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Alyson Lo April 12, 2021

The Inheritance

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An feature-length screenplay exploring difficulties of existing in the Asian-American hyphen

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An abstract of
A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
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Abstract

The Inheritance: An feature-length screenplay exploring difficulties of existing in the Asian-American hyphen

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The Inheritance is a full-length dramatic screenplay with comedic overtones about an estranged Asian-American family who begrudgingly works together in order to search for their late mother's inheritance. Though this serves as the narrative plot, the screenplay acts as an exploration of reckoning with existing in the Asian-American hyphen. In discovering to what degree each character upholds Chinese values against American ones, the text focuses on the relationship between collectivist and individualist values and how the model minority and yellow peril concepts affect Asian-Americans. More broadly, the screenplay also investigates the breadth of experiences of immigration, assimilation, and the American Dream.

In addition to the feature-length screenplay, *The Inheritance* also comes with a joint honors creative statement, which details research regarding the history of Asian-American representation in literature, television, and film, a film review of prominent Asian-American films, and a review of common Asian tropes and stereotypes. Further, it also includes a detailed summary of the writing process for a feature-length film, the sequence method, and outlines of the story.

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I. Introduction

There's a famous Chinese phrase, which loosely translated means: every family has an unreadable bible. Each household has its own unique set of issues and problematic relationships that they cannot always solve. Rather, we stay together and argue, never fully solving the problems of the unreadable bible but still learning to love each other despite them.

In Asian-American life there exists a much more complex unreadable bible. On top of standard relationship and communication issues, Asian-American families carry the additional burden of the hyphen. Asian families used to be about multi-generational households, grooming kids to become doctors and lawyers, and above all focusing on elders and ancestry first. Not anymore. On the whole, recent Asian-American generations have been rebelling – not just in the typical sex, drugs, and rock-and-roll, but rather in going against family standards that solidify the model minority myth. This rebellion brings its own unique tension within each specific household. In focusing less on the family and more on themselves, these generations have moved into the space of not quite Asian and not quite American. We exist in the in between, and each family's unreadable bible is thicker because of it.

In recognizing this foundational issue that spans across the Asian diaspora, I wanted to create a creative work that showcased and explored this unique problem. Specifically, this took the form of a full length screenplay. Although I had not written a 90-page screenplay before, my previous experience writing countless short films and pilots prepared me for the endeavor. Further, the importance of a screenplay that brings more unspoken Asian-American themes into the limelight is of significance in a current age where momentum for these films is high.

Although in the last year there has been a big boom in regards to Asian-American film, my thesis, *The Inheritance,* differs in that it centers on a less-stereotypical Asian story. Yes,

Asian-American representation has moved away from the horrible representations of accents, buck teeth, and uncleanliness. But many representations in media still depict us in stereotypes. Just recently, *Fresh off the Boat* was lauded as great Asian-American representation, but the show further perpetuated conventional images of model minority and tiger moms. *Crazy Rich Asians* also acted as great representation. In fact, it was one of the first times I went to a theater to see an all Asian cast on screen. But the film is not representative of much of the Asian-American community. It focused on the top echelon of society, therefore not indicative of most Asian-American experiences. Further, much of the film was centered in Singapore and assimilation into Singaporean society, so although it was a breakthrough in our representation, it lacked many facets of Asian-America I still crave on screen.

Current representation is problematic because being Asian-American cannot be boiled down to experiences seen in these few films or previous archetypes. Josephine Lee, a leading scholar in Asian-American studies at the University of Minnesota, perfectly summarized "Asian-American identity as stuck between antiquated and repressive Chinese values and American consumer-driven youth culture" (Lee, 92). Shah continues this idea, stating that the idea of being Asian or American as a binary gives an implication where "one term is always dominant over the other…those people identified as 'them,' 'barbaric,' and 'non-white' who are likely to be essentialized as the inferior 'Other'" (Shah). It is clear that in this case, Asians, like every other community of color in America, are 'othered' by being labeled as "*non*-white," implying we lack something.

Therefore, in being stuck between two ideas that act as foils of one another, there are naturally hundreds of different ways one can exist in the spectrum. This leads to hundreds of distinct and significant Asian-American experiences. Though the recent boom in Asian-

American representation in film has been significant, it is clear that the films above do not deal with the heart of Asian-American identity issues. I aim to deal with the most foundational issue – how to exist in the Asian-American hyphen – specifically in the form of a 90-page screenplay.

The Inheritance is a full-length dramatic screenplay with comedic overtones about an estranged Asian-American family who begrudgingly works together in order to search for their late mother's inheritance. Though this serves as the narrative plot, the screenplay reckons with different forms of existence in the Asian-American hyphen. The story is *Knives Out* but without the extreme wealth, and encompasses the drama of *Crazy Rich Asians* without the glamour. In discovering to what degree each character upholds Chinese values against American ones, the text focuses on the relationship between collectivist and individualist values and how the model minority concept affects Asian-Americans. As Asian culture's focus on the collective is constantly at odds with American individualism, Asian-Americans not only have to battle model minority and yellow peril stereotypes, but also endure internal conflict due to existing within the hyphen. I will reveal difficulties of existing in the Asian-American liminal space in my screenplay, along with analyzing these stereotypes in the literature reviewed below.

I. Literature Review

On Asian-American representation in entertainment: literature

Though today we primarily think of representation in entertainment in terms of film and television, Asian-American depictions, and the beginning of Asian stereotypes, are largely found in novels and plays. This foundation therefore must be explored when trying to have an in-depth look of Asian-American narratives overtime.

First, Ju Yon Kim's *Racial Mundane* gives an extensive history of Asian depictions and explains why Asian-Americans hold ourselves the way we do both on the screen and in reality.

The term "racial mundane" refers to how one of a certain race acts and the traditions and rituals one practices in their day to day life unique to other races (Kim, 3). In verbalizing, and therefore in a sense, quantifying the aspects of culture that differentiate races, Kim shows the main characteristics that tie us to our respective backgrounds and are publicized in entertainment.

Specifically, Kim hones in on the racial uniform and the racism against Asian-Americans throughout fixed periods in history: Chinese and the sedition acts, Japanese and WWII, and Koreans and interracial conflict through the Rodney King riots. In the nineteenth century, Chinese immigrants flocked to the US in order to participate in the Gold Rush. When these efforts to find gold became fruitless for many, immigrants stayed to begin new lives in America, primarily working as cheap laborers. Chinese-Americans were therefore depicted as vermin, characterized through the unhygienic nature of Chinatowns, lower wages, and poor living conditions. With these stereotypes cropping up, some Asian-Americans tried to distance themselves from the rest (Ozawa vs. U.S.) by being "culturally occidental, even though he seems to be racially oriental," which created the idea that mannerisms of a certain race can be separated from the body while still a product of the race's culture (Kim, 36). Ultimately these stereotypes helped justify the need for exclusion acts, and created a sort of voyeurism around Chinese and Asian culture. For example, *Yellow Jacket,* the first play deemed "Chinese" outside of yellowface in American plays, was mainly watched by upper class whites who "watched Chinese in order to enjoy both the possibility of being like them and the certainty of not being like them" (Kim, 43). In this instance, the racial mundane at the time depicted Asians as uncleanly, leading to harmful stereotypes of Chinatown and Chinese people.

In the mid twentieth century, the Japanese population was also ranked in American life based on the amount of traditions they kept. Japanese-Americans were seen as successfully

integrated into society through passing certain American markers after World War II. This led to the prioritization of Japanese war brides, who were deemed acceptable through their use of baby formula, cars, using laundry machines, and not eating rice. In this case, the racial mundane was erased in order to force immigrants into an American society rather than accepting the differences between the two. The erasure for assimilation created a rift within the Asian-American community, as those who were seen as "clinging" to traditions could not associate with those fully assimilated. This was heavily evidenced in *Tea*, a play written by Velina Hasu Houston performed in 1987. The play is set in 1968 Kansas, and centers on five Japanese women who come together after the death of a fellow Japanese War Bride. During the play each woman stands for a certain level of Americanization through how they drink their tea: the character married to a Japanese man will only have special Japanese tea in a fancy cup, the wealthiest, married to a Caucasian man, prefers coffee instead, and more middle class war bride has hers lukewarm in a nice cup (Kim, 106). Here, the racial mundane, drinking tea, is used to show how Americanized each war bride is: the more assimilated one is into culture the less traditional their tea drinking habits are. Using tea as a signal for integration or lack thereof into American society not only creates rifts between Asians within the community, but also creates a hierarchy of which Asians are deemed acceptable in American society.

Although Asian-American unity increased due to the Asian-American movement of the 1970s, rifts within and beyond the Asian-American community continued in the late twentieth century. This is specifically evidenced in the LA riots. Though the LA riots were sparked by the beating of Rodney King, protests also arose due to the killing of LaTasha Harlins by a Korean store-owner. The conflict stemming from the cultural differences of the two groups was studied in a play, *Kimchee and Chitlins* (1994). The play focused on the "racial mundane" and the

impossibility to fully understand another culture's rituals or actions. This is depicted through constant commentary made by African-Americans and Asian-Americans while the opposite race does things on stage. In both of these instances, the Asian community is judged by the amount of traditions or cultural aspects they keep. *Kimchee and Chitlins,* as well as *Tea,* both exemplify instances in entertainment where Asian-Americans are othered purely due to their traditions. After surveying these earlier forms of entertainment, it is evident that Asian representation in these spaces is mainly codified by classic stereotypes. Kim's survey of these plays therefore influences my work in revealing what previous representation lacks. Further, his analysis of how the history of Asian-America has shaped our image is important to note in dispelling existing stereotypes in my screenplay.

Kim's overview of Asian-American stereotypes across the diaspora reveals what Asian-American media is fighting against. Specifically, Josephine Lee's article, "Asian-American Drama," takes these stereotypes outlined by Kim and argues that "performance of Asian American drama and its plethora of Asian American characterizations amount to nothing less than a full-scale effort to resignify Asian American bodies and actions" (Lee, 90). This can be noted specifically in plays created after the founding of East West players, a Los Angeles theater company centered on Asian-American work (Lee, 90). Though not on the screen, this company acted as a breakthrough in pushing for representation that explained Asian experiences instead of trivializing them. "Chickencoop Chinaman" was one of the first plays the group put on, exploring harmful effects of stereotypes and the need to push for interracial unity between Asians and other ethnicities in America. This play, in comparison to the 1961 film and play *Flower Drum Song*, written by two white men, serves to empower the Asian-American community by giving them a platform to speak rather than distilling Asians down to submissive,

undeveloped characters solely there to perpetuate notions of our identity. It is therefore clear that even though these works were not seen on the screen, they acted as a foundation in "accentuating the distinction between the psychologically complex Asian American character and the media images that promote racial and gender stereotyping" (Lee, 94). In this sense, Lee's article outlined previous media that paved the way for current representation and the possibility of even writing my screenplay today.

Though Josephine Lee argues that there are dozens of Asian-American plays and media that have carved out our representation in entertainment, Erin Ninh argues that there are many flaws to many of our depictions (even those created by Asian-Americans). One of the most pervasive topics found in all Asian-American media is the concept of the model minority. Though not outlined in Ju Yon Kim's novel, Erin Ninh's article "Model Minority Narratives and the Asian American Family" details the problematic structure of twentieth century novels and films that criticize this idea.

The model minority term originates from a 1966 New York Times article "Success story: Japanese American style" written by William Petersen (Washington article p 173). The article aimed to demonstrate Asians, despite their minority status in America, were able to overcome prejudice and discrimination in order to achieve success. The idea was that if Asians, as people of color, could become wealthy in America, then African-Americans must have been granted the same resources, therefore proving through the "model minority" concept that America did not have systematic racism in place. Through aiding the government's white narrative, the model minority idea increased conflict between Asian communities and African and LatinX communities, fueling the fire of the LA riots revealed in *Kimchee and Chitlins* evidenced above.

On top of this detrimental effect on inter-racial interactions, the concept had the unexpected effect of creating stereotypes and intergenerational conflict within the Asian community itself. Instead of pushing against this concept, Asian-Americans bought into it, encouraging second and third-generation Asian-Americans to uphold these standards. Suddenly, Asian-American children were encouraged to play classical instruments and fall into medical or scientific professions in order to displaying the pinnacle of living the American Dream. Pop culture stereotypes of Asians being good at math, uncreative, competitive, and only focused on studying stem from the model minority concept after the term was coined in 1966 (Washington article 2011 p 174).

In literature and general entertainment, this manifested itself in Asian-American artists criticizing their parents for a harsh upbringing. These artists blamed previous generations for the model minority myth instead of recognizing that the model minority myth was placed as a burden upon the Asian-American community merely to uphold America's systemic racist structures. In turn, Erin Ninh argues in this article that "Asian American family stories not only tend to follow a tired formula but that this formula is a politically conservative one used by those striving for mainstream acceptance, aiming for assimilation" (Ninh, 114). Asian-American literature has therefore been too focused on intergenerational conflict in the model minority theme, pivoting the blame on Asian communities for second and third generation strife in order to fit in with the American Dream. This is perfectly evidenced in her analysis of *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), a novel and eventual blockbuster film that "partakes in self-Orientalizing; it does not include racism in its social reality, with the result that all conflict is contained to the family" (Ninh, 123). Though this film made great strides for Asian-American representation on screen, ultimately the message proved problematic. Similar to other famous Asian literature such as *The*

Fifth Chinese Daughter, The Joy Luck Club antagonizes Asian family values and blames Asian culture for suffering rather than getting to the root of the issue. It is not Asian culture that bolsters the model minority myth but rather the capitalistic American society that has forced Asian immigrants to act in these manners in order to survive and succeed in America.

In bringing this flawed representation of intergenerational conflict to my mind, I increased my attention to revealing a more true depiction of Asian familial conflict. My screenplay deals with intergenerational conflict but specifically centers on the fact that the siblings and their family at large must all compete purely for economic survival. In revealing their difficulties in simply sustaining their lives in America, I reinforce the idea that it is not Asian culture that creates high standards for future generations but rather the capitalistic American system Asian-American families, and all people of color, are placed into. Specifically, after reading Erin Ninh's book, *Ingratitude: the Debt Bound Daughter in Asian-American Literature*, I crafted my characters to reflect the pressures of maintaining the model minority myth. Additionally, I structured the resolution of my screenplay to be a unification of family, placing their relationships above the need for success that plagues them throughout the narrative.

Moving deeper into examining representation, Ninh's book, *Ingratitude,* further delves into depictions of Asian families, specifically regarding Asian daughters. Unlike Ninh's previous article, she argues in *Ingratitude* that the depictions of Asian-American daughters can be used as a beginning window into Asian families. It is important to note Ninh only references burdens on Asian daughters and not Asian sons or other Asian children. This is due to the common Asian ideology of praising sons instead of daughters, evidenced through the high amount of orphaned daughters through China's One-Child policy (CBC). In this idea of claiming more value for a son

than a daughter, Asian daughters are generally groomed to serve the family, leading to the depictions of Asian daughters Ninh discusses in her book.

Ninh places the regular representations of the ungrateful Asian daughter into three categories: debt bondage, discursive disownment, and designated failure. Regarding debt bondage, children became investments rather than assets used for labor. Investing in a child therefore puts pressure on both the parents and the daughter, manifesting itself needing to do chores, help the family, or pursue a certain profession because of the need to payback the family for investing resources. “Debt-bound” daughters are therefore pressured to guarantee success, leading to the need to “wrap your American successes around you like a private shawl” in order to prove your worth to your own family (Ninh, 58). I used this aspect of the Asian-American familial structure to create Jane, the protagonist of the screenplay. Though Jane is individualistic, the fear of needing to seem successful is exhibited in her compulsion to fake wealth towards her siblings. Further, the debt-bound daughter is heavily referenced in Tammy, who begins the story constantly submissive to the collective family.

Ingratitude also references another type of daughter designed for designated failure. These children, due to veering outside of the typical bounds expected of an Asian child, are automatically written off by their family. Besides professions, these bounds include promiscuity and drugs, as seen in two famous Asian-American novels: the *Fifth Chinese Daughter* and *Everything I Never Told You*. Compounded with the model minority idea, children are also forced to keep up the reputation of the family, which means that when you slip up, your family has “no choice” but to punish you (Ninh, 67). I therefore continued this idea of designated failure as I believed was also true to reality through May, a supporting character of my ensemble. May was seen as detached from both her parents, therefore harboring resentment against her siblings

due to being seen as the failure of the three daughters. It is evident that Ninh's book therefore delved deeper into familial structures of Asian-American families both in literature and in reality, which helped with the character formation in my screenplay.

On Asian-American representation in entertainment: film and television

After reviewing past literature depictions of Asian-America, I was then able to move towards representations of Asian-Americans namely in film and television. Even in this modern age, illustrations of Asian-America on screen is still lacking. According to the USC Annenberg School, from 2007 to 2015 only 4.8% of all speaking or named roles in Hollywood were played by Asian actors. Further, not a singular lead or co-lead role was played by an Asian actor in that time period, and merely 2.8% of projects in Hollywood were directed by someone who identifies as Asian American (Annenberg Institute). Compared to Asians making up 5.6% of the US population, representation in the industry is about half of what it should be in order to be proportional to the US makeup (Pew 2020). Further, Asian representation in visual media has only grown (and even then, barely) in the last two decades, therefore necessitating a look at the previous literature as it stood as the only basis of representation.

Asian representation through other forms of media such as YouTube also barely made a dent in breaking Asian-American typecasts, even if they do act as an increased form of representation for our diaspora. The repeat study from 2002 to 2011 by Sun et. al. titled "Shifting Receptions: Asian American Stereotypes and the Exploration of Comprehensive Media Literacy" showed that thoughts on Asian-American representation in the media has not changed even with the rise of more media platforms. The study repeated the same use of college student focus groups (specifically surveying groups with a relatively even number of Asians, European Americans, and African Americans) in order to determine how average media consumers viewed

Asian-American representation in the entertainment industry. Both the 2002 and 2011 results found that all racial groups recognize that Asian-American representations in classic media are problematic. However, all the college students agreed that there is no way around these stereotypes in media, as corporations will forever use them in order to increase a profit (Sun, 308). Although Asian-Americans are willing to forge better representations in the media, media conglomerates are most likely unwilling to break these stereotypes in fear of risking audience approval. Further, even with the rise of famous Asian YouTubers such as Wong Fu Productions or NigaHiga, the study found that only 26.7% of the Asian-Americans surveyed knew of these YouTubers, and none of those surveyed from other racial groups knew about them (Sun, 306). Along with these results, the study reveals that those of differing races outside of the Asian students studied primarily used the media to form their perceptions about Asian people (Sun, 304). It is therefore evident that as mentioned in the section outlining Asian stereotypes, the portrayals of the Asian diaspora as the model minority or yellow peril (seen through Lucy Liu in *Charlie's Angels* or in the Japanese businessman of *Die Hard* respectively*)* clearly reinforce the belief that Asian-Americans will always be "other." These findings reveal it is to not only important to have Asian-American representation, but it is also crucial to have realistic depictions that break these stereotypes.

Once I completed analyzing the literature and reviewing statistics about the Asians in Hollywood and general media, I began to instead explore the content of Asian characters found in film and TV. Similar to the representations found in those past novels analyzed, Hemant Shah declares that there are four common stereotypes of Asians in visual entertainment that coincide with those I previously listed in the section above: Yellow Peril, Charlie Chan, Dragon Lady and Lotus Blossom (Shah). It is important to note that Shah labels the model minority stereotype as

Charlie Chan here, and Shah's two ideas regarding women coincide with Erin Ninh's idea of either promiscuity or submission in Asian women. I will therefore go into a closer look at each of Shah's four labels.

First, the idea of "yellow peril," translates to many Hollywood films of the silent era. In the US, Yellow Peril mainly stems from white labor unions in fear of the increasing Asian population taking available jobs or competing in the agriculture business (Shah). This fear generated rhetoric against the Asian population, most notably in the New York Times: "if there were to be a flood tide of Chinese population – a population befouled with social vices, with no knowledge or appreciation of free institutions or constitutional liberty, heathenish souls and heathenish propensities, we should be prepared to bid farewell to republicanism" (Shah). This quote reveals the yellow peril stereotypes of the Chinese population that paint them as animalistic, against democratic values, and overall a threat to American life.

Films such as *Broken Blossoms (1920)* and *The Cheat* depict Asian men as predatory towards white women while also emasculating them (Shah). This is heavily translated to other films prevalent in our pop culture today; the depiction of Mr. Yunioshi (played by a white man, Mickey Rooney) in *Breakfast at Tiffany's (1961)* clearly portrays the Japanese man with large buck teeth, ugly glasses, and a heavy Asian accent that renders him unappealing to the audience. Even more recently, Justin Lin's *Better Luck Tomorrow (2002)* capitalizes on the yellow peril idea. *Better Luck Tomorrow* broke barriers in portraying Asian children outside of the model minority. In fact, Lin uses his film to go against stereotypes by focusing on high school students driven to rebel because of the pressures of the model minority myth. These Asian-American high schoolers become criminals, involved with violence and drugs that act as the antithesis to the model minority idea. However, in doing so the film highlights similar yellow peril archetypes;

the main characters Ben and Virgil participate in a robbery, prostitution, and cheating schemes which directly parallel ideas of Asians being threatening or dangerous. These films reveal representations of the Asian diaspora have not moved very far from that of 1920, and that stereotypes of Asians through the Yellow Peril lens remain prominent today.

Though Yellow Peril is a prevalent representation, the idea of a "Charlie Chan," or an Asian character embodying the model minority myth, also rings true to pop culture today. Shah describes Charlie Chans as "deferential to whites, non-threatening, and revealing his 'Asian wisdom' in snippets of 'fortune-cookie' dialogue" (Shah). Jackie Chan perfectly personifies this character in the famous *Rush Hour* series, in which he plays a buddy cop, helpful in solving the case but not the full hero of the story (that title is reserved for Detective Carter, who begins in the LAPD unlike Chan's character originating from Hong Kong). Jackie Chan's more recent film *The Foreigner (2017)* also furthers this notion. Although Chan takes the lead role in the film, the title itself automatically "others" him by calling him something foreign. Additionally, the movie poster also labels the film with the words "never push a good man too far," implying that Jackie Chan embodied the idea of an Asian character as non-threatening. His character even owned a Chinese restaurant in the film, classically falling into Asian stereotypes until he was pushed to the limit. Chan's presence in the film industry, though great for representation on the surface, proves that even as recently as 2017, Asian characters are forced into these archetypes.

Finally, Shah's idea of Dragon Lady and Lotus Blossoms continue the ideas that Erin Ninh laid out in *Ingratitude*. Shah states that the Dragon lady is "diabolical, sneaky, and mean, but with the added characteristics of being sexually alluring and sophisticated" while the Lotus Blossom is "submissive, meek, and ready to serve a man's every need" (Shah). Lucy Liu's portrayal of Asian women in both film and television easily evidences the Dragon Lady idea. In

Kill Bill: Volume 1 and the television show *Ally McBeal*, Liu's characters are cold but incredibly talented, skilled, and intelligent. Further, each character exudes sexual appeal, reinforcing the exact definition that Shah presents for the Dragon Lady. Though Liu is a prominent Asian-American actress that has increased representation, like Jackie Chan, these depictions, which at first seem empowering, can prove problematic. In regards to the Lotus Blossom character, an incredibly prominent example is Lily in *Pitch Perfect (2012)* played by Hana Mae Lee. Lily is silent the whole time, only whispering certain mysterious phrases and overall remaining the quietest of the group throughout all three films. Her portrayal, though seen as another form of recurring comedy in the series, furthers the idea of Asian women being quiet, shy, and compliant, especially since she is given no character arc throughout the three films.

It is therefore evident that Asian depictions in traditional visual media remain highly problematic, even with an increased Asian-American presence both in Hollywood and on the Internet at large. This is perfectly summarized in *Interior Chinatown* (2020), a book written by Charles Yu, an Asian-American novelist and TV writer for HBO. Although Yu's position as a television writer in Hollywood evidences the growth of Asian-Americans in media, his novel depicts the hardship that stems from stereotypes such as Charlie Chan, Yellow Peril, Lotus Blossom, and Dragon Lady on screen. Written in a screenplay format, Yu focuses on a fictional Chinatown in which all the Asian men and women attempt to break into the industry. Their need to play roles he outlines as "Oriental Guy," "Kung Fu Guy," "Generic Asian Man," "Pretty Oriental Flower," and "Woman with Almond Eyes" are just a few examples of actual titles Asian-American actors are given on screen. Further, the poverty and hardship characters in *Interior Chinatown* endure stems from striving for top roles in the novel. In setting up the town, and characters like this, Yu reveals to readers how toxic current Asian-American representation

in Hollywood is. These roles not only force Asian-Americans to play mere shells of who we are, but also pit Asian-Americans against each other merely to gain these demeaning roles. What's more, these roles keep Yu's fictionalized Chinatown in poverty, connoting the unattainability of proper representation in the current system and how the industry confines Asians: "The two words: Asian Guy…Two words that define you, flatten you, trap you and keep you here…Your most salient feature, overshadowing any other feature about you, making irrelevant any other characteristic" (Yu, 94). Yu evidences the effects of Asian stereotypes that Shah previously outlined, demonstrating the need for more holistic representation for Asians in Hollywood.

In *The Inheritance*, I will break classic stereotypes of the model minority, yellow peril, dragon lady, and lotus blossoms thrust upon Asian characters and Asian-Americans. Beginning with the model minority stereotype, all of my characters generally fall outside of this norm. Two characters, May and Nelson, specifically struggle with a lack of success. Nelson does not have a family, dresses in a more liberal way than his siblings, and leaves his mom's house in a dilapidated state. Like Nelson, May also fails to attain the model minority standard in not having children and living in a cramped apartment that makes her unsuitable for fostering a child. Both stand as examples of those who fall outside of the model minority myth of maintaining a nuclear family, working in a lucrative field, etc.

Jane and Tammy also work towards breaking these characterizations. The main sibling, Jane, falls within the model minority category but demonstrates the pressure of that label. Jane, whose entrepreneurial business failed, continues to maintain her image as the wealthiest sibling in order to uphold the standard of the model minority idea. The deep-rooted need to hold onto successful status and fear of humiliation regarding failure is what ultimately drives her to immediately search for the inheritance. Finally, Tammy breaks stereotypes in moving from meek

to outspoken by the end of the screenplay. In countering the lotus blossom stereotype of a quiet and submissive Asian woman, Tammy ends the film by finding her own sovereignty outside of her relationship.

Writing the Screenplay

For researching how to write a full-length screenplay, I chose to focus on Syd Field's *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting* and Robert McKee's *Story*, two books that acted as the foundation of the structure I would follow. Further, I also read about the sequencing approach to screenwriting, which I used along with knowledge learned from the texts.

Field's *Screenplay* gave a thorough overview of how to write a screenplay. For someone who has only written short films and pilots, it seemed like the best way to plan my own story while reading. The book details the three act structure, plot points, and gives general guidelines for success in screenwriting structure. The classic three act structure can be broken up into the set-up, confrontation, and resolution, which total to about 52 scenes (Field, 93). This structure, and the numerical breakdown given by both Field and McKee, was instrumental in drafting out my scene breakdown. After creating the exposition and forcing action, "act two will consist of building the emotion….building up the hurdles and obstacles the hero must overcome" (Field, 92). I referenced this chapter heavily, which led to the death of the mother and the funerals taking place at around page 10 to serve as the inciting incident, and the idea of a hunt throughout Los Angeles to act as increasingly difficult obstacles.

Aside from the main structure, Field gave an outline for the formulation of scenes, sequences, and characters. Every scene must do two things: move the story forward and reveal only one new piece of information about the character at hand. I found myself constantly looking back at this tip when creating my scene breakdowns before I began actually writing the

screenplay. I often had to remind myself that each scene needed to have its own concrete, distinct purpose. In referencing this part of Field's book, I ended up amending or deleting many scenes that felt like repeated beats in my story. Finally, the character must have both an exterior and interior motivation or self, with the exterior actions revealing character, and the interior actions forming it. In finalizing my characters before I began writing, I found this distinction to be instrumental, which is why each sibling has a clear inner and exterior arc. Tammy, for example, moves externally from being invisible to visible to the family and gaining wealth through the new Tsang family business. For her interior arc, Tammy moves from being feeble to maintaining more confidence and command. This can be seen with the other three siblings, and is further described in the Character Outline Sheet below for further reference. Overall, Field's book was integral in outlining the structure for a screenplay and helping me build my story properly.

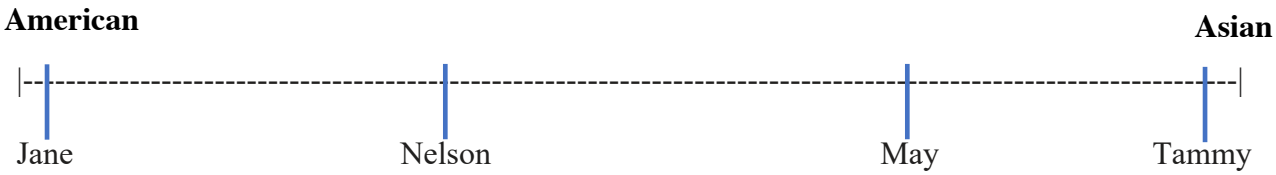
The next book I read was Robert McKee's *Story*, which further crystallized screenplay structure and characters. McKee specifically references having a controlling idea "describing how and why life undergoes change…composed from these two elements, value plus cause" (McKee, 115). For my screenplay, the controlling idea would be that our main characters prevail over greed (the value would switch from greed to indifference or generosity) after bickering over their mother's will. McKee also talks at length about more visual aspects of the story in order to better fit it for the screen. This is mainly done through motifs or image systems throughout the screenplay. His idea that a movie experience is 80% visual and 20% audio made me recognize the need for less dialogue and increased action to get the point across on the screen. This therefore allowed me to create my motifs of contrasting the characters' use of Asian cars versus American cars, which siblings wear white to the funeral, etc. Additionally, the idea inspired the

use of Chinatown, the poolhouse, and the temple in order to reveal the American-ness of Jane and Nelson compared to May and Tammy, who are more comfortable in that space.

In addition to structure, McKee shed light on character development within the screenplay. Similar to Field, McKee focuses on the three places conflict can stem from, however, McKee argues "story is born in that place where the subjective and objective realms touch," or what a character expects of a situation versus the reality (McKee, 147). I used this idea to storyboard and heighten the stakes of each scene when completing my scene breakdown, which also revealed which scenes had purpose and which could be cut. Finally, McKee also states there must be at least 3 different supporting characters that act as foils to your main character and their value. Specifically, the four characters put together each represent a different side of a value: the positive, contrary, negation of the negation, and contradictory (McKee, 320). This idea was instrumental in creating my characters and their arcs tied to existing in the Asian-American hyphen:

Jane – Positive Individualism = "Success"	Nelson - Contrary Individualism = mere survival
May– Negation of Negation Collectivism with pains of mere survival	Tammy – Contradictory Collectivistic = "Success"

The overarching value system created here pits Asian values against American ones. Jane is set to be the pinnacle of American "success," while Nelson, in also representing more American values, does not achieve success and instead scrapes by. On the other hand, May and Tammy represent more of the Asian collectivistic values, although within the two we also see the hardships within those values. The four siblings therefore represent a gradient within the Asian-American hyphen:



In setting up the characters in this manner, I was able to give them immediate conflict while also using them as tools to show the growth of our main character, Jane. Further, identifying each character as a part of the individualist versus collectivist spectrum helped clarify their roles in my story, as each has a distinct way of existing in the Asian-American hyphen. Overall, McKee's *Story* helped build off of Field's book in giving me concrete structure to follow for my screenplay.

The final book I read in preparing to write my screenplay was Lucy Hay's *Writing Diverse Characters for Fiction, TV, or Film*. Though not as formulaic as Field or McKee, Hay's book was useful in identifying more criteria for characterization. Specifically, she states that characters are "fueled by bad decisions and human weakness" (Hay, 33). I often found myself thinking back to this idea when drafting my characters. It is instinct to create perfect characters in order to increase sympathy for the protagonist, when in reality, compelling characters must make mistakes. Keeping this in mind made it easier to allow these characters, who are loosely based of family, to make mistakes and fight in order to further the stakes of the story. In regards to characterization, Hay's outline of the need for archetypes and some stock characters was especially helpful. Archetypes are models for the characters but differ from stereotypes, defined as oversimplified images of a person based on widely held beliefs (Hay, 92). Her differentiation and guidelines between archetypes and stereotypes allowed me to feel more comfortable in creating models for characters without the fear of creating a character that could offend certain communities. Instead, I wanted to use archetypes, not stereotypes, to allow audiences to instantly

connect with certain characters. This is evidenced in side characters such as John acting as the overbearing husband, or Ashley acting as the classic aloof teenage daughter. Though Hay's book had less concrete advice for my writing, I found these two tips to be useful and heavily referenced them in the preparation prior to formally writing the screenplay.

II. Film Review

Joy Luck Club (1993)

The Joy Luck Club (1993) stands as one of the first Asian-American films to gain national attention. In fact, when I first embarked on this thesis, researching this film was recommended to me by many different professors and friends. This film does have similar tones to *The Inheritance* in dealing with the community and connection between Asian women, specifically Asian-American immigrants. In doing so, and also pushing Asian-American representation on a national stage, *The Joy Luck Club* was monumental for representation. Further, the choice to use a story centered around women pushed representation for Asian-American women outside of the classic Lotus Blossom and Dragon lady tropes, which primarily use Asian women in film for fetishization or sexual objects. Giving these women, and this female-centered story, the spotlight brought attention to the Asian community in a more sympathetic light, rather than using Asians solely as supporting characters as evidenced in *Interior Chinatown*. In fact, in a recent interview with the stars of the *Joy Luck Club*, many stated that the pride and success of future Asian movies, namely *Crazy Rich Asians,* stemmed from this Asian, feminine-centric focus (Valiente).

Though the film was groundbreaking, Wang capitalizes off of tropes of Asian-Americans in order to gain the film's popular status. Wayne Wang uses flashbacks and mise-en-scene in order to emphasize quintessential stereotypes of life back in China. This is most evident through

the storylines of abusive husbands and arranged marriage, which garner more screen time than the present day or the daughter's stories. Though these stories are true to many Asian-American women, honing in on the salacious details of their struggle almost uses their hardship as a way for the film to keep its audience. The use of flashbacks to detail these stories further exploit these plotlines through revealing moments visually; the drowning of Ying-Ying's son is a notable graphic scene in the film that uses the audience's voyeurism to make them unable to turn away from the story. Besides the use of graphic details and tropes, along with the discussion of the film further antagonizing Asian culture (see pages 11-12), *The Joy Luck Club* made great strides in holistic representation for Asian-American communities.

Crazy Rich Asians (2018)

Crazy Rich Asians (2018) was in fact the first large move towards Asian representation after the Annenberg school report. However, Le and Kang write in the *Sociological Forum* that the film both helped and hurt Asian representation at large. *Crazy Rich Asians* served as the most successful romantic comedy film in the last decade, clearly bringing an all-Asian cast to the eyes of a wide, diverse audience on an international scale (Le, 525). However, Le and Kang argue that the film perpetuated stereotypes of Asians now on an even wider platform than ever before: "there is little attention given to injustices…single instance in the story of anti-Asian racism…blatant discrimination is easily solved when the family buys the hotel right on the spot" (Le, 526). Here, Le references the one example of racism in the story, in which Nick's family is turned away from a stay at a New York hotel. As Le states, this is the only moment of discrimination in the entire film, and the solution acts as an example of upholding the model minority stereotype. By only using one superficial example of such a prevalent issue in the Asian community, *Crazy Rich Asians* not only fails to aid the Asian-American community by using its

platform to speak about these issues, it also perpetuates the idea that Asians, in using the model minority narrative, are not subject to obstacles stemming from racism. Although movies with an all-white cast are not subject to this same criticism, it is significant that in one of the first examples of Asian-American representation on a wide-scale in the 21st century, we are still seeing the model minority myth perpetuated.

The Farewell (2019)

One of the few films that deals with similar themes is *The Farewell*. The film deals with existing within the hyphen in many themes – such as deciding to tell Nai Nai she has cancer versus keeping it a secret as a family to keep her happy. Further, the one dinner table scene that pits Billi's family against the rest due to their decision to move to America speaks to the difficulties of immigrating and Asian-American life; no one fully exists in America or in China. This film therefore acts as a great lens into the struggles that I want to explore in my film. However, my film still differs in that *The Farewell* focuses on the matriarch and her role in the extended Asian-American family. My narrative deals with the confusing and conflicting relationships only in 1 nuclear family. Further, my screenplay differs in that it focuses on difficulties of finding an Asian and American balance; instead of showing the all American or all Chinese way of doing things, I show that the gradients in between are *all* acceptable.

Lucky Grandma (2020)

Lucky Grandma stood as another film that fell perfectly into the Asian-American narrative I am trying to foster. Specifically, Nai Nai in this film falls outside of the model minority stereotype: after working her whole life, she still cannot afford her own apartment after the death of her husband. In this desperation, she chooses to steal money from a Chinese mafia in order to have a comfortable retirement. Like the characters of *Better Luck Tomorrow*, Nai Nai

steers towards crime, acting as the antithesis of the model minority concept. The Chinatown in this film further demonstrates those outside of stereotypical Asians as well: the use of the mafia, especially with Big Pong, demonstrates the hardship Asian immigrants face and characters like Nai Nai that do not fit conventional Asian stereotypes. The film's use of melding Mandarin and Cantonese also interested me. Because it is rare to hear a mixture of the two languages, especially on screen, showcasing both displayed the diaspora within Chinese culture and uplifted Cantonese speakers, which generally go overlooked due to the prevalence of Mandarin. Though the film dispels certain stereotypes, the antagonistic characters fall into themes of yellow peril. The mafia men, specifically the two that chase after Nai Nai, cut their tongues and threaten Nai Nai in a way that resembles the shifty, dirty characteristics found in yellow peril. The head of the mafia, Sister Fong, embodies the Dragon Lady idea referenced above, as she sneakily controls Chinatown and wears more scantily clad dress, creating the allure of a mysterious, "exotic" women that is found in Dragon Lady characters. In breaking these stereotypes while leaning into others to get the film made, *Lucky Grandma* acts as a step in the right direction towards holistic Asian representation.

Viewing this film also influenced my screenplay in its ability to balance comedy and drama. *Lucky Grandma* had a similar tone to *The Farewell* which I have struggled to find in my own screenplay. I found that the lack of dialogue in many scenes added to the humor, which inspired me to read through my first two sequences and cut down on dialogue to focus on actions. Further, I was also impressed by the ability to lean into Chinese traditions for a film tailored to an American audience. There was no explanation regarding the fortune teller, the number 8, and the altar in the film. In demonstrating these traditions without necessitating

explanations, I felt more comfortable writing Cantonese practices into my thesis without having dialogue around it for the audience.

Minari (2021)

Similar to *The Farewell*, *Minari* has made excellent strides for Asian-American representation through a strong, personal film (unlike *Crazy Rich Asians,* which fell more into the romantic-comedy blockbuster genre). Set in the 1980s, the film deals with similar themes of family, collectivism, and resilience as audiences watch a Korean-American family settle into life on their new Arkansas farm. Specifically, *Minari* details what it means to exist in the Asian-American hyphen through moments of confusion between the inter-generational household and the family against the rest of the community. Through moments of confusion between the grandma and the son, struggles between the husband and the wife about the farm, and scrambling to find that sense of belonging among the primarily Caucasian community around them, the film exemplifies what I felt was missing in Hollywood. I therefore believe that *Minari* has made incredible steps towards substantive and physical representation for the Asian community, most notably through the awards it has also gained throughout Hollywood. I hope that my screenplay is able to follow in its footsteps and add to a rising collection of heartfelt Asian-American stories that demonstrate our experiences without exploiting tales of immigration for box office profit.

III. Writing Process

Outline Sheets and Scene Breakdowns

In order to begin the process of writing after research, I began with outlining my characters and general plot. I completed this outlining before beginning my script. I first detailed my main characters and PoPo since her presence is strong throughout the whole film, through specifying their occupations, backstory, physical features, and emotional characteristics. This

acted as the base of the screenplay. Later on in the process, but before I started officially writing the screenplay, I also added in the section about their story arcs, how each character changes, and the beats that lead to their transformation at the end. Some details were updated throughout the writing process due to changes made while writing the first draft. The outline of each main character is shown below:

Character Backstories

Name: Yin Yee Tsang – The Matriarch/Mother – also known as "Po Po" for grandkids.

- **Physical appearance**: A small (4'11") old woman in her mid-eighties before her death. Fluffy white hair, smiles with some teeth out of place due to a long life of usage. She loves wearing fleece and warm, comforting clothes – mostly in bright colors like red and pink, but also enjoys button-down shirts that she has made or patched up with other fabric (a mishmash of patterns on one shirt). Wrinkled hands but still a very lively face, even if they are wrinkled with crow's feet. She usually uses a walker or an old, brown cane with tennis balls on the bottom to prevent the floor from scratching.
- **Backstory** (the character's story before the screenplay begins): Po Po originally came from a small province in Southern China, and was married off when she was young to a hardworking man who, out of the need to provide for the family, was just never home. After having her first two daughters and a stillborn son, her husband and her fled from China to Hong Kong due to the Communist Revolution. They stayed in Hong Kong for a few years until her husband moved to Los Angeles, and she followed suit with her daughters a year after. It is important to note that although she left Hong Kong due to the communist revolution in China, in doing so she severely isolated herself from her family in China. She took the more western way of life, and in turn, she became estranged (which could be something Jane could discover later on in the film, convincing her to be less aloof and interact with her family). Upon arrival in Los Angeles, Po Po attempted to learn English but was accosted on the bus when trying to go to her English class one day, and the fear of further racist remarks made her give up on learning English in a classroom setting. She therefore continued to raise her kids, and have two more (they had to have at least one son). In raising her kids, she grew closer to the last two, Jane and Nelson, and others in the family are convinced that Nelson is the favorite. As her children had kids, she raised them as well, all in the same Los Angeles home, until her husband died.
- **Present circumstances (occupation, income, geographic location, dwelling, key relationships)**
    - When her children were all grown and her husband died, she sold the house and moved in with her third-eldest daughter, Jane. She's been living there ever since (around 15 years). She helps take care/raise Jane's kids in Pasadena, a suburb outside of Los Angeles, and she does not have a job, relying on Jane's and her husband's income. They live in a nice home (definitely a step up from her house in Central LA), and she has her own room with a TV she uses to watch Wipeout and other American shows with her grandkids. Although she does not get along

well with Jane's husband, she was close to Jane and as close as you can be to her grandkids who do not speak Chinese.
    - Although her other children come to visit occasionally, she mostly only interacts with Jane and her family. She would love to keep in touch with all her children, but they just live too far away. Tammy is busy keeping up with her store and her husband, Nelson is working, and she is unable to see May after Jane and May had a falling out.
- **World view? Attitude? Opinions? Values? Beliefs?:** Po Po carries a lot of old Chinese traditions and values with her, which she was able to pass on to two of her daughters (Tammy and partially Jane). Further, her past experiences in China (with the Communist Revolution and the Japanese) make her jaded against those communities. At the end of the day – her belief rests on family first, and she embodies that through making her life's work raising her grandkids after her kids are grown.
- **Imperfections:** Like her daughters, she maintains a stubborn belief that she is always right. Her stringent focus on traditional values also causes many squabbles, as 1960 is not 2020. Although she is caring and has so much love for her family, her values also tend to get in the way of connecting with grandkids in the household. For example, she disagrees with the way Jane's kids dress or where they go, and actively speaks to them about her disapproval.

Name: Jane Tsang – The Third Eldest

- **Physical appearance**: Jane is a 45 year old woman that maintains the standards of Asian American values and Los Angeles modernity and femininity. She usually dresses well, following the trends of other Los Angeles and New York moms (wanting to wear brands, a very keeping-up-with-the-joneses situation), and wears expensive jewelry, specifically her large wedding ring. She's starting to have some wrinkles, but not many, and overall holds herself high, but she also isn't arrogant – you can tell she's a mom and cares about others in the way she interacts with just about anyone.
- **Backstory** (the character's story before the screenplay begins):
    - The third eldest of the group, Jane was born after her family had moved to the US. She was the child they had in attempts to have one last son, which is why she has a younger brother, Nelson. Jane was the goodie-two-shoes of the house growing up, and would cling to her mother and her father when he was around. She was therefore her father's favorite, although she harbors resentment of her younger brother, Nelson, due to him being the mom's favorite and the lauded son of a Chinese family. Due to the semi-large age gap between her first two siblings, Jane was asked to take a lot of responsibility growing up and acted as the older sister. Specifically, her older siblings had kids while she was still a teenager, and because of this she acted as the older sister to them and her actual younger brother, Nelson. A common phenomenon in Asian families is also the idea of the eldest sibling being another parental figure, a position that Jane takes and still believes she holds, despite her siblings being grown as well. Of the siblings, she was also the only one to really focus on school and therefore go to a good university, which has brought her the most wealth of her siblings, therefore causing a gap between them.

    - Through working as an assistant at a law firm, she met Danny, a white man. They are married and have two daughters, and live in a relatively wealthy suburb of Los Angeles. Further, after the death of her father, her mother moved into the house. Jane endures some stress in caring for her mother and the rest of her family, but generally takes pride in taking her mother in, as no other sibling would.
    - After taking her mother in, Jane also took her sister, May, into the house for a few years after May got out of jail. Though Jane was happy to do this (and proud), their relationship grew strained, and Jane accused May of stealing, the two got into a fight, and have not spoken ever since. She also has not spoken to Tammy or Nelson often – only at Thanksgivings and Christmases for light chit chat.
- **Occupation**: Unemployed, a failed entrepreneur
- **Present circumstances** (occupation, income, geographic location, dwelling, key relationships): Jane does not take her mother's death well, and she has regrets about her mom not being able to see her other siblings. Her relationships are growing strained due to her mother's death, causing her to give less attention and more responsibility to her daughters. Further, she attempted to start her own business and failed, leaving her bankrupt with leftover merchandise. Her relationship with her husband has also grown strained in the recent years due to her failed business and her inability to get her finances together.
- **World view? Attitude? Opinions? Values? Beliefs? & Some Imperfections**:
    - I lumped these two together because some of her beliefs and values lead to imperfections. Jane is an interesting character because she has some outdated Asian values, yet she is deemed the most Americanized of her siblings simply because she has attained the life most similar to the "American Dream" out of her entire family. Although she has distanced herself from her family and is individualistic in comparison to the rest, she believes she has her family's best interest at heart. Specifically, in turning her attention to her nuclear family instead of her siblings, she believes she is doing the best she can in focusing on family and upholding the Asian "model minority" standard. I would therefore say her main values are love and loyalty (which has whittled overtime with her siblings).
    - Speaking to her outdated beliefs, like her mother, she is focused on raising her children to be acceptable to conventional, white ideas of society. Though she does this out of love, this does add to her imperfections, as it puts strain on her relationships with her family. Her extreme love and idolization for her parents has also led her to have slightly backwards beliefs that are commonly held in their generation – specifically in regards to race. These jaded views overall make her a bit more paranoid and skeptical of others and her siblings, especially because they are now estranged.
- **What do they Need?**
    - Need the inheritance because of unemployment, desperate to keep up her lifestyle
    - Internally: needs family and collective help
- **Arc + How**: Jane begins individualistic and ends more willing to be a part of the collective.
    - Starts individualistic in not wanting to work with family, taking initiative all on her own for the funeral, reunion, etc.
    - Actively chooses to work with siblings to hunt for inheritance. (end of seq 2)

  - Jane helps Nelson during the poolhouse scene, also picks up May and Nelson after they attempt to break into the childhood home.
  - Unreadable bible scene & revealing she's broke, a cry for help.
  - End: works together with family to get the home fixed.

-

Name: Tammy Tsang – Eldest; conforming to Chinese values & submissive

- **Physical Appearance:** Tammy is about 60, and acts as the eldest of the siblings. Because of her status, she is submissive and shows it in how she walks, acts, and holds herself, especially around her family (it's hard for her to get a word in during conversations). She has short, short hair, basically resembling the classic haircut old Chinese ladies have, minus the white hair. She also wears large metal framed glasses that overwhelm her face. As for clothing, she dresses once again like a classic Chinese old lady, with matching cardigans and shirt sets, knee length white shorts, no makeup, and slippers. She's extremely skinny and the shortest of all the siblings, at around 5'2."
- **Backstory:** Tammy, as the eldest, was born in China in a small village to Yin Yee and her father. Three years apart from May, she was still only 7 when they fled to Hong Kong, therefore around 10 when they first came to the US. She is incredibly submissive and the most focused on Chinese values in her family, embodied by her constant need to please her mother and father when she was little. In fact, her focus on the collective significantly harmed her education, as she was unable to receive her high school diploma after working as a waitress for her father's restaurant's opening day instead of attending the last day of school. The most traditional of the bunch, she also has an arranged marriage to John, a Taiwanese man who is extremely stingy with money and is therefore incredibly overbearing when it comes to the search for the inheritance. Her marriage to him created some distance between her and her family due to his aloofness and controlling nature. The two have one kid, Kenny, who was primarily raised by Jane when Tammy went to run the family restaurant. Kenny is therefore close to Jane and is one of the few who talk to her, despite Jane and Tammy's distance. Further, Kenny witnessing his mother struggle under the stringent, cheap restrictions by John inspired him to become a lawyer and achieve the classic "model minority" status to give them a better life. After working and running the family restaurant until her father's death, Tammy opened up her own convenience store for about 15 years until her retirement.
- **Occupation:** Retired, previously store owner.
- **Present Circumstances:** Tammy is now retired and lives about an hour from May and Jane's Los Angeles suburb. Unlike Jane and May's predominantly white suburb closer to LA, Tammy lives in an area that has a predominantly Asian community far from the bustle of Los Angeles. She mainly only sees John and Kenny, who visits once a week. If anything, she only speaks to May out of all the siblings, and she only does that occasionally regarding small talk such as grocery shopping or new restaurants. Other than that, Tammy is lonely and wants to find new hobbies and friends to fill her time.
- **World view? Attitude? Opinions? Values? Beliefs?:** Because Tammy is the most traditional of the group, she has opinions that are very outdated and similar to her parents. For example, because of hearing stories of the Japanese invading China from her mother, as well as the communist revolution, have given her harsh views on other East Asian races. Further, Tammy is the most focused on the collective due to her emphasis on Chinese values. Because of this, she prioritizes her family, but instead of Jane's focus on

her nuclear family, Tammy is focused on her mom and her siblings. Like Jane she also retains similar ideas on marriage and how one should grow up-she too focused on Kenny's looks growing up and is currently trying to set him up for marriage in fear that he has not found someone and is getting too old. Though she strays from the model minority stereotype focused on education, at heart she too believes in this ideal and holds it with pride.

- **Imperfections:** Her submissiveness (Crushing responsibility of the collectivism) is what leads to the first conflict in the family-the refusal to pay her share of her mother's funeral. Further, her collective focus is rigid and uncompromising, causing her to disagree with how Jane has raised her children, as well as some facets of May and Nelson's lives.
- **What do they Need?:** Freedom (in the form of more economic freedom) from her husband. Therefore, getting the extra cash could help loosen things up, or at least, give a sense of liberation, maybe even allow her to have more space apart from her husband and stop being stuck under his thumb..
- **Arc + How**: Moves from submissive to taking a stand for herself – invisible to visible.
    - Completely submissive to her husband
    - Refuses to help the collective by staying outside the family restaurant. (seq 3)
    - Briefly tries to stand up to John when he takes Jane's gold statue.
    - Stands up against Auntie during the reunion. (seq 6)
    - Stands up against John and refuses to give her inheritance money to him, instead puts it towards her siblings and the childhood home. (seq 6/7).

Name: May Tsang – 2nd Eldest, seen as "promiscuous," a problem child

- **Physical Appearance:** May is a 55 year old woman (a 10 year age gap between her and Jane), with a short, undemanding bob she cuts herself and severe, thinly drawn eyebrows. She has a thin frame, and unlike Jane, tends to dress practically with a little more focus on comfortable shoes and active-wear than keeping up with the latest trends. She has thin lips and some wrinkles, but just enough to show her age. Simply from how she holds herself down the street you can tell that she is headstrong and fights for herself but in a quiet, unpresuming way, while still being able to joke around and relax. This is unlike Jane, who is confident and headstrong but cannot take a joke.
- **Backstory:**
    - May is the second eldest, and was born prior to the stillborn in China. When she was four years old they moved to Hong Kong during the communist revolution, and she grew attached to all her cousins and friends in Hong Kong. She was therefore devastated when they left and moved to Los Angeles, and she definitely hated her first few years in the US and only made one friend on her block. Further, she was also forced to leave all her toys behind in Hong Kong, meaning that in Los Angeles she only had access to her friend's toys. As her mother had Jane and Nelson, May felt less seen and valued in the family, causing her to act out and join friends who enjoyed stealing and doing generally sketchy things with their free time.
    - She eventually grew out of this phase, met, and married the Chief of Police of a suburb in Los Angeles and had one kid, Ariane. Unfortunately, her husband's busy job strained their relationship, causing her to act out and revive her stealing habits again. One final heist with an old friend landed her in prison for 9 years,

and gave the custody of her kid to her husband. Being sent to prison caused significant strain and grief for her family, who refused to believe she committed the crime and was also extremely disappointed in where she had gone. When she was released from prison, Jane took her in, and May shared a room with Jane's two daughters. They continued this set-up for 3 years until Jane accused May of stealing from her and the two got into a huge fight, causing silence between the two until today.

- **Occupation:** Receptionist at Doctor's office.
- **Present Circumstances:** Since being kicked out of Jane's house, she has tried to make amends but to no avail (Jane will not engage with her). She met another man named Gary, although he passed a few years ago. She now lives alone with a few dogs in a small condo for those with lower-income in the sketchier part of Jane's Los Angeles suburb. She was also able to get a stable job at a receptionist/secretary in Pasadena, allowing her to stay in the suburb, even if not in such a nice part. Further, she was able to reconnect with her daughter, Ariane, for many years until her daughter tragically passed away in a car accident. Her daughter's death, especially as May was getting closer to her, had a huge impact on May and furthered her desire to reconnect with her family and spend time with loved ones. It is therefore crucial to her that she makes amends with her family during this period. Additionally, it fuels her desire to foster a child in her home.
- **World view? Attitude? Opinions? Values? Beliefs?:** Being one of the two siblings born in China, May does carry many Chinese values. However, she is less focused on upholding Chinese values, as her experiences as an immigrant in the U.S. and the lack of resources given to that community has hardened her and forced her to sometimes put her needs in front of Chinese ones (ex: dressing promiscuously or stealing in high school in order to fit in, not studying or helping the family and instead going out with friends or to parties). However, after her family has been with her through her many hardships, she has grown to understand the importance of the collective, which is why she is now more focused on working with her family and connecting with them. In regards to the model minority stereotype, she does not believe that all Asians have to fit into that mold or act as a model minority. This is primarily because she herself does not fit into the model minority concept, and since she has still had a fulfilling life outside of that norm, she recognizes that her siblings, extended family, and the Asian community at large do not have to compete against other races to succeed, thereby straying away from Jane's ideas.
- **Imperfections:** Obviously, May has made many mistakes in the past, and her prioritization of things Chinese culture deems as "bad" instead of focusing on her family has really hurt her relationships. Although she is trying to work on reconnecting, her stubbornness can lead her to be a little quick to anger with her family still. I would therefore say she is the most hot-headed of the family and easily picks fights, leading to arguments throughout the hunt.
- **What do they Need?:** Money to adopt
- **Arc + How:** Begins more collectivist and aggressive and ends more quiet, willing to accept other individualistic styles of life.
    - Starts loudly collectivist – taking over the funeral and saying the Jane is incapable of running a Buddhist funeral, etc
    - Starts creating an alliance
    - Attempts to steal furniture (more individualistic)

- Keeps quiet and no longer fights against the individualistic way of doing things once they find the inheritance

Name: Nelson Tsang – Youngest, the only son, the "runt of the litter" complex

- **Physical Appearance:** Nelson, 43, is only slightly younger than Jane but has a much more childlike presence. Unlike the three girls who dress rather conventionally, Nelson has a darker, more grungy look to him, wearing a leather jacket and riding a motorcycle (causing some anger between him and May). Though when he grew up his dress followed the same usual Asian standards, today his hair sweeps down to one side, and occasionally his hair is so long it is put in a bun. Generally, he dresses in dark colors and worker boots. Though in his forties, he still retains some acne scars from his youth, and does not have many wrinkles like his other siblings, but does have some slightly crooked teeth.
- **Backstory:** Nelson was the youngest, although he was the coveted son of the family. He was specifically born because his parents wanted a son before they stopped having children. As the son, he was required to do much less around the household, however, being the youngest and the only son, he felt isolated at times from the rest of his siblings. He was closest to Jane due to age, but as he grew older, he grew close to May as well, as the two were able to joke around and pull pranks together. He was never super great at school as well, therefore making him a black sheep compared to Jane. He attended college near his home, however, he never really found his calling, and therefore had many odd jobs. He lived in a small apartment in a more rough part of LA, although he briefly moved in with May and Gary while finding a place to live. This also allowed May and Nelson to maintain contact, and out of all the siblings they remain the most in-touch. He currently lives in their old childhood home after his mother gave it to him upon the death of his father. However, he does not take care of the home and it is left in a disarray.
- **Occupation:** Grocery store clerk
- **Present Circumstances:** Nelson currently lives in a small apartment with his wife, Tina. Out of all of the siblings, he is definitely the most overtly emotional in finding out about his mother's death and is seen as distraught. Though he used to be closer to Jane when they were growing up, he is now closest to May and relies on her heavily during this time, especially when the two team up together in searching for the inheritance.
- **World view? Attitude? Opinions? Values? Beliefs?:** I would say Nelson does not buy into the model minority belief at all due to his difficulty finding a calling and not maintaining a profession that is sought after in most Asian families. Further, the way he dresses and acts goes directly against the model minority idea as well. Out of all the siblings, he is probably the most against the stereotype both value wise and identification wise (as May was able to get back on her feet and maintain a typical white-collar job). As the youngest, he also maintains the most open sentiments on race and difference, as growing up as the youngest and only in America, he was shielded by some of the racist encounters his mother had.
- **Imperfections:** Nelson puts his emotions in front of logic, which can become difficult for situations where he has to deal with family issues (such as the inheritance) while he is unable to control his emotions. Further, his resentment towards his siblings, especially Jane for being the "perfect" child growing up, is evident, and makes it more difficult to connect with them in the present moment.

- **What do they Need?**: Originally wants money out of individualistic greed, just wants to buy a new motorbike and more things. Through his arc, he realizes he wants the money to fix up the house.
- **Arc + How**: Moves from irresponsible to responsible.
    - Not taking care of anything or caring about family
    - Getting into the alliance with May
    - Speech about the care for his family.
    - Begging for a loan
    - Fixing up the house.

In addition to outlining the characters, I also thought it was necessary to outline the scavenger hunt for the will. Thinking about when and why PoPo hid the clues, as well as what each clue signifies and teaches the siblings, proved instrumental, as it provided clarity for what each scene's objective was, and what dialogue and notes I had to hit in a given scene.

Thesis – Treasure Hunt Outline Sheet

The Hunt

- Why?: Grandma wanted to reunite her children after they fell apart from both generally moving out of their childhood home and their inability to connect on a fundamental level.
- How?: Grandma decides to design a hunt, taking the children to concrete places in their childhood/family life in order to get them to reminisce and learn that they are not so different and can be tied together by their shared hardships and experiences.
- When?: Grandma plans this hunt of sorts after her husband dies, a few years prior to the film's beginning. After the death of their father, the siblings go their separate ways. She therefore designs this hunt and leaves clues right before she moves into Jane's house after the death of her husband. Then, Grandma has a stroke, causing her to move into Jane's house, as her family is concerned with her living alone. She therefore plants the last clue hastily in an old piece of furniture, a chest from China. Finally, Grandma is concentrating on saving up as much money as she can, therefore holding onto the inheritance until the very last minute (further reiterating why she hides the inheritance in a piece of furniture she takes with her to Jane's house). This ensures she has access to the inheritance constantly and can check on it and add to it.

The Will & the First Clue

- Clue says:
    1. I know you expected this to be easy. You all just wanted to go your separate ways, again, quickly. But just like you all are stubborn, I am too, and I'm not letting you grow apart without one last fight.
    2. Taught you all how to play games and you've got one left.
    3. First clue – never got to travel yet we lived across the pond. It was a home for two, a house for two, and YeYe and I worked to give it all to you.
        - Home for two, house for two = divide btwn American children and Asian children.

- What do they learn from the will?
    1. Point of no return, have to learn to work together
    2. All had similar relationships in playing games with their mother
    3. Divide between the children

The Childhood Home & the Second Clue

- Why this spot?: It's their childhood home, talk about the experiences growing up (as elementary/early adolescence), clearly significant.
- What does this spot teach them?: Shows them how much the parents loved them and worked for them, and how much they all worked and helped each other growing up.
    1. Maybe they find balloons from all of their birthdays/their first birthdays, implying grandma kept all of those for sentimental value.
    2. Possibly show the sacrifices they gave for each other? Show how Jane sacrifices for Tammy here, then reveal other sacrifices in the other destinations.
- Second Clue: **May finds this clue.** Find in the spice cabinet. This next clue takes them to the family restaurant. → Maybe mention that when grandma wasn't cooking here she was cooking there, a second home, always present.

The Family Restaurant & the Third Clue

- Why this spot?: Reveal more family story, specifically the pre-teen high school phases (therefore progressing in time, starting with childhood home then moving to later memories)
- What does this spot teach them?: Show they all had to sacrifice, including their mother.
    1. Tammy sacrificed her high school diploma.
    2. Instead of working as she should have like Tammy, May would ditch her shifts to hang out with friends. Coming back to find the clue now (decades later), she realizes the toll this took on Tammy.
- Third Clue: **Tammy finds this clue after being forced to come back into the restaurant.** Find in the lucky cat they left for the next owner. This clue takes them to the poolhouse. Maybe talk about a place of fun but force, how they were thrown in the water and taught to swim.

The Poolhouse & the Fourth Clue

- Why this spot?: Show they are tied through community and actual good childhood memories.
- What does this spot teach them?: Reminds them of their strong ties and reliance on each other. They all played at the poolhouse, a space of enjoyment between the family. Further, PoPo had her stroke while swimming in the pool. This has created Nelson's fear of going into the water. PoPo therefore calls on him to be the one to swim into the pool and get the next clue.
- Fourth Clue: **Tammy and May find** the first clue in the family locker. This clue includes a pair of large swim trunks, and gives them a set of symbols to decode. **Nelson therefore has to change and swim to the bottom of the pool where the symbols are in order to decode the message**. Takes them to the Buddhist Temple. Clue should probably say something about the last place they were altogether.

The Buddhist Temple & the Fifth Clue

- Why this spot?: Religion is a huge part of grandma and her existence, so maybe it reminds them of her and the idea of needing to stick together for the collective? Additionally, the last place they were altogether.
- What does this spot teach them?: Reminds them they are tied together by the love of their mother and father. Maybe also reveals that although they all know varying levels of information in regards to Buddhism, they are still tied to this Asian part of them in the Asian-American hyphen.
- Fifth Clue: **Jane finds this clue.** This clue will be tucked away in the large incense burner at the temple, taped at the top so that to most it is obscured from view. Because PoPo visited the temple regularly, she worked with the monks to secure the clue and ensure it would stay there. The clue will say: Almost at the end of your trials, this last piece is not close to your hearts but close to mine (signaling the piece of furniture from China that May took)
    1. The four overlook this clue because
        - They do not know where the chest is/May stole it OR
        - It is stuck in the house which they lose by the time they get home.

The Sequence Method

Because writing a 90-page screenplay is an incredibly daunting task, I needed to employ a strategy that would encourage me to write and rewrite in a manner similar to how I write shorter scripts so I would not burn out mid-script. Professor Barba and Professor Barracano both recommended the sequence method. The sequence method breaks up a standard 90-120 page screenplay into 8 relatively equal sequences, or a series of 5-7 scenes that act as their own mini-movie while furthering the character and plot of the overall film. Still following the three act structure, there are usually 2 sequences in Act One, 4 sequences in Act Two (two before the halfway point of our film, and two after), and 2 sequences at the end of Act Three. Writing the screenplay in chunks, and thinking of certain sections as their own short films in a sense, helped me tackle writing in a productive manner that was not overwhelming. Instead of worrying about how one scene would fit into a 100 page screenplay, I only had to worry about how one scene would fit into a series of 5-7 scenes, making writing, drafting, and re-writing much more manageable.

Sequences function as a way to tackle the screenplay by almost writing 8 smaller short films within the overall screenplay; in each sequence problems posed at the beginning of the sequence are answered, however overarching themes remain more open ended in order to continue the plot into the next sequence and further the progress of the screenplay at large. For example, my first sequence sets up the film by introducing the main characters, showing Jane's life prior to the inciting incident, and the inciting incident (the death of PoPo, which triggers the events of the rest of the film). In this case, the question posed is: what will happen to Jane and the family after PoPo's death? I answer this question at the end of the sequence: the Tsang family decides to search for the will. The first sequence therefore answers the main question posed while offering up more mystery for the future of the screenplay and the plotline.

Each sequence also generally has their own "rules" in order to further the screenplay and keep readers/audiences hooked. I have outlined each sequence's necessary features, as well as how I fulfilled the features with plot lines in my sequence in the chart below.

Sequence:	Features:	In my script:
First	Status Quo and the Inciting Incident	Show Annie and Jane's relationship with PoPo, PoPo's death, and the need to search for her will.
Second	Set up a predicament central to the story and ensure that the main character is locked in to completing the task (a point of no return).	Predicament: They find the will and it leads them on a scavenger hunt. In deciding to participate in the hunt, Jane makes a point of no return and has to finish this quest with her family.
Third	First obstacle in the hero's way and raising stakes.	First obstacle: going to the childhood home only to realize there are many more clues throughout Los Angeles at large. Raising stakes: Jane's issue with money arises, May and Nelson's alliance poses an obstacle for Jane, John stealing from Jane, etc.
Fourth	Another obstacle and a midpoint following the first culmination rule.	Obstacles: Old family restaurant, poolhouse, and the Buddhist temple.

	The first culmination rule details that the midpoint must mirror the end of the film. For example, if the story ends in a tragedy, the midpoint should be a low point. However, if the story has a happy ending, the midpoint should be a high point.	Midpoint/First Culmination: Though the siblings get kicked out of the temple, they seem relatively unified, and are only bickering on where to go next, not attacking each other's character.
Fifth	Bringing in the subplots and more rising action for the main plot.	Bringing back the subplot of needing to prepare for the family reunion. Additionally, Nelson loses the house, raising stakes and creating an obstacle for the search and the family.
Sixth	Main culmination: bring the subplots into the main plot and create the highest amount of tension at the end of Act Two. This point should also be the opposite of the ending (if the story ends happy, this moment should be sad).	Main culmination: the family reunion ends in disarray after the siblings fight over the next clue and the inheritance in front of all of their relatives from China. They decide to go give up on finding the inheritance and give up on each other – going their separate ways.
Seventh	A quick new twist. The main culmination makes it seem as if there is a resolution, need something new.	The third generation (Annie, Ashley, Ken) find the inheritance.
Eighth	A clear resolution.	The third generation reveals their findings to the adults of the Tsang family. They decide to pool their money together towards fixing up the childhood home instead of everyone taking their share for their own uses. The film ends with the family together at the childhood home.

Writing and Re-writing

After completing these outlines, I started writing sequence by sequence. Although the sequence method made tackling a feature-length screenplay more manageable, I sometimes felt overwhelmed by the sheer amount of screenplay left to write. This feeling proved to be a big obstacle when writing the first half of Act II, as I was so worried about writing a bad scene I ended up not writing at all for a few weeks. These fears significantly got in the way at times, and honestly, made me fall behind on winter deadlines. In order to get over that mental block of

putting the pen to paper and creating these scenes and characters, I honed in on the sequence method further and also workshopped my screenplay with friends, peers, and professors. This feedback allowed for changes I never would have thought of, creating a more creative and complete screenplay. Triumphing over the fear of a bad first draft has also increased my ability to write other projects and screenplays, as I have grown more confident in writing and less self-conscious of a first draft.

Regarding storyline, juggling many different arcs also proved to be difficult during the writing process, and resulted in a lot of re-drafting and modification of scenes while I was still writing. For example, after completing the first act I found that Jane's arc and the issue regarding her finances was both not brought up consistently throughout the rest of the screenplay and not urgent enough to make us sympathize with our main character. Therefore, after each sequence I constantly found myself re-drafting in order to amplify Jane's need and storyline (changing her profession three times before finishing the first draft of the screenplay). Using a beat board helped with this. Through a beat board, I outlined each scene that would occur in my screenplay, and connoted different storylines with different colors. This way, I was able to track how often each storyline appeared, how often characters appeared in each sequence, and where I should add or subtract certain storylines. This was especially helpful in tracking the reunion arc, as I originally had the family reunion all condensed into sequence six (the end of Act II). I also used the beat board to track each character and the arc of the third generation (Annie, Ashley, and Kenny), which also added to the weight of them finding the inheritance at the end. During my drafting process, I was able to recognize this and instead weave the scavenger hunt storyline in with the reunion. These changes made for a much stronger and cohesive script.

Finally, one of the greatest challenges I had in writing this screenplay was the ties to my family and reality. When I first pitched this idea and worked on it the summer before senior year, I attached myself to the idea that the characters would heavily represent my family, and the script would stay true to real life events. In short, I desired for the hunt for the inheritance to act as the only fictional idea. I wanted the story to remain a true Asian-American story, and because of that, I struggled to stray away from reality during the outlining process. However, this became difficult when I first pitched a screenplay with six different siblings (mirroring my mom and her siblings), rather than the four siblings we see in *The Inheritance*. I slowly drifted away from reality and into heavily fictionalized material, as to a certain extent mirroring my family's actions was holding back the story and creating arcs that would not be as compelling. Breaking from reality allowed me to give the characters higher stakes: Jane and Nelson going bankrupt, May wanting a foster kid, and Tammy needing more freedom from her husband. These arcs activated the story by creating sympathy for the characters, otherwise audiences would not understand each individual's desperation for the inheritance. Although these changes significantly wandered from reality and ultimately strayed from my original vision of the screenplay, at its core, this is still a true Asian-American story. The grounding in Asian-American issues of identity within that hyphen stands as the foundation of *The Inheritance*, and therefore allowed me to find peace in deviating from reality.

Conclusion

As *Crazy Rich Asians* made its debut, Viet Thanh Nguyen, a prominent Vietnamese-American author, wrote about the film's significance--not of the story, but of its premiere. Nguyen argues that what Asians need is "narrative plentitude:" a world in which we have so many authentic Asian stories on screen that we do not have to fight for representation any longer.

What we currently have is the antithesis of that; similar to what's written in *Interior Chinatown*, the roles that do exist for us often erase us, treat us as less-than-human, or show demeaning stereotypes that ultimately allow audiences to believe these images of us are real, leading to mistreatment. Especially now, with the rise of Asian-American hate, pushing for representation in Hollywood is even more crucial. Bringing more of our stories to light humanizes us. I sincerely believe that more realistic depictions of Asian-Americans, written by Asian-Americans, can have an impact on all audiences that extends beyond just one mere viewing of a film. After all, film is used to export and demonstrate culture. Magnifying our stories on this scale can not only shape how those outside of the community view Asian-Americans but also change how Asians see themselves in monumental, positive ways.

That's what I set out to do. In *The Inheritance*, I depicted the struggles of existing in the Asian-American hyphen that so many authors have written about, and countless Asian-Americans have experienced. I desired to demonstrate that there is no incorrect way of falling within this liminal space. Although the racial mundane, the media, and our own communities constantly impose ideas of how Asian-Americans should be, there is no right answer. These stereotypes of being of the model minority, meek, indebted to your family, and good at math do not describe every Asian-American.

The media needs to represent that. Existing in this liminal hyphen is incredibly difficult, and to judge a fellow Asian-American for the extent of their individualism versus their collective work for the family should not be the case. No film in Hollywood, not yet at least, has truly been able to encompass that message. I sincerely hope that my screenplay allows Asian-American audiences to feel more comfortable in how they exist in the hyphen, and also pushes Hollywood to tell more authentic, necessary stories like these.

When I grew up, the television set was always on. Whether it was *Sesame Street* or *SNL*, TV was not just a form of entertainment in our household. TV was my teacher, a cheaper version of English class. I would rush home after school to join my grandma in watching *Wipeout, Cheers*, and *Family Matters* re-runs as together we all learned about American culture and the language required for survival. In searching for the American dream, the media was our guide.

But it was white media. When *Fresh Off the Boat* and *Crazy Rich Asians* came out, our community not only shared feelings of immense joy and pride, but also finally felt a connection to the screen. In seeing lead roles and true stories about Asians immigrating and navigating America, I felt seen. The journey to complete my thesis was arduous, but ultimately demonstrated the necessity of using writing and pursuing this career. That faded television set acted as our instructor towards the American world, but failed to show us ourselves and how Asians fit into the American screen. I've grown and learned from the screen and beyond since then, namely through this thesis. With the tools given to me, I can take steps towards a fuller representation of Asian-Americans on screen. And maybe in the future, a family similar to mine will use television, film, or a story like mine to not only learn English but also gain confidence in figuring out how their story fits into America.

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