

## BOOK REVIEW

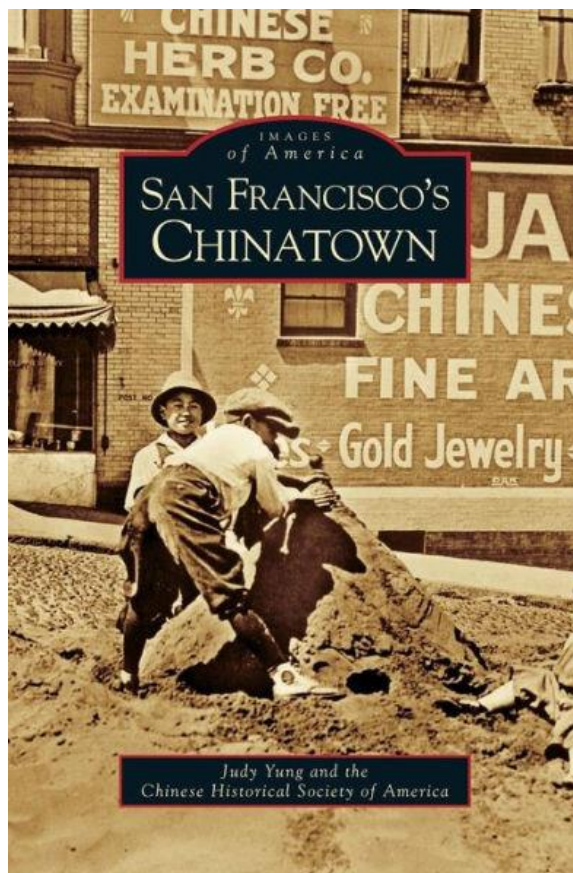
# San Francisco's Chinatown

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Review by Walter Ko

Having reviewed the Mid-West cousin book "Chinese in Chicago" last year, I enjoyed the newly published "San Francisco's Chinatown". In cooperation with the Chinese Historical Society of America, author Judy Yung has presented a well research historical photo album showing the evolution of the oldest, largest and most famous Chinese settlement in America for over one hundred fifty years.

This book composed of four chapters with an introduction. The first chapter "Tong Yun Fow: 1848-1906" highlighted the formation of Chinatown with SF Mayor welcoming the 300 "China Boys" as early as 1850. Chinatown offered early settlers as an extended family for help, protection, jobs, food, shelter, healthcare, spiritual needs and entertainment. Page 12 showed a horse-driven cart of Wing Chun Laundry in contrast to the image of a Chinese laundryman on foot with a pole and two baskets. The city business license charged discriminatory more to walker than to rider. The picture on P.27 was about the Chee Kung Tong, (Chinese Free Masons) which was a major support of Dr. Sun Yat-sen for his revolutionary activities in America. On page 29, there were four men in the picture with three smoking opium. It was British, the opium pushers to Chinese people by waging the Opium War in early 19th Century. The picture in Chapter 2, page 57 recorded Chinatown community leaders worked with federal agents to make a public burning of opium on Washington Street 1914. Racial discrimination and language barrier limited Chinese residential choice. Congress passed the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, based on race, and it prevented Chinese labor immigration for over sixty years. This chapter



pictures showed the reality of a bachelor society. Out of the 54 pictures in this chapter, only 9 included women or children. There were smuggles of girls for prostitution to America. Missionary group rescued and aided these poor victims to be productive with a few pictures. This chapter ended with two documentary pictures of 1906 earthquake and fire.

The second chapter chronicled rebuilding Chinatown after the quake and fire for further development up to 1945. The picture on Page 43 showed Grant Avenue looking north in 1910. A picture on page 50 showed Double Ten Parade 1912 celebrating the new Republic with mainly Chinese youths in western suits and ties. This chapter created the impression that Chinese women were not the weaker sex: Page 50 showed a rare photo of Portola Parade 1909 with a Chinese woman warrior Mulan, as a parade marshal on horseback, very significant in a period

of racism and discrimination, page 60 showed a young Chinese women on strike for better treatment, p.73 showed a woman radio host and three women musicians 1940s, p.76 showed Rice Bowl Party solicitation for Chinese relief donations with fifty Chinese beauties, p.77 showed a dozen of Chinese women in cap and military uniform to promote war bonds. Of vital importance was the picture on p.79 with China's first lady Madam Chiang Soong Mei-ling stopover at San Francisco on American tour for support against Japanese invasion. It was her impressive, elegant and graceful address to US Congress that won the hearts and minds of Americans to support China as comrade fighters and the repeal of Chinese Exclusion Act. The photo on p.78 showed a group of Chinese young men took their enlistment oath on top of a captured Japanese submarine in Chinatown.

Chapter 3 covered Gilded Ghetto 1945-2000. Chinatown underwent changes. Bathing suit beauty contest in Chinatown started as early as 1948. Page 84 picture was a dedication ceremony honoring the 90 San Francisco Chinese Americans for their ultimate sacrifices in WW II and I, an allegiance to American freedom and democracy. The civil right movement of 1960s inspired the community with many organizations to fight for residents and recent immigrants in childcare, healthcare, language, employment, housing, senior citizen, juvenile delinquency and immigration in the series pictures on p.88 and 99. Chinese Americans were organized in peaceful demonstration to voice their concerns on P.98, 101, 102 and 117. Furthermore, P.111 picture showed two Chinese women helped register voters in American politics in 1977. This process led to great number of Chinese Americans in Federal, State, County and City positions. Chinatown was not only a stop for food but also for services and resources.

The last chapter included a collection of ten photos to summarize today Chinatown. There were a series of pictures: one on senior, one on teenagers, one with three women holding their sons to their bosoms. It was a sharp contrast to the

initial Chinatown bachelor society. The Green Street Brass Band on page 121 was a funeral procession tradition. There is a paradigm shift from "falling leaves return to the root" to "falling (seeds) on ground to take root". Gold Mountain is no longer a sojourn place but permanent home now.

Chinatown is the attraction where tourists leave their hearts in the heart of San Francisco. The 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire reduced Chinatown into ruins and ashes overnight. City Hall agenda of "Chinatown and Chinese Must Go" and "Confiscating Chinatown real properties" was hotly debated thereafter. Without the determination and solidarity of Chinatown businessmen, tenants and Chinese Imperial Diplomats, San Francisco Chinatown would have been moved to Hunter's Point or Telegraph Hill. A proper picture and caption would honor the diplomat elite group who organized, fought and won the respect and dignity of rebuilding Chinatown in the same site that all enjoy today. It would be helpful if the book included a time line showing the major events relating Chinese and Chinatown for quick comprehension. My recent research led to a photo, courtesy of Chinese Historical Society of America, showing Tye Leung, a renowned social worker in San Francisco, was the first Chinese-American woman to vote – eight years before 19th Amendment. It was a significant milestone. The new immigration waves of 1960s and 1980s kept Chinatown challenged. More and more Chinese-Americans participate in the mainstream especially in politics, economics, academics, medicine and Hi-Tech. New organizations for social justice, civil rights and economic equality are formed in addition to the traditional Family Associations and the Six Companies. A bilingual list of these organizations with pictures will honor their contribution and service. Besides food and gifts, Chinese culture includes Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. A section on these institutions will show the harmony of spiritual diversity.

This book is an odyssey of Chinese people who came to Gold Mountain with a dream despite the odds, hardships, language barrier, bias and discrimination. It portrayed their sacrifice, determination and survival in making a new life for themselves and their family. They labored hard and long to earn the respect and honor in the great American family. This book makes this testimonial contribution an important chapter in American history.

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*Walter Ko was born in China and grew up in Hong Kong. He came to America in 1973 and graduated from the University of Missouri at Rolla and the Central Missouri State University. Mr. Ko is a board member of this magazine.*