

## Final Essay: Comparison and Contrast

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You have learned about numerous topics related to Chinese American literature so far:

- Ethnic Identity Formation
- Perpetual Foreigner
- Model Minority
- Ethnic Feminization
- Mass Asians
- Mass laborers
- Economic Success
- Conservatism
- Orientalism / Self-Orientalization
- Abject Imagery
- Imposture – “Performing” One’s Own Identity
- Mail-order brides
- The White Savior trope
- Biracial Asian Americans

...and so on. One can interpret these works of literature in endless ways. You have read literature *examining* Chinese Americans from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the 21<sup>st</sup>. You have read works *published by* Chinese Americans from 1975 to the present day. Across these texts, you have seen the *ethnic culture* of Chinese and the *national culture* of Americans in numerous and diverse ways.

Select any *one* topic from the above (or create your own) and compare and contrast Ken Liu’s “The Paper Menagerie” with any *one* of the other texts we’ve studied thus far. Your comparison and contrast thesis may take one of two forms:

- i. (A) approaches Z theme in X way, but (B) approaches Z theme in Y way (*X and Y contrast each other*). Nevertheless, both approach Z theme in one common way (*comparison*).
- ii. Both (A) and (B) talk about Z theme (*comparison*), but (A) talks about Z in X way, while (B) talks about Z in Y way (*X and Y contrast one another*).
  - a. One variation you could take on this is (B) is more “important” or interesting than the other (A). B will end up being the argument of your paper; A will form your *counter-argument*.

A comparison argument with a contrast counter-argument (i) usually attempts to *synthesize* two seemingly separate issues under one common theme.

- Example’: Although women in “The Auntie” appear to have authority, while the mother in “The Paper Menagerie” appears to have no authority, women in both stories remain self-conscious over their roles in a hierarchical society.
- Your final comparison argument should NOT be more simple or basic than your contrast argument.

- WRONG: Although women in “The Auntie” appear to have authority, while the mother in “The Paper Menagerie” appears to have no authority, women in both stories have roles in society.

A contrast argument with a comparison counter-argument (ii) usually attempts to describe an issue in a *more nuanced, complex fashion* than what is commonly known.

- Example’: While “The Auntie” and “The Paper Menagerie” both feature magical women, in “The Auntie” magic emphasizes women’s influence after death, while in “The Paper Menagerie” it emphasizes their ability to create life.

Remember: **two issues being different are not the same as two issues contrasting. A contrasting issue usually embodies two opposites.**

- Example’: Although women in “The Auntie” appear **to have authority**, while the mother in “The Paper Menagerie” appears **to have no authority**, women in both stories remain self-conscious over their roles in a hierarchical society.
- Example’: While “The Auntie” and “The Paper Menagerie” both feature magical women, in “The Auntie” magic emphasizes women’s influence **after death**, while in “The Paper Menagerie” it emphasizes their ability to **create life**. (This example isn’t perfect.)

**In many instances, comparisons and contrasts are not obvious. Especially in the study of literature, do not just summarize the events, phrases, arguments, etc. in a text; try to *discover* and *argue* for comparisons and contrasts through *interpretation*.**

WRONG:

Haichen says to Maya, “That’s a bad color for you” (Wong and Xu ch.3). But “At my request, Mom also made a goat, a deer, and a water buffalo” (Liu).

*The contrast between these two statements is not self-evident. Neither sentence properly introduces the characters’ situation, why you chose these quotations, the specific idea or interpretation you are contrasting, and so on. The second sentence is especially poor. As a rule, things that contrast are similar in almost every aspect except for ONE, and that one is distinctive, embodying an opposite. In your interpretations, you will need to explain that contrast or comparison.*

RIGHT:

Maya chooses her own clothes during shopping. Meanwhile, Auntie Haichen hovers over her. As she says, “That’s a bad color for you,” she criticizes Maya’s choices without offering any constructive alternative (Wong and Xu ch.3). Jack also makes choices over his own toys. He desires “a goat, a deer, and a water buffalo,” but lacks the means to create them (Liu). His mother, however, listens to Jack’s “request” and makes these companions promptly (Liu). Haichen offers only empty, negative criticism over a young Chinese American’s choices, but Jack’s mother listens to those choices, and makes the young Chinese American’s desires real. Haichen’s judgment creates problems for youth, but Jack’s mother solves problems for youth.

*This paragraph actually combines comparisons and contrasts. Below, all comparisons are underlined, while all contrasts are in **bold**. Since this paragraph intends to contrast Haichen and the mother, the comparisons help to establish a framework for understanding the samples from these texts, while the contrasts help to distinguish these two samples under that framework.*

Maya chooses her own clothes during shopping. Meanwhile, Auntie Haichen hovers over her. As she says, “That’s a bad color for you,” she criticizes Maya’s choices **without offering any constructive alternative** (Wong and Xu ch.3). Jack also makes choices over his own toys. He desires “a goat, a deer, and a water buffalo,” but lacks the means to create them (Liu). His mother, however, listens to Jack’s “request” and **makes these companions promptly** (Liu). Haichen offers only **empty, negative criticism** over a young Chinese American’s choices, but Jack’s mother listens to those choices, and **makes the young Chinese American’s desires real**. Haichen’s judgment **creates problems for youth**, but Jack’s mother **solves problems for youth**.

Please perform research for this paper. You *can* use any of the sources provided in class for your material. Do remember to cite using MLA format – I didn’t necessarily follow it in my own material! You must, however, provide a minimum of *two* sources carefully selected, introduced, integrated, cited, etc. on your own. Wikipedia and Baidu themselves are not credible sources; remember to properly justify and explain your choice of researched material. All criteria for usage is the same as in your Argumentative Essay.

*MLA formats for this assignment will be graded quite strictly – including page numbers, titles, formats for titles, punctuation for quotations, proper MLA headers, and so on. Failure to properly follow these conventions will result in a deduction from your grade on this assignment.*

**DUE: July 31, 23:59 on Canvas**

GRADING CRITERIA: Please see the document “VY200 CC Essay Scoring Rubric” for guidelines. This essay is considered “argumentative,” not “expository.”

The absolute minimum length for your essay will be SIX pages, double-spaced, Times New Roman 12pt font. The maximum length is ten pages; the suggested length is 7-8 pages. This length is not strictly enforced; I care more about the quality of your argument.