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**The Power of Publicity:
The Fate of Los Angeles' Old Chinatown
1900-1939**

By Linda Ngov

**Gim Suey Chong
His Life From Hoyping to Gum Saan**

By Raymond Chong

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The Power of Publicity: The Fate of Los Angeles' Old Chinatown, 1900–1939

By Linda Ngov



A 1937 Drawing of Union Station¹

On May 3, 1939, Los Angeles' highly anticipated Union Station opened with great fanfare. After nearly 30 years of rumors, hopes, and debates concerning its proposed construction, the iconic railroad depot finally acquired its concrete form. A brochure celebrating the edifice's opening enthused that "the Los Angeles Union Station is new, and in its modernity and completeness will be as new tomorrow and for a long time to come. But, surrounding and in many ways dominating this 1939 achievement is an atmosphere of tranquility and understanding, clearly influenced by the spirit, hospitality and tradition of the Californians of days gone by, and this we hope will never change."² Apparently, Union Station completed the pictorial canvas of the city and the space it occupied was just waiting for its arrival. Yet just what was Los Angeles' "spirit and tradition," and who were these "Californians of days gone by"? Were they the Chinese of Old Chinatown, who were present during Los Angeles' rural beginnings until Union Station displaced them?

Indeed, before the arrival of Union Station, the area between El Pueblo Plaza and Old Arcadia Street held a heavy concentration of Chinese immigrants (See FIG. 1 & 2). The 1880s witnessed a flood of Chinese workers into the area due to a loss of employment in railroad construction, overcrowding in San Francisco's Chinatown, and the land boom in Los Angeles. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Los

Angeles Chinatown reached its peak, expanding from two streets to 15, housing approximately 200 buildings. The prevalence of restaurants, curio shops, and entertainment venues made the community something of an attraction for early tourists traveling into Los Angeles. However, by 1910, Old Chinatown saw signs of decline. The Chinese, prohibited from owning land, were lessees or tenants of privately owned land, the majority of which belonging to the Apablaza family. Thus, when capitalists viewed the area as a possible site for a train depot, the Chinese were vulnerable to displacement. This vulnerability became reality when, after years of litigation, a U.S. Supreme Court ruling approved condemnation of the entire area to allow for the construction of Union Station.³ Yet, the razing of Old Chinatown was not the result of legal proceedings alone; instead, the city's booster literature abetted the physical eviction with representations that either maligned or erased the Chinese presence in the contested site. Such literature helped to remove any stake Old Chinatown had on Los Angeles' popular identity.

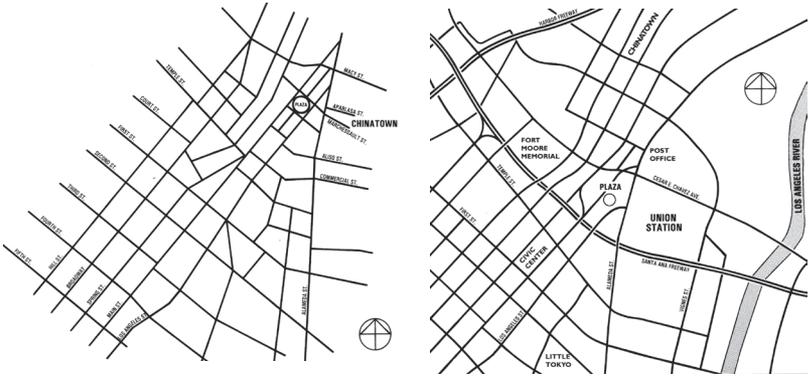


Figure 1: Location of Chinatown, ca. 1890. ⁴

Figure 2: Present-day location of Union Station and (New) Chinatown. ⁵

This essay will follow the gradual rise and acceptance of the Union Station project, in parallel with the changing representations of Old Chinatown in the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce brochures and the *Los Angeles Times*. The inverse relationship between the trajectories illustrates the ways in which the period's booster literature worked in concert with the city's development agendas by creating a sensibility open to Old Chinatown's displacement.



Old Chinatown before the Depot: 1900–1909

During the first decade of the twentieth century, Old Chinatown was integral to Los Angeles' character. Harry Ellington Brook, a longtime writer for the city's Chamber of Commerce, wrote: "The population of Los Angeles is cosmopolitan. During the past 10 years it has received accessions to its population from every State in the Union, and from almost every country in the world. . . . Papers are published in the German, French, Spanish, Italian, Basque and Chinese languages. There are several thousand Chinese in and around Los Angeles, who are engaged in raising vegetables, or employed in housework. They have a residence section of their own, adjoining the old Plaza, in the geographical center of the city."⁶ The inclusion of the Chinese in a passage intended to bolster tourism elucidates that the Chinese presence was not thought of as bad publicity. In fact, Old Chinatown fit neatly under the cosmopolitan theme that boosters were using to sell Los Angeles. In the 1909 edition of *A Summer Tourist in Southern California*, another brochure published by the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, a tourist named "Jane" exclaimed, "Certainly, in this cosmopolitan place [sic]. Every section in the United States has contributed its quota, and every country in Europe. To the Oriental races this is Paradise—and what would the country do without the faithful labor of the Chinese and the Japanese?"⁷ Contrived or not, this published sentiment expressly illustrates that the Chamber of Commerce accepted to a certain degree, and did not vilify Asians at this time. Indeed it would have been unwise to do so: boosters recognized that the ethnic community provided evidence of Los Angeles' cosmopolitanism. In so doing, boosters imbued the ethnic community with a measure of cultural value to the city.

The *Los Angeles Times*, acting as a source for both news and boosterism, also publicized its positive opinions about the Chinese, upholding that they were clean and progressive-minded. In 1900, peculiar deaths in San Francisco Chinatown set off alarm about a raging bubonic plague and fear that Los Angeles Chinatown also harbored the epidemic. *Times*' writers, however, quieted these fears by informing readers that while "Chinamen were accustomed to living in dingy shacks . . . they are relatively conversant of the disease. . . [and] have been remarkably willing to scrub down our Chinatown!"⁸ Another article reported that it was unlikely that the plague would appear in Los Angeles Chinatown, as the health inspector





found the quarter in such good condition.⁹ Unlike San Francisco's reporters, who used the plague scare as an opportunity to further marginalize and denigrate the Chinese, the *Times* portrayed the Los Angeles Chinese as compliant to sanitation ordinances and eager to clean its quarters from pestilence that could endanger the city.¹⁰ While it could be said that the *Times*' confirmation of Chinatown's cleanliness was simply the truth, the fact remains that the articles acknowledged the existence of Chinatown and made no attempts to condemn it. Moreover, the *Times*' optimistic feelings over Chinatown went beyond settling the plague scare. According to an article entitled "Almond Eyes Read Future": "Los Angeles Chinatown has felt the impulse of Los Angeles spirit of progress, and now steps forth with several factors which are strange and idea-provoking to the Americans who have been wont to declare that the Chinese are automatons and never can they imbibe the western ideas of 'get up and git.'" ¹¹ The article then celebrated the efforts made by the newly established Chinese Empire Reform Association in constructing its "handsome" headquarters and educating Chinese women and children.¹² The accolades given to the Chinese certify that, during this period, Chinatown was far from being considered a blot in Los Angeles' makeup. In fact, the Chinese were portrayed as compatible with the traits that the *Times* strived to associate with Los Angeles: progressive, clean, and reform-oriented.

Of course, booster literature's positive attitude toward Chinatown was not without its motives. The Chamber of Commerce's pocket-sized travel guide, *Points of Interest in and about Los Angeles*, designated Chinatown as a destination spot.¹³ *The Los Angeles Times* also did its part in making Chinatown a place for the curious to see. One article stated that because all "Chinese constraints" were peeled away during the summertime, "things that your eye never caught there before, passages you never saw, are all open to the public gaze."¹⁴ The Chamber of Commerce's and the *Times*' encouragement to go to Chinatown thus underscores that the positive representations were necessary to the interests of the city's tourist industry. Still, other articles showed genuine affection for the Chinese community.

An article exclaimed that the Chinese New Year brought 5,000 visitors to Chinatown, including "big gangs of [white] hoodlums [that] picked up whatever they could lay their hands on, and greedily accepted every offering made by the Chinese..."¹⁵ Another article written years later





added that “The Oriental used to welcome the white visitors, but so much hoodlumism has been indulged in by persons calling themselves Christians while enjoying pagan hospitality, that the doors of Chinatown are no longer open to all comers during the Chinese New Year’s festivities.”¹⁶ That the city’s dominant newspaper actually denounced groups of whites for taking advantage of Chinese generosity testifies that Chinatown did have a real place in the hearts of Angelenos.

It would be a big overstatement, though, to suggest that all representations of Old Chinatown during that period were positive. The Tong Wars and the opium and gambling raids undeniably helped cast Chinatown in a bad light. However, the articles that vigorously attacked Chinatown for its vice were interspersed with more objective reports. The creatively titled article “Ghost of Slain are Haunting Him” described an old Tong desperado, a figure who once invoked public fascination, now in “Chinatown begging and bulling pittances from the See Yup clansmen to get money enough to buy him opium. They want to send him back to China, but he would not say whether he would go or not.”¹⁷

In this report, one man was singled out for all the crime in Chinatown. Other articles were not as kind. In a two-page spread, the *Los Angeles Times* detailed the inscrutable gambling dens in Chinatown and the efforts being made to put a stop to them.¹⁸ A sensational exposé charged that the vice-ridden district of Chinatown held approximately 2,000 Caucasians in its clutches, addicting them to opium.¹⁹ While these reports informed the public that Chinatown was an immoral place, the descriptions also stirred curiosity and intrigue.

This is apparent in a rebuke made by Fook Chong Wong, a Chinese guest writer for the *Times*, who stated that visitors of respectable classes are “willing to visit houses of ill fame, the hellish opium dens and places of immorality, places the respectable Chinese themselves never even dare to go near...”²⁰ Because, as Wong reveals, the maligned representations of Chinatown proved advantageous by giving the city a tourist draw, is it too simple to argue that Chinatown’s bad reputation alone resulted in its demise. Furthermore, the fact that bad portrayals were intermixed with fair ones shows that the *Los Angeles Times* had no intention of running Chinatown out of the city—at least not in the first decade of the 20th century.





Chinatown vs. Union Passenger Terminal: 1910–1931

In the Chamber of Commerce's 1910 edition of *Los Angeles, California—City and County*, the brochure's writer, Harry Ellington Brook, reiterated: "The population of Los Angeles is cosmopolitan. During the past 10 years it has received accessions to its population from every State in the Union, and from almost every country in the world."²¹ Though this appears to be copied from past editions, the description of Chinatown is missing. Perhaps Brook simply had to cut it because there was much more about Los Angeles to laud than before. But juxtaposed with the onslaught of negative representations of Chinatown coming out of the *Los Angeles Times*, the excised passage takes on greater significance. Headlines such as "Smash Dens of Gamblers," "Chinatown Raids Result in Finding Much Opium," "Tong War Sudden," "Opium Dens are Raided," "Opium Raid is Biggest in the City," "Gambling in Los Angeles is Going on Night and Day," and "Sad Chinamen Watch Dope Go Up in Smoke" became commonplace, dwarfing the rather positive depictions of Chinatown from the years prior.²² By omitting the description of Chinatown found in the brochure's previous editions, Brook not only disassociated the city from the negative attention given to Chinatown, but also removed Chinatown from Los Angeles' popular identity.

The timing of this excision was not coincidental. The track that Chinatown sat on, long a transportation nexus, had become the site of development and planning issues. On May 17, 1913, a large portion of Old Chinatown was entangled in a three-way litigation suit between the heirs of the Apablasa family, the City of Los Angeles, and Edgar B. Carrol, the vice president of the Industrial Terminal Railway Company. Carrol claimed that one John Martin of San Francisco entered into a contract with Concepción Apablasa-Sepulveda, the widow of Cayetana Apablasa and wife of Ildefonso Sepulveda, who sold the Chinatown tract to Martin, who then transferred the deal to Carrol. Juan Apablasa, the oldest son of Cayetana Apablasa, argued that his mother was not entitled to sell the land because it was meant for her children and asked that he and his siblings get their rightful share. On June 25, 1913, case 97,717 of the Superior Court of the State of California handed the property to Carrol, who was required to pay the outstanding sum owed to the Apablasa family.²³ Concepción Sepulveda sought to expedite the process by requesting that the Los Angeles City





Council waive its right to appeal *Carrol vs. Sepulveda* and relinquish its claim that Chinatown was on public land.²⁴ The Public Works Commission then suggested that the Council inspect the streets “proposed to be vacated, and if...Council should find said streets were unnecessary for use of the public, that said petition be granted.”²⁵ The Council never ordered the inspection and on November 20, 1913, waived its right to appeal. That the area was “proposed to be vacated” meant that Chinatown was to go; that the Council did not find Chinatown worthy of an inspection to look for any public utility reveals that they did not mind seeing Chinatown leave. Whether the representations during this time influenced the city’s heedless treatment of Chinatown or whether the Council influenced the boosters to malign the community is not the central issue. Instead, the significance is that boosters and the City Council alike had begun the process of erasing Chinatown from Los Angeles’ physical and mental landscape.

However, the rights to Chinatown’s land were not yet settled: An immediate disagreement ensued between the city and the railroad commission over who had jurisdiction over what.²⁶ And evidently it did not occur to either party that the Chinese should have any say in the issue. In fact, booster literature made sure they did not. The Chamber of Commerce brochures by and large ceased to mention Chinatown, focusing instead on the city’s Spanish heritage.²⁷ The *Los Angeles Times* featured articles with such headlines as “Chinatown to Go on Wheels,” “Chinatown Site in Litigation,” “City May Lose Thoroughfares,” and “Chinatown Goes,” all of which appeared that they might mourn the possible removal of Chinatown, but instead chose to describe the legal proceedings in great detail.²⁸ Other articles during this time ridiculed and vilified Chinatown. *Times* writer James Marshall Warnack exclaimed:

[The Chinese] have a strange habit of doing everything backwards. They begin with living on the other side of the world, which is utterly contrary to our idea of a place to live on this globe. A few of them have drifted over to this side and settled in Los Angeles and San Francisco, as bees settle on the comb, but even these are bad enough, for they continue to be of a different color, to speak a different tongue and to use a different literature... When they talk they sing, and when a bunch of them sing it sounds like a meeting of members of a





*Political Equality League... Of course, I allude to the stone age, ere the light of civilization had dawned upon the lords of creation.*²⁹

Warnack's characterization of the Chinese contradicts the *Times*' once celebratory remarks about the community's reform efforts and motion toward progress. Perhaps detecting its own inconsistencies, the *Times* wrote that "there was not much left of Chinatown anyway...and it will be a good thing for the city to have the old rat holes cleared out. We have a sad suspicion that the Chinese in community life are not all they should be."³⁰ This admission that the *Times* may have been mistaken to believe in Chinatown's merits tainted all accolades it had given to Chinatown during the previous decade. Furthermore, the renunciation of Chinatown permitted the *Times* to unabashedly give its stamp of approval to Lewis F. Hanchett of the Industrial Development and Land Company, who bought the majority of the area from Edgar B. Carrol and the Apablaza family with the intention of building a railroad terminal.³¹

Soon after this arrangement, the *Los Angeles Times* reduced its mention of Chinatown to almost nothing from 1916 to 1923. This amnesia prevented Chinatown from becoming an obstacle to what appeared to be Union Station's secure future. It should come as no surprise that Harry Chandler, the owner and publisher of the *Los Angeles Times*, strongly supported proposals for a union passenger terminal, as it would boost the value of his own holdings in the northern downtown district.³² As if to make sure that Union Station would come to fruition, optimistic coverage about the impending rail depot became a regular feature in Chandler's newspaper. According to the *Times*, "this wonderful industrial impetus" would become the exemplar of progress and would stabilize business as well as bring investments into the city.³³ The erasure of Old Chinatown and the promotion of Union Station in booster literature not only effectively changed Los Angeles' marketable identity from cosmopolitan to modern, but also precluded the Chinese community from being a part of this new selling point.

However, on August 8, 1923, a possibility arose that Old Chinatown might stay. The Los Angeles City Council unanimously revoked the permit granted to the Industrial Railway Company to establish railroad facilities in the Chinatown district, arguing that the proposed plan would be





detrimental to traffic conditions and that an underground terminal would be more advantageous to the city.³⁴ As if following the city's sudden change of heart, the *Los Angeles Times* again spoke favorably of Chinatown. The article "Chinatown to Tell World" explained that the community was tired of the erroneous perceptions imposed on them and was striving to advertise its advantages to the city.³⁵ *Times* writer Harry Carr extolled the Chinese as "sweet, courteous, kindly old Chinks" and was repulsed by the notion that "they will all be gone and we will have hooting automobile trucks, Greek vendors of vegetables in their places."³⁶ Another writer opined, "This Chinatown of ours is assuredly sordid, but alluring."³⁷ A two-page spread entitled "Los Angeles Chinatown Offers Wealth of Romance, Mystery, and Ancient Customs" told visitors that they could see fascinating displays during the Chinese New Year, experience a mystical theater performance, and observe the different, but exotic Chinese ways.³⁸ Even the Chamber of Commerce restored its mention of Chinatown in its 1925 edition, stating that the city's "Chinatown with its weird Oriental customs and ceremonies, is a constant source of interest to tourists..."³⁹ Picking up where they left off before proposals of a railroad depot materialized, these depictions certified Chinatown's place in Los Angeles' early history, marketed it as a tourist attraction, and described it as a community not incompatible to the city's ideals. These portrayals may seem out of place, especially after the *Times* worked so hard to slander Chinatown just years before. But because the city's outlook on the location of the railroad depot had momentarily changed, it makes sense that booster literature found it safe to bring Chinatown back from the dead.

Unfortunately, because the decision of whether and where to build a union station was still under fierce debate between city officials and railroad company heads, Chinatown's fate was concurrently in doubt. During this period, city officials expected railroad companies not only to pay for the costs of constructing train stations, but also to comply with their wishes. Thus, when the city announced that it preferred to have an underground terminal and an extensive subway system, Southern Pacific and Pacific Electric authorities balked at the staggering cost of tunneling. As an alternative, they proposed an elevated structure linked to Southern Pacific's existing Central Station, which would benefit both the Pacific Electric's Red Cars and the Southern Pacific's long-distance trains. The disadvantage of the plan was that it would exclude the Santa Fe trains due to





a lack of a feasible connection with the Southern Pacific's elevateds. In April of 1926, the city decided to take the case for a union station to the people, with two propositions placed on the ballot: Proposition 8 asked if a union station should be built and Proposition 9 asked specifically if it should be built in the Chinatown area.⁴⁰

It is no secret that Harry Chandler played a highly influential role in the passing of Propositions 8 and 9.⁴¹ Placing the issue in the public's hands gave Chandler the opportunity to use the *Los Angeles Times* as a means to persuade the public of the benefits of building a union station at the Chinatown site. In so doing, the *Times* once more denied Chinatown a place in the city. Two articles, "People vs. Railroads, Union Station Issue" and "Fabrications vs. Facts," explained that although opponents called it a "Chinatown depot" in a dilapidated area, the station would actually "form such a gateway to Los Angeles as no other city has...[and] will forever do away with Chinatown and its environs."⁴² The articles' condemnation of Chinatown refuted what was said of Chinatown just a few months earlier when the city contemplated the possibility of an underground terminal instead of a union station. It is again apparent that the treatment of Chinatown was inextricably tied to the city's whims and that the way it was represented depended on how the city wanted to construct its character. By contrast, that the aforementioned articles assured that the historic Plaza would not be destroyed highlights that the *Times* knew that the destruction of Spanish Plaza would cause public alarm (SEE FIG. 3). The reason the Plaza was so near and dear to Los Angelenos' hearts can be attributed to the fact that the Plaza was a permanent fixture in booster literature and its representations were relatively positive, in order to provide the city with a mystical and romantic past. The ingrained sentimentality that the Plaza invoked did not exist for Chinatown.

Though Propositions 8 and 9 both passed on May 2, 1926, the fight was not yet over. The Southern Pacific and Pacific Electric appealed to the California Supreme Court, hoping to stall the project indefinitely.⁴³ The uncertainty of Union Station's future, though, did not translate into a possibility that Chinatown might stay as it did in 1923. This time, the city fully supported a union station at the Chinatown site. Coinciding with the city's interests, the *Los Angeles Times* wrote of Chinatown as if it were already gone. *Times* writer, Pat Shepard wrote:





Stripped of its romance and mystery by the hideous talons of the tong war, Chinatown, like a crushed lotus bloom thrown into the gutter, lies naked and soiled in the most squalid and unsightly part of the city... The traditional shadows that crept through the narrow alleyways have vanished... There is little to remind one of Chinese mysticism in cigarette butts, fragments of greasy rags, scatter portions of American newspapers and repulsive bits of rotting vegetables.⁴⁴

Though written in the immediate aftermath of the May referendums, Shepard denied that the eventual union station had anything to do with Chinatown's decline. Instead, the author placed the blame on the Tong Wars, which ironically had lost publicity (and perhaps prevalence) since the early 1920s.⁴⁵ Furthermore, informing the readers that Chinatown's once lauded virtues had been replaced with filth removed whatever guilt people had in supporting Chinatown's condemnation in favor of Union Station. Writer Grace Wilcox gave another reason why Chinatown was disappearing, claiming that the older generation of Chinese was dying and the younger generation was returning to China. Interestingly enough, while Shepard portrayed a decaying Chinatown, Wilcox professed that the picturesque colony was without fights, "poppy smoking," and other vices attributed to other Chinatowns. This, she prodded, was the reason visitors should go there: for "it will soon be gone."⁴⁶ Wilcox succeeded in promoting Chinatown as a destination spot for tourists while also depicting it as a disappearing place, by claiming that the Chinese were willingly leaving Chinatown. Gordon L'Allemand concurred that the Chinese were dying off and nostalgically waxed, "The atmosphere of Old Chinatown...as one walks away he feels that this is all but a dream and that a few years hence it will be gone."⁴⁷ Once again, these rosy-colored versions downgraded the city's role in blighting the community and also made Union Station's forthcoming takeover acceptable.

Although these articles were somewhat truthful in stating that Chinatown had lost some of the vibrancy found in the early part of the century (mainly due to inhabitants' knowledge of their impending dislocation), many of the "older folks" stayed until they received their eviction notices.⁴⁸ Thus, the articles' assertion that the Chinese were either dying or leaving fed the lie that even if some still harbored sentimental feelings toward the community, objecting to the location of Union Station would



prove futile. These depictions therefore constructed beliefs about Old Chinatown that abetted the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to condemn the entire area on May 18, 1931.

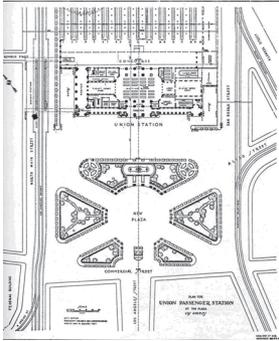


FIG. 3: 1919 Plan of Union Station⁴⁹
Although the California Railroad Commission found this plan most suitable, it was fortunately rejected because it called for the complete obliteration of Olvera Street.

During this period, the positive and negative treatment of Old Chinatown vacillated in tandem with the changing prospects of Union Station. Clearly, the booster-business elite wielded an enormous influence in shaping the geography of the city through its control over what and how things were represented. Once they agreed that they wanted a union passenger station at the Chinatown site, the Chinese were characterized as excessively foreign, backwards, and even disappearing. These portrayals barred Old Chinatown from becoming a part of the boosters' new vision of Los Angeles as a modern city. So with cosmopolitanism no longer the boosters' selling point for the city and with the earlier assertion that the Chinese were reforming and assimilating to American ways expunged, Old Chinatown lacked a place within the city's cultural identity.

Conclusion: the Plaza/Olvera Street vs. Old Chinatown

During the first decade of the twentieth century, two "ethnic" communities, the Old Plaza and Old Chinatown, figured prominently in booster literature. Both attested to the cosmopolitan fabric of Los Angeles' constructed identity. Both were considered exotic yet innocuously so. But the two communities had opposite fates: At almost the exact time that the U.S. Supreme Court sounded the death knell of Old Chinatown, Christine Sterling, who had tremendous backing from city leaders and the public, completed the "revitalization" of the Old Plaza and Olvera Street.⁵⁰



Admittedly, this new tourist attraction was simulated to give Anglos what they expected; as historian Kevin Starr bluntly stated: “Olvera Street might not be authentic Old California or even authentic Mexico, but it was better than a bulldozer.”⁵¹ So why Old Chinatown?

The most important difference between the two communities was this: the Chamber of Commerce brochures always insisted that the Old Plaza was the birthplace of Los Angeles. This divergence grew larger around 1912 when progress and modernity became the city’s new watchwords. Since boosters either stopped mentioning Old Chinatown or described the Chinese as uncivilized, the community was precluded from being a part of this new identity. By contrast, the Chamber of Commerce wrote that “the rapid growth of Los Angeles, from an insignificant semi-Mexican town to a metropolitan city, has been retold and retold, until it is familiar to millions of Americans.”⁵² Though this passage depicted the Old Plaza as primitive, the Chamber of Commerce needed to refer to the site to illustrate the city’s story of progress.

Another key difference between the communities is that while booster literature caricatured the Chinese of Old Chinatown as excessively foreign, the residents of the Old Plaza became Europeanized and thus more familiar to Anglos in the city. The “semi-Mexican town” of 1912 became in 1925 the place where “Spanish priests and soldiers came to found missions and tame the wilderness.” Readers were also informed that the Old Plaza “is heroic history, which stirs the blood, with its padres and pirates, discoveries and duels, grain-planting and gold-finding, its sea storms and shore strife, its Indians and strange incidents.”⁵³ This cultural mythology linked to the Old Plaza explains why the 1919 plan of a union station in the Plaza area was rejected; why the *Times* consistently assured its readers that the site would be not be harmed should the railroad terminal be at the Chinatown site; and why Christine Sterling was alarmed at the Avila Adobe’s condemnation notice.⁵⁴ The public simply believed that the Old Plaza was their local history, as told in booster literature.

Boosters appear to have exploited these sentiments (shaped by their own doing) by associating their civic projects with the Spanish fantasy past with more dexterity and enthusiasm. When plans for the Civic Center began in 1925, the Chamber of Commerce explained, “A magnificent plan



for an immense cultural and administrative center, has been completed...A vast area is involved...The historical old Plaza and Plaza church will become part of the prodigious new project.”⁵⁵ Similarly, after Sterling “revitalized” Olvera Street, a brochure complete with photographs of beautiful women in Spanish dress and picturesque fiestas enthused that in the Old Plaza one could experience the “incomparable symphony of music, art and chivalry which still seems an echo of Old Spain” and could thus understand why the “busy, metropolitan Los Angeles [is] a charmed land.”⁵⁶

Moreover, the incorporation of the Plaza into Los Angeles’ proclaimed modernity is seen in the city’s promotion of the new “gateway.” William Joyce Dunkerly of the Chamber of Commerce exclaimed, “A trip to the tower of the city hall enables the sightseer to obtain a glimpse of almost the entire city. Just north and east of the city hall is the historic Plaza where Los Angeles had its beginning. Extending for one short block to the north of the Plaza is Olvera Street — a picturesque glimpse of old Mexico much frequented by the tourists.”⁵⁷ The view that Dunkerly suggested visitors see gave a linear history of the city’s progress, from the tiny Pueblo at the Plaza to City Hall’s “neo-Babylonian futurity.”⁵⁸ In fact, Union Station’s architectural fusion of Spanish and Art Deco design fit neatly between the Plaza’s “simple” adobe style and City Hall’s ultra-modernism. This is especially apparent in a Union Station brochure that states: “A few places beyond the colorful old plaza of El Pueblo de Nuestra Senora la Reina de



Figure 4: View from the City Hall towards Union Station, 1937.⁶⁰ The shadow of the City Hall tower points to the steel framework of the new Union Station.

Los Angeles stands the railroads’ contribution to the romantic progress that has made the Los Angeles of today...The physical setting of the entire achievement bespeaks the glamour of California—all blended so harmoniously with the man-made structure itself that you will believe the entire ensemble has always been there and as you see it today...”⁵⁹

Because boosters embraced the Spanish fantasy past and incorporated it into their vision of modernity, the Old Plaza and Olvera Street became part of the built environment. Moreover, since Union Station fit within the



continuum of progress, it too became part of the built environment. Conversely, since the city singled out Old Chinatown, especially after 1919, for the site of the future Union Station, coverage of the community became maligned and ultimately erased. These representations or lack thereof eased Union Station's takeover, because unlike the possible demolition of the Plaza which sparked public outcry, the razing of Old Chinatown received no such resistance. When the railroad terminal commenced with a tableau called "The Romance of the Rails," which traced Los Angeles' history from the founding of the city at the Plaza to the birth of Union Station, few seemed to notice that they were celebrating on the very place where Old Chinatown had been.⁶¹ Hence, observing the representations surrounding the Plaza in contrast to those of Old Chinatown underscores that a community's presence in booster literature determines the staying power it has in the city.

Notes

¹ Artist's sketch, "Union Station," 1937, SPNB Collection, Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.

² Brochure of Union Station, (1939) in Southern Pacific Railway Collection of Material, collection 2026, at the University of California, Los Angeles, Library, Department of Special Collections.

³ Edwin R. Bingham, *The Saga of the Los Angeles Chinese*, Unpublished Master's Thesis, Department of History and Government, Occidental College, Los Angeles, 1942; Roberta S. Greenwood, *Down by the Station: Los Angeles Chinatown, 1880–1933* (Los Angeles: Regents of the University of California, 1996), 10–12.

⁴ Map done by D. Slawson in Roberta Greenwood, *Down by the Station, Los Angeles Chinatown, 1880–1933*. (Los Angeles: Regents of the University of California, 1996), 2.

⁵ Map done by D. Slawson in Roberta Greenwood, *Down by the Station, Los Angeles Chinatown, 1880–1933*. (Los Angeles: Regents of the University of California, 1996), 2.

⁶ Harry Ellington Brook, *The City and County of Los Angeles in Southern California*. (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce and Kingsley-Barnes & Neuner Co., 1900), 29. The same description is found in the 1902, 1904, 1905, 1907, and 1909 editions of this brochure.

⁷ *A Summer Tourist in Southern California* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, 1909), 3.





⁸ “How the Chinatown of Los Angeles Has Been Washed Up and Purified,” *Los Angeles Times* 17 Jun 1900, I14.

⁹ “Another Plague Scare Agitates Officials,” *Los Angeles Times* 16 Nov 1900, A5.

¹⁰ For more on how the plague was used as a tactic to “exterminate” the Chinese in San Francisco, see Nayan Shah’s *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco’s Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

¹¹ “Almond Eyes Read Future,” *Los Angeles Times* 29 Sept 1905, I11; also see “Chinatown Improvements,” *Los Angeles Times* 5 Nov 1905, p. I11.

¹² “Chinese Call for Clean-Up,” *Los Angeles Times* 21 Jul 1906, I13 and “Oriental City for the Chinese,” *Los Angeles Times* 18 Nov 1906, I127.

¹³ *Points of Interests in and about Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, 1904, 1906, 1907).

¹⁴ “Pop’ Invades Chinatown,” 4.

¹⁵ “Five Thousand Visitors,” *Los Angeles Times* 19 Feb 1901, 13.

¹⁶ “Invasion of Chinatown,” *Los Angeles Times* 5 Feb 1904, A6.

¹⁷ “Ghosts of Slain are Haunting Him,” *Los Angeles Times* 5 Sep 1902, A2.

¹⁸ “Orientals Stirred Up,” *The Los Angeles Times* 13 Jan 1904, A4; also see “Chinese Gaming: Measures to Suppress,” *Los Angeles Times* 19 Jan 1904, A2.

¹⁹ Fred R. Bechdolt, “Hideous Vice Holds Many in Clutches,” *Los Angeles Times* 10 Mar 1907, II16.

²⁰ Fook Chong Wong, “Suggestions to Visitors to Chinatown,” *Los Angeles Times* 9 Aug 1909, I19; for a similar article, see “Want Reform in Chinatown,” *Los Angeles Times* 8 Dec 1906, I11.

²¹ Harry Ellington Brook, *Los Angeles, California—City and County* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, 1910), 29.

²² The articles with these headlines appear in *Los Angeles Times* from 1910 to 1912.

²³ Greenwood, 35–36.

²⁴ *Minutes*, Los Angeles City Council, 1 July 1913.

²⁵ The Los Angeles Public Works Commission, 19 July 1913, quoted from Greenwood, 36.

²⁶ Bill Bradley, *The Last of the Great Stations: 50 Years of the Los Angeles Passenger Terminal* (Los Angeles: Interurban Press, 1989), 58.

²⁷ As evidenced by the following Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce publications from years 1910–1939: *Los Angeles, California, City and*





County; Los Angeles City and County, Los Angeles County, Los Angeles: Some Facts and Figures; Los Angeles To-Day; A Summer Tourist in Southern California; Points of Interests In and About Los Angeles. Not all years of each edition were collected, but those that were found after the missing years were reprints of earlier editions that did not mention Chinatown. Many of these brochures heavily described the Spanish origins of the city and the festivities in the Old Plaza.

²⁸ These articles appear in *Los Angeles Times* from 1913–1914.

²⁹ James Marshall Warnack, “The Discovery of Chinatown,” *Los Angeles Times* 18 Sep 1913, ll4.

³⁰ “Chinatown Going,” *Los Angeles Times* 8 Nov 1914, ll8.

³¹ “Terminal’s at Last in Sight,” *Los Angeles Times* 13 Jan 1915, ll1.

³² Robert Gottlieb and Irene Wolt, *Thinking Big: The Story of the Los Angeles Times, Its Publishers and Their Influence on Southern California* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1977), 152–53; Kevin Starr, *Material Dreams: Southern California through the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 108–109.

³³ “A Wonderful Impetus for Los Angeles” *Los Angeles Times* 7 Feb 1916, ll4; “All for Great Union Station,” *Los Angeles Times* 16 Jun 1917, ll1; “Stages to Have Union Station,” *Los Angeles Times* 31 Aug 1919, VI10.

³⁴ Bradley, 59; also in “Railroad Franchise Canceled,” *Los Angeles Times* 9 Aug 1923.

³⁵ “Chinatown to Tell World,” *Los Angeles Times* 25 Jan 1924, A1.

³⁶ Harry Carr, “My Friends, the Chinks,” *Los Angeles Times* 11 Feb 1924, A4.

³⁷ J.J. Lowman, “East is East,” *Los Angeles Times* 12 Feb 1925, A4.

³⁸ Agnes Pallen, “Los Angeles Chinatown Offers Wealth of Romance, Mystery, and Quaint Customs,” *Los Angeles Times* 1 Mar 1925, C2.

³⁹ *Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, 1925), 38.

⁴⁰ Bradley, 59–61.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴² “Fabrications vs. Facts,” *Los Angeles Times* 28 Apr 1926; repeated in “People vs. Railroads, Union Station Issue,” *Los Angeles Times* 20 Apr 1926.

⁴³ Bradley, 62.

⁴⁴ Pat Shepard, “Tong Wars Have Stripped Chinatown of its Former Glamour and Romance,” *Los Angeles Times* 22 Aug 1926, B5.

⁴⁵ There are only five articles that mention the Tong Wars, including the article discussed. All of them do not speak of an incident that occurred





during this time period.

⁴⁶ Grace Wilcox, "Young Chinatown in Old Chinatown," *Los Angeles Times* 22 May 1927, H1.

⁴⁷ Gordon L'Allemand, "Old Chinatown," *Los Angeles Times* 5 Oct 1930, K8; for similar articles, see Harry Carr, "Tragedies of Chinatown," *Los Angeles Times* 23 Sep 1928; Clyde Callan, "Poor Pa," *Los Angeles Times* 11 Oct 1929; Carroll O'Meara, "Chinatown," *Los Angeles Times* 10 May 1931, K7.

⁴⁸ Greenwood, 38.

⁴⁹ Bradley, 73.

⁵⁰ Phoebe Kropp, *California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), 211.

⁵¹ Kevin Starr quoted from William Estrada, "Los Angeles' Old Plaza and Olvera Street: Imagined and Contested Space," *Western Folklore* 58:2 (Winter, 1999), 107.

⁵² Harry Ellington Brook, *Los Angeles, California: City and County* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, 1912), 1.

⁵³ Howard S. Nichols, *Los Angeles County, California* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, 1925), 3.

⁵⁴ Estrada, 114.

⁵⁵ Howard S. Nichols, *Los Angeles County, California* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, 1925), 31–32.

⁵⁶ *Los Angeles County, California* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, 1937).

⁵⁷ William Joyce Dunkerly, *Know Los Angeles County* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce), 10.

⁵⁸ For more on City Hall, see Starr (1990), 114.

⁵⁹ Brochure of Union Station, 1939.

⁶⁰ "View from City Hall tower Towards Union Station," *Herald-Examiner Collection*, Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.

⁶¹ Bradley, 8–20.





Gim Suey Chong – His Life From Hoyping To Gum Saan

By Raymond Chong

My interest in tracking my ancestral roots began in the year 2003. A series of subliminal moments led to this personal odyssey to discover my own ethnic identity in America and to learn more about Gim Suey Chong, my father. Between late January and late March, two friends and two relatives died. With their deaths, I felt a compelling need to connect closer with my family and to understand my ancestral heritage. Bill Moyers' special "Becoming American: The Chinese Experience" reminded me that Gim Suey Chong was part of the Chinese immigration saga as he struggled in Gum Saan. In late June at a friend's 80th birthday, I met my father's crew chief, from when they maintained the China Clipper seaplane on Treasure Island in 1943.

It has been a poignant journey these past five years. My genealogical research revealed that my father quietly led an extraordinary life. I have retraced his footsteps in Boston Chinatown; Little Tokyo, Los Angeles; San Francisco Chinatown; Los Angeles Chinatown; and finally in Hoyping, China. In each place, I met and talked with his acquaintances. The climax was my return to my paternal ancestral village, Yung Lew Gong Village in Hoyping, in fall 2007 and later in summer 2008. After more than a half century, I have reclaimed our ancestral home. I received that Zhang zupu that traced my male lineage back to 1506 to the Ming Dynasty. The Zhang elders honored me with a lion dance. This journey has come full circle. My heart and body is in America but my mind and soul lie in China.

Prelude - Hoyping

Pearl River Delta

Gim Suey Chong (Zhang Jin Rui), my father, was from Hoyping County in the fertile Pearl River Delta of China. He was the son of Moi Chung (Zhang Mei Xin) and Cun Chuen Wong (Huang Qin Chun). He was born on December 26, 1922, in Yung Lew Gong (Yang Lu Gang)





Village, Hoyping County (Kaiping) of Kwangtung (Guangdong) Province.

The farming village lies within the fertile Pearl River Delta, surrounded by rice fields, vegetable plots, and the Yung Gong stream on the east and the Suey Gon stream on the west. A community *diaolou*, a gate tower, protects the village from bandits. A wealthy Jeung (Zhang) family owns another *diaolou*, a residential tower.

Sek Chyun Ji (Shi Quan Zi) ancestral hall is in the square. The founder of the village was Sia Chwen Gon (Shi Quan Gong). Our ancestors are buried on the ancestral hill of Fei All Sam (Fei E Shan) (“Hill of Flying Swan”). Gim attended Man Dak (Min De) elementary school in the ancestral hall. Chek Seui (Chishui) Town is down the road.



**Yung Lew Gong Village with *diaolou* in background in Hoyping in 2007.
(Courtesy of Chong Family)**

Hoy Lun Chung (Zhang Pei Lan), my great-grandfather, was the father of Moi Chung. Shee Lee was his wife. They had two children: Moi Chung and a daughter. In the late 19th century, Hoy Lun Chung went to America—known to the Chinese as Gum Saan (“Gold Mountain”)—in the first wave of emigrants from Yang Lu Gang Village. He worked in America as a contract laborer and returned to Hoyping a rich man. He became a merchant with his partner, Pui Mou Jeung (Zhang Pei Mu), in a dry goods





market called Daai Suen (Da Xin) (“Grand Credit”) across Sa Jau (Sha Zhou) River in the town of Baksa (Baisha) in Toisan (Taishan) County. Hoy Lun Chung had business investments in San Francisco, CA; Cambridge, MA; and Springfield, IL, and he wanted his son, Moi Chung, to carry on his success in America.



Baksa Market in Toisan in 2007.
(Courtesy of Chong Family)

Hoy Lun Chung was very successful man in his village. He was a respected village chief who gave sound advice. The family’s home had two bedrooms, two kitchens, lofts, etc. Outside it had a brick façade with a wood frame. Situated among the tight cluster of homes in narrow alleys, it was the ninth house on the sixth alley of the village. Hoy Lun Chung’s nephew, Whai Soon Cheung (Zhang Huai Xin), lived on the seventh house.

Moi Chung, my grandfather, was married to Shee Leung who died early in their marriage. Together they had a daughter, Suey Fong Chong, born in 1912. They also had an adopted son, Bow Fui Chong (Zhang Bao Hui).





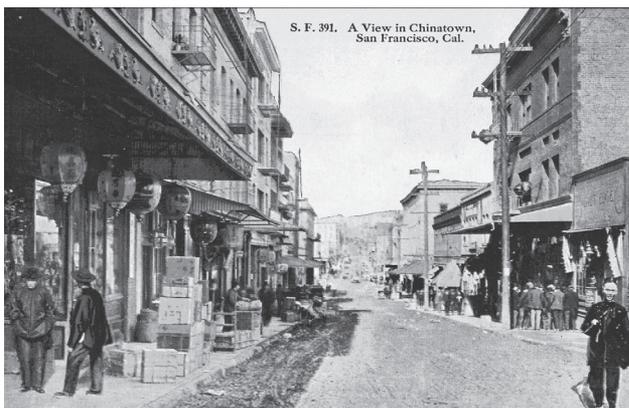
Act I. Gum Saan

San Francisco Chinatown

Moi Chung immigrated to Gum Saan aboard S.S. *Mongolia* steamer, which carried 1,818 passengers, grossed 13,639 tons, and had a speed of 16 knots. Moi Chung arrived at the Port of San Francisco in California on June 17, 1912, where he was briefly interviewed at the Angel Island Immigration Station. He attended Ng Lee Mission School under sponsorship of Miss Ida Greenlee, while residing at 658 DuPont Street (now known as Grant Avenue) in San Francisco Chinatown at the Jeang Sing Kee (Chong Sing) Company, a seller of Chinese dry goods and food products. Hoy Lun Chung, his father, became a silent partner of the company that same year. Moi Chung later became a silent partner as well.



Moi Chung.
(Courtesy of National Archives & Records Administration)



San Francisco Chinatown.
(Courtesy of Chong Family)



New England

In 1917, Moi Chung moved to New England to work as manager at the Imperial Restaurant in Cambridge, of which his father, Hoy Lun Chung, was a silent partner. It was near Boston Chinatown, the center of the Chinese community in New England. Howard For Chew (Ah For Chew) was the principal owner of Imperial Restaurant, which he started in 1917. He also owned the Nanking Restaurant in Springfield, IL. His wife was Florence. Moi Chung worked there until 1919.

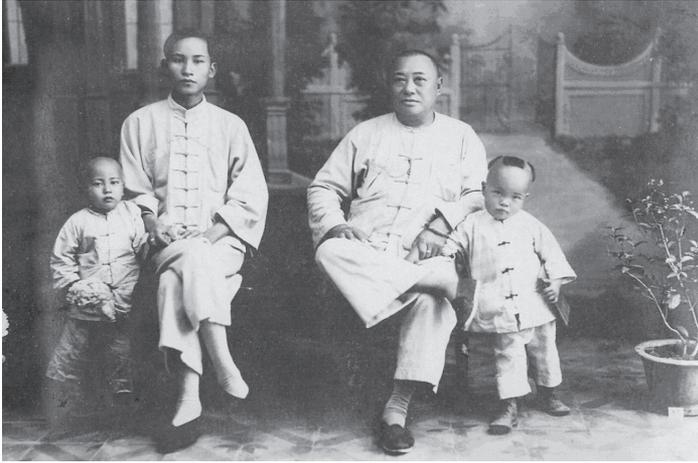
On December 1, 1919, Moi Chung became a partner with a \$500 share of the Royal Restaurant, located at 16 Harrison Avenue in Boston Chinatown, near Phillip's Square. He was a partner from 1919 to 1921. Royal Restaurant was a first-class restaurant serving Chinese and American customers; it consisted of two floors with 100 seats. The business had capital of \$15,490 with 42 silent partners and 5 active partners. Moi Chung was restaurant manager who oversaw a cashier, Ng Chung; a waiter, Quong Kwok Kee; a cook, Foon Wong; and a kitchen helper, Lang Yow. Royal Restaurant was generating \$6,000 per month in sales, and Moi Chung received a \$90 monthly salary. Connected with the Royal Restaurant was the a grocery store, Quong Shue Lung Company, Importers of Merchandise, located at 2 Oxford Place. Moi Chung lived and worked among a bachelor community of few women and few children. They were a fraternity of brothers who had left their wives in China.



Royal Restaurant on Harrison Avenue in Boston Chinatown.
(Courtesy of Chinese Historical Society of New England)



Moi Chung returned to China as a merchant for the Royal Restaurant. He departed on June 16, 1921, from the Port of Vancouver, aboard R.M.S. *Empress of Asia*. He returned to Yung Lew Gong Village, where he married Cun Chuen Wong (Huang Qin Chun) on December 1, 1921. A year later, Gim Suey Chong, my father, was born.



From left to right: Yuy Some Cheung, Moi Chung, Hoy Lun Chung, Gim Suey Chong in 1923. (Courtesy of Chong Family)

Moi Chung returned to America from the Port of Hong Kong aboard S.S. *President Grant*. He arrived at the Port of Seattle on July 27, 1923.

Moi Chung became a partner of Imperial Restaurant in Central Square of Cambridge on December 1, 1923. He brought \$700 interest from Hoy Lun Chung, his father. Imperial Restaurant had 33 silent partners, 7 active partners, and capital of \$13,500. They were generating \$4,000 per month in revenues, and Moi Chung received \$100 monthly salary. As restaurant manager, he oversaw a cashier, Ah For Ju (Howard Chew); a chief cook, Chu Chung; three cooks: Chu Jung Yu, Chu Yick Yin, and Gim Ling; and a waiter, Shuck Quan.

Imperial Restaurant was a high-class restaurant with white tablecloths served by waiters, with the capacity to seat 170 people. Located on the second floor of the Holmes Block, a three-story brick block with



mansard roof, it had three dining halls, a kitchen, and a storeroom. It was known for Chinese and American dishes, especially Chop Suey. It served turkey for lunch on Sundays. It employed one Caucasian porter, and at another time, three Caucasian waitresses.

In 1930, Moi Chung rented the Imperial Restaurant building at a monthly rate of \$465. According to the 1930 census, in addition to Moi Chung, ten partners/lodgers were listed with occupations as waiters, cooks, and cashiers.

Central Square, the site of Imperial Restaurant, is centered on the junction of Massachusetts Avenue, Prospect Street, and Western Avenue. Several Cambridge neighborhoods meet at Central Square. Central Square is the seat of government in Cambridge—Cambridge City Hall, the Cambridge Police Department, and Cambridge Post Office are located in this area. Central Square has long been known for its wide variety of ethnic restaurants and bars, and as a commercial and retail center for Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).



Imperial Restaurant in Cambridge in 1919.
(Courtesy of Cambridge Historical Commission)

Epic Journey

At the age of nine, after a bittersweet farewell to his mother, Cun Chuen Wong, and his half-sister, Suey Fong Chong, my father, Gim, left Yung Lew Gong Village. He walked to Baksa and took a train and a ferryboat to Hong Kong for his epic journey to Gum Saan. He stayed in Hong Kong for ten days in March 1932. As a sojourner, he departed on March 25, 1932, from Hong Kong, China, on R.M.S. *Empress of Asia*. In the steerage class, he was accompanied by Hung Quock Chong (Zhang Guo Xiang), his “paper father” (see affidavit and certificate of identify), who was a restaurant cook who had lived at 17 Tyler Street in Boston Chinatown. A “family friend,” Mee Fong Gee, also joined them on the ocean journey.

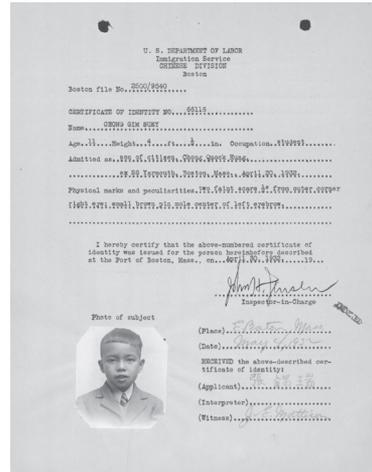


Gim Suey Chong in 1932.
(Courtesy of National Archives & Records Administration)

The Canadian Pacific Steamships (“World’s Greatest Travel System”) were known as the largest and fastest liners on the Pacific Ocean to and from Asia. They showed off white hulls with blue ribbons and with huge buff funnels as they plied the Oriental waters on their trans-Pacific runs. The R.M.S. *Empress of Asia*, one of *The White Empresses of the Pacific*, was a steamship of 16,090 tons, 19 knots, and 1,118 passengers. Along the trans-Pacific “White Empress Route,” Gim and his companions saw the great seaports of Shanghai (on March 28), Nagasaki (on March 29), Kobe (on March 31), Yokohama (on April 2), and Victoria on Vancouver Island.



The White Empresses of the Pacific ad
 (Courtesy of Canadian Pacific Railroad Archives)



Certificate of Identity of Gim Suey Chong in 1932.
 (Courtesy of National Archives & Records Administration)

After 19 days of ocean travel, my father arrived at the Port of Vancouver on April 13, 1932. He boarded the No. 2 “*Imperial Limited*” Vancouver–Montreal Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) train, which pulled coaches and sleepers. His 2,881–mile transcontinental journey from the CPR Vancouver Waterfront Station, through the towering Canadian Rocky Mountains and sweeping prairies, to CPR Windsor Station in Montreal, Quebec, took about 100 hours (four days). From Montreal, he took a CPR train to CPR Saint John Station in New Brunswick. The Canadian Pacific S.S. *Princess Helene*, a Bay of Fundy ship, ferried him to CPR Digby Station in Nova Scotia, to his final destination of the old Dominion Atlantic Railway Yarmouth Station.

On April 19, 1932, from the Port of Yarmouth on the Atlantic Coast, Gim departed on S.S. *Yarmouth*, the Boston–Yarmouth Line of the Eastern Steamship Lines. The next day, April 20, 1932, he arrived in the Port of Boston. On the Boston waterfront—after 26 days of ocean and train travel—he touched the golden soil of Gum Saan.



Boston Harbor.
(Courtesy of Chong Family)

On arrival, Gim was held in the detention facility of the East Boston office of the Immigration & Naturalization Service of the U.S. Department of Labor. Under the Chinese Division, he was interviewed for admission by James E. Fitzgerald, inspector. On April 25, 1932, the officials admitted Gim Suey Chong, as son of Hung Quock Chong, American citizen. Afterwards, Gim excitedly met Moi Chung, his real father. Hung Quock Chong died on February 4, 1964; he is buried at Mount Hope Cemetery with other Chinese sojourners.

Cambridge

Gim lived with his father, Moi Chung, in the old Holmes Block on the second floor of 2 Central Square in Cambridgeport, which housed Imperial Restaurant that Moi Chung managed. Gim had to quickly learn English, the language of his adopted country, and the American way.

The population of the City of Cambridge was about 110,000. Central Square was the retail and entertainment center for the neighborhoods of Cambridgeport and MIT. People shopped for groceries at Manhattan Market and brought clothes at J. H. Corcoran's & Company Department Store. They enjoyed a wide range of ethnic foods at restaurants. On Friday and Saturday evenings, they were entertained by motion





pictures and vaudeville at the Olympic Theatre and Gordon's Central Square Theatre; they also drank and danced at nightclubs and bars. On Sundays, families worshipped at the First Baptist Church.

The Boston Elevated Railway Company operated the Cambridge Main Street Subway. The Central Station was on Massachusetts Avenue. Trolley streetcars connected Central Square to greater Boston. The Nabisco (National Biscuit Company) bakery was a major employer in Cambridge.

Scholars from China attended MIT and Harvard University, and each had several Chinese student clubs on campus, including the Chinese Students' Alliance in the United States of America, which was involved in political and social activities and events. Also in the neighborhood was the Chin family, who operated Oriental Restaurant on Massachusetts Avenue; the Dong family ran a Chinese laundry on Norfolk Street.

Gim attended Webster School of Cambridge Public Schools at 15 Upton Street, a brick façade three-story building. The school had 35 kids per class with wood desks on wood floors with wonderful teachers. Whites and Blacks were segregated with few Asian students. Gim carried his books in a shopping bag. After school, he returned to Imperial Restaurant to do chores in the kitchen. He slept in the storeroom.

Departure

Due to the economic downturn of the Great Depression, Imperial Restaurant was failing, so Moi Chung sold his share of the business. In the summer of 1936, Gim and his father left New England for a new life in California, "The Golden State." With their meager possessions, they departed from the South Station of Boston to transit through the Union Station of Chicago. They finally arrived at the old Southern Pacific Railroad/Union Pacific Railroad Station in Downtown Los Angeles. Gim and Moi began a new chapter in Gum Saan in Little Tokyo, Los Angeles near City Hall.





Act II. Little Tokyo

Arrival



East First Street of Little Tokyo.
(Courtesy of Chong Family)

Yet Quong Low Chop Suey Cafe

Jim lived and studied in bustling Little Tokyo—the biggest enclave of Japanese in America—from about 1936 to 1943, with his father, Moi Chung. Moi Chung worked as a waiter at Yet Quong Low (“Sun Light Building”) Chop Suey Café at 339 ½ East First Street, also known as Nikko Low Chinese Restaurant among the Issei and Nisei community. The café specialized in the Chop Suey version of “China-Meshi,” which was extremely popular among the Japanese American community. The café was founded around 1913 by Lung Fong and his two brothers; Lung was married to Hanako Nishii, an Issei from Wakayama Prefecture.

After school, Jim worked as a busboy to earn food and boarding. He and Moi Chung slept in the storage room of the café. Jim missed his mother as he was growing up.





Lung Fong in front of Yet Quong Low in Little Tokyo after World War II.
(Courtesy of Henry Fong)

Yet Quong Low had a banquet room for up to 200 people. A dining room of six tables was in front. The café served chow mein, beer, and wine. Japanese farmers were regular customers after they delivered fruits and vegetables to the Produce Market. They also enjoyed drinks and entrées at the Chop Suey Café on Saturdays. The adjacent Far East Café, owned by Hoie Wing Jung (aka Robert Jung), was a rival. Other Chop Suey restaurants in Little Tokyo included Sam Kow Low Chop Suey Café and Lem's Café.

In front of Yet Quong Low, the Yellow Car streetcars of the Los Angeles Railway P Line ran along East First Street, between Pico Boulevard and Boyle Heights. The streetcars offered access to other Los Angeles neighborhoods.

Gim's best friend at Belmont High School was Yook Toy Jeung. They explored Downtown, Little Tokyo, and Chinatown. Gim took Yook to top of City Hall to see the skyline of Los Angeles.

Moi Chung associated with his fellow clansmen from Kaiping at Wai Sing Meat Company on 700 Spring Street across from China City.





They shared their hopes and dreams, and how they missed their wives and children in China. They wrote letters back home, gossiped, and played games. Moi Chung's best friend was Paul Jung (Dong Foo Jung), a watchmaker.

Antonin Sperl Building

Gim and Moi Chung lived on the second floor of the Antonin Sperl Building, a landmark in Little Tokyo. Antonin Sperl built it in 1882 as a blacksmith shop for horse carriages and wagons. As part of the Little Tokyo Historic District and Preserve America Community, the Antonin Sperl Building is a historically significant building in Little Tokyo according to Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles.

Antonin Sperl was an inventor. He held five patents with the United States Patent Office:

1. Portable Fruit Evaporator, Patent No. 489,168, Patented January 3, 1893.
2. Forging Hammer, Patent No. 500,970, Patented July 4, 1893.
3. Band Brake for Vehicles, Patent No. 769,416, Patented September 6, 1904.
4. Fire Escape, Patent No. 1,488,624, Patented, April 1, 1924.
5. Collapsible Fire Escape, Patent No. 1,537,506, May 12, 1925.

Amelia Street School

Gim attended Amelia Street School at 611 Jackson Street. The students were mostly Japanese, with a very small minority of Chinese and Mexicans.

Central Junior High School

For one semester, Gim attended old Central Junior High School at 457 North Hill Street in Downtown Los Angeles. It had a similar mixture of Japanese, Chinese, Mexicans, and Blacks. He got his diploma on February 4, 1938.



Belmont High School

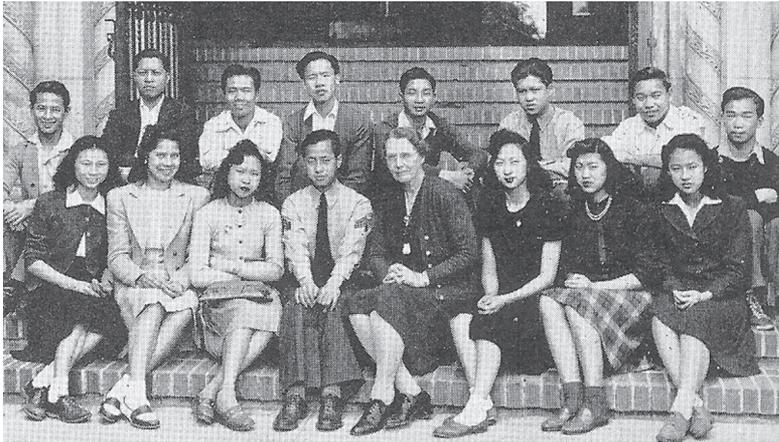
Gim entered Belmont High School, a three year high school, on February 7, 1938. He received average grades in his classes. Here, he met fellow Chinese from Chinatown. After school and on weekends, Gim worked as a street sweeper, picking up cigarette butts and other trash with a stick. The family was still undergoing financial difficulty. In the apartment, he slept on a “mattress” composed of old newspapers and magazines.

Opened on September 11, 1923, at 1575 West Second Street on Crown Hill, Belmont had a high academic reputation as a model high school in California. Its diverse student body represented the world. There were Blacks and Asians in academic programs, in sports, and in student leadership. The principal was Alfred Longfellow Benshimol, a graduate of Harvard University.

Belmont’s annual yearbook was nicknamed “The Campanile” after the high school’s prominent tower. During Gim’s four years, the yearbook themes were “City of Los Angeles,” 1938; “All the World’s a Stage,” 1939; “The Stories of the Arabian Nights,” 1940; and “Pan American Highway,” 1941.

Immigrants from Japan, China, Mexico, and other countries attended Foreign Adjustment class to learn English. Gim participated in the Chinese Club, established in 1934 to promote friendship between Chinese and American students; Social Studies teacher Miss Zula Brown was the sponsor. Another student club, Fuji-Kai, promoted better understanding and friendship between USA and Japan; Social Studies teacher Miss Harper was the sponsor.

After six semesters, Gim graduated on January 31, 1941, with his 233 classmates. The 31st Commencement was held on Thursday evening, January 30, 1941, in Tritt Auditorium.



**Chinese Club at Belmont High School
(Courtesy of Chong Family)**

Heyday of Little Tokyo

Gim Suey Chong, a Chinese, witnessed the tumultuous times of Little Tokyo during its heyday as the business and cultural center of the Japanese community in Southern California. The hostilities between Japan and China were a growing community concern. Tension was rising as the Imperial Japanese Army invaded China.

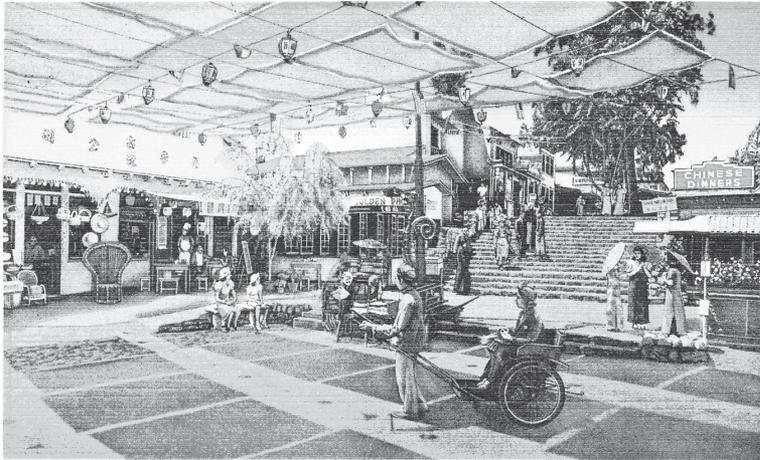
On December 7, 1941, Japanese naval bombers attacked the American Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor. President Franklin Roosevelt issued United States Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, exercising his war power authority as Commander-in-Chief to send ethnic Japanese to internment camps. Stores began promoting bargains to unload merchandise. By March 21, 1942, the mandatory exodus to Manzanar in the Owens Valley of California was launched. Little Tokyo was a ghost town.

Little Tokyo gradually became “Bronzeville” as housing for Blacks, another underclass, from the Deep South. Jazz clubs and fine restaurants flourished for a short period to the end of World War II. Nearby Chinatown and China City underwent major funding-raising initiatives to help war relief efforts.





Street Scene in Little Tokyo in 1942
(Courtesy of National Archives & Records Administration)



China City in 1938
(Courtesy of Chong Family)

Curtiss-Wright Technical Institute

During early World War II, Gim Suey Chong studied at Curtiss-Wright Technical Institute of Aeronautics (CWTI) at old Grand Central Air Terminal, established in 1929, in Glendale. He began his training on July 13, 1942.

Founded in 1931, CWTI was “In the Heart of the Aircraft Industry,” specializing exclusively in Aeronautical Engineering and Master



Mechanic Training. It was largest aeronautical engineering and mechanical school in United States. CWTI had an excellent shop training program, in which master mechanic trainees practiced on a variety of obsolete airplanes.

Grand Central Air Terminal was the base for a Lockheed P-38 *Lightning* fighter squadron during World War II. Based there for coastal defense was the 402nd Army Air Forces Base Unit (Fighter) (318th Wing).

Gim undertook 1920 hours of Combined Aircraft and Aircraft Engine curriculum. It included Basic Instruction (160 hours); Aircraft Manufacturing (480 hours); Engine Repair and Test (600 hours); and Aircraft Inspection and Maintenance (680 hours). He got his certificate as master aviation mechanic from the Administrator of Civil Aeronautics on April 23, 1943. (Diploma from Curtiss Wright Technical Institute of Aeronautics at Grand Central Air Terminal.)

While attending CWTI, Gim lived with Moi Chung in a boarding house owned by Hoie Wing Jung of Yet Quong Lew Chop Suey Café. Located at 457 Turner Street in Little Tokyo, the two-story wood-framed boarding house had six rooms for rent at \$10 per month. Supreme Court Justice and California Governor, Earl Warren, was born in this boarding house.



**Chinese Club at Curtiss-Wright
Technical Institute in Glendale.
(Courtesy of Chong Family)**



Act III. San Francisco Chinatown

Pan Am

After graduating from Curtiss Wright Technical Institute in 1943 as a qualified aircraft mechanic, Gim was hired by Pan American Airways System as a mechanic's helper. His all-Chinese crew maintained the world famous *China Clipper* flying boat and other seaplanes stationed on Pan Am Treasure Island Station at the Naval Auxiliary Air Facility in San Francisco Bay. The *China Clipper*, a Martin M-130, was the first seaplane to complete the first transpacific flight in 1935. During World War II, it flew between Treasure Island and Pearl Harbor in Honolulu.

Gim was on inactive service duty with the United States Navy, beginning on May 18, 1943. Pan Am was under wartime service contract to the United States Navy. In 1944, the U.S. Navy called Gim to serve at the Pan Am's Honolulu Station at Pearl City in Pearl Harbor. Hawaii was "dull" for Gim. He lived in the barracks, ate in the mess halls, and performed his duties in uniform. During his free time, he went to the beach. Despite being a poor swimmer, he enjoyed floating lazily in the warm tropical waters. One time, unaware that the ocean current had pushed him far from the beach, Gim nearly drowned.

After his tour at the Honolulu Station, Gim returned to work at Mills Field Municipal Airport (now San Francisco International Airport) to maintain seaplanes and passenger planes. Working on a tight schedule, his crew maintained the engines, electrical systems, and mechanical systems to ensure the planes' airworthiness. Gim's crew chief, Lee Leong, remembered Gim as a hard worker—an introvert who rarely mingled with his fellow crewmembers. *"Jim Chong, I have always called him that, was one of best members of my crew. He did his job always to the best of his ability; I remember that he seldom questioned his assignments. He did the job regardless of whether it is a desirable or not so desirable one. Another thing I remembered well was his positive attitude. He got along well with all his co-workers."*

From 1943 to 1950, Gim lived primarily in San Francisco Chinatown, in the apartments of 847 Clay Street. The apartment building is now known as "San Francisco Lodge Chinese American Citizens Alliance



Building 1953.” During World War II, San Francisco Chinatown was an enclave of shops, bazaars, and restaurants. The Chinese nightclubs, including “Forbidden City,” were at their zenith of business success. With fellow crewmembers, Gim carpooled from Chinatown to Treasure Island and later to Mills Field for his job.

As an Asian during a war against the Japanese, Gim experienced his share of prejudice. During a drive back from an outing in the San Francisco Bay area, Gim’s friend was at the wheel; Gim and his other friends were lying down asleep in the car. Suddenly two men in another car forced Gim’s friend to pull over to the side of the highway. The two strangers shouted curses as they approached their car. They were expecting an easy fight against a single little “Japanese.” However, the disturbance awoke Gim and his friends, and they all exited the car. Unexpectedly, the two strangers were confronted with six Asians, including an exceptionally large one—George Fong had played fullback at University of California, Berkeley. The two men quickly walked back to their car and drove off. Years later, Gim recalled this incident with laughter.

Gim was discharged from military service on December 7, 1945.



The crew in front of *China Clipper* on Treasure Island Station in 1943. (Courtesy of Chong Family)



Gim Suey Chong in uniform with Pan American Airways System at Honolulu Station in 1944.
(Courtesy of Chong Family)

Kubla Khan

At end of World War II, during The Golden Age of Chinese Nightclubs, Gim invested his savings with nightclub owner Eddie Pond and others. From 1946 to 1950, Gim Suey Chong was a partner at the famous Eddie Pond's Kubla Khan Theater Restaurant.

Eddie Pond—under the name of Kwan Pun—had arrived at the Port of Seattle on July 16, 1923, aboard S.S. *Jefferson* from the Port of Hong Kong. Pond was an astute entrepreneur. Under Pond and Associates in San Francisco Chinatown, Eddie Pond was involved in real estate as a broker and in insurance as a broker. In the early mornings, Eddie Pond also operated a breakfast club on Grant Avenue and later on Kearny Street. He was a natural lover of the theater and of the arts. Prior to Kubla Khan, Eddie Pond opened his first nightclub, the Dragon's Lair, in Chinatown.

Eddie Pond was married four times, to Goldina Lee, Lonnie Fong, Adele Wong, and Barbara Yung. He had three children with his first wife, Goldina Lee: Adelina, Gilbert, and Roger. They were born in San Francisco. His subsequent wives were performers at the Kubla Khan.

The Kubla Khan was a Chinese theater restaurant and nightclub with bar, known for its band entertainment and stage performances.





Located at 414 Grant Avenue, next to the famous San Francisco Chinatown Gateway, it was a gathering place for dinner, dance, and show. Patrons had the choice of either American or Chinese dishes and were entertained by an all-Chinese revue, with a mixture of vaudeville and burlesque in the theater.

Kubla Khan was named for a classic poem: “Kubla Khan, or a Vision in a Dream. A Fragment,” written by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Eddie Pond took the title from the Mongol and Chinese emperor Kublai Khan of the Yuan dynasty.

*In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.*

Eddie Pond’s Kubla Khan was promoted as “San Francisco’s Most Exciting Chinese Theatre Restaurant.” Eddie Pond was a fine showman. He greeted Hollywood and Broadway stars and other celebrities to his exotic palace of splendor. Ivan Paul, Night Club Editor of *San Francisco Examiner*, wrote, ““No need to travel to China for the spell...the mystery...of the Orient. Ankle Chinatown way to the KUBLA KHAN...there it is.”

The Kubla Khan competed with the internationally famous and popular “Forbidden City” nightclub and cabaret by Charlie Low. “Forbidden City” was featured in the hit *Flower Drum Song* novel (1957), Broadway play (1958), and Hollywood movie (1961).

Eddie Pond was colorful personality and enigmatic individual. At times, he emceed and performed on the stage. Three times every evening, Eddie Pond presented a one-hour program with a Latin theme. The program had nine acts:

1. Street Scene
2. Chinese Sleeve Dance
3. Chinese Lullaby
4. Coolie Dance
5. Sing Lee Sings – Chinese Acrobats
6. Sing Song Girls
7. China’s Dancing Sweethearts





8. Oriental Interlude

9. Chinaconga

In the program, Jadin and Li Sun gracefully danced to the Latin band of Bill Oetke and his Rumberos. Sing Lee Troupe performed their circus acrobatics. May Lee sang songs. Walton Biggerstaff was the producer and choreographer. At times, Eddie Pond danced in the acts and played instruments with the Latin band. He was jovially known as “The Chinese Demon of the Maracas.”

Exotic dancer Noel Toy performed her strip tease acts nightly at the Kubla Khan, seductively dazzling audiences with her famous fan dance and bubble dance. She was billed the “Chinese Sally Rand,” after a well known burlesque dancer.

Nora Wong, now Elly Chui of Honolulu, related her experience as singer, dancer, and emcee at the Kubla Khan (from “Late Night in the Lion’s Den in “Gastronomic” by Harley Spiller):

Later on, Nora worked at Kubla Khan, which she described as “a huge place on the Gateway of Chinatown, still there, a three-story building. I was billed as a Latin-American-Chinese-Vocalist.” As she’s purely Chinese-American, we joked that they must have thought her birth in Arizona qualified as Latin. She did sing some songs in Spanish, like “Besame Mucho” (“Kiss me a lot.”). “It’s still there and was beautiful,” she whispered.

At the Kubla Khan, the dining room and dance floor were in front of the stage on the second floor, with a balcony on the third floor. A cigarette girl sold various brands of cigarettes and cigars. A lady photographer offered souvenir photos to patrons. Cocktail waitresses served drinks. The bartender was busy mixing house cocktails at the bar near the cocktail lounge. In the back stage, the Kubla Khan beauties enjoyed the well-appointed dressing rooms.

Frank Yee, a patron as well as friend of Eddie Pond, recalled his times at the Kubla Khan:

During my bachelor days, with my buddies, I was hopping among the Chinese nightclubs in San Francisco Chinatown. Eddie Pond’s



Kubla Khan was a fine nightclub at the same class as Charlie Low's Forbidden City and Andy Wong's Chinese Sky Room. We brought our dates to watch the entertaining Broadway-style shows. We had group parties in the cocktail lounge at the Kubla Khan. Eddie Pond was a very gracious host.

Gim worked quietly as a waiter at the Kubla Khan. He gradually gained confidence and was known as a sharp dresser. Gim was photogenic as he gazed away from camera. He was adapting well to the American way of life.

The Chinese nightclub business was in a slow and gradual decline after World War II. Gim eventually sold his share of the Kubla Khan and returned to Los Angeles to live again with his father.



**Old Kubla Khan
at the Gateway of
San Francisco
Chinatown.
(Courtesy of
Chong Family)**



**Eddie Ponds' Theatre Restaurant
souvenir photo holder.
(Courtesy of Trina Robbins)**



**"A Night in Chinatown" at
Kubla Khan.
(Courtesy of Trina Robbins)**



**Gim Suey Chong with fellow waiters at Kubla Khan.
(Courtesy of Chong Family)**





Act IV: City of Angels

Return to Los Angeles

Jim Suey Chong returned to Los Angeles to live in New Chinatown in 1950. From 1950 to 1955, he and his father, Moi Chung, lived in a room of the College Hotel on Broadway, above the famous Little Joe's Italian American Restaurant. The College Hotel had a big wooden staircase; the apartments had communal bathroom at the end of the long hallway. Before becoming New Chinatown, the neighborhood had been an enclave of Italian immigrants. The New Chinatown business community consisted of grocery stores, laundries, and restaurants. Moi Chung worked casual jobs at restaurants in the area.



West Gate of Central Plaza in New Chinatown.
(Courtesy of Chong Family)

Lockheed

The Cold War period was known as The Golden Age of Aviation in the San Fernando Valley. Jim worked for the Lockheed-California Company as a quality assurance inspector, in a vast industrial complex in



Burbank. He was a member of the team that produced U.S. Navy Anti Submarine Warfare (ASW) planes like the P-2 *Neptune*, P-3 *Orion*, and S-3 *Viking*. He also worked on F-104 *Starfighter*, C-5 *Galaxy*, and L-1011 *TriStar*.

Gim worked diligently for Lockheed from December 4, 1950, until his early retirement in 1978, due to kidney disease. He received many commendations for his excellent work at Lockheed. He was a loyal company man in faithful service for 28 years.



**Gim Suey Chong with co-worker
with P-3 *Orion* in Burbank
(Courtesy of Chong Family)**

Far East Cafe

On weekends, from 1950 to 1974, Gim Suey Chong worked as a waiter at the old Far East Café (aka En Tow Low) at the landmark Far East Building at 347 East First Street in the heart of Little Tokyo. This chop suey joint was known in the Nikkei community for its China-Meshi cuisine. Its principle owner, Look Mar, was partners with three cousins, Goey Yee Chong, Oak Hoey Chang, and Kwok Hoey Jeong. Gim enjoyed working for his Hoyping cousins.

Every Saturday and Sunday, Gim left early in the morning and headed late in the evening for home (11 a.m. to 9 p.m. schedule). Toyo Miyatake, the prominent photographer of the Manzanar internment camp,



was a regular lunch and dinner patron of Far East Café, along with his sons and grandsons. Miyatake's photography studio was on 318 East First Street.

During breaks at the Far East Café, Gim joked with his fellow waiters and busboys, and played games. Among his peers, Gim was known as a nice guy with a sense of humor, and intelligence. Dr. Andrew Chong, a busboy at the time, had fond memories of Gim. He recalled Gim as a humble man who seldom talked about himself, typical of a Chinese man of his generation. Gim was noted for his musculature and strength—he bested everyone in arm wrestling at the restaurant. He also was known for trying to please his customers. One hot summer day, a customer demanded sweet watermelon for dessert. Gim promised that he would serve the sweetest watermelon the customer had ever tasted. So Gim went to the kitchen, poured sugar over a plate of watermelon, and brought it to the customer. He was also helpful to his friends in getting them jobs at Lockheed.

The Far East Café was a special gathering place for the Nikkei community. They gathered for weddings, birthdays, graduations, parties, and funerals. Bill Watanabe, Executive Director of Little Tokyo Service Center, felt strongly that the Far East Café had a major impact on the Nikkei community, who had returned to Los Angeles from the internment camps in despair at the end of World War II.

Bill Watanabe wrote:

When World War II broke out, all of the Japanese along the west coast of the United States were forcibly removed and incarcerated in camps in the interior portions of the country. Thus, from 1942–1945, Little Tokyo was devoid of any Japanese or Japanese American presence, and the area was occupied by others who came to Los Angeles from the South and Midwest and were in need of housing.

After World War II ended in 1945, many Japanese Americans sought to return to Southern California but they found there were few places for them to live. A number of families were housed temporarily at the Koyasan Temple on First Street in Little Tokyo – including members of my own family.

According to some folks who recall those days, after spending





years in the camps and losing most if not all of their possessions, they had little spending money. They would go to the Far East Cafe across the street from the Koyasan Temple and the Chinese owners of the Cafe, who were familiar with many of these returnees, allowed them to eat “on credit”, asking to be paid when they were able to do so. It could truth fully be said that this kind of goodwill helped to make the Far East, along with its famous cheap and tasty menu, the most popular and well-known restaurant in the entire Japanese American community.



“Far East Building” sign.
(Courtesy of Chong Family)



Chop Suey Café Today.
(Courtesy of Chong Family)

With the help of his future mother-in-law, Tuey Hai Quan, Gim courted Miss Seen Hoy Tong of Santa Barbara, California. His first dinner date with Seen and her family was at the old Far East Café in 1954. They sat at Booth #2. Since he was also a waiter, Gim actually served dinner to Seen and her family.

Gim’s bachelorhood ended on January 14, 1955, when he married Seen Hoy Tong in Los Angeles. Paul Jung, Gim’s relative, served as witness. Superior Court Judge George Dockweiler performed the ceremony. On March 5, 1955, Gim and Seen purchased a two-bedroom bungalow home in Elysian Valley, a working class neighborhood by the Los Angeles River near Downtown. Gim also bought his first car, a green 1955 Ford sedan.

Gim and Seen raised two sons: Raymond was born in early 1956. Michael was born later the same year. Dr. Julius Sue, M.D., delivered both



boys at the old French Hospital in New Chinatown. He also was their family physician. The boys saw Dr. Julius Sue at his medical office on Broadway for assorted childhood illnesses and vaccination shots. They remember the strong odor of alcohol in the examination room.

Family Life

Gim proudly watched the boys grow to young men. Working at Lockheed and Far East Café, he hustled for money to provide a better life for the family. He worked the swing shift at Lockheed to earn a little extra needed money. Gim was also supporting his mother who lived in China and his retired father who was living with his family. Working his two jobs, Gim was rarely home during family meals. His paternal relationship with his sons suffered as a consequence. Nevertheless, he was always concerned about the welfare of his active sons and was very proud of their eventual educational achievements.

Yook Toy Jeung, a cook at the Far East Café, fondly recalled: *“Gim was a hard worker. He took care of his family. He was an honest person.”*

On December 8, 1964, Gim and Seen bought an old house adjacent to their own, and built a four-unit apartment building as a real estate investment.



**Portrait of Chong Family in 1961.
(Courtesy of Chong Family)**



Seen worked as an electronics assembler for General Instruments Company of Hawthorne in the South Bay. Many of her co-workers were Issei or Nisei women, so Seen picked up a slight Japanese accent. She and her co-workers became lifelong friends, especially Clara Higuchi.

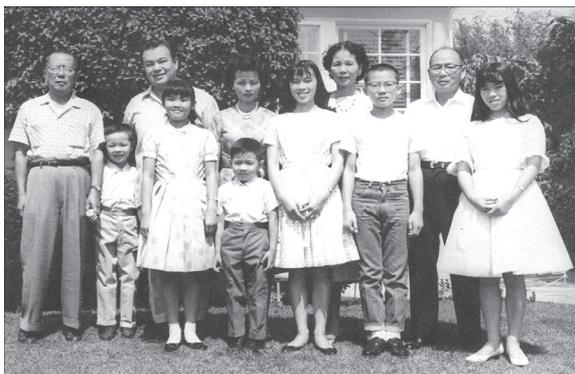
The Chong family exchanged visits with their relatives, the Tong family, near State Street in Santa Barbara. Sun Yoke Tong, Gim's father-in-law, operated the Sun Tong Laundry. The boys spent several summers enjoying the beaches of Santa Barbara with their uncle and aunts. They also visited the family of Fong Suey Chong, Gim's sister, in the Richmond District of San Francisco, where the boys played with their Mar cousins.

With the help of California Congressman George Edward Brown, Jr., Gim was reunited with Cun Chuen Wong, his mother, on February 14, 1966, at Los Angeles International Airport after a long separation of 34 years. Seen and her co-workers at General Instruments won a major prize in the Irish Sweepstake. With her share of the money, Gim and Seen were able to purchase a bungalow nearby for his father and mother. Still, Gim worked steadily at the two jobs. He supplemented the meager Social Security check that Moi Chung, his father, was receiving.

For years after his mother immigrated, Gim wrote a letter of gratitude each Christmas on behalf of his father and sent it with a box of Chinese tea to Congressman Brown. Despite living in the United States for many years, his father's English was very poor, so Gim had to write the letters. But by writing these letters, he was actually expressing his own gratitude to the Congressman—especially since Gim was unable to acknowledge his relationship to his father and mother to those outside close friends and family.

He was a “paper son,” and his relationship to his real parents was unknown even to those in regular contact with the family. Many years later after Gim's passing, Dr. Julius Sue, the family physician, remarked to one of Gim's sons that he remembered Gim being very caring for the old man (Moi Chung) but that he was puzzled by his devotion.





**Gim Suey Chong with
Tong Family.
(Courtesy of Chong
Family)**

Deaths

The health of Moi Chung and Cun Chuen, Gim's parents, gradually declined. With great reluctance and deep anguish, Gim eventually placed them in a nursing home in Los Angeles. Moi Chung died on August 3, 1976. Cun Chuen Wong died on October 24, 1977. Both died at the French Hospital with Dr. Julius Sue in attendance. Gim sadly buried them at the Chinese Cemetery in East Los Angeles among other Chinese sojourners.



**Graves of Cun Chuen Wong
and Moi Chung in the Chinese
Cemetery of East Los Angeles.
(Courtesy of Chong Family)**

After a short life of 57 years, Gim Suey Chong died on December 2, 1979, at Saint Vincent's Hospital in Los Angeles. He died of complications from a kidney transplant rejection. Dr. Roger Boken was the attending physician. Jeung (paternal) and Yee (maternal) relatives, and close friends from Far East Café and Lockheed deeply mourned his death. They



attended his funeral on December 7, 1979. Gim is buried in Gardens of Honor at Forest Lawn Memorial Park cemetery in Glendale.

His grave marker is inscribed simply:

Gim Suey Chong.
1922–1979.
Beloved Husband and Father.
He lives with us in memory
And will for evermore.



**Grave of Gim Suey Chong in Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Glendale.
(Courtesy of Chong Family)**

Epilogue

Raymond Douglas Chong, the eldest son of Gim Suey Chong, reflects on the life of his father:

Gim Suey Chong faced constant hardships and harsh challenges in Gum Saan. As a young sojourner, he embarked on an epic journey across the Pacific Ocean and the North American continent to arrive in Boston in 1932. He lived in poverty under adverse conditions in Central Square of Cambridge and in Little Tokyo of Los Angeles. He experienced the tumultuous periods of the Great Depression, World War II, and the Cold War in America.

Gim witnessed the “The Heydays of Little Tokyo,” “The Golden Age of Chinese Nightclubs,” “The Golden Age of Aviation in the San Fernando Valley,” and “The Golden Years of New Chinatown.” He was involved with the old Yet Quong Low (Nikko Low) Chop Suey Café in Little Tokyo, historic Eddie Pond’s Kubla Khan Theater Restaurant in San Francisco Chinatown, and Far East

Café in Little Tokyo. He worked for the venerable Pan American Airways System on Treasure Island, with its China Clipper, and the historic Lockheed-California Company in Burbank. He lived and socialized in New Chinatown of Los Angeles.

For centuries, his ancestors, peasant farmers, toiled in the fields of the Pearl River Delta. As a sojourner, he never returned to Yung Lew Gong Village in Hoyping. However, he left a strong legacy for future generations of his descendants in Gum Saan through his sons, Raymond and Michael. Gim was our humble "Quiet Man" in our family. He firmly believed in the American dream. Gim Suey Chong lived an extraordinary life from Hoyping to Gum Saan.



Gim Suey and Seen Hoy Chong.
(Courtesy of Chong Family)



About the authors:

Linda Ngov

Linda Ngov was born in San Diego, California, to Chinese-Cambodian parents. Before immigrating to the United States in 1980, her parents experienced the horrors of genocide launched by the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s. Linda's family story inspired her to pursue an academic career in Asian American history. Having earned a degree in History from the University of California, Santa Barbara, with a minor in Asian American Studies, Linda is now in the PhD History Program at the University of California, Los Angeles. Her areas of expertise are Asian American history, Los Angeles history, and immigration history. She currently works as researcher for a new NBC historical documentary series called *Who Do You Think You Are?*, a program that traces the family ancestry of eminent Americans.

Raymond Chong

Raymond Chong is a Deputy Director for the city of Houston, Texas; he is in charge of the transportation system infrastructure of America's fourth largest city. Raymond was raised in a barrio near New Chinatown in Los Angeles. He earned his bachelor's degree from the University of Southern California and a master's degree from San Jose State University. He is a licensed civil engineer and traffic engineer. Raymond resides in Sugar Land, Texas, with his wife Mabel and their son Kenji.

