



BOOK LIST

Books on the Chinese-American Experience

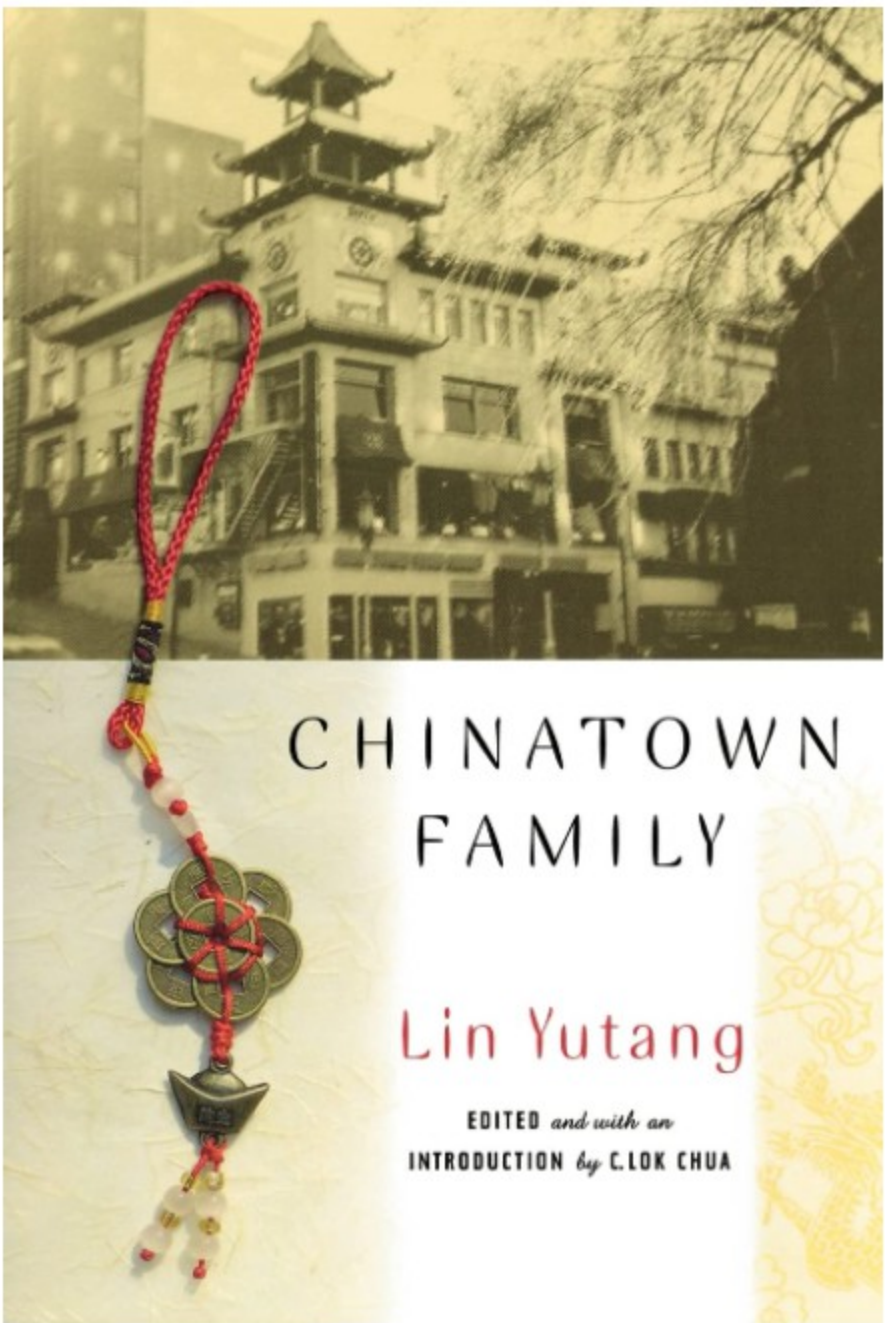
To celebrate AAPI month, we partnered with Asia Society to round up five books that capture different facets of what it means to be Chinese-American.

EDITORS — MAY 28, 2024

MISC.



Literature has long played a critical role in telling the story of diasporic communities, shedding light on experiences that are often marginalized. To celebrate Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) [Heritage Month](#) — a commemoration of diasporic contributions to America every May — in this partner post with Asia Society in New York, we asked five Chinese-American colleagues to each recommend a book that captures an aspect of the Chinese-American experience, or that resonates with them personally. From a 1948 novel about a Chinese laundromat on the Upper East Side, to a new biography of Hollywood’s first Asian-American movie star, we hope this selection captures some of the diversity, nuances and evolution of these communities and their unfolding stories.



Buy the book >

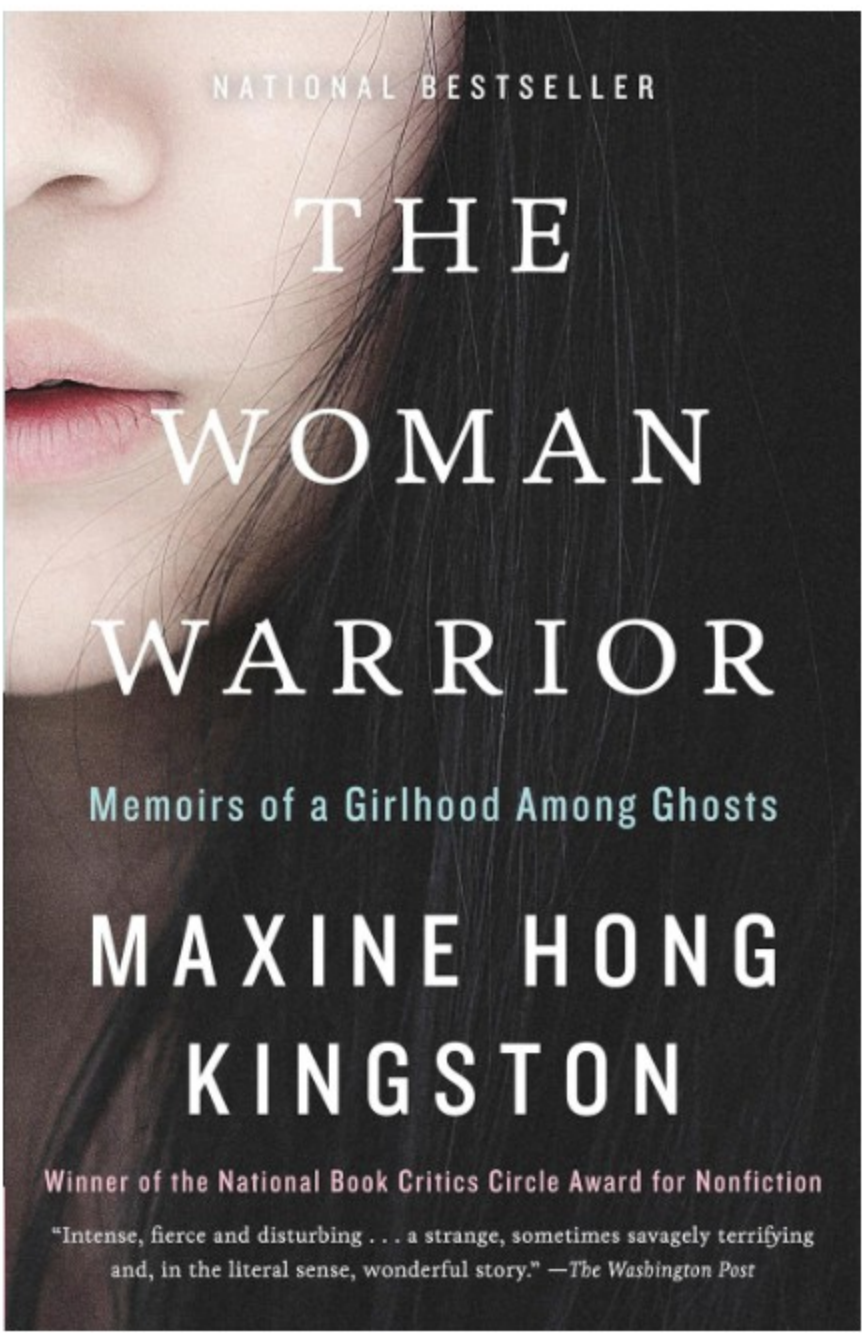
1. Chinatown Family
A Novel

LIN YUTANG | MAY 2, 2024 | RUTGERS UNIVERSITY PRESS

This novel, by the celebrated early 20th century Chinese writer and translator Lin Yutang, tells the story of the Fongs, a family of Chinese immigrants that runs a laundry on the Upper East Side of New York City in the early 1900s. *Chinatown Family* centers around the personal and romantic lives of the three sons of the family, and spans two generations, capturing the nuanced and ever-changing relationships that first-and second-generation immigrants have with the United States. As the novel progresses, it also exposes the tension between the American desire for material wealth and the traditional

Chinese commitment of putting family before all else. Members of the Fong family grapple with a question that many Chinese-Americans struggle with today: can you attain the American dream without damaging familial ties?

— recommended by Wenxuan (Wendy) Ma



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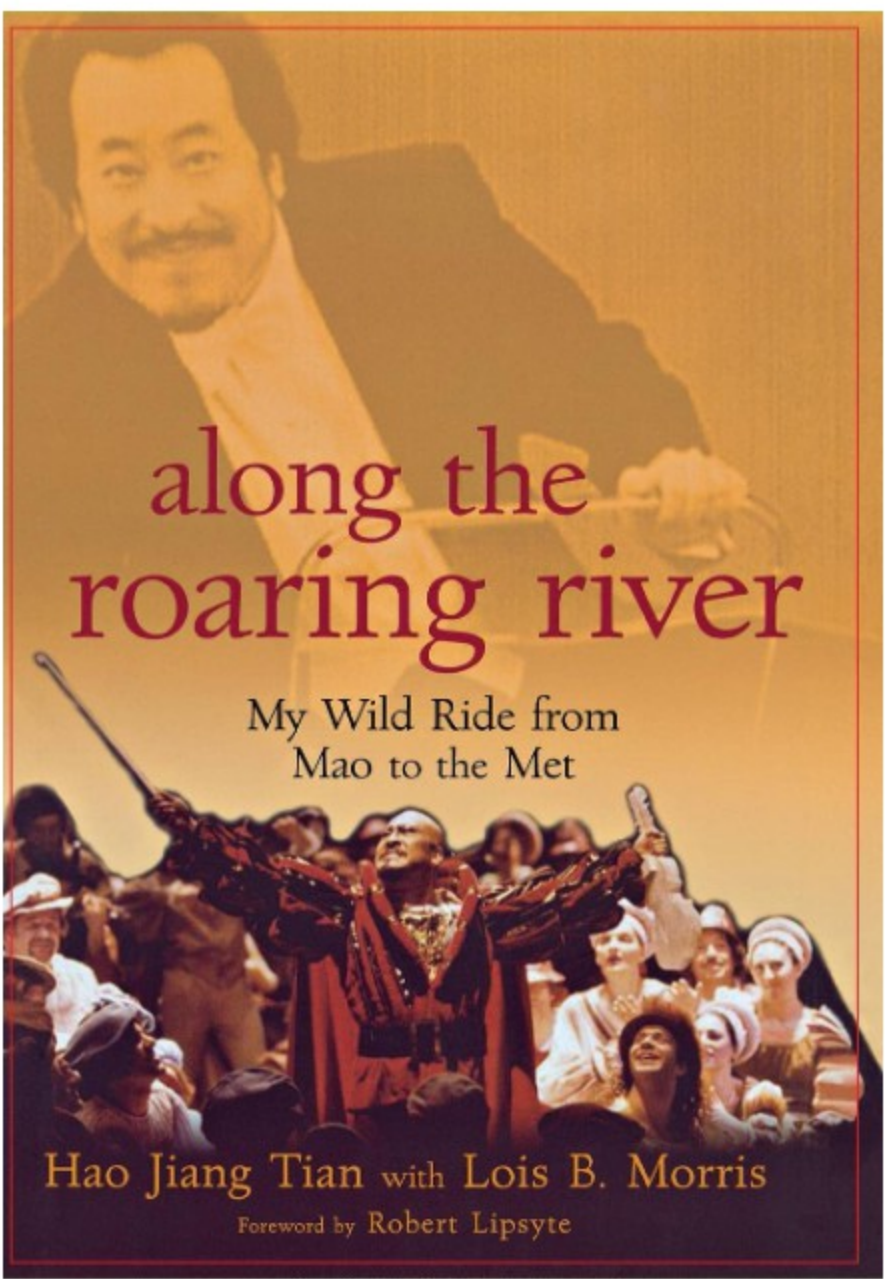
2. The Woman Warrior

Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts

MAXINE HONG KINGSTON | APRIL 23, 1989 | VINTAGE

Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* intricately blends memoir and myth to explore the complexities of Chinese-American identity. Through the stories of five women — Kingston’s mother, Brave Orchid; her long-dead aunt, Moon Orchid; the mythical warrior Hua Mulan; the “No-Name Woman”; and Kingston herself — the book delves into the dualities faced by Chinese-American women, balancing traditional Chinese values with modern American expectations. Kingston’s relationship with her mother is particularly compelling. Brave Orchid, a former doctor and midwife in China, both instills resilience in Kingston while also teaching her to conform to the submissive role expected of Chinese girls. Kingston’s lyrical prose and evocative storytelling shine as she weaves her experiences with her mother’s “talk-stories,” creating a rich tapestry of cultural heritage and personal struggle.

— recommended by Betty Wang



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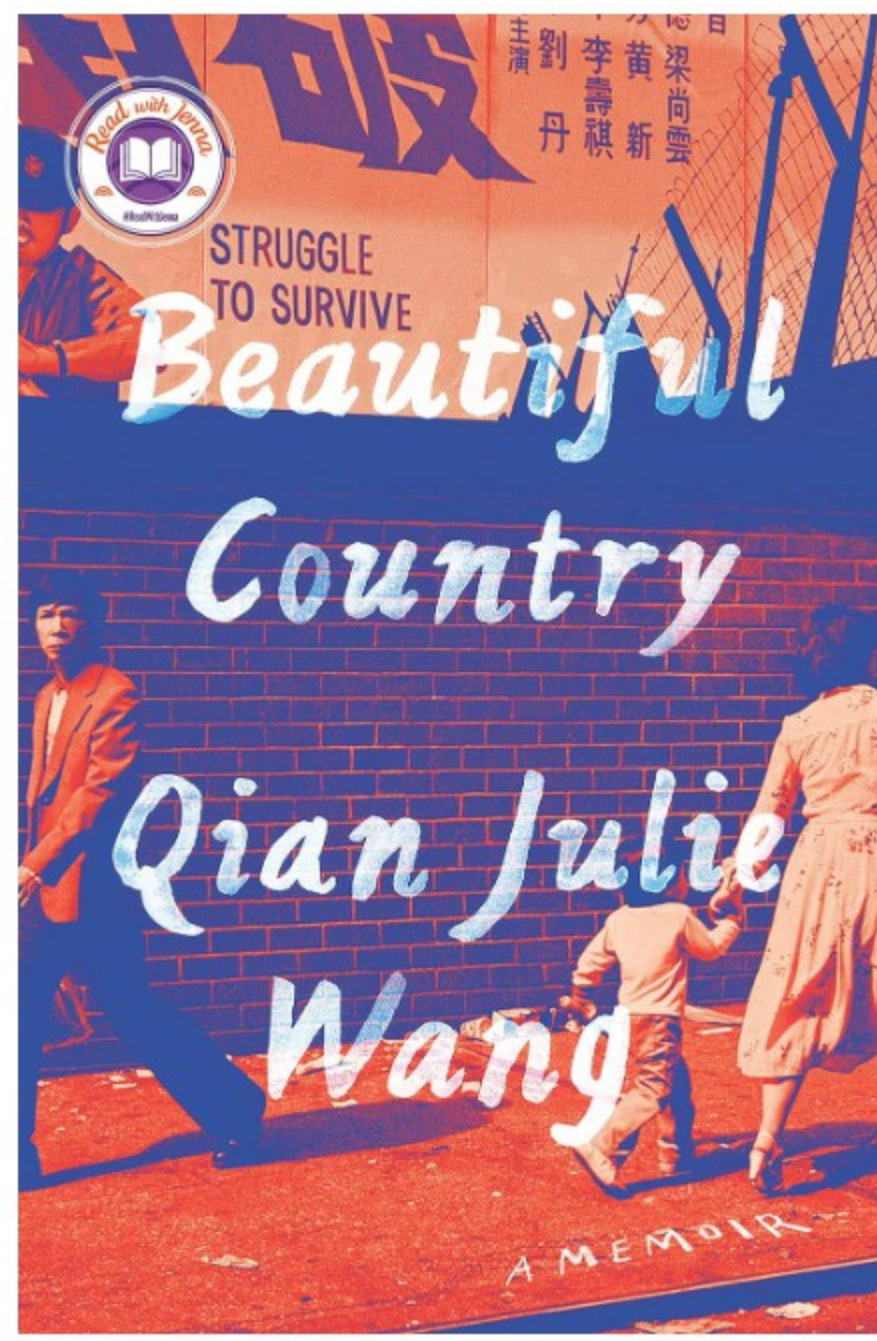
3. Along the Roaring River

My Wild Ride from Mao to the Met

HAO JIANG TIAN | APRIL 1, 2008 | TRADE PAPER PRESS

Along the Roaring River is an inspiring, romantic and fateful memoir written by Hao Jiang Tian, the first Chinese-born opera singer to make it on the world stage. A rebellious child who lived on his own during the Cultural Revolution before laboring in a factory for seven years, Tian seemed an unlikely candidate to make it in the world of Western classical music. He recalls listening to the banned Bethoven Symphony No. 6 on a record player as a child. He describes his first experience going to the Metropolitan Opera in New York City, where he spent \$8 out of the \$35 he had the day after he landed in America, for a standing pass to watch Pavarotti in Verdi’s *Ernani*. Now an American citizen, Tian has performed over 1400 times at venues across the world — and has helped pave the way for other Asian singers in the world of opera.

— recommended by Ping An



[Buy the book >](#)

4. Beautiful Country

A Memoir

QIAN JULIE WANG | SEPTEMBER 7, 2021 | DOUBLEDAY

Qian Julie Wang’s *Beautiful Country* (a literal translation of America, 美国, in Chinese) is a heart-wrenching memoir about how Wang’s family illegally moved from China to the U.S. when she was seven years old. Her parents, professors back in China, had to work in sweatshops in New York City, and their life was plagued by poverty, stress and illness — while as a child, she had to navigate an often cruel adult world. Wang describes, with poignant prose and unbridled honesty, how her undocumented status created an ever-present shadow of anxiety and fear that came to characterize her childhood. *Beautiful Country* is a moving and thought-provoking memoir that challenges both what it means to be a “beautiful country,” and how our society treats those who make incredible sacrifices to come here.

— recommended by Taili Ni



[Buy the book >](#)

5. Not Your China Doll

The Wild and Shimmering Life of Anna May Wong

KATIE GEE SALISBURY | MARCH 12, 2024 | DUTTON

You may recognize the name Anna May Wong — Hollywood’s first Asian-American movie star, active from 1919 to the early 1960s — from books, documentaries, or the recent TV mini-series *Hollywood*. But this biography tells Wong’s unique story in parallel with the development of Hollywood itself, and the creation of the American movie star. It reframes Wong’s life and career not as one of regret and missed opportunities, but grants her agency over the choices that led to both her greatest accomplishments and bitterest disappointments. Gee Salisbury also weaves in the story of her own life and family history, reminding us that the past is never further than the present. *Not Your China Doll* is a fiercely readable, meticulously researched and entertaining account with a serious journalistic foundation, intent on reclaiming the legacy of Anna May Wong. ■

— recommended by Ami Li