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## **Crowning the Queen of Betwixt**

### ***An analysis of Miss Chinatown USA 2018***

#### **Abstract**

In this paper I will analyze a diasporic Chinese beauty pageant, Miss Chinatown USA (MCU) as a performative event. I will argue that the beauty pageant serves as a ritual enactment of Chinese American sovereignty, accepting and celebrating the permanent in-between position of the Chinese in American society. Building on performance studies literature, I will read the beauty pageant as a symbolic system of meanings and show how the social and historical past, the present condition, and an imagined future of the Chinese Americans become embodied on stage.

#### **Introduction**

Diasporic Chinese beauty pageants were initiated by Asian American civil rights groups (such as the Chinese American Citizenship Alliance) in the late 1940s in the USA as means to perform American citizenship. Beauty pageantry became an effective form of proving their loyalty to the American nation during the Cold War era, when the People's Republic of China officially banned beauty pageants declared to be "bourgeoisie non-sense" (Morgan, 2013 at Chiu, 2010), and middle class feminine beauty became a salient feature of Cold war gender ideology (Yeh, 2008). Ethnicity also became salient, as the post-World War liberal Cold War civil rights era provided opportunity for racial minorities to claim civil rights based on ethnicities. (Lim, 2006) Thus, under a Cold War liberal democratic ethos that rewarded displays of all-American citizenship, Asian American beauty culture became a site for its gendered display. As Lim (2006) points out, by organizing ethnic beauty pageants, the Chinese Americans simultaneously showcased their loyalty to America, their anti-communist stance, and "their ability to stage their communities' model citizenship to the larger American public." The Cold war rendered the Chinese in America to be politically affiliated with Taiwan (ROC), instead of the PRC (Yeh, 2011). This political affiliation has been a significant part of cultural festivities and celebrations among ethnic Chinese in the US, that started to fade away recently due to the reconfiguration of international relations among the three countries, but is still present to some extent.

Ethnic beauty contests have proliferated through the country and in the following decades have been exported to different localities where a numerous Chinese diasporic community was present. First to South America, then Europe and most recently to East Asia where such festivals enjoy the greatest popularity at the present. Local pageants have been structured into a hierarchical order, in which local contests serve as feeder pageants to regional, and finally to the international Chinese beauty contest, Miss Chinese International that is held in Mainland China where a mainland contestant is competing with diaspora representatives. The Miss Chinatown USA pageant, the case study for this article, is a regional competition, where representatives of different American cities (Miss Chinese Chicago, San Francisco, New York, etc.) compete for the crown to symbolically reign over the entire Chinese American diaspora as well as represent it to the broader public.

I will look into diasporic Chinese beauty pageants as sites that “offer a glimpse at the constantly changing and always complicated stories about the nation itself” (Banet-Weiser, 1999) and address the question what is the nation that is actually being represented on the pageants. The most obvious purpose of all beauty contests is to choose a queen, who is a symbolic representation of the collective identity to the larger group, who chooses them throughout the course of the competition. The queen embodies “the values and goals of a nation, locality, or a group” (King-O’Riain, 2008). The quest for the ideal contestant, whose attitude, appearance, and style encompasses both gendered and nationalist representation turns the competition to a “national field of shared symbols and practices that define both ethnicity and femininity in terms of national identity” (Banet-Weiser, 1999). After reviewing the literature on performance studies, I will apply the theories highlighted to the specific case study and analyze how the different segments of the pageant are structured to radiate the double-anchoredness of ethnic and national identifications and how the stage of the pageant is designed to provide space for enacting gender and class roles.

### **The Sociology of Performances – Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

As Miss Chinatown USA took place on the stage of the illustrious Herbst Theater of San Francisco, the event naturally lends itself to be read as a performance. The fact that the event happens on a stage is hardly ignorable. As performance studies Richard Schechner

points out, the stage functions as a boundary between reality and pretention, which informs the audience that the “social and personal worlds enacted are not those of the actors, but those of the characters” (2002, p. 43). What makes the Miss Chinatown pageant particularly interesting is that its stage is supposed to stand for enacting true, authentic performances instead of “pretention.” The enactments of this kind should demand a somewhat different understanding, that lies in the function of the performance.

The pageant is narrated as a “community event”, therefore it is important to understand the performance in relation to producing and reproducing a sense of community. I identify three levels on which the performance relates to the community: 1, organizing and producing the show has brought together otherwise unrelated people, therefore it served to forge a community. 2, In the show, the norms and values of the emerging community has been defined. 3, In the final stage of the ritual, the contestants enacted these values and norms and the best enactment has been rewarded to articulate once again the values the community wishes to identify itself with. The enactment of contestants serves a double effect: it both validates and solidifies the proposed norms, and by reciting these values and norms, it makes the contestants individually identify with them. The success of individual performances defines the success of the collective assertion of Chinese Americanness. The performance traditionally takes place as a highlight of Chinese New Year festivities in San Francisco, which makes the pageant a public ritual. Therefore, I will rely on sociological literature on performances, with a special focus on rituals.

The sociology of performance, more precisely the performance of rituals and its power to both create and sustain “social solidarity” was first recognized by Durkheim within his broader body of work on religion ([1912] 2000). This double effect – creation and maintenance – carried out by rituals caused ambiguity considering the function and thus the intention of rituals. The first sociologist, who turned his attention to the theatrical dynamics of ritual was van Gennep (1960), whose insight has been developed to a fully-fledged theory by V. Turner ([1966] 1995). In their theory, life is composed of a succession of passages from one social role to another, and each passing is carried out through a ritual. The three phases of such rituals identified by van Gennep – pre-liminal, liminal, post-liminal – remain unchanged in Turner’s theory, but he focuses on the middle stage, liminality, which has great use to the present analysis as it proposes the Chinese in America to be conceived as liminal entities between (both) China(s) and America. Turner

defines liminal entities as the people, who are is “betwixt and between” social categories or personal identities as follows:

Liminal entities [...] behavior is normally passive or humble; they must obey their instructors implicitly and accept arbitrary punishment without complaint. It is as though they are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new stations in life. Among themselves, neophytes tend to develop an intense comradeship and egalitarianism. (V. Turner, 1995, p. 95)

In his book, *Dramas, Fields, Metaphors* Turner further elaborates on ritual processes by completing it with his social drama theory (1975), that resonates with Goffman’s dramaturgical conception of the social world as theater (Goffman, 1959). The social drama theory’s main argument is that ritual passages occur on a larger societal scale as well, where the phases are defined as: breach, crisis, redressive action, and reintegration or schism. In this case it is not an individual who is under transformation, but a “disturbed social group”. In this sense the Chinese in America can be conceived as such, being marked as perpetual foreigners. The beauty pageant, having been held for over 60 years seems to ritually enact this schism, marking the Chinese as a separate body in the US society.

Albeit the applicability of this theory has received severe criticism, its insight on the fluid relationship between aesthetic and social processes is undoubtedly useful. The social drama theory explains how aesthetic and social processes are being mutually constitutive, as they inform and shape each other. This model requires each social drama and aesthetic drama (or other performance) to be understood in its specific cultural and historical circumstances (Schechner, 2002). By pointing to the mutually constitutive nature of aesthetic and social processes, it provides a basis for analyzing the sociological connotations deriving from the aesthetics of the pageant.

Albeit implicit in the aforementioned theories, the power structures governing the dynamics of performativity were not theorized until the 90s. Judith Butler points to the matrixes of power, both internal and external to individual subjects, that enable concepts such as gender to become unquestioned realities through constant repetition. Butler argues that gender identity is performed and constituted in the process of doing, while also underlines the constraints of expectations and pre-existing structural factors. (1993) What is new to her argument – as we have seen Durkheim already pointed to ritual’s

power to create – is her point of view, that sheds light on the darker side of performing: the pre-existing structural factors and expectations that are produced by power regimes, hegemonies if you like. As Woronov sharply puts it: performative acts "are part of regulatory practices that produce social categories and norms of membership.... [The activities] are sites where hegemonic definitions of the collective body relate to multiple injunctions of individual bodies" (Woronov 2007 cited by Chiu, 2010, p. 81).

The question arises, who is the power behind defining expectations considering young Chinese American women of the pageant? I argue that there is a distinct diaspora truth regime governed by the ruling class of the diaspora, which functionally defines the beauty pageant as a site for localizing disciplinable subjects. The significance of performing class – showcasing the success of the Chinese in America – is explicit throughout the staging of the event and the entire spectacle.

Here Goffman's notion of fixed and mobile or transitory 'sign vehicles' is very useful (1956, pp. 14–15). We can consider race and gender fixed sign vehicles – with the caveat that their meaning is still open to change and narration – and class can be ultimately performed by mobile sign vehicles such as dress and poise. As Mignonette Chiu concludes her analysis of Miss New York Chinese, through emphasizing the capitalist values of hard work, individual merit, and competition, a model minority role model is constructed. She argues that it is one of the stated goals of MNYC is to "improve the self-presentation skills of the contestants; in other words, train them to behave within the boundaries of the numerously intersecting "fine lines" that distinguish the upper from the lower class" (Chiu, 2010, p. 247). Adopting a goffmannian wording, the contestants learn through the pageant the know-how of the 'proper sign-equipment' of the capitalist elite (Goffman, 1956, p. 45). One part of this sign-equipment is fashion, that plays a prominent role throughout the beauty pageant. According to Merleau-Ponty the human body is a meaning-creating subject and a medium of culture, which can be further played out by clothing. "Clothing reveals personal ambitions, social aspirations, and the prevailing Zeitgeist" (Merleau-Ponty cited by Chiu, 2010, p. 191). Thus, fashion will be an important aspect for the upcoming analysis.

Another fruitful aspect of Butler's notion on gender as a performative act is that it is easily transmittable to all other social constructs, such as race, ethnicity and class, all of which are actively performed on the stage of Miss Chinatown. Scholars such as John Clammer and Jon McKenzie argue that ethnicity, "one of the most obviously 'embodied' aspects of

identity” is a prime example for a notion “that has to be acted out and constantly reproduced in everyday life.” (Clammer, 2015) Even though this argument holds particularly true to asserted identities – instead of assigned ones, a distinction between ethnicity and race - dress, hairstyles, postures, accents, dance forms and other cultural devices can be utilized to draw attention to, contest or deny ascribed – racial – identities.

A good illustration of challenging the unwritten norms of Miss Chinatown is provided by Chinese American artist Kristina Wong, who performed a “guerilla theater character,” Fannie Wong, former Miss Chinatown USA 2nd runner up, who made her fame by being forcibly removed by security from official Miss Chinatown events. Fannie wears the qipao, the crown, and the sash, unmistakably marking her Miss Chinatown, but her “class” and “poise” is breaking all the rules defining a real Miss Chinatown. She drinks Jack Daniels, constantly curses, smokes an enormous cigar and is overtly predatory and vulgar with males. Albeit it is not stated anywhere that these characteristics make one illegible to hold the title, her performance and its receptions points to the expectations Chinese American women are subjected to.

As the previous illustration shows, adopting an intersectional perspective is crucial for an appropriate understanding of Miss Chinatown. Although the notion of intersectionality has moved “from oppression to diversity” as it started to be employed to describe “the mutually constitutive relations among social identities” (Shields, 2008) I find the original proposal by Cernshaw of describing “layered systems of oppressions” by pointing to the “cumulating features of discrimination and social exclusion (...) interwoven in various ways” (Goodwin, 2016) more useful for this case study. McCall identifies three intersectional approaches defined based on their relation to the nature of the categories they work with. The second approach is the “intracategorical” that lies in the middle of “the continuum between the first approach, which rejects categories, and the third approach, which uses them strategically” (McCall, 2005, p. 1773). Instead, it focuses on “particular groups at neglected points of intersection.” The Miss Chinatown contestants are not neglected at all, to the contrary, their particular group is put the center of attention at a highly enhanced intersection. I will analyze the particular intersection of age, race, ethnicity, class and gender which is embraced and celebrated by and through the pageant. Now I will turn to the case study, Miss Chinatown USA, 2018.

## **Miss Chinatown 2018 – The Queen of Betwixt**

The Miss Chinatown 2018 has seen some changes in terms of its production. As the former director, who represented classical Hong Kong-style entertainment retired, the new team, headed by Vietnamese Mark Tran with Hollywood affiliations moved toward a more Americanized type of event. This was mostly visible in the lighting and sound of the pageant, as well as in the lack of any visible hints that would readily identify the event as Chinese. Scholars of diasporic Chinese beauty pageants all point to a tension between the event's self-definition as cultural – making it distinct from other mainstream beauty pageants – and the actual lack of “traditional Chinese practices” (Chiu, 2010, p. 188). According to TVB's official in charge of the aforementioned Miss Chinese International, their mission is to “make [Chinese women from elsewhere] feel more at home with Chinese culture, to get in touch with Chinese culture” (Chow, 2011, p. 418), while according to its website, MNYC seeks “to promote Chinese cultural heritage in the U.S.” (Chiu, 2010, p. 189). Albeit the MCU does not have any official statement about its mission, every second contestant mentioned in their introduction that celebrating or immersing in Chinese culture was their main motivation for participation.

Chinese cultural elements did appear on MCU 2018 – unlike in the other two pageants, even though in very essentialized and fragmentary ways, mostly evolving around the theme of the Chinese New Year. The show opened with Yao Kung Moon Kung Fu Sport Association's lion dance performance. The lion dance is considered to be a traditional element of Chinese New Year festivities, accompanied by a drum number. Though the format and the shape were absolutely traditional, the lions were decorated with neon lights, and the performance was carried out in the dark, which can be seen as an enactment of technological advancement, carefully adapted to preserved traditions.

Another salient feature of the opening number was that all performers were women, that cannot be said to be traditional. The female presence on stage was prevalent throughout the whole event. All guest performers were women, apart from one of the MC's, the stage was set for women for the whole night. Compared to the other pageants mentioned above this is a significant difference. One of the most distinctive characteristic of the pageant was the unusual amount of opportunity for contestants to speak for themselves. Apart from the introduction, they also provided their personal narrations about the talent performances, which were announced by the MC's before the performances. These two

occasions were complemented by the Q/A session, during which they could take as long as they wished to – unlike in other pageants, where an intimidating sound is constantly reminding the contestants that they have to finish at any moment. Considering the pageant as a whole, it promoted an independent, agile, and successful image for Chinese women, for which it provided as much time and space as needed.

It is interesting to note, that the guest performances indicated a deliberate intention for displaying every age cohort of Chinese American women that could be read as symbolizing the future, the present and the past of them. After the traditional lion dance, Sutro Elementary School's 3rd-5th grader performed a New Year's children song in Mandarin. Even though they were introduced as all 3rd-5th graders of the school, no males and no other ethnicities featured in the group, but 14 Chinese girls. Both their number and their uniform looks (hairdo and Chinese costume) anticipated the 14 contestants, who appeared soon after them, wearing uniform Chinese-flavored cocktail dresses. The school girls' performance was deliberately deprived of any sexuality, the girls wore trousers, and neither the song nor the choreography suggested any gendered expectations towards them. They were there to represent an open-ended future, filled with carefree youthful optimism.

Before the contestants appeared, the queen and "court" of MCU 2016 performed an energetic K-pop number for popular Taiwanese singer, Jolin Tsai's Play. This performance showcased the opportunity lying in winning the title. The former queen and her court was designed to represent celebrities, what was highlighted and enhanced by four professional back-up dancers. The choice for the song and the choreography aimed at representing a 21st century cool Asian vibe. Both K-pop moves, and even certain Mandopop songs broke into the global market and earned fame and success for themselves. The former queen – who did not pursue a career at entertainment, but work at Google as an engineer instead – promoted the idea of a globally attractive, and absolutely independent Asian woman.

At this point, the MC's took the stage. For the first time, the event was trilingual: Cantonese, Mandarin and English. The constitution of the MC triad was highly symbolical: Julia, wearing an elegant Chinese gown was the Cantonese speaking MC represented the tradition in the event, having had MC-ing it "for many many years." Betty, a former queen wearing a Western Evening gown represented continuity and was in charge of English for the night. Both ladies wore an excessive amount of jewelry on their necks, ears, arms and



fingers, which they changed on more occasions during the evening. The constant shining and glittering that surrounded them lend the event a glamorous atmosphere, showcasing the wealth and affluence of the community. The third MC, the only male on stage was Jeff, the Mandarin speaking American, repeatedly referring to himself as “that white guy.” This reversed colonization also served the pride of the community, as Jeff, a Yale graduate Hollywood entertainer proved over and over again his admiration of Chinese culture. The dynamics between Betty and Jeff caused a certain hybridization and direct confusion about race and ethnicity. Betty, who could be considered as racially Chinese was actually ethnically American; while Jeff, who was racially American was ethnically Chinese. This confusion over race and ethnicity can be conceived as part of the rite the passage of a liminoid social group. This sense of in-betweenness was characteristic for the whole event, best exemplified by the contestants.

Last but not least the 14 contestants finally took the stage, all at once after a short while of darkness. The fact that they appeared all at once in their uniformly designed cocktail dresses inevitably evoked Turner’s theory about liminal entities “being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew.” The uniformity of their looks symbolized a sense of community while they performed an absolutely uniform choreography to Tez Cadey’s 2015 electro/deep house hit, Seve. The song and choreography accompanied by the hybrid style of the dresses projected a global cosmopolitan image of modern Chinese American women. Observing a similar image projected in MNYC, Chiu notes that this image[...] reflects not the reality but the fantasy both of material wealth, as well as the social status and fame that accompany it. It is a fantasy in which Chinese, as individuals, are given entrance to spaces from which they had formerly been excluded because class and/or race and ethnicity. It is the fantasy of an entire racialized ethnic community to be included in what was once articulated as the “American dream,” even if it is displaced elsewhere (Chiu, 2010, p. 248)

The collective introduction was followed by all contestants individually introducing themselves. Instead of listing their measurements, they listed their achievements and accomplishments. All introduction bore a uniform pattern in departing from one’s past, present accomplishments to future aspirations. The aspirations included “hope to one day pursue a career in the field of engineering and consulting,” “dream to become an anesthesiologist”, or to “aspire to become a chief technology officer” to list but a few.

These dreams and hopes are quite peculiar in promoting an image of independent career women, standing on their own feet, with non mentioning of family or community service. The aspirations pertained to high status jobs with a Caucasian male dominance. As one contestant explicitly put it: “tonight, I am going to show the world, what being Chinese American means to me. Fiercely competitive, and insanely driven.” As contestant applications went through severe scanning we can assume the projection of this image is hardly accidental. The discourse about contestants evolved around being a role model for Asian Americans, that is defined in individualistic capitalist terms. The luxury of the event with all the costumes, jewelries and shining high heels reflect the rise of a global and transnational Chinese capitalist class, exemplified by the values propagated by most contestants.

The other major non-fashion portion of the event, the talent portion succeeded the self-introduction. At this portion every contestant individually performed a talent of her choice. A significant majority chose dancing (10 out of 14) from which we can assume that contestants found this portion to be the best option to showcase their femininity alongside their cultural knowledge about China. Albeit only half of them identified their dances as Chinese, or Chinese-fusion dance, everybody chose to display a somewhat restrained, Orientalized notion of femininity and applied classical accessories of Chinese dance such as the ribbon, flags and fan. The trope of the independent woman recurred a few times, but the majority enacted a desirable, fresh woman, to win over the audience and the judges. However, the unintended and unexpected uniformity of performances made them dull and difficult to separate from each other. As a result, the Miss Talent title went to the only classical Chinese instrument player, who performed the best-known piece written for pipa. This result also signals the lack of cultural knowledge on the side of the jury, exemplified the only outrage voiced by the announcements in the audience.

If the talent portion served to exemplify Chinese femininity, it was balanced by the very Americanized notion of femininity in the swimsuit round. The swimsuits were designed by the same designer, but they differed in style and color, making it a symbol of “diversity and uniformity.” Most of the Chinese beauty pageants in the U.S. include the swimsuit segment, although when the MCU was founded in 1958, the organizers “prided themselves for not having their contestants parade around in bathing suits” (Wu, 1997: 23). The swimsuit was not introduced into MCU until 1967. (Chiu, 2010, p. 195) As the bikini is “arguably one of the most modern and revealing pieces of women’s clothing,” it

stands in sharp contrast with the Chinese notion of femininity that is preserved and introverted. Probably this is the reason why contestants were given Beijing opera masks, an emblem of Chinese cultural authenticity, to cover their on an occasion at MCE, reported by Chow (2011, p. 421). In MCU 2018 they were only given a veil to cover their bottoms, which they had to unfold when turning their front to the audience. This segment lends itself for the most feminist critique as it solely serves to objectify female bodies, that is often worsened by introducing contestants' measurements. In this case, it was worsened by introducing contestants' sponsors, thereby attributing the physical form and fitness of contestants to their sponsors. During this performance Papi by Jennifer Lopez was playing, the "lyrics [of which] center around Lopez's love for dancing for her man", further enhancing the idea that a woman's worth is measured through the admiration she can squeeze off her "sponsor." However, as contestants' narratives reveal, this segment fosters a strong sense of self-confidence in revealing themselves to the gaze of others.

To compensate the excessive nudity and oversexualization of their bodies, contestants got to put on their evening gowns for the next segment. This time only music was playing, the MC's silently withdraw. The evening gown is a segment that almost every beauty pageant features, probably because the symbolism it represents is highly adaptable to all norms and values that are embraced by different beauty pageants. As Chiu put it: "The elaborate gowns are symbols of the economic, political, and social/cultural assent of imagined communities. The evening gown, which is a visible element of contemporary mainstream fashion, is a site upon which, in a capitalist economy, the desire and fantasy for wealth materializes" (Chiu, 2010, p. 243). As such they also contribute to the display of the global transnational Chinese capitalist class.

The question and answer portion was conducted while the contestants still wore the elegant gowns. It is a recurring theme in beauty pageant literature what do contestants wear if they got to this portion. Often times it is bikinis, that is at once challenging but if successful truly embodies the "whole in one package" idea that is often cited throughout this round. On Chinese pageants it is usually the qipao what they wear, explained as it is the q/a when contestants should ritually enact their Chineseness. However, in MCU 2018 it was the evening gown, that served to project the image of an elite and knowledgeable Chinese woman.

The questions themselves were unusual to beauty pageants, as half of them directly tackled social issues concerning the Chinese in America, such as "The Chinese Americans

are still underrepresented in American media and films. How would you encourage a better and healthier image of your community?" or "Even in 2018 America, where Chinese people are in every corner of society, there are still many misconceptions about them. What do you feel is the biggest misconception, and how would you help educate on this?" Questions evolving around the politics of the community render the queen of MCU a political role, also implied by her title of "goodwill ambassador" for the community. The outright political nature of the questions signals a significant women empowerment agenda in the diaspora's political sphere. The qualities possessed by Miss MCU clearly include leadership skills, which is not characteristic of other beauty pageants. The necessity of these skills is justified by her tasks as "goodwill ambassador." Having an attractive looking politician boosts the social capital of the entire community.

The qipaos did not miss from MCU either, as they are the common identifier of Chinese beauty pageants. According to Chiu, the qipao "is the one element that is common to all ethnic Chinese beauty pageants and is incorporated as the most defining element in the pageant of ethnic Chineseness." The qipao became the "the garment of choice for self-marking as a Chinese" during the heightened Chinese nationalism during the 1920s-1930s. The modern qipao was a part of "the Republican discourse of the "New Woman" and "[b]oth the qipao and its wearers were stitched into the rubric of... modernity" (Ling, 2009: 6) as symbols of Chinese "national" identity." (Chiu, 2010, p. 209) According to Ling, the qipao served to represent an emerging middle class with some education financial independence, and social and cultural awareness. "Those women wearing their qipaos were significant in the creation of a progressive China and were co-opted by the state as Republican icons." (Ling, 2009) After the Republican government came into power and intended to severely regulate qipaos, the dress also became a site for popular resistance and female empowerment. Despite its rich and colorful history, today's qipaos do not bear more meaning than being the self-markers for Chinese women, and this was their role in MCU 2018 as well. The MCU contestants only put on their qipaos for the grand announcements, the symbolism of donning the qipao for the crowning is obvious. It is also symbolical that after they put on the qipao, they do not talk again, not even the queen. They freeze into Chinatown postcard-like postures, beautiful Chinese women in their "traditional" qipaos.

## **Conclusion**

The crowning ceremony deployed all possible tropes, including gem crowns (shaped like the Statue of Liberty's crown), a throne (carved from sandalwood with identical design), a robe (adorned with an embroidered or carved dragon motif), a scepter and title. Besides the queen seven sashes are "bestowed" along with two crowns. The crowning of the queen can be interpreted in different ways. For Chiu, it "represents not only the maturation of an ethnic community but as the symbolic mother of that community, is a metaphor for an ethnic community coming into being. But even more, the desire to re-cite a Chinese "queen" speaks to the historical denial of sovereignty to China (state) and Chinese' (subjects)." (2010, p. 95)

Even though I agree with the argument pertaining to the whole show, as the production and consumption of it does undoubtedly produce a community, I do not read the symbolism of crowning the same way. In my view the crowning symbolizes the success of the Chinese as an ethnic group within the mainstream American society. It symbolizes that the Chinese belong to America, but always remain different – not as if they had another choice. It symbolizes that nevertheless, they are capable of achievements the larger society can only be jealous of. But the larger society is not in the theater, so this remain a secret, that knits the community even closer.

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