operas performed in Chinatown San Francisco, premiered in London. The play, written by white American authors George C. Hazelton and (Joseph) Henry Benrimo, tells the story of Wu Hoo Git, a governor's

son and his usurping half-brother Wu Fah Din (Thorpe, 2016, p. 70). When Hoo Git's mother discovers that her husband wishes to kill their son so he may pass his title to his second son Fah Din, she sacrifices herself to save him. A local farmer subsequently adopts Hoo Git, and at the age of twenty, Hoo Git is eager to uncover his true identity. Despite several trials and tribulations set by his half-brother, Hoo Git eventually emerges victorious and in love, wearing the yellow jacket to symbolise his rightful title as governor. Unlike *The Orphan of China*, *The Yellow Jacket* was advertised as a play created from ethnographic research, offering an authentic intercultural representation of Chinese Drama and Theatre. 'Costumes for the production were credited to "Kwong Sun Chong of Canton and San Francisco"', and the set included 'Chinese lanterns, lacquer furniture, textiles, ceramics...drums and cymbals added to the exoticism' (Thorpe, 2016, p. 76). Benrimo also adopted Chinese staging conventions, such as using a Property Man who held props for actors and rearranged props and furniture silently on stage. Performed by white actors in yellowface, the play ran for 154 performances, far exceeding its run on off-Broadway. Thorpe contextualises this success by arguing that '*The Yellow Jacket* expressed informal British imperialist and colonial perspectives on mainland China through the prism of chinoiserie and fantasy' (Thorpe, 2016, p. 73).

Less successful was the Chinese opera *The Circle of Chalk*, performed in London in 1929. Similar to *The Orphan of Zhao*, the play was a translation of a Chinese play with numerous European translations and adaptations before arriving in London. Riské for its time, the play follows protagonist Hi Tang, whom her mother sells into prostitution following the suicide of her father. Prince Po courts Hi Tang at the tea house, but their relationship is interrupted when the tax collector Ma, the man responsible for Hi Ting's father's death, buys Hi Ting from the tea house and makes her his mistress. When Hi Ting becomes pregnant, Ma's jealous wife kills her husband and frames Hi Ting for his murder. At the trial, Hi Ting expects to be found guilty; however, before the verdict is delivered, news arrives that Prince Po has become emperor, and the play ends happily with Prince Po and Hi Ting getting married (Thorpe, 2016, p. 87).

The staging of *The Circle of Chalk* was a fusion of chinoiserie and minimalist art deco, matched by the music, combining traditional Eastern and modern Western music styles. More significantly, *The Circle of Chalk* was the first-time actors of Chinese descent performed alongside white actors in yellowface in a Chinese play on the London stage. Asian American actress Anna May Wong played Hi Ting, and Australian-Chinese actress Rose Quong played Ma's wife, Yu-Pi. Wong, a successful Hollywood star famous for British silent films such as

Piccadilly, was one of the main attractions of *The Circle of Chalk*. Director and producer Basil Dean capitalised on Wong's sex appeal and physical gracefulness famously displayed in *Piccadilly* by having her slow dance early in the play. Theatre critics reacted positively to her dancing but criticised her speaking voice, describing it as too American and not Chinese enough. Asserting that Wong was better seen and not heard emphasised her status as a sex object. Sexualising and objectifying East Asian women by the West likely began as early as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries during Britain's trade expansion to Asia and the Opium Wars and was further exemplified by America's Page Act of 1875, which prohibited Chinese women from entering the US fearing they would engage in prostitution. Thorpe (2016, p. 95) suggests that some of 'the most explicit moments of objectification' are when Hi Ting encounters Prince Po, played by Lawrence Olivier in 'yellowface'. In Hi Ting's first encounter with Po, she dances and teases him seductively. Later, after Ma, the tax collector, buys Hi Ting, Po follows her to Ma's house and makes love to her while she is asleep. In today's context, Hi Ting's lack of consent suggests an act of rape. Further, Thorpe offers that with Wong's casting as a vulnerable Chinese woman and Olivier's as a powerful male in 'yellowface', the ending of the play becomes racially charged, and 'in the context of imperialism...a metaphor for the perceived vigour of the British Empire versus the weak, feminised semi-colonised, inferior, Chinese other' (2016, p. 96).

The first Chinese play written and directed on the London stage by a Chinese playwright is *Lady Precious Stream* by Shih-I Hsiung. His life as a Chinese artist in Britain in the 1930s and 1940s is detailed in Diane Yeh's, *The Happy Hsiungs: Performing China and the Struggle for Modernity*. Born in 1902, Hsiung, an academic, translator, writer and playwright, was the eleventh child to a family of landowners in Nanchang, Jiangxi province. As a student at Beijing Normal University (previously Peking Normal University), Hsiung developed a passion for English Literature, theatre and film, subsequently leading him to several ventures, including translating Benjamin Franklin's autobiography into classic Chinese and managing movie houses in Beijing and Shanghai (Yeh, 2014, p. 19). Although Hsiung translated subtitles for foreign films like British and Hollywood movies, he only gained recognition as a translator when his translation of Benjamin Franklin's autobiography was published.

His other translations include the works of British playwrights George Bernard Shaw, J.M. Barrie, Thomas Hardy and John Galsworthy (Yeh, 2014, p. 23). Nevertheless, despite Hsiung's prodigious collection of translations, 'excellent English skills, a good classical

education, teaching experience, and even a recommendation by Xu Zhimo, a leading poet in China' (Yeh, 2014, p. 26), Hsiung was unable to secure a permanent teaching position at an elite university because he lacked a foreign degree. Therefore 1932, Hsiung enrolled at the University College London to do an English Bachelor of Literature degree.

While in London, Hsiung befriended and interacted with many of London's literary circle, including playwrights James Barrie and George Bernard Shaw, sharing with them his one-act play, *Mammon*, which cast two couples of different social classes to satirise elitism, materialism, and greed of cosmopolitan urbanites in modern-day China. However, despite praising his writing, both Barrie and Shaw advised Hsiung that British theatre-goers lacked appreciation for a modern-day drama written by a foreigner (Yeh, 2014, p. 34).

Hsiung subsequently wrote *Lady Precious Stream*, 'a spoken-drama adaptation of a Chinese opera *Lady Precious Bracelet (Wang Bao Chuan)*, which opened in London on 22 November 1934' (Thorpe, 2016, p. 103). A tale of social mobility and enduring love, the play describes in four acts the story of Precious Stream, the daughter of prime minister Wang Yun, and her decision to marry Xue Pinggui, the family's gardener, against her parents' wishes. After the couple's marriage, Lady Precious's family disinherits them, forcing them to live in a cave in poverty. Soon after, her husband, Xue, is sent to Mongolia to fight in a war. When Precious hears news of her husband's death, she refuses to believe it and waits for him for eighteen years. Unknown to Precious, Xue and his men have defeated the Mongolians, and Xue has become the king of Mongolia and will soon marry a Mongolian princess. However, on his wedding day, Xue decides not to betray Precious and returns to China to reunite with his wife, marrying the Mongolian princess off to a minister. With his newfound status, wealth and power, Xue takes revenge against his brother-in-law for plotting his demise.

Comparable to *The Yellow Jacket* and *The Circle of Chalk*, earlier plays performed in the British chinoiserie tradition or 'Chinese manner', *Lady Precious Stream* also employed white actors in 'yellowface' and other recognisable Chinese conventions, such as The Property Man, Chinese-styled costumes, and props displaying Chinese art objects, including 'Ming dynasty vases, lacquered furniture and a large rug dating from 1863' (Thorpe, 2016, p. 106). However, despite these similarities, Hsiung's involvement as a Chinese playwright and director gave the play its interest and authenticity. Although described by Hsiung as 'an old Chinese play done into English according to its traditional style' (Hsiung, 1958, p. 89), *Lady Precious Stream* was one of the first intercultural productions that syncretised Chinese and British

culture and dramatic styles. One of Hsiung's significant changes from the original is adapting a poetic lyrical piece to one with only spoken text (Thorpe, 2016, p. 110). Other alterations include a new opening scene showing the Wang family enjoying New Year's Day in their snow-covered garden (Qiao, 2020, p. 847), as well as the addition of a new character, So and So, the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Hsiung, 1958, p. 193), who in the finale is paired with the Mongolian princess, changing the original polyamorous ending to a modern monogamous one. Scholarly examinations often interpret this last adaptation through a binary East and West lens. However, Hsiung argued that he intended to represent modern-day China cultural norms. For example, he explained the introduction of the character So and So as follows:

In ancient China, men were polygamous, so the King of the Western Regions could have Lady Precious Stream as his Queen-Proper and the Princess as his Vice-Queen. Since the revolution in 1911, the law of our country forbids a man to have more than one wife, and my solution of the difficulty is the introduction of this man of the world whose sole duty is to get an extra lady off my hands.

(Hsiung, 1939, as cited in Thorpe, 2016, p. 110)

However, Qiao (2020) suggests that given Hsiung's diasporic identity, his authority as a cultural ambassador for modern China is contestable. Hong Shen, a Chinese playwright and dramatist, asserts that Hsiung's introduction of 'traditional China to the West fails to authentically represent China at a time when ordinary Chinese were struggling for a living in a time of the Sino-Japanese war... [concluding] that it bestows humiliation rather than honour upon the country' (Qiao, 2020, p. 856).

The plays discussed represent Chinese characters in an interpreted Chinese historical setting using British Chinoiserie-inspired sets and aesthetics. However, these plays shine little light on contemporary Chinese men and women's lives in Britain or China. Except for literary works such as Tyau's *London Through Chinese Eyes or, My Seven and a Half Years in London* (1920), and Lao She's *Mr Ma and Son* (2013, p. xii, originally published in Chinese in 1929), there is sparse literature on the lived experiences of the Chinese in Britain in the early part of the twentieth century. After World War One, the media in Britain began to characterise the Chinese as 'yellow peril', depicting them as degenerate, depraved, debauched and evil schemers. Fiction popularising this image includes Sax Rohmer's *Tales of Chinatown* (1922) and Thomas Burke's *Limehouse Nights* (1916). This characterisation was not limited to low-brow fiction but also appeared in literary classics such as Oscar Wilde's *The Tale of Dorian Gray*, Evelyn Waugh's *Decline and Fall*, and Somerset Maugham's play *East of Suez*.

‘Where I draw the line is a Chink, nasty inhuman things. I had a pal bumped off by a Chink once. Throat cut horrible, it was, from ear to ear.’ ‘Good gracious!’ Said the Clutterbuck governess, ‘was that in the Boxer rising?’ ‘No,’ said Philbrick cheerfully. ‘Saturday night in the Edgware Road. Might have happened to any of us.’

(Waugh, 2012, Chapter IX, paragraph 3, location 1101)

Set in Peking (Beijing), Maugham’s *East of Suez* is a seven-act play that tells the story of Daisy, a biracial woman of Chinese and English descent and her love for two Englishmen, George and Harry. George and Harry are old friends, but Harry is unaware of George and Daisy’s romantic past. Daisy marries Harry, but it is George she loves. Added to this love triangle is a Chinese merchant, Lee Tai, to whom Daisy was sold by her mother as a teenager. All the Chinese characters in the play speak comical pidgin English, and Lee Tai and Daisy’s domestic servant (her biological mother) are shown as sinister, scheming and unscrupulous. This negative depiction of Chinese characters on the British stage was so commonplace in the 1920s that ‘In March 1929, the chargé d’affaires at London’s Chinese legation complained that no fewer than five plays showing in the West End depicted Chinese people in a vicious and objectionable form’ (Lovell, 2014).

The founding of two British East Asian theatre companies, Mu-Lan Theatre and Yellow Earth Theatre, in 1988 and 1995 heralded the beginning of the development of plays that focussed more on the British Chinese and the broader British East Asian experience (Thorpe, 2018, p. 195). Uncovering new East Asian writing was a part of that, as seen in Mu-Lan’s First Festival of New Writing and Yellow Earth’s Typhoon Festival and Yellow Ink programme (Thorpe, 2018, p. 211). Thorpe (2018) suggests that one of Mu-Lan’s more successful plays was *Porcelain*, written by Singaporean playwright Chay Yew and staged at the Royal Court. This lyrical and striking play explores in 29 short scenes the relationship between nineteen-year-old British-born Chinese John Lee and his bisexual lover William Hope. Lee and Hope meet at a men’s lavatory in Bethnal Green, forming a passionate but sometimes violent relationship. When Lee suspects Hope is being unfaithful to him, he shoots him. Using a Greek chorus style, the drama examines the experience of being othered both as a Chinese in Britain and as a homosexual in the Chinese community (Yew, 1997).

Another more well-known play exploring the sexuality of a Chinese character is David Henry Hwang’s *M. Butterfly* (1989) which performed at the Haymarket Theatre from 25th March 1989 to April 3rd when it moved to Shaftesbury Theatre until 10th February 1990 (Theatricalia, n.d.). Hwang, an Asian-American playwright of Chinese descent, loosely based the play on the true story of Bernard Boursicot, a French diplomat and Shi Pei Pu, a Chinese spy and male

opera singer. The play opens with Gallimard, the diplomat in a French prison cell longing for Song, the opera singer, and reflecting on his ignorance that Song was a spy and a man disguised as a woman. Using flashbacks, Hwang charts the couple's relationship from their first encounter to their ultimate scandal and, in the process, interrogates cultural misconceptions between East and West and racial and gender stereotypes (Hwang, 1989). In the London production, Sir Anthony Hopkins played Gallimard.

Another Asian-American playwright who has had some success on the London stage is Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig. The National Theatre staged her play *The World of Extreme Happiness* in 2013. Cowhig, whose mother is Taiwanese and her father Irish-American, spent most of her teenage years in China (Tran, 2015). Unlike Hwang's *M. Butterfly*, set in mid-1980s Europe after China's newly announced economic reforms, *Happiness*, written nearly thirty years later, and spoken entirely in English, is set in contemporary China and interrogates China as an economic powerhouse through the lens of Sunny, a Chinese factory worker (Cowhig, 2013). Staged in London in the same year, *Chimerica*, written by Lucy Kirkwood, was set in China and America. Through photojournalist Joe Schofield's quest to find 'tank man', the protestor who confronted a tank during the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989, the play focuses on the complex political and economic relationship between superpowers America and China (Kirkwood, 2013). The dialogue is in both English and Mandarin.

Over the last couple of centuries, we can see a shift in the theme, story, setting and style of Chinese plays staged in Britain, reflecting the weakening power of post-colonial Britain, changing social and cultural norms, and an increased desire to understand the global impact of an assertive and economically powerful China. 'Yellowface' is no longer accepted, and using Mandarin dialogue for Chinese characters is commonplace. Plays that have attempted to use discriminatory casting and 'yellowface', for example, *The Golden Dragon* and *The Orphan of Zhao*, have elicited protests and, as mentioned earlier, resulting in the early closing of both plays. Although Chinese-themed plays written by non-British Chinese playwrights provide creative opportunities for British-Chinese actors and artists, they do not necessarily elucidate the lives and lived experiences of the British Chinese. Compared to Asian American drama and literature, literary works by British Chinese writers, specifically the subset of British-born Chinese writers, are in their infancy. However, it is growing.

British Chinese Literary and Dramatic Works Using Cultural Practices as Markers of Identity, Acculturation and Assimilation Differences

Perhaps Britain's best-known British Chinese writer is Timothy Mo, who wrote the novel *Sour Sweet*. Born in Hong Kong to a Hong Kong Chinese father and a British mother, Mo lived in Hong Kong until the age of ten, when the family moved to Britain. First published in 1982, *Sour Sweet* was short-listed for the Booker Prize for Fiction and won the Hawthornden Prize. The acclaimed novel also adapted into a film in 1988, follows the lives of Chen, his wife Lily, his son Man Kee, and his wife's sister Mui, an immigrant family who move from Hong Kong to Britain to work in the catering trade ultimately setting up their Chinese takeaway. Set in Chinatown, London, the novel follows the family's struggles and conflicts, including racism with the locals and physical threats of violence from the triads headed by the Hung family. While fictional, the book highlights the Chinese migrant experience in the 1960s, a community often overlooked.

With most British Chinese coming to Britain from Hong Kong in the 1960s and 70s entering the catering trade, it is not unexpected that more recent works by British Chinese writers with Hong Kong ancestry also set their works in takeaways. These include Sue Cheung's *Chinglish*, Julie Ma's *Happy Families*, and Angela Hui's *Takeaway: Stories from a Childhood Behind the Counter*. Written almost forty years after Mo's *Sour Sweet*, these works cover similar grounds of racism, family conflicts and the migrant experience. However, because Cheung, Ma and Hui are British-born Chinese writers, the narrative is told from the perspective of second-generation British Chinese, providing more insight into the inter-generational conflicts arising from the differences in assimilation and acculturation between their immigrant parents and themselves.

When migrants move from their native home to a new country, they encounter a new and unfamiliar culture, for example, new behaviours, languages, beliefs and values. Sam and Berry describe the process of migrants interacting with this new culture and the subsequent cultural, psychological and social changes as acculturation (2010, p. 472). Berry (2005) posits a framework to model four different acculturation strategies. These are; assimilation, separation, integration and marginalisation. Assimilation occurs when an individual repudiates their original culture and embraces the new society's cultural values and norms. Separation occurs when an individual maintains native cultural integrity by minimising interactions with the new society, rejecting its values and norms. Integration is a compromise between the two when

individuals participate in the new society while simultaneously holding on to their native cultural integrity. Finally, individuals who reject the values of the new society and their native culture utilise the marginalisation strategy. Although Andreouli (2013) and others have criticised Berry's model for being static, decontextualised, two-dimensional and 'ignoring the diversity of the migrant experience' (p. 166), the model has been used to study inter-generational acculturation differences, for example, acculturation within Chinese immigrant families (Costigan & Dokis, 2006; Huang & Lamb, 2015).

Studies focussing on second-generation examine their complex identities and bicultural experience (Sekhon & Szmigin, 2011; Lee & Kim, 2014; Huynh, Benet-Martinez & Nguyen, 2018;). These studies have found that children of migrants, second-generation, adopt an integration strategy, moderating and navigating the tensions between their parent's culture and the dominant culture of wider society, creating hybridity. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha uses the term 'hybridity' to consider the consequences of post-colonialism and the creation of a 'third space' (2012). More lyrically, Salman Rushdie (2010) describes this equivocal position of neither/nor as falling 'between two stools' (p. 15).

Ien Ang addresses hybridity in the Chinese diaspora in her book, *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living between Asia and the West*. Ang introduces herself as someone of Chinese descent, born in Indonesia but raised in the Netherlands and living and working in Australia. She uses her identity conflicts to explore the predicament of 'Chineseness' and what it means to identify as 'Asian' in her adopted country, Australia, because she looks Chinese and what it means to be a 'puzzle' in Taiwan because of her inability to speak Chinese (2001). Ang, a passionate advocate of hybridity, describes hybridity as 'beyond identity and difference toward a more dynamic concern for togetherness-indifference' (2001, p.viii).

As mentioned, academic studies show that second-generation children of immigrants experience hybrid identities and a bicultural experience. How British-born second-generation writers represent these experiences and multifaceted identities in their literary and dramatic works is discussed below.

Yun-Hua Hsiao in *Women in British Chinese Writings: Subjectivity, Identity and Hybridity* (2014, pp. 67-73) suggests that first names, language and food are examples of hybridity. Recognising that having both an English and Chinese name expresses British Chinese hybridity inspired the play's title—*Wendy and Min*. Although her paternal grandmother (Ah Por) gave Wendy the Chinese name Wee Min (慧明), Wendy never uses it

until she meets Peter, a mainland Chinese PhD student. Her decision to reclaim her Chinese name in act one, scene three, represents a turning point and marks the beginning of Wendy's embrace of her Chinese heritage (2023, p. 17).

Characters with English and Chinese names are commonly found in British Chinese literary works. For example, in Helen Tse's *Sweet Mandarin*, the author describes how her grandmother Lily, a first-generation immigrant to Britain, and her mother, Mabel (second-generation), have both English and Chinese first names. Her grandmother, Sui King, in Hong Kong, adopted the name Lily when she came to Britain. Similarly, her mother, Mabel, has the Chinese name, Bo Yee. Tse explains that it is common for people from Hong Kong to adopt English names as English names are easier for the British to pronounce (2007, p. 136). However, Lab Ky Mo's sister in *Jacky - No Sorry, Ain I Mean* (1992) took choosing an English name to the extreme. Her name was 'Yuk', which means Jade in Chinese. However, in English, it would probably have been pronounced as 'Yuck!' which sounds far less auspicious. Unfortunately, Yuk could not settle on an English name, and Mo describes his sister's post as being variously addressed to, 'Monica, Jennifer, Christine' (1992, p. 18).

Adopting English names is also common for South-East Asian Chinese, like Malaysians or Singaporeans. For example, in *Run of the Molars* (2019), Elaine Chiew's characters include Ah Hong (Lily), Ah Won (Winnie) and Ah Kim (Maggie).

Some British Chinese adopt English names after converting to Christianity, while others fear the mispronunciations of their Chinese names. My father, Teik Seng (德盛), gave himself the name Eddie when he arrived in England, and my mother, Sui Chin (水清), always introduced herself as Sue. My parents gave me the English name Shirley as they felt this would result in less discrimination and teasing in school. However, I did not like the name, associating it with the famous child star Shirley Temple, and insisted on sticking to my Chinese name Suet Lee (雪丽), which means 'beautiful snow'. Unfortunately, due to my name's spelling, at school, I would often be called 'Suet pudding' or just 'pudding' for short. Nevertheless, that was preferable to having the same name as someone who wore ringlets and a cute smile.

Pui Fan Lee's *Short, Fat, Ugly and Chinese* (1994) also talks about Lee's desire for an English name. She wanted to be an Elizabeth or Isabella, describing the latter as representative of 'my secret ideal me'. Lee bemoans that her parents did not give her an English name, unlike

other Chinese kids that she knew who ‘used them at school and put them away when they went home’ (1994, p. 180).

In *The Life of a Banana* (2014), PP Wong humorously describes how a teacher mispronounces the protagonist’s Chinese name, Xing Li, as ‘Axe-ing Lee’. When Xing Li later explains that her name is pronounced ‘with-an- S-sound’, her classmates tease her by calling her ‘Sing-Song’ (2014, p. 29)

Second-generation Joanna/Jo Kwan in Sue Cheung’s *Chinglish: An Almost Entirely True Story* (2019) and her younger sister also have ‘home and school names’. First-person narrator Jo always refers to her sister by her English name Bonny, whereas her mother calls Bonny only by her Chinese name, Ling Ling. Jo confesses she does not know the meaning of the name but says it makes Bonny ‘sound like a panda bear’ (2019, p. 46). Later in the book, we learn Jo’s Chinese name, Yenzi, is written on her birth certificate and means ‘swift’. However, Jo finds having two names meaningless, ‘Why not just stick with an English name? It would be much simpler’ (2019, p. 61).

Bernard and Jackie (Wendy’s parents in *Wendy and Min*) also believe having two names is unnecessary and are indifferent to Wendy’s and Lisa’s Chinese names. Therefore, when Wendy announces she wishes to be called only by her Chinese name, Min, her parents are shocked and offended, ‘What’s wrong with Wendy? I chose that name. Your mother wanted Anne’ (2023, p. 32).

Hansen’s theory of ‘Third-Generation Return’ states that ‘what the son wishes to forget the grandson wishes to remember’ (quoted in Bender & Kagiwada, 1968, p. 360). Developed after studying various European immigrant communities in America, this theory suggests that unlike second-generation parents, who are ‘anxious and insecure about their foreign parentage’, third-generation grandchildren of immigrants take pride in their ethnic identities (Bender & Kagiwada, 1968, p. 360). However, given that Wendy reclaims her Chinese name in response to Peter’s suggestion that she is not Chinese, ‘this is my first time with someone who is not Chinese’ (2023, p. 16), Wendy’s decision is likely to be motivated more by a challenge to her Chinese identity, than pride in her identity. However, Wendy’s willingness to change her name legally and use it for her workplace (Currys) suggests Hansen’s theory may be relevant as it indicates that, unlike her parents, who have rejected their Chinese heritage, Wendy takes pride in her Chinese heritage and is unafraid to claim it.

Before Ah Por's death, there is no indication that Wendy gave her identity much thought. Ah Por was likely Wendy's anchor to her Chinese heritage, and she was confident in her identity as Chinese. However, Ah Por's passing weakened her connection to her Chinese heritage, causing her to question her identity. This is shown when she describes her dream of Ah Por to Lisa. The creeping insecurity of her identity is compounded when Peter does not acknowledge her as Chinese, and she is confronted with her inability to speak, write, or correctly pronounce her Chinese name, Wee Min (慧明). Can a person who looks Chinese but cannot speak or write it call herself Chinese? This question suggests language is another contested area of Chineseness for second and third-generation British Chinese.

As Jo Kwan, the narrator in *Chinglish*, laments, 'How do you explain you don't speak Chinese when your parents are Chinese, you look Chinese and you live in a Chinese takeaway?' (2019, p. 148). To communicate with their families, second-generation British Chinese often resort to a hybrid language, a mixture of Chinese and English, something Jo Kwan describes as 'a rubbish language I call "Chinglish"' (2019, p. 14). In *Take Away: Stories from a Childhood Behind the Counter*, Angela Hui also describes how she and her siblings spoke 'Chinglish'; a mix of English and Cantonese' (2022, p. 63), and often used 'a dictionary or Google' to communicate with their Cantonese speaking parents (2022, p. 62). Similarly, Tracy Cheung's narrator in *Wayward Girl* (1994) spoke 'Cantonese mingled with English, with a South London accent' (p. 159), which her Hong Kong Chinese cousin found amusing.

Looking Chinese and being unable to speak Chinese, more derogatorily known as being a 'banana', can also result in poor service in some Chinese establishments, an example of intra-racial othering. For instance, Kim Tan in *Life as a Banana, What Does it Mean?* (1992) recalls having to remember a set of dishes for dim sum to avoid a waiter's 'bad stare' or having 'spit in [her] food' (p. 48). I understand Tan's concerns. I have also suffered from inferior service because of my inability to communicate in Chinese, specifically Cantonese. Once, when buying fish and chips from our local chip shop, the shop's owners, a Hong Kong Chinese family, insisted on knowing why I did not speak Chinese. When I replied that I did speak Chinese, that I spoke Hokkien (another Chinese dialect), they mumbled to one another and disdainfully threw my chips in the bag. I had similar experiences in Chinese restaurants in Chinatown when I ordered in English and pointed at the menu. The service that followed was always brusque and unpleasant. Although I am hesitant to conclude that all British Chinese non-Chinese/non-Cantonese speakers have had similar unpleasant experiences, I include this form of intra-ethnic

discrimination or othering as an experience that Wendy and Peter share in the play *Wendy and Min* (2023, p. 15). However, Mandarin is now more widely spoken in Chinatown, so it is unclear whether Peter genuinely experiences this discriminatory behaviour or if he is just being sympathetic.

The narrator in Liu Hong's *The Magpie Bridge* (2003), Jiao Mei, a mainland Chinese student in Britain, describes indifference when her English boyfriend suggests visiting London's Chinatown to alleviate her homesickness. Although she acknowledges that the people in Chinatown resemble her physically, her inability to communicate in Cantonese and the Qing dynasty-inspired architecture of gates, pavilions and ornate dragons alienate her and reminds her more of a 'film set' than of her home in China (2003, p. 54). Hong wrote the book in 2003. Since then, China's growing political and economic influence, as well as the influx of mainland Chinese migrants, has meant Mandarin is more widely spoken and is now considered by some in the British Chinese community to be the official 'mother tongue' for Chinese in Britain, supplanting Cantonese. This has resulted in a change in intra-racial hierarchies. For example, Helen Tse in *Sweet Mandarin* (2007) shares an encounter she experienced as a child at a Chinese New Year party. At the party, a lady handing out good luck red packets filled with money approached Tse speaking in Mandarin. As Tse did not understand Mandarin, she called her mother to translate, but Mabel, her Cantonese-speaking mother, also could not understand. Looking at Tse but addressing Mabel, the Mandarin-speaking lady said in broken English, 'We want our children to understand their mother tongue,' to which Mabel responded in perfect English, 'Come on Helen, let's get something to eat' (2007, pp. 234-235).

However, the unnamed mainland Chinese narrator and new migrant to Britain in Xiaolu Guo's, *A Lover's Discourse* (2020) suggests that wait staff in Chinese restaurants still use Cantonese more than Mandarin, 'A Chinese waitress stood by our table. She had the face of a terracotta soldier. Speaking Mandarin, I ordered some vegetables. She responded in Cantonese' (2020, p. 18).

These shared anecdotes and literary extracts exemplify language as a contested area and a source of tension within the British Chinese community. In the play *Wendy and Min*, I have chosen to represent such tensions in act one, scene eight, when Mei and Ah Gong argue in their dialects (2023, p. 56) and when Ah Gong tries to speak to Peter in Hakka (2023, p. 58).

Another contested space in the British Chinese community is food. In the 1950s and 60s, the British were still unfamiliar with and wary of Chinese food. Thus, proprietors and chefs of Chinese restaurants and takeaways cleverly adapted their menus to include familiar foods like chips, bread and butter, pork chops and omelette while offering more exotic fare like chicken curry and sweet and sour dishes (British Library, n.d.). Jo Kwan, the narrator in *Chinglish*, calls classic Chinese takeaway food like ‘spare ribs, crispy noodles and spring rolls’ ‘pretend’ Chinese food because takeaways have adapted it ‘to suit the Western palate’ (2019, p. 59).

Like Lily’s mother in *Run of the Molars* by Chinese Malaysian-born writer Elaine Chiew (2019, p. 17), my parents refused to patronise Chinese takeaways. Except for fish and chips, my father snubbed anything from our local Chinese takeaway, calling it ‘fake Chinese food’ and ‘a waste of money’, claiming that my mother’s cooking was far superior to any Chinese takeaway. Hui’s family in *Takeaway* also did not eat from the takeaway menu. Instead, Hui’s parents would prepare simple Chinese food for the family, like nutritious Cantonese soups and ‘steamed sea bass with ginger and spring onion’ each night. Hui includes the fish recipe for readers to try out (2022, p. 84). In *Sweet Mandarin*, Tse describes how her grandmother Lily created her signature chicken curry on board the *SS Canton* during her six weeks journey from Hong Kong. Finding the food aboard the ship too rich, Lily befriended the cooking staff. They allowed her to use a small stove for cooking her meals. Lily took the opportunity to experiment with new ingredients and techniques that she learnt from her brother-in-law in Singapore and her visits to Malaysia and India to perfect the dish. It was a big hit with her employer and other British families (2007, p. 158). However, is chicken curry Chinese food? It is popular with the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia but is not usually considered Chinese cuisine.

The unavailability of Chinese and South East Asian ingredients in Britain in the 1970s and 80s meant my mother also had to innovate and adapt her cooking. For example, she would make *Penang Assam Laksa*, a spicy, sweet and sour fish-based rice noodle soup popular in Penang, using tinned pilchards and pineapples and substituting rice noodles with Italian spaghetti. Although not authentic, this hybrid dish was tasty and a big hit with her Malaysian friends. In act one, scene seven of *Wendy and Min*, Jackie and Mei also show this resourcefulness when they desperately attempt to make fish balls (2023, page 52). The fish balls then become a source of argument between Mei and Ah Gong, culminating in each

accusing the other of cooking 'fake' Chinese food, reinforcing the concept that there is no consensus among the heterogenous Chinese community of what constitutes Chinese cooking.

Practising cultural norms and traditions acquired from family or other members of society is also a way of expressing our cultural identity and belonging. Using Japanese culture as an example, Mesoudi states:

Culture includes the Japanese grammar, vocabulary, Japanese norms, and Japanese customs that a Japanese child acquires that contribute to maintaining the specific 'Japanese Culture.' The skill required to use chopsticks, for example, is stored in the brains of virtually all Japanese people, is acquired from other people via imitation or teaching, and is expressed behaviorally in the form of chopstick use.

(2011, p. 3)

Sometimes, performing a specific cultural practice can be a way to reclaim one's cultural identity. Liu Hong in *The Magpie Bridge* (2003) illustrates this when the protagonist Jiao Mei buys paper money from London's Chinatown and burns it on Qing Ming or Ching Ming ('clear and bright') in honour of her deceased father and grandmother (Nainai), (p. 56-57). Falling each year on the 4th or 5th of April, Qing Ming, often referred to as Tomb Sweeping Day or Ancestors' Day, is when descendants of the deceased congregate at the cemetery to remember their ancestors and demonstrate filial piety by sweeping and cleaning their gravesites, making ritual offerings like food, drinks and burning paper ('hell') money (Singapore Infopedia, n.d.).

After Jiao Mei burns the paper money in her garden, she feels reconnected with her grandmother and senses she is 'between worlds'. She is in a 'third space' between her world in London, pregnant with her English boyfriend's baby, and the world she left behind in China with her father and grandmother (p. 63). Jiao Mei asks her grandmother for forgiveness, as she knows she failed her grandmother by being pregnant out of wedlock and not wanting to return to China.

Julie Ma's *Happy Families* (2021) also highlights the significance of practising Qing Ming customs. After his wife Martha dies, George Yang, an immigrant from Hong Kong, struggles to juggle the demands of his takeaway business and bring up his daughter June. Martha's cousin, Mei Wen, in Hong Kong, offers to take care of June. George is initially ambivalent, however, when he recalls how Mei Wen 'burnt incense and paper money on the family burial plot' after Martha's death and annually on 'Ching Ming and Chung Yeung' (Qing Ming and Double Ninth festival), George decides to allow June to stay with Mei Wen in Hong

Kong (p. 119). George's decision suggests that Mei Wen's acts of filial piety move him, and he sees these acts as a demonstration of good character.

Adrian Tang, in his short monologue *Inauspicious* (2020), also describes giving offerings to his deceased brother on his birthday:

I burnt the cash, the banknotes and the gold bars. Wasn't easy. It rained overnight so everything got a bit soggy. Had to tip the water out of the drum. Get rid of the ash that was wet at the bottom. Cleaning it was a pain in the arse.

Like Tang's protagonist, Wendy in *Wendy and Min* attempts to reclaim her Chinese identity through filial piety by burning paper money and offering food to her deceased grandmother, Ah Poh. However, unlike Tang's protagonist, who openly makes offerings in a Reading crematorium, Wendy and Lisa are uncomfortable about making offerings publicly, afraid of what the authorities or their neighbours might think. Wendy's and Lisa's fear is not unexpected, given that the local or autochthonous population does not practice this tradition in the UK.

I am unaware of any study that explores the rationale behind the practice or non-practice of death rituals by British Chinese, so I offer anecdotal evidence from conversations with British Chinese Community workers and British Chinese friends and family. Some people suggest they do not observe Qing Ming because they are Christians and the rituals are inconsistent with their religious beliefs. Others suggest they observe Qing Ming only at home, perhaps by lighting a single joss stick. They do not make food offerings or burn paper money because they do not want to attract unwanted attention from the public or the police. Keeping a low profile and not drawing attention might be why my parents and many of their Malaysian and Singaporean Chinese friends living in Britain did not observe Qing Ming, which is an example of their acculturation efforts to assimilate into British society fully.

However, second-generation or third-generation British-born Chinese like myself or Wendy from *Wendy and Min*, who want to observe Qing Ming in Britain, need to find a hybrid way. Wendy achieves this by burning the 'hell money' in an alleyway (2023, p. 9), thus avoiding confrontation with unhappy neighbours. She uses a metal bucket because it is the only suitable thing she can find in Tesco (2023, p. 9). Friends whose parents own takeaways say they use disused oil drums to burn their paper money. However, like Wendy, my brother and I could only find a metal bucket from Tesco to use when we burnt money for our deceased mother.

In Tang's *Inauspicious* (2020), the protagonist describes offering food to his brother, 'I bought your favourite for later. 烤鸭 (Roast duck). With pancakes and plum sauce'.

Consistent with not wanting to draw attention, Wendy offers a McDonald's Filet-O-Fish to her grandmother, Ah Por (2023, p. 5).

Min: I was going to get a plate of roast pork, but we can't put that at Ah Por's grave without attracting attention. So, I thought why not get her a McD...that way people will think it's litter, and ignore it.

Lisa: You got Ah Por a Big Mac?

Min: No. Filet-O-Fish. And Apple Pie. She'll like that.

Marriages are also a significant ritual for most cultures, and wedding customs are another marker of cultural identity. How a couple negotiates divergent cultural values determines the success of their relationship. Although several films explore conflict and negotiation in wedding preparations, for example, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?* (Kramer, 1967), about a wedding between a white Anglo-Saxon woman and an African American widower, or *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (Zwick, 2002), about a wedding between a Greek American woman and a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant; most of them examine cultural tensions of inter-racial marriages. Some East Asian and South Asian films, however, also explore conflict in intra-racial marriages. For example, two more recent films include *2 States* (Varman, 2014) and *The Wonderful Wedding* (大喜临门) (Huang, 2015).

2 States is an Indian romantic comedy-drama that follows the struggles of courtship and marriage between Krish and Ananya. Krish is from an affluent but troubled Punjabi Hindu family in New Delhi (in north India), and Ananya is from a Conservative Tamil Brahmin family from Chennai (in south India). Both families meet for the first time at the couple's convocation ceremony and immediately dislike one another, creating difficulties for Krish and Ananya's relationship and forcing the couple to find creative ways to win over each other's family. This innovative approach proves successful, and both sides agree that the couple can get married. However, a pre-wedding holiday in Mumbai with both families exposes significant cultural differences and prejudices. Krish's mother makes snide comments about Tamilian culture, resulting in the couple splitting up and Krish going into depression and requiring therapy. Although Krish has a poor relationship with his father, saddened by his son's mental state, Krish's father intervenes by apologising to Ananya's parents for his wife's inappropriate behaviour. Eventually, the couple marries, and Krish and his father reconcile.

Like *2 States*, *The Wonderful Wedding*, a Taiwanese film, also explores tensions between intra-racial marriages. When Fei from Beijing discovers his girlfriend Shufen, a Taiwanese from a small country village, is pregnant with his baby, Fei asks her to marry him.

Exacerbated by the families' inability to communicate, a series of misunderstandings follow as the couple's families argue over the wedding customs. For example, should they follow Mainland Chinese or Taiwanese traditions?

The play *Wendy and Min* also examines conflicts from choosing which wedding traditions to follow. However, unlike the two films, the tensions result from different acculturation practices within Wendy's family. For example, as a first-generation immigrant, Mei (Wendy's maternal grandmother) sees Wendy's nuptials to a Chinese man as an opportunity to assert her authority on the 'proper' Chinese wedding customs. Alternatively, Jackie, a second-generation growing up in the 1980s and fully assimilated into British culture, wants Wendy to follow 'proper' English wedding customs. Finally, Wendy, a third-generation fully assimilated but seeking to reclaim her Chinese heritage, chooses which customs she wants to follow and which she wants to syncretise or adapt. This difference in opinion is shown, for example, when Wendy resists Jackie's suggestion to wear a white wedding dress, opting instead for the Kwa (pinyin: Gua, 褂), a traditional red Chinese wedding dress adorned with dragons and phoenixes (2023, p. 76). Act two, scene 2, scene 4, and scene 5 also show Wendy's hybridised wedding choices.

Unlike English weddings which are often intimate affairs determined by the wedding couple's personal preferences, Chinese weddings are family affairs that include various ceremonial rituals. Although Chinese weddings might differ from region to region within China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Indonesia etc., some common customary rites exist. These include a betrothal ceremony, bed setting ceremony, hair combing ceremony, tea ceremony, and a grand wedding banquet often held in a hotel ballroom or restaurant. Of course, not everyone follows all the customary rites, but British Chinese works suggest that the British Chinese practise some of these rites. For example, Pui Fan Lee's *Short, Fat and Ugly* (1994) describes her sister's wedding in the Midlands, 'Dad hired the biggest restaurant in town. Everything was red. It was scandalous. Everybody wanted to know how much my sister was sold for. How much my Dad was going to ask for. How much the groom was willing to pay' (1994, p. 183).

The wedding banquet usually consists of a dinner with 8 or 9 courses and is a festive occasion for relatives and friends of both sides to meet the bride and groom. It is also an opportunity for the bride and groom to propose toasts and express gratitude to their parents and families (Yeo, n.d.). As the banquet marks the beginning of the couple's marriage and the union

of two families, it is often an extravagant affair that reflects the wealth and status of both families. Thus, in Act 2, scene 2, of *Wendy and Min*, Wendy's declaration that she wants to hold the wedding reception in Ah Gong's takeaway, Lucky Garden, is radical and contrary to Chinese tradition. Ah Gong and Peter's swift reactions acknowledge this. Ah Gong says, 'I don't want no trouble' (2023, p. 84), and Peter responds, 'The wedding dinner must be in a proper place. This place is not suitable. It will give your parents no face. It will give my mother no face. It will give me no face' (2023, p. 87).

In contrast, Wendy believes that her wedding preferences are more important than her parent's preferences or how both families are perceived by their community and friends, 'Why are you bothered what they think? This is our day...it should be about us...and what we want' (2023, p. 87). Her dismissal of her parent's preferences and her indifference to the concept of 'face' or *miànzi* (面子), a key feature of Chinese culture, demonstrates a Western or individualistic psychological tendency and is consistent with Mesoudi (2011) and Heine's & Norenzayan's (2006) assertion that:

The longer people of Asian descent have been in North America, the more their psychological tendencies resemble those of European Americans, to the point that third-generation Asian Canadians are indistinguishable from Canadians of other cultural backgrounds.

(2006, p. 261).

Wendy demonstrates this individualistic tendency again in Act 2, scene 4 when she refuses to accept Peter's *pin kim* (*pin jin*, 聘金), also referred to as dowry or 'bride price', viewing it as an archaic practice that belittles women. Wendy's perception of *pin kim* contrasts with her grandmother Mei's view, who believes it symbolises goodwill and traditional Chinese practice that should be upheld. She tells Wendy that it is not for her to decide whether to accept the *pin kim* and that *pin kim* 'is a symbol of goodwill and respect' (2023, p. 102). This conflict arises because of differences in acculturation.

In some respects, Mei has adopted many British cultural practices, for example, her love of roses, having tea and biscuits, and asking her granddaughters to call her Grandma instead of 'Ah Ma' (Hokkien for maternal grandmother). However, as a first-generation migrant and the only surviving grandmother, Mei is also keen to assert her authority in the wedding preparations. Mei's involvement in Wendy's wedding is precious to her because, as a maternal grandmother, traditionally, she would have been side-lined by Ah Por, who, as Wendy's paternal grandmother, might take the lead in the wedding customs. Unfortunately,

Mei's subsequent heavy-handedness results in Wendy defying her grandmother by refusing to take no more than 80 pounds as her pin kim (2023, p. 104). Angry at Wendy's defiance, act 2, scene 5, opens with Mei faking a headache so that Jackie and Bernard (Wendy's parents) are left to conduct the hair-combing ceremony. As fully assimilated second-generation migrants, Jackie and Bernard have no interest in and little knowledge of Chinese cultural practices. Therefore, they must rely on Mei's handwritten notes to conduct the ceremony. Inevitably, Mei's poor handwriting results in Jackie and Bernard failing the task, and Jackie saying, 'I can't...I don't know what you're supposed to say' (2023, p. 109). Wendy's wedding choices force Jackie to confront her identity as a 'banana', someone who looks Chinese but does not identify with Chinese values or traditions. Only when Wendy tells Jackie to 'Use your own words' (2023, p. 109) does Jackie realise cultural hybridity is an option and that she can create a cultural fusion congruent with her values and traditions.

Unlike the literary works mentioned earlier, only some of the action in *Wendy and Min* takes place around the family takeaway, although there are several references. For example, we get insight into the Lucky Garden working conditions and how each generation sees the business differently. Like many Chinese from Hong Kong in the 1960s and 70s, having a livelihood and owning their own business was a source of pride for Ah Gong and Ah Por. However, they worked long hours, and raising a child was difficult. Like George in *Happy Families* and Lily in *Sweet Mandarin*, without extended family support, Ah Gong considered sending Bernard back to Hong Kong. Ultimately, Ah Gong decided against this, reasoning that Bernard 'is born here, he must speak good English, he must speak English better than the English' (2023, p. 120). However, Bernard's experience of racism at the takeaway results in Bernard hating the place and choosing a career away from it, echoing Jo Kwan's sentiments in *Chinglish*, 'Why do all Chinese people work in restaurants or takeaways? Why can't they be teachers, plumbers or bus drivers? When I grow up, I am getting a normal job' (2019, p. 20). However, when Ah Gong mismanages his finance, Bernard reluctantly steps in to help, showing that despite his misgivings, he is still a filial and dutiful son.

Several literary works by British Chinese writers document the constant racism experienced by British Chinese takeaway owners and their offspring. For example, Hui in *Take Away: Stories from a Childhood Behind the Counter* recounts an incident of young kids throwing eggs at their takeaway window and leftover rice at their working counter (2022, p. 158). Hui's initial response is to contact the police. However, her parents are reluctant to make any report as they lack confidence that the police will take action, and they do not want to 'kick

up a fuss', preferring to resolve the problem themselves (2022, p. 158). Hui comments that her parents taught her that silence, keeping her head down, and not attracting attention was a form of protection that would keep her safe (2022, p. 58). Jo Kwan, the narrator in *Chinglish*, details a more dangerous episode of racism at her takeaway during New Year's Eve when drunkards shout racist taunts at the family and throw carpet tiles around the takeaway. However, unlike Hui's parents, Jo's mother orders Jo to call the police, whose arrival help to disperse the drunks and resolve the situation (2019, p. 185).

Racism is also shown in *Wendy and Min* at the end of the play when Wendy and Lisa clean off racist graffiti. In contrast to Ah Gong's lack of faith in the police, Lisa and Wendy are confident of their legal rights and status in British society and approach the attacks differently from their grandparents. Lisa says, 'He should have gone to the police. Let the law deal with it. That's what I would have done' (2023, p. 123). Despite the challenges Wendy might face running the takeaway, she nonetheless decides to take over the business from Ah Gong to update the décor and menu and introduce more fusion cuisine, reflecting her hybrid identity and tastes. Although first-generation immigrant takeaway owners used to prefer their children to enter white-collar professions to uphold status and wealth, it is becoming more common for the younger third-generation to return to the catering trade, as shown with Helen and her sisters in *Sweet Mandarin*.

Literary and Dramatic Works Influencing *Wendy and Min's* Characterisation, Dramatic Structure and Style

Characterisation

Authentic characterisation is essential to create a play that reflects the diverse background of the British Chinese. Characterisation details are important in *Wendy and Min*, as the characters' backgrounds and degree of acculturation often drive the plot. The inter-generational play has seven characters. The first-generation immigrant characters, Mei and Ah Gong, are Wendy's maternal grandmother and paternal grandfather, respectively. They are from different countries of origin and social backgrounds and speak different Chinese dialects. The second-generation characters are Wendy's parents, Jackie and Bernard. The third-generation characters are Wendy and her younger sister Lisa, and finally, Peter is Wendy's boyfriend, a PhD student from Fujian, China studying in the UK.

The back story I created for Wendy's paternal grandparents, Ah Gong and Ah Por, is partly inspired by the story of my cousin-in-law's parents who came to the UK from Wong Chuk Wan (Huáng Zhú Wān; 黄竹湾), a village in the New Territories of Hong Kong. Like them, Ah Gong and Ah Por are Hakka; although they can speak Cantonese, they prefer to converse in their own dialect. Like other migrants from Hong Kong in the 60s and 70s, Ah Por spoke very little English before coming to England. Ah Gong is reasonably fluent in English, having learnt it working on merchant ships. Ah Gong's back story of being a seafarer before settling in England was inspired by historical research and a YouTube interview (2013, October 14) of Mr Han Ken Chan by the Swansea Chinese Community Co-op Centre, who also worked on ships before settling in the UK. When crafting Ah Gong's character, I wanted to create someone who was battle-hardy, had survived a hard life and was often misunderstood by his son and grandchildren. He has good intentions even though the execution of his choices is rarely perfect. With his stubborn independence, gambling habit and love of karaoke, he chooses to live on his terms. Some of my character choices were inspired by my parents and their friends, who often enjoyed karaoke, singing and frequenting casinos in their retirement. Initially, I hesitated to depict Ah Gong as a debt-ridden compulsive gambler, fearing that it was stereotypical. However, as Benton and Gomez state, 'gambling has always been a mainstay of Chinese life and economy in Britain...[and] most prevalent among older and less educated Chinese workers' (2008, p. 133). Furthermore, British Chinese works such as *Sour Sweet* and *Sweet Mandarin* show the tragic consequences of gambling addiction. In K. P. W. Cheng's short

story, *The Casino* (1997), Cheng offers this blunt assessment of Chinese attitudes to gambling: 'most of the Chinese people I know in Britain like gambling more than they like their own children. They gamble, I suppose to make a boring life more exciting' (1997, p. 85). Therefore, depicting Ah Gong as a gambler seemed an authentic characterisation.

In the back story, I created for Mei, Jackie's mother, Mei was born in Malacca, a Malaysian state that the Dutch ceded to the British in 1824. It was one of four British territories known as the Straits Settlements, which included Penang and Singapore. Chinese born in the Straits Settlements were known as Straits Chinese and identified differently from recent Chinese arrivals. Their ancestors were often Chinese traders who married local women and became creolised and acculturated in the indigenous Malay culture, language, food and dress. Straits Chinese are also described as 'Baba' or 'Peranakan' and are primarily Western-educated (Suryadinata, 2015. p. 22).

Mei's character is written as a Hokkien Peranakan, meaning her ancestors emigrated to Malaysia a few generations ago from the province of Fujian in China. I decided she came from an upper-middle-class background and, as a child, was taken care of by a 'majie', a domestic servant who wore a black and white uniform and from whom she learnt to speak Cantonese. Mei moved to Singapore for her education, where she met Jackie's father. My mother-in-law, a Hokkien Peranakan from Malacca, inspired Mei's identity. Mei's character traits are not based on any specific person but are part imagination and part amalgamation of various people. For example, Mei's fondness for tea and biscuits was inspired by my father, a stickler for having tea and biscuits at 11 am and 4 pm daily.

I deliberately chose Mei to have a different dialect, educational and socio-economic background from Ah Gong to provide conflict and tension, often used to comedic effect. Having them argue in different dialects over food and Chineseness also helps the audience to appreciate their differences. Like many fluent English-speaking Peranakans, Mei was educated in a missionary school and is an anglophile. After a failed marriage to Jackie's father, Lim, a wealthy Chinese Singaporean, Mei met Albert, an Englishman serving in the British armed forces in Singapore. When Albert returned to England, Mei and Jackie followed him, and he and Mei got married despite Albert's parents' disapproval. Relationships between British servicemen and local Singaporean and Malaysian women were not uncommon. My parents had several friends who followed their British spouses to England in the 1960s and 1970s. When

the British announced the withdrawal of their troops in 1971, more than ‘30,000 British troops were stationed in Singapore’ (SG101, n.d.).

In Jackie’s back story, I decided she was four years old when she came to England, so her schooling and formative years were in England. She can be described as a 1.5 generation. While growing up in the 1970s and 1980s, Jackie likely faced overt and covert racism. Having some personal experience of this, I imagine her response to these incidents was to fully assimilate and distance herself from her foreign heritage, as predicted in Hansen’s theory of ‘Third-Generation Return’ mentioned earlier. The choice to be thoroughly British is likely to be reinforced because of her love for her stepfather Albert and her lack of ties with Singapore and Lim, her philandering father. This characterisation choice is important, as it underpins Jackie’s parenting choices and insecurities, often driving the play’s plot.

Like many British-born Chinese with parents from Hong Kong, Bernard grew up in a Chinese takeaway. Not having personal experience of this, I relied on academic studies (Song, 1995; Hsiao, 2020), YouTube videos (BBC Stories, 2019; Fong, 2022) and British Chinese literary works such as *Sour Sweet*, *Sweet Mandarin*, *Happy Families*, *Chinglish*, *Takeaway: Stories of A Childhood from Behind the Counter*, *Game Boy* (1997) and *Snowdrop* (1997) for character details and inspiration. Like Jackie, Bernard would have experienced racist incidents growing up, and given his life in the takeaway, these incidents are likely to have been more violent and threatening. I decided that Jackie and Bernard responded to these adverse childhood experiences by distancing themselves from their Chinese heritage and fully assimilating into British society. This explains why neither can speak Chinese and have little interest in Chinese culture and traditions. By distancing themselves from their Chinese heritage to fit in, Jackie’s and Bernard’s approaches could be construed as internalised racism, a relatively undeveloped area of study, discussed in Hwang’s research on Asian Americans (2021). In deliberately crafting Jackie and Bernard as indifferent to their Chinese heritage, there is more tension and conflict when Peter is introduced to the family. His relationship with Wendy threatens to challenge their values, forcing them to question their identities.

Inspired by Phoebe Waller-Bridge’s characterisation of Fleabag and her sister Claire in Waller-Bridge’s play *Fleabag* (2013), third-generation Wendy and Lisa are crafted to have contrasting character traits. Lisa’s character as an academically high-achieving young lawyer conforms to that of the ‘model minority’ discussed earlier. Wendy, who is not academically inclined, works in Curry’s, the electrical store. This dynamic of over-and under-achieving sisters

is also consistent with Wiz Wharton's characterisation of Lily and her sister Maya in *Ghost Girl, Banana* (2023). Being stubborn, impulsive and unconventional in her choices, Wendy represents a non-stereotypical British Chinese female character. Their choices of boyfriends are also different. Lisa has been in a long-term relationship with her white British boyfriend, Tom, since sixth form college. In contrast, Wendy has had mostly short-term relationships with various men, including a skinhead and cosplay artist. Neither sister has had a Chinese boyfriend. While crafting Wendy as a rebellious, unconventional female protagonist allows for comedy, it also endears her to the audience, enabling them to sympathise with her as the stakes increase. Furthermore, such a British Chinese female character is rarely seen on the British stage. As expected, there is a rivalry between the two sisters, especially as Wendy feels that Mei and her late grandmother, Ah Por admire and respect the academically capable Lisa more than her. Wendy's parents, Jackie and Bernard, appear to support her life goals. However, Wendy believes her parents' support is disingenuous and more reflective of their need to appear modern and progressive. While the rivalry between the two sisters does not directly drive the play's plot, it contributes to Wendy's insecurity within the family structure, which inadvertently drives some of Wendy's choices.

I chose Reading, Berkshire, as a setting for the play because, as discussed in the historical background of British Chinese, many Chinese takeaways are dispersed throughout Britain to minimise competition and business rivalry. Furthermore, setting the play in the home counties differentiates *Wendy and Min* from other British Chinese plays, often set in cities such as London or Liverpool. In addition, having grown up in the home counties, I felt that I would have a greater understanding of the characters lived experiences than if I had chosen a big city setting with larger Chinese communities.

Not being a male and not having lived in China, crafting Peter's character was perhaps the hardest for me. As mentioned earlier, I strive for authenticity when crafting characters. Thus, I hoped to conduct informal interviews with several Chinese male students in the UK in their mid to late 20s to uncover their thoughts and opinions on family, love, relationships and marriage. However, despite my efforts, the students I contacted refused to meet me, citing their poor English or discomfort in expressing their views. However, I did speak to a friend's cousin, who is in his late 20s and lives in Dalian, Liaoning, in northern China. Despite having never visited England, his command of English is good because his job requires him to communicate with overseas offices. He shared that he learnt his English from various media sources. Another Chinese friend in her 30s told me that she and many of her peers learnt their English from Harry

Potter books, which are quite popular in China. A radio programme on Chinese students in the UK reports that many students like to study in Glasgow because they think the university looks like Hogwarts (Chu, 2022). Hence, I decided that I would make Peter a Harry Potter fan, and given that Wendy likes cosplay, this could be a shared interest for them.

My PhD supervisor, David Britton, also connected me with a Chinese male from Hebei who is married with two children and has lived in England and Wales for some time. Over a Zoom call, he generously shared his thoughts, opinions, and anecdotes on relationships, marriage and immigrating to Britain. However, these informal interviews were insufficient to form Peter's character. Hence, to corroborate and complement the information I had gathered, I also watched Chinese TV dramas described as realistic portrayals of contemporary romantic relationships in China. These include *Ode to Joy*, 欢乐颂 (Hou, 2016-2017); *All is Well*, 都挺好 (Hou, 2019); and *Delicious Romance*, 爱很美味, (Fang, 2021).

From these various sources, I also learned that it is stereotypical to assume that all Chinese students are from wealthy families. Many come from 'modest financial backgrounds' (Chu, 2022). Consistent with this, I decided to create Peter with a similar financial background and to have him borrow money from his relatives for his PhD studies in the UK. By creating sufficiently high stakes for Peter, his extreme actions to stay in the UK are plausible.

Dramatic Structure and Style

In finding a structure to explore the settlement of Chinese migrants to Britain, I initially sought inspiration from playwright August Wilson's decade plays (from 1900 to 1990) on African American life. However, after researching Chinese migration to Britain, I realised I would need to write at least eight plays to adequately cover the various waves of migration. This task is beyond the scope of a PhD.

Subsequently, I considered adopting a dramatic structure like Moira Buffini's, *Loveplay* (2001), which condenses exploring love and sex over two millennia in ten scenes. Although this overarching approach would provide a valuable historical portrait of the Chinese in Britain, single scenes might not sufficiently interrogate the diverse characters and their lived experiences. Billington (2001) alludes to the potential disadvantage of this form when he comments, 'Buffini's chosen form also risks turning the play into a series of rapid revue sketches'.

I also considered using a dramatic style similar to Ping Chong's play *Chinoiserie* (2004) which premiered in Nebraska in 1995. The play uses text, movement, costumes, Chinese opera and media projection to explore significant historical events in East-West relations (2004, pp. 59-122). These include the meeting between Qianlong, the Emperor of China, and Lord George Macartney, a trade emissary from England; the Opium Wars; the exploitation of Chinese railroad workers in America; and the tragic death of Vincent Chin by auto workers in Detroit, who blamed Japan for job losses in the auto industry and mistook Chin for a Japanese. These historical events are interwoven with Chong's personal anecdotes and vignettes, creating a collage of the intimate and the historic. However, I felt that using such an approach might be too broad-sweeping for my purposes and that the historical events might overshadow the intimate ones, with an emphasis on the pedagogical rather than the theatrical. Indeed, in Holden's review of *Chinoiserie* in *The New York Times* (1995), he stated that 'as theater "Chinoiserie" isn't especially compelling. Most of the evening has the tone of an illustrated lecture'.

In act one of *Top Girls* (1990), Caryl Churchill uses an innovative approach to explore women's socio-economic and political roles throughout history. The play collapses time and space by seating five women of different nationalities and histories at dinner with Marlene, a contemporary woman of the 1980s (1990, pp. 51-83). I considered using this non-generational approach in a single act as a possibility in exploring the British Chinese community. I imagined various characters from different countries of origin, socio-economic classes, and times of arrival together in one space. These could include, for example, historical figures such as missionary Shen Fuzhong, William Macao, Britain's first Chinese resident, as well as imagined figures such as a sailor working for the East India Company, a Singaporean Chinese student from the 1960s, a Hong Kong takeaway owner from the 1970s, and an illegal Chinese migrant from the noughties. However, after attempting a few scenes, I decided this dramatic structure would not let me explore inter-generational tensions arising from generational acculturational differences. Furthermore, in an inter-generational play, where the focus is on intimate family issues, dramatic stakes can often be higher, as demonstrated in; Ayub Khan-Din's *East is East* (1997); Ins Choi's *Kim's Convenience* (2012); Winsome Pinnock's *Leave Taking* (2018); Natasha Gordon's *Nine Night* (2018); Nakkiah Lui's *Black is the new White* (2019); and S. Shakthidharan's *Counting and Cracking* (2019). Therefore, I decided that an inter-generational play in two acts would be the best structure for *Wendy and Min*.

Mountains: The Dreams of Lily Kwok (2018), an inter-generational play, is In-Sook Chappell's dramatic adaptation of Helen Tse's novel *Sweet Mandarin* (2007). However, in this play, Chappell uses the genre of magic realism to tell the story of Helen's search for identity. Used by the critic Franz Roh to describe post-Expressionist art in the 1920s. Slemon (1988) proposes that magic realism in literature is an 'oxymoron' where fantasy and realism co-exist in 'binary opposition' and are 'locked in a continuous dialectic' (1988, p. 11).

Like *Wendy and Min*, *Mountains* is a three-generation play that focuses on Helen, her mother, Mabel, and her grandmother Lily. A third-generation British Chinese, Helen, a lawyer, goes to Hong Kong, Lily's country of origin, for work and finds herself confused, out-of-place and feeling very British (2018, p. 8). Helen's confusion raises the ghost of her long-dead grandmother, Lily. As time shifts and distorts, Lily takes Helen on a journey to the past, helping her to understand her family's unspoken history and restoring her sense of identity. Lily recounts the tragic murder of her father, her ne'er-do-well husband, her abandoned children, her emigration to England with Mrs Woodman, her love of cooking and the opening of her restaurant. As Helen reflects on her ancestors' hopes and ambitions, her grandmother's struggles and fierce independence, she rediscovers her sense of self. She develops pride in her ancestral heritage, leading her to exclaim at the end of the play, 'I know who I am now. Know what I want. The recipes...' (2018, p. 94).

Other plays that use magic realism or other anti-realist forms to tell British Chinese stories include Benjamin Yeoh's *Yellow Gentleman* (2018), Amy Ng's *Under the Umbrella* (2019), David Yip's *Jin Shan Gold Mountain* (2010), and Jennifer Tang's *Ghost Girl/Gwei Mui 鬼妹* (2019).

Described by Yeoh as a memory play (2018, p. 4), *Yellow Gentleman* has a dramatic structure similar to Edward Albee's *Three Tall Women* (1995). The play's main character is Malaysian Chinese Tommy Lee, who emigrated from Malaysia to Britain in the 1950s. As in *Three Tall Women*, the main protagonist is elderly, close to death, and waiting for a visit from an estranged child. The other two characters in the play are carers who personify middle-aged Tommy Lee and eighteen-year-old Tommy Lee, 'just before going to university' (2018, p. 4). The play subverts time and space enabling the younger Tommy Lees to question older Tommy about his secrets and their future. As the older Tommy Lee recalls London's heady days in the 1960s and 70s, the trio bicker and ridicule one another. The older Tommy Lee ruminates his migrant experience, racism, and choices on love, family relationships and regrets.

Like *Mountains, Under the Umbrella* (2019) uses magic realism to introduce the supernatural as it focuses on a first-generation British Chinese. Unlike Tommy Lee in *Yellow Gentleman*, who migrates from Malaysia in the 1950s, protagonist Wei, a doctor and PhD researcher in fertility, is a recent arrival from China and living in Coventry. As a woman of twenty-seven, Wei's 'sell-by date' for marriage is getting closer, and since her uncle is childless, Wei's mother, Dong and Wei's grandmother are worried that the family line will end if Wei remains single. Pressured by her mother, Dong attends 'marriage markets' in Guangzhou to find Wei a suitable marriage partner. During a return trip for Chinese New Year, Wei discovers her mother's interventions and is so furious that she returns to England. Given the title, it is not unexpected that umbrellas are used liberally in the play as props, scene-changing devices and set pieces. Their ominous presence reminds the audience of the Chinese superstition that opening an umbrella at home invites ghosts into the house. Three ghost babies appear when Dong unwittingly opens her mother's umbrella in the house. Frightened by their appearance, Dong's mother confesses that they are Dong's dead sisters, Spring, Summer and Autumn, who died of starvation because of their mother's neglect. After the trauma of her confession and the vision of her dead daughters, Wei's grandmother dies, freeing Wei to live in England and make her own choices about her singlehood.

Jin Shan Golden Mountain (2010), a semi-autobiographical play that spans over fifty years from the 1930s to the 1980s, uses text, movement, soundscape and multi-media to narrate David Yip's father, Yee Lui's arduous journey from China to England. Against the backdrop of World War II, the deportation of Chinese seaman from the UK and the rising power of Communism in China, the play charts Yee Lui's survival in Liverpool and his estranged relationship with David and his English mother.

According to the show's booklet, Jennifer Tang, writer and director of *Ghost Girl/Gwei Mui* 鬼妹 (2019), states that the play began as a verbatim project, using testimonies and interviews of members of Chinese Community Centres. The piece later evolved into a dramatic play using an anti-realist form with multimedia projections, movement and dance, and projected voices of verbatim recordings. The play tells the story of Kim, who has two mothers; a Chinese biological mother, whom Kim calls Auntie Mei, and an English foster mum. Two English and Chinese actors take on various characters interchangeably and sometimes break the fourth wall to address the audience directly. One interesting device used in the play was to have an English and Chinese actress play Kim interchangeably. Although initially disconcerting, it did add another layer to Kim's identity crisis. Is she English? Is she Chinese?

Tension in the play develops when Kim prefers to stay with her English foster mother. Mei fears losing Kim and tries to encourage Kim's Chineseness through the Chinese language, food and music. This attempt is resisted by Kim, who denounces her Chinese identity, even though she acknowledges that the white British do not entirely accept her as English. The play uses dance as a metaphor to express Kim's confusion about her identity. A young Kim is a confused and awkward dancer, unable to coordinate and ignorant of the proper steps. At the end of the play, an older Kim moves more fluidly, dancing confidently and with ease, signifying that age and experience have helped her come to terms with her hybrid identity.

While I enjoy magic realism as a genre in literature and drama, my literature review shows that it has already been used in several recent British Chinese plays to explore identity. Therefore I decided a different style might be preferable.

Monodrama is another dramatic form I considered in the early development of *Wendy and Min*. A form often used to tell immigrant or ancestry stories, the monodrama requires one performer to act all the characters in the play, as seen in Oliver Chong's *Roots* (Chong, 2014), Liu Xiaoyi's *Citizen X* (Chong, 2021) and Yulissa Campos's *I, Frida* (Mendez, 2021). Economical and suitable for theatre groups with limited resources, the performer uses their physicality, voice, and language to embody various characters. For example, in *Roots*, performer Oliver Chong plays numerous characters, including his father, ageing grandmother, various Chinese villagers, aunties and uncles, and a young receptionist. In *Citizen X*, Liu Xiaoyi interrogates what it means to be a new Chinese migrant in Singapore by going back to Jieyang, China, to interview his family about his grandfather, who came to Singapore in 1928 but returned to China. Semi-autobiographical and staged in Singapore, the two plays performed in English and Mandarin follow each performer as they uncover and learn to appreciate their ancestors' history, helping them to understand their own identity and concept of 'home'.

Performed as part of Singapore's M1 fringe festival in 2021, *I, Frida*, written and performed by Yulissa Campos, a Venezuelan migrant living in Canada, uses inspiration from Frida Kahlo and her mother to excavate the concepts of migrant identity and home. However, unlike the other monodramas mentioned *I, Frida* focuses on Campos, the performer, who tells her contemporary migrant story of assimilation and alienation in schools and other institutions through a combination of dance, music, and puppetry.

Although a form with an economic appeal, I decided against adopting the monodrama form for *Wendy and Min*. The chosen form should allow the audience to experience and

empathise with real people on stage instead of imagined characters. I also wanted to use a familiar stage setting, a British home. I aimed to create a space for a British Chinese family's ordinary and mundane hopes and struggles and resist depicting them as exotic or alien. This approach does not diminish the rich cultural heritage of Chinese living in Britain. However, as the play shows three generations of assimilation, it is imperative to show Chinese living in modern Britain not as caricatures or stereotypes but with a rich and complex psychology to present a more nuanced representation of their internal and external lives. Further, having one actor play all family members in *Wendy and Min* might confuse the audience and, more importantly, obfuscate the intra-ethnic othering, generational and cross-cultural conflicts, which is the creative impulse of the play.

Ming Ho's *Citizens of Nowhere* (2019) is a site-specific piece that uses an inter-generational structure. The play explores what it means to be first-generation and second-generation British Chinese. The short play set in real-time in a restaurant offers audience members via headsets an opportunity to 'eavesdrop' on a conversation between Linda and her two children, Jane, a Tory MP hopeful and Jun, her soon-to-be-married son. After years of running a Chinese restaurant, Linda has decided to retire to Hong Kong. How this decision impacts her second-generation children is an exploration of identity and what it means to be a contemporary British Chinese. While I found this form intriguing, I decided that as the relationship between the characters and their environment was not the focus of *Wendy and Min*, a site-specific piece might not be suitable.

The interaction between new migrants and second and third-generation individuals, such as Peter (new migrant) and Wendy (third-generation) in *Wendy and Min*, has been previously explored in Asian-American plays such as David Henry Hwang's *FOB* (1983) and Lauren Yee's *Ching Chong Chinaman* (2011). In *FOB*, a second-generation Chinese American, Dale shows animosity, loathing, and intra-racist behaviour towards Steve, a 'fresh off the boat' student from China. Dale mocks Steve's accent and questions his coming to America, 'Your fad-dah tink he sending you here so you get yo' M.B.A. den go back and covuh da world wit' trinkets and beads' (1983, p. 29). Dale's extreme aggression towards Steve likely stems from internalised racism, self-loathing and a reminder of his efforts to become a fully assimilated American, as suggested in his monologue in the opening of Act 2, 'They've tried to cage me up with Chinese-ness when all the time we were in America. (*Pause.*) So, I've had to work real hard—real hard—to be myself. To not be a Chinese, a yellow, a slant, a gook. To be just a human being, like everyone else (1983, p. 35).

In Lauren Yee's satirical play, *Ching Chong Chinaman* (2011), the Wongs, Ed, Grace, Upton and Desdemona, are a third and fourth-generation fully assimilated Chinese American family who are forced to confront their complex and complicated identity when Chinese migrant Jinqiang, comes to live in their laundry room. Employed as an indentured servant by Upton to do his schoolwork and chores so he can qualify for an international World of Warcraft tournament, Jinqiang dreams of being 'America's Next Top Dancer'. Unable to pronounce his name correctly, Ed calls Jinqiang, Ching Chong, for which his daughter, Desdemona, admonishes him as racist. Ed's and Grace's ambivalence towards Jinqiang is similar to Bernard's and Jackie's treatment of Peter in *Wendy and Min*. Also, like Bernard and Jackie, Ed's and Grace's interaction with a new Chinese migrant force them to confront the consequences of their internalised racism. For example, when Ed suggests they order Chinese food from the takeaway, Grace responds with, 'Ed, I'm scared' (2011, p. 14). This comment reflects the discomfort felt by descendants of Chinese immigrants who cannot speak Chinese and experience intra-ethnic othering by others in their community. While I appreciated Yee's approach of using comedy and satire to explore cultural identity and challenge stereotypes, I felt that satire with over-the-top characters might detract from my objective of authenticating a British Chinese family and their lived experiences.

After researching all these various forms and styles, I decided that a text-based realist or naturalistic structure would best serve my dramatic intentions. As both realism and naturalism represent characters as they are, writers often use the terms interchangeably. However, unlike realism, causality is a crucial aspect of naturalism. Naturalism seeks to 'scientifically' understand a character's relationship with the world and how this relationship impacts their motivations and actions. Examples of well-known playwrights using this form include Henrik Ibsen in *A Doll's House* (1998, first published in 1879) and August Strindberg in *Miss Julie* (1976, first published in 1888). Set in other countries and written over a hundred years ago, both plays resonate with *Wendy and Min*. The constraints of family and societal expectations drive Wendy's, Nora's, and Julie's actions, ultimately leading them to authenticity and selfhood.

Compared to British Chinese theatre, Black British theatre and British Asian theatre have a long history of development and lineage. Therefore, I also reviewed their dramatic works for naturalistic plays to assess their success in representing and communicating the complexities of their communities.

Michael Pearce (2017) divides the lineage of post-war Black British writing into three generations. The first generation of playwrights immigrated to Britain between the 1950s to 1970s and wrote plays that focussed on ‘themes of alienation, (un)belonging, disillusionment with the “Mother Land” and a nostalgic yearning for their home’ (2017, p. 5). Second-generation writing in the 80s and 90s concentrates on ‘inter-generational culture-clash, (un)belonging and self-discovery’ (2017, p. 5). Finally, third-generation writing frequently represents inner city ‘urban youth...diasporic themes and associated issues of identity are less prevalent’ (2017, p. 6).

Consistent with my dramatic aspirations for *Wendy and Min*, I found some Black British plays often used naturalism to explore the inter-generational conflict between Caribbean immigrants and their offspring and intra-racial tensions between characters of Caribbean and African origin. These include, for example, Kwame Kwei-Armah’s *Elmina’s Kitchen* (2009) and Bola Agbaje’s *Gone Too Far!* (2007). *Elmina’s Kitchen* (2009), the first black British play staged at the West End, is about three generations of black men, Clifton, Delroy (Deli) and Ashley, living and surviving in Britain. While a sick Clifton tries to repair his relationship with his estranged son Deli, second-generation Deli attempts to keep his son Ashley in college and away from gangsters like Digger, a native Grenadian who frequents Deli’s restaurant. Neither is successful. Deli, unable to forgive Clifton for cheating on his mother Elmina, refuses to live with him, and Ashley, keen to prove his manhood, joins a local Yardie gang leading to his tragic death. *Elmina’s Kitchen’s* commercial success suggests that a naturalistic inter-generational framework suitably portrays and educates on the lived experiences of minority communities and affirms the dramatic form chosen for *Wendy and Min*. Pearce notes, ‘The inclusion of multiple generations fulfils Kwei-Armah’s aim to chronicle black British experiences...Kwei-Armah’s approach to aesthetics is one that combines an educational aspect, demonstrative of his commitment to using theatre as a means to raise the self-awareness of his audience’ (2017, p. 62).

Also relevant to *Wendy and Min* is the work of Bola Agbaje, a British-born Nigerian woman who adds an alternative voice to male writers of Caribbean heritage. Similar to *Wendy and Min’s* exploration of British Chinese intra-racial relationships, Agbaje’s work focuses on differences in acculturation by examining the tensions between black British of Caribbean origin and newer migrants of African descent. Pearce notes that ‘Agbaje’s dramas...focus on issues of cultures meeting and mixing’ (2017, p. 135). The play *Gone Too Far!* (2007) is a good example. Set in a South London housing estate, the play follows two brothers, Yoruba-speaking

older brother Ikudayisi, who recently arrived from Nigeria, and his British-born brother Yemi as they struggle to negotiate their place among the diverse black British community. Pearce suggests that irrespective of their ancestral origin, second-generation writers choose themes that explore the ‘complexities of navigating a dual culture and identity’ (2017, p. 171).

British Asian theatre also has a history of representing the Asian community using various dramatic forms, including naturalism. Dominic Hingorani (2010) suggests theatre companies such as Tara Arts (now Tara Theatre), Tamasha Theatre, and Kali Theatre have found ‘myriad ways of performing the particularities and heterogenous cultural differences, histories, and diasporas of the Asian communities in Britain’ (2010, p. 191). Plays using naturalism include Ayub Khan-Din’s commercially successful play *East is East* (1997), *Deadeye* (2006) by Amber Lone, Hanif Kureshi’s *Borderline* (1999), and Jatinder Verma’s ‘Binglish’ plays ‘influenced by Jatinder Verma’s study of the *Natyasatra*’ (Hingorani, 2010, p. 46).

This limited review of Black British and British Asian theatre supports the suggestion that an inter-generational, naturalistic two-act play can offer a successful approach to depicting a minority community like the British Chinese.

Conclusion

As a British-born Chinese of Malaysian descent growing up in a small town in Hampshire in the 70s and early 80s, there was little understanding of the British Chinese. If you looked Chinese, the assumption was that you came from China or Hong Kong and grew up in a takeaway. However, as my exegesis documents, the British Chinese community is diverse and heterogeneous. Its members are from China, Hong Kong, or Taiwan, or they may be remigrants of Chinese descent from Southeast Asia or former colonies like Mauritius or Jamaica. They also include second and third-generation British-born Chinese. This lack of knowledge and understanding of the complex composition of the British Chinese community has resulted in scapegoating and racist attacks, as seen during the Covid-19 pandemic and the increase in Sino-Western political tensions.

Ignorance of the British Chinese is not unexpected given the paucity of scholarly work, the perpetuation of negative stereotypes, and the lack of authentic representation of the community in the media, on-screen and on stage. However, as my essay suggests, this is changing. *Wendy and Min*, a character-driven three-generation naturalistic play that interrogates Chineseness, acculturation differences and the ambiguity and fluidity of British Chinese identity, when Wendy, a third-generation British-born Chinese, chooses to marry a PhD student from China, adds to this growing body of British Chinese literary and dramatic works.

Using a three-generation family to explore family tensions is not unique, as shown in *Sour Sweet* (Mo, 1999), *Sweet Mandarin* (Tse, 2007), *Happy Families* (Ma, 2021) and Benjamin Yeoh's play, *Yellow Gentleman* (2018). However, uniquely in *Wendy and Min*, the characters come from different places of origin and socioeconomic backgrounds and have different experiences of what it means to be Chinese or Chineseness. Moreover, explicitly crafting the characters from different Chinese dialect backgrounds, for example, Hakka and Hokkien, enables the play to explore intra-ethnic or cross-ethnic tensions, intra-ethnic othering, and intra-racial hierarchies previously unexamined, thus contributing to existing British Chinese dramatic works.

As well as validating to the community, Knox suggests self-representation offers 'a wider range of perspectives on British Chinese culture' (2019, p. 140) and may provide a counter to problematic stereotypes. However, Knox concedes there is no guarantee, as evident

from the backlash of the BBC 3 show *Chinese Burn* (Atalla, 2017), created by Taiwanese and Hong Kong writers Shin-Fei Chen and Yennis Cheung.

To create diverse, contemporary, and authentic characters, I recognised early on that as a second-generation British-born Chinese of Malaysian descent residing in Singapore, I could not limit my sources of inspiration to personal experience. Otherwise, I would risk creating stereotypes or tropes. Therefore, I also used historical, social, and cultural studies, social media, anecdotal evidence, radio and informal interviews, and historical and contemporary British Chinese literary and dramatic works for inspiration. This comprehensive approach ensured that although *Wendy and Min* is fictional, my artistic choices are authentic, giving a more nuanced, complex and contemporary representation of the British Chinese community, specifically Chinese of Southeast Asian descent and second and third-generation British-born Chinese whose narratives are under-represented and seldom documented.

However, claiming *Wendy and Min* as a definitive representation of a British Chinese family would contradict my thesis. The play can only represent this particular family at this specific time. As my review of Chinese settlers in Britain shows, the composition and dynamics of the British Chinese community change over time, depending on the economic and political circumstances. When I grew up in the 1970s and 80s, speaking Chinese in Britain meant speaking Cantonese. However, since the 90s and '00s, with the influx of mainland Chinese businessmen, workers, professionals and students, Mandarin has been more commonly spoken. Moreover, following the Hong Kong protests, the British government has offered 'up to 3 million Hong Kong residents...the chance to settle in the UK and ultimately apply for citizenship' ('Hong Kong: UK makes citizenship offer to residents', 2020), suggesting the make-up of the British Chinese community is likely to change again, which may impact the concept of Chineseness in Britain.

If I were to begin my PhD journey now, the tensions between these new Hong Kong migrants, mainland Chinese migrants, the old Hong Kong migrants and their children or grandchildren might offer a fascinating exploration of intra-racial and inter-generational tensions. Anecdotally, I have heard that some new Hong Kong migrants refuse to classify themselves as Chinese in the UK census, preferring to 'tick other', indicating that some Chinese newcomers in Britain prefer to be categorised by their nationality rather than ethnicity. For example, some Chinese from Hong Kong prefer to be identified as Hong Kongers or Hongkongese ('Hong Kong handover: Am I Chinese or a Hongkonger?', 2022).

Wendy and Min's representation of a British Chinese family is also consistent with current British media trends. For example, *Hollyoaks*, a popular British TV soap opera, includes a Chinese family in their series for the first time (Lindsay & Patterson, 2022). Chinese or East Asian faces are also better represented in TV advertisements.

Finally, *Wendy and Min* contributes to the community by offering a broader perspective of Chineseness and what it means to be British Chinese. Despite some cultural similarities, my exegesis shows that within the British Chinese community, Chineseness is a contested space; therefore, intra-racial othering and intra-racial hierarchies are nonsensical. Second and third-generation British Chinese, often called 'not British enough' or 'not Chinese enough', should embrace this space and be confident that their hyphenated identity is unique and integral to modern British national identity. As Sarah Ping ruminates in her radio documentary *Becoming British Chinese*, 'I hope we can find a unique British Chinese identity that we can be proud of and claim as our own' (2022, 27.41mins).

APPENDIX A

Our Family Kamcheng



APPENDIX B

My Wedding Kwa



APPENDIX C

The Wedding Altar in My Home with Dragon and Phoenix Candles



“Double Happiness” Wedding Banner at Our Hotel Wedding Banquet



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