



NEWS 'N NOTES

CHINESE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

WWW.CHSSC.ORG • (323) 222-0856

FEBRUARY 2001

EXCERPTS

CHINESE SAN FRANCISCO, 1850-1943: A TRANS-PACIFIC COMMUNITY

*Courtesy of Scott H. Tang <shtang@socrates.berkeley.edu>,
Reviewed for H-California, Department of History,
University of California at Berkeley*

In Chinese San Francisco, Yong Chen investigates life within the largest and most significant Chinese American community before the Second World War. His study of the quotidian rests upon creative readings of newspaper items, personal diaries, and other sources generated by the residents themselves. In addition to reconstructing Chinatown from the perspective of the immigrants, Chen explores the trans-pacific links they established with their ancestral homeland and the shaping of a Chinese immigrant mentality. Whenever possible, he also notes how the discourse of nineteenth-century Chinese immigration contributed to misinterpretations of Chinese immigrant life.

The book begins with a look at the factors encouraging migration in the first place. Emphasizing the migrants' status and agency, Chen refutes a conventional depiction of immigration as a panic-stricken flight from hunger and poverty. Although they were disparaged in anti-Chinese propaganda as members of the lowest social class, the immigrants arriving in America were seldom from the poorest segment of Chinese society. The Pearl River Delta, the region sending the overwhelming majority of the immigrants, actually had a thriving market economy characterized by diversified commodities production and extensive maritime trade. This economic vitality and prosperity, according to Chen, "gave rise to individuals willing to venture away from home to pursue money-making opportunities" (12). Moreover, contact with American traders and missionaries in the treaty port of Canton contributed to Chinese knowledge concerning the United States and helped draw California within the constellation of potential sites for overseas migration. They may have possessed only a limited understanding of their future in America, but Chinese immigrants still chose to make trans-Pacific journeys to enhance their lives.

Throughout his portrayal of life in Chinatown, Chen asserts that nineteenth-century Chinese immigrants kept many of their traditional attitudes, beliefs, and practices. Even immigrants who learned the English language and adopted American ways did not sever their strong bonds with Chinese culture. Chen refuses, however, to interpret the immigrants' affiliation with their ancestral homeland as evidence of a sojourner mentality.

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MARCH PROGRAM

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 7TH, 2000

7:00 PM

CASTELAR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

MULTIPURPOSE ROOM

840 YALE ST.

LOS ANGELES, CHINATOWN

(PARK ON PLAYGROUND. ENTER ON COLLEGE ST.
BETWEEN HILL AND YALE STREETS)

A TRANS-PACIFIC COMMUNITY

BY YONG CHEN

OUR SPEAKER FOR MARCH WILL BE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT IRVINE ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF HISTORY AND ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES, YONG CHEN. HIS RECENT BOOK, CHINESE SAN FRANCISCO, 1850-1943: A TRANS-PACIFIC COMMUNITY, ADDS ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE TO OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE CHINESE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE. YONG CHEN IS PART OF A NEW WAVE OF HISTORIANS WHO HAVE EXPLORED AND RECOVERED THE HISTORY OF CHINESE IN AMERICA FROM THE WRITINGS OF CHINESE THEMSELVES AND IN ITS CULTURAL CONTEXT. IN THE PAST MUCH OF CHINESE AMERICAN HISTORY HAS BEEN BASED UPON THE OBSERVATIONS OF NON CHINESE MANY OF WHOM HAD LITTLE UNDERSTANDING OF EASTERN CULTURE. THIS DEVELOPING STAGE OF CHINESE AMERICAN HISTORY CAN ONLY HELP MAKE OUR UNDERSTANDING MORE TRUE TO LIFE.

PROGRAMS FOR 2001

April - James Hong

Presentation by the most recognized character actor whose roles have span the entire spectrum from comedy to dramatics.

May - TBA

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CHINESE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

FEBRUARY 2001

SPECIAL THANKS FOR FEBRUARY REFRESHMENTS TO:

SUSAN DICKSON
MAE HOM
RUTH LUNG
DOROTHY LOUIE LEW
DOLORES WONG
DONNA YOUNG
NOEL TOY YOUNG
AND JOHNNY YEE

We apologize if we have inadvertently left anyone off this list.
Your support is invaluable and much appreciated.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL DEADLINE IS MARCH 16, 2001

CHSSC membership dues are from January through December. Please check your mail label to find your expiration date. This is also a chance for you to bring in a NEW member.

DOCENTS NEEDED

Retirees, Semi-retirees, anyone with time 'weekdays' WE NEED YOUR HELP. CHSSC has been giving educational tours to students ages 6 through adulthood. The "tour" season has already started and docents are needed. The hours are from 10 a.m. to noon. If you are interested, please contact the office at (323) 222 0856 or call Ella Quan (323) 255 6487

CHSSC SCHOLARSHIP FUNDS NEEDED

How would you like to help a college student fulfill his dream? You can do so by contributing to the CHSSC Scholarship Fund. For the last several years, the CHSSC has awarded a \$1,000 scholarship to a qualified and deserving undergraduate student in a college or university here in Southern California who shows a strong interest in Chinese American studies in the Humanities or Social Sciences. Donations are needed to continue this important program, which starts in December, so please consider contributing to the Scholarship Fund and know that you are helping to encourage a student continue his or her education goals, especially in the field of Chinese American studies.

More and more interest is being shown in the contributions of Chinese Americans to this country and the world, and what better way is there to show your support and applaud their efforts? We will gladly accept donations of any amounts. Just specify "Scholarship Fund" on your donation and accept our thanks for helping in such a tangible way!

Contact Winnie Lew, Scholarship Chair, for more information through the CHSSC office at (323) 222-0856

25TH ANNIVERSARY T-SHIRTS

A limited number of 25th Anniversary commemorative T-shirts are still available at \$20 each or two or more at \$18 each, sizes come in medium, large, and extra large for sale at the Heritage and Visitors Center. Or you can order them by using the membership subscription.

2000-2001

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**IN MEMORIAM****FUNG CHOW CHAN
PIONEER BUSINESSMAN**

The Chinese American community lost one of its great leaders with the passing of Fung Chow Chan on January 29, 2001, in Los Angeles, after his suffering a stroke. He leaves a legacy as an entrepreneur, banker, and community philanthropist as well as a dedicated family man.

Born in 1909 in Canton, he arrived in Los Angeles in 1933 to join his father in his silk business. He and his wife Wai Hing opened Phoenix Bakery in 1938 in the New Chinatown Central Plaza, selling a variety of pastries from family recipes. Shortly afterward, younger brother Lun Chan joined the business and is credited with creating the strawberry cream cake for which Phoenix Bakery has become renown. The Chan family continues to own and operate the award-winning bakery.

Recognizing the challenges of financing Chinese American business enterprises due to discrimination in the local banking industry, Fung Chow Chan helped found Cathay Bank in 1962, becoming its first chairman of the board. Still headquartered in Los Angeles Chinatown, Cathay Bank is now the largest Chinese American Bank in the U.S.

Later, in 1964, he helped found East-West Bank, the first federally chartered Chinese American savings bank, also becoming its first chairman. The bank focused on home loans, enabling many Chinese American families to buy homes at a time when racial barriers were being broken in many L.A. neighborhoods.

Mr. Chan also founded a number of other enterprises, but he maintained his commitment to the Los Angeles Chinatown community. Over the years, he and his family have generously supported organizations such as the Friends of the Chinatown Library, the Friends of the Chinese American Museum, the Chinatown Public Safety Association, his family association, the Gee How Oak Tien Association, as well as the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California.

He is survived by sons Kellogg, Kenneth, and Kelly, brother Lun, sister Fung Chee Chan Fat, and eight grandchildren.

NATHANIEL WONG, JR., ESQ.

Condolences go to Cy Wong and his family in the passing of his brother, Nathaniel Wong, Jr. A donation of \$50 was made to honor him in his memory.

NEWS 'N NOTES

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SUBMISSIONS OF CALENDAR
EVENTS AND ARTICLES MUST BE
RECEIVED BY THE 15TH OF EACH
MONTH IN ORDER TO BE
CONSIDERED IN THAT MONTH'S
NEWSLETTER

CONTACT

YVONNE CHIA
YCHIA76@HOTMAIL.COM
(310) 393-9185
333 22ND STREET
SANTA MONICA, CA 90402

**THE LONELY QUEUE
BY ICY SMITH**

The Forgotten History of The Courageous Chinese Americans in Los Angeles by Icy Smith, Foreword by the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California. This unprecedented pictorial history book presents the vibrant and diverse contribution of the 150 years of Chinese Americans in Los Angeles. The author worked with researchers and historians to document this remarkable history and to trace more than 200 vintage photographs, drawings and paintings depicting the struggle of making America their home.

The book was sold at the January meeting. Mrs. Smith was there to hand sign the books. The book is now available at the Heritage House.

Johnny Yee has donated a copy of The Lonely Queue to the Monterey Park Library. On his recent trip to Hong Kong, he also plans to donate a copy to the American Embassy.



CHINESE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

CALENDAR OF EVENTS/ EXHIBITS AND PERFORMANCES • FEBRUARY 2001

MARCH 18TH

CHINESE ENGINEERS AND SCIENTISTS OF SOUTHERN
CALIFORNIA BANQUET
AT LOS ANGELES AIRPORT HILTON

MARCH 23RD

CHINESE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE GOLF
TOURNAMENT
AT CALIFORNIA COUNTRY CLUB
11:30 LUNCH
STARTS AT 1 PM
6 PM DINNER

MARCH 25TH

ACADEMY AWARDS
AT SHRINE AUDITORIUM

THRU 2001

COMMON GROUND: THE HEART OF COMMUNITY
JAPANESE AMERICAN COMMUNITY
JAPANESE AMERICAN NATIONAL MUSEUM
(213) 625-0414

MARCH 21ST - APRIL 15TH

EAST WEST PLAYERS PRESENTS:
*A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE
FORUM*
AT 120 JUDGE JOHN AISO STREET

THRU MAY 27, 2001

SUPERFLAT, 19 OF JAPAN'S MOST PROVOCATIVE
ARTISTS WHOSE WORK BRIDGES POP CULTURE AND
FINE ART IN AN EXHIBITION SEEN FOR THE FIRST
TIME OUTSIDE JAPAN
AT THE MOCA GALLERY AT THE PACIFIC DESIGN
CENTER
(213) 626 6222 OR WWW.MOCA.ORG

MACY STREET PROJECT IMPORTANT NEWS TO COMMUTERS

Macy Street Area Cement-Mortar Lining Project. The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (DWP) will begin renovating aging water pipelines in the areas bordered by: Pasadena Fwy. (110) to Santa Ana Fwy. (5), San Bernardino Fwy. (10); Pasadena Fwy. (110), & Hollywood Fwy. (101), east to Golden State Fwy.(5) Daly St. & Marengo Street.

"The renovation will help us maintain high water quality standards. The renovation will also result in increased water flow capacity for better fire fighting capabilities in your neighborhood, and it will add up to 50 years to the life of the pipeline. Pipeline renovation is less disruptive to the neighborhood than pipeline replacement work and it is typically one-third the cost. The pipeline renovation project involves a section-by-section cleaning and cement-mortar lining of selected older pipes in the area. The duration of the project will be approximately nine months with work on each street requiring six to eight weeks."

EXCERPTS

continued from page 1

He criticizes the bipolar paradigm of sojourners and settlers, itself an outgrowth of an outmoded Anglo-conformist definition of assimilation, for failing to recognize that immigrants can simultaneously plant roots in America and remain closely tied to China. Chinese immigrants, Chen writes, "did not have to make a choice between being settlers and sojourners or between China and America" (57). He ultimately concludes that the Chinese immigrants' world transcended national boundaries.

Political life in Chinatown was similarly trans-Pacific. Before the 1920s, Chinatown's political leaders were all scholars who passed Chinese civil service examinations and subsequently migrated to take their posts in America. This system of appointments bolstered China's authority over the community, ensured the continuity of Chinese political traditions, and led immigrants to look to China for political remedies. At the same time that China played a role in the politics of its immigrant communities, Chinese immigrants demonstrated concern for Chinese national politics.

When they began to believe a stronger Chinese nation could better protect their interests in America, the immigrants became more deeply involved in overseas politics. They gave financial support to reform and revolutionary groups advocating different programs for political change. The money contributed to these rival factions and to the Chinese economy as a whole, elevated the immigrants political clout, and made the plight of immigrants a salient political issue in China. The economic importance of the "Gold Mountainers" was so widely recognized that fellow Chinese in China helped organize a 1905 protest



against America's anti-Chinese policies and provided relief funds to Chinese San Franciscans after the earthquake and fire devastated Chinatown in 1906.

The connections between China and its immigrant communities grew closer and increasingly reciprocal in the early decades of the twentieth century. One added dimension in the trans-Pacific relationship was the emerging spirit of Chinese nationalism. Excited by changes occurring abroad, Chinese immigrants decided to participate in the so-called "awakening of China." They helped finance China's economic development with investments in manufacturing industries and railroads. In 1911, they enthusiastically embraced the Republican revolution and raised money for the new government. At home in America, they formed schools to teach their children Chinese language and culture. These institutions reinforced a national identity which celebrated Chinese civilization while stressing the need to incorporate Western ideas and practices. Some Chinese in America began adopting the ways of the dominant culture and discarding those traditional customs they considered "obstacles to evolution" (180). Chen cautions against interpreting the period's cultural changes, e.g. voluntary queue cutting and the anti-opium campaign, as either signs of assimilation or rejections of China. Given the nationalist sentiment, these social reform measures were strategies for self improvement and expressions of national pride in a modernizing Chinese republic.

Chen concludes his presentation by describing how the trans-Pacific relationship with China permitted Chinese Americans to improve their status in the 1930s and 1940s. As several scholars have pointed out, Chinese Americans actively supported China's war against Japan. They disseminated propaganda and collected money and supplies for their homeland. According to Chen, "Rice Bowl" parties and other fund raising efforts did more than provide donations and generate sympathy for China. The events brought white Americans into the Chinese enclave and introduced Chinese culture to these visitors. In doing so, they subverted the negative images associated with Chinatown and stimulated tourism in the ethnic economy. Coupled with the media focus on China's rising international stature, the emphasis on favorable representations of Chinese Americans contributed to a better race relations environment. Furthermore, Chinese Americans took advantage of wartime employment opportunities and built upon their reputations as hardworking, patriotic Americans. With attitudes concerning the Chinese changing, a movement to repeal the racist Chinese exclusion laws gained momentum, especially after the government publicized the Second World War as a global campaign against intolerance. To stave off charges of hypocrisy and to advance its alliance with China, America eventually modified its restrictions on Chinese immigration.[2]

The most refreshing part of the study is the portrayal of everyday life in Chinatown. Chen pieces together evidence from restaurant menus, newspaper advertisements, school textbooks, and other sources. He makes extensive use of the diaries kept by Ah Quin, an immigrant who lived in San Francisco from December 1878 through October 1880 before moving to San Diego.

Chen admits that the diarist's Christianity and English language abilities made him an atypical Chinese immigrant and that his brief stay in San Francisco forced Chen to extrapolate from later experiences in San Diego. Nevertheless, the diaries provide a rare glimpse at one immigrants daily activities and concerns. Early diary entries revealed Ah Quin's strong feelings of obligation toward his family and friends in China. Other entries chronicled mundane aspects of Ah Quin's life, including the time he spent eating meals, playing chess, visiting brothels, and attending shows.

Chen also pays less attention to race relations, presumably because the numerous studies addressing the anti-Chinese movement and white perceptions of Chinese immigrants make including this discussion unnecessary. Further exploration of interactions among Chinese immigrants and other non-white minorities, however, would enhance significantly our understanding of local race relations. Oral history accounts and contemporary writings indicate some cross-cultural encounters. To his credit, Chen cites ethnic newspaper articles containing negative statements about African Americans and hostile attitudes toward the Japanese. He notes one intriguing case of Chinese employers trying to replace striking Chinese laundry workers with African Americans. Though evidence of substantive relations is fragmentary at best, Chen could have mapped out the city's racial geography, examined patterns of interaction, and suggested why San Francisco's ethnic worlds barely touched. Quintard Taylor's study of the African American community in Seattle provides one model for representing race relations in a multi-ethnic city.[5]

The subordination of the aforementioned themes does not diminish the value of Chen's scholarly contribution. In Chinese San Francisco Chen synthesizes creative readings of Chinese language sources with the existing literature on Chinese American communities. The result is an original description of Chinatown that captures the voices and perspectives of Chinese immigrants. Together with recent examinations of the American-born generations, Chen's study of the world and mentality of Chinese immigrants rounds out our understanding of Chinese American life before the Second World War.

--Excerpts in full could be requested via e-mail at ychia76@hotmail.com or if hard copy is needed please call CHSSC.

SAVE THE DATE !!!
FRIDAY, MAY 11, 2001
CHSSC ANNUAL SPRING DINNER
AT
EMPRESS PAVILION RESTAURANT

CHINESE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

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