

## BOOK REVIEW

### Chinese St. Louis: From Enclave to Cultural Community

By Huping Ling.

Temple University Press, Philadelphia, (2004), Intro, 9 chapters, 286 pgs,  
ISBN: 1-59213-038-0

As reviewed by Tzy C. Peng

Being a long time resident of St. Louis (1967-present), I would like to congratulate Prof. Huping Ling for writing a book about the history of Chinese Americans in St. Louis, MO. As I am aware, this book is the first comprehensive document on Chinese or Chinese American community in St. Louis and its evolution from 1857 to 2000.

The history of Chinese immigrants is really about being "Chinese in America" and "Chinese Americans" with the emphasis on Chinese in the former and Americans in the latter. Chinese Culture is the glue that binds both. Still, the difference of clans, dialects, (Chinese) politics, religions, and ancestry in China often creates internal differences of opinion. Much of this was described throughout Prof. Ling's book. My only regret is that the book is still titled "Chinese St. Louis". Shouldn't "Chinese Americans in St. Louis" be more appropriate and less separated from the American mainstream?

This book is also the first of its kind in that it deals with the progress of the whole community of 150 years, instead of just one period or one group of Chinese Americans. Prof. Ling provides introductory remarks of Chinese American communities across the U.S., and hence saves the reader from the tedious tasks of doing more research or gaining the overall perspective. My thanks to Prof. Ling. More importantly, she takes the community as a cultural center of activities, rather than a commercial zone with well recognized geographical boundaries, such as the traditional Chinatowns in San Francisco, Los Angeles,

Chicago, and New York, for example. This is a bold and fresh idea.

For these reasons, I would strongly recommend this book as a must-read reference to teachers, high school and college students, especially those interested in the history of Chinese American communities in the U.S. **That being said**, I must point out troublesome problems in this book about the development of the Chinese American community in St. Louis, MO. I can honestly say this because I was in Taiwan (1947-1952) and have been following Chinese history from 1945 to the present, and was directly involved in the development process of the Chinese American community in St. Louis.

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*On p. 238, Chapter 9, the 3rd paragraph, "From the 1960s to the 1990s, Taiwan-born Chinese Americans dominated almost every aspect of community life in St. Louis. They provided the leaders for all the big community organizations, especially the OCA. They established the first two Chinese Language schools and the Chinese churches, and they coordinated the Chinese Cultural Days and celebrations of various traditional holidays. ..."*

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**This is an oversimplification which can lead to a misunderstanding of the Chinese American community at a crucial time of its development.** I came to St. Louis in 1967 and was invited to join the St. Louis Chinese Society, the only mainstream community organization at that time. Many members were professionals from Monsanto. Leaders such as William Tao, Nelson Wu, S.K. Liu, C. C. Tung, Albert Ng,

Howard Young, George Wang, T. P. Li, and T.C. Peng in the 1960s and 1970s are not Taiwan-born. They were born in mainland China, coming to the U.S. either directly in the late 1940s or indirectly via Taiwan after 1949. This is because the Communists took control of the Chinese mainland in 1949, and over 2 million mainlanders, following the Nationalist government, resettled in Taiwan, a province of the Republic of China.

Japan took Taiwan from China by force in 1895 and ruled with strict colonialism. I was in Taiwan (1947-51) to attend the National Taiwan University, after Taiwan was restored to China in 1945. The former name of this University was the Taipei Imperial University which was for Japanese only. Most Chinese students from Taiwan in the U.S. in the 1950s and 60s were those who migrated to Taiwan in 1949. Not only were they not Taiwan-born, but from various provinces of China.

The term "Taiwanese Chinese" has been used frequently in this book. It is ethnically redundant, since Taiwanese are Chinese by ancestry, culture, and history. If this term is used to indicate "Chinese from Taiwan", then it would be congruent with historical development of the St. Louis Chinese American Community.

Similarly, the establishment in 1973 and initial development of the Organization of Chinese Americans, St. Louis chapter (OCA-St. Louis), and later in the late 1980s and 90s, was accomplished by the same group of Chinese immigrants who created the St. Louis Chinese Society. I was a founding member of the League of Chinese Americans which a year later changed its name to OCA-St. Louis. I was also the OCA National Officer in the mid 80s and the President of OCA-St. Louis from the second half of 1989 through 1990-91.

**In addition, there are important omissions in this book regarding the development of the St. Louis Chinese American community.**

In St. Louis, the Chinese New Year was celebrated privately from the late 1950s. In 1973, when I was the President of the St. Louis Chinese society, my goal was to reach out to the community and bridge cultural boundaries. To this end, the celebration was first opened to the general public. More than 200 people attended. This open format has drawn a typical attendance of 600-700 ever since. The Chinese New Year celebration evolved into an important event with multiple sponsorships from Chinese American Organizations.

In 1973, the first Chinese Cultural Festival was initiated again by the St. Louis Chinese Society with support from individual members of the Chinese Gospel church. It was a successful social and cultural event conducted at Parkway Central Junior High School, West St. Louis County with a general attendance of about 2,400 people. This cultural festival was revived in the early 1980s under the leadership of Mrs. Anne Tao, and later became an annual event named the "Chinese Culture Day" at the Missouri Botanical Garden.

Realizing that English was a vital tool for Chinese Americans to communicate with the general public, I joined a group of professionals in Washington, DC. We created the Chinese American Forum (CAF) magazine in English in 1984. The use of English instead of Chinese was not only so that the non-Chinese general public could read about the views and aspirations of Chinese Americans, but that Chinese Americans could be better understood and thus, respected by the American mainstream. Years later, a team of volunteers assembled in St. Louis. We published the CAF magazine between 1997 and 2004. The CAF members varied over time. Over the last 7 years, Drs. T.C. Peng, Chingling Tai, and Harold Law, as well as Kathy Ferris, Donna Coble, and Annie Meneely of the Families with Children from China (FCC) have been the central contributors.