Performing Chinatown:

Hollywood Cinema, Tourism, and the Making of a Los Angeles Community, 1882-1943

By

William Gow

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Abstract

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Examining a period of national debate over immigration and U.S. citizenship, this dissertation foregrounds the social, economic, and political contexts through which representations of Chinatown in Los Angeles were produced and consumed. My dissertation asks: how did Chinese Americans in Los Angeles create, negotiate, and critically engage changing representations of Chinatown? To what extent did popular representations and economic opportunities in Hollywood inform life in Los Angeles Chinatown? And in what ways were the rights and privileges of U.S. citizenship and national belonging related to popular representations of Chinatown? To answer these questions, this project examines four different "Chinatowns" in Los Angeles—Old Chinatown, New Chinatown, China City, and MGM's set for *The Good Earth*—between the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 and the law's symbolic repeal in 1943 during World War II.

Whereas scholars have long argued that the geopolitical context of the Second World War and in particular the U.S. alliance with China led to both to the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943 and a general increase in opportunities for Chinese Americans, my dissertation presents a different narrative. Building on film studies scholars who trace the birth of cinema to the overlapping forces of modernity and urbanization at the turn of the century, I argue that the same transformations in urban visual culture that led to the development of film also transformed Chinatown into a medium of cultural production. Tracing the co-evolution of Chinatown and cinema as overlapping media forms between the arrival of the film industry in Southern California and the openings of New Chinatown and China City in Los Angeles in 1938, I demonstrate the myriad ways that Chinese American merchants, background extras, and others in Los Angeles repositioned Chinatown as part of, rather than distinct from, the idea of a modern cosmopolitan city. In the process, I analyze the ways that Chinese Americans utilized performance in Hollywood film and Chinatown to lay the groundwork for the incorporation of Chinese Americans into the nation-state under the logic of racial liberalism during World War II. In making this argument, my project places the everyday actions and performances of Chinese Americans at the center of discussions of American Orientalism demonstrating that the increasing inclusion of Chinese Americans into the United States was not the product of geopolitical forces alone.

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Introduction

Surveying the parade as it passed by the reviewing stand and through the West Gate into New Chinatown, Peter SooHoo must have felt a sense of pride. That day, June 25, 1938 was the official opening of the newest Chinatown in Los Angeles, and SooHoo was serving as the Master of Ceremonies. A third-generation Californian, SooHoo was officially the English-language secretary for the Los Angeles Chinatown Project Association, but his role in the construction of New Chinatown had been much more significant than his title implied.[1] Four years earlier, city leaders announced that Old Chinatown would be torn down and its residents displaced to build the new Union Station. Since then, Peter SooHoo had acted as a liaison between the railways and the Chinese American business owners and residents set to be displaced by this new train depot. As crews dismantled Old Chinatown block by block, Peter SooHoo worked tirelessly to forestall the evictions. It was as a result of SooHoo's tireless efforts that so many Chinese Americans were able to stay as long as they had.[2]

The desire of city elites to destroy Old Chinatown was not a surprise. In the popular imagination, white artists, authors, and filmmakers had long represented urban Chinatowns as the physical embodiment of the immigrant alien. Since the passage of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act when the U.S. government began barring Chinese laborers from entering the country, the figure of the Chinese immigrant became the ethnic Other against which the American citizen was constructed. Representations of Chinatown defined the cultural possibilities of citizenship for Chinese Americans in the same way the law defined the possibilities of legal citizenship. During the Chinese Exclusion Act era (1882-1943), there remained real political and material stakes to the way Chinatown was popularly portrayed.

For at least half a century, media elite and leaders in Los Angeles had portrayed Old Chinatown as a site of tong violence, illicit drug use, and prostitution. These stereotypes of Chinatown were rooted not just in ideas of race, but also in perceived differences of gender and sexuality. Images of vice and corruption were a direct result of popular representations that depicted Chinatown as a community of bachelors living together in an all male social world. The few women in the community were usually portrayed as prostitutes. Thus, Chinatown was popularly linked with a deviant form of sexuality that challenged the normative ideas of the white middle class family united in Christian marriage.[3] Furthermore, many white residents of Los Angeles believed that the built environment of the Chinatown contributed to this vice. Stories of an underground network of lairs and secret tunnels facilitated the idea that Chinatown lay outside the vision and control of white authorities.

New Chinatown in Los Angeles built on prior efforts by the Chinese American merchant class throughout North America to redefine the place of Chinatown in the popular imagination. Beginning with the Chinese Village at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, continuing on through the reconstruction of San Francisco's Chinatown following the 1906 Earthquake and fire, Chinese American merchants challenged notions of Chinatowns as disease-ridden slums and

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[1] For a description on the placement of the reviewing stand and Peter SooHoo see Suellen Cheng and Munson Kwok, "The Golden Years of Los Angeles Chinatown: The Beginning," *Los Angeles Chinatown 50th Year Guidebook* (Los Angeles: Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, 1988).

[2] Cheng and Kwok, "The Golden Years of Los Angeles Chinatown," 40.

[3] Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco Chinatown,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 13-14.

refashioned them into spaces of commerce that catered to white tourists.[4] During this time period, Chinese American merchants served as cultural brokers, whose position between white tourists and the vast majority of working-class Chinese Americans allowed them to consciously transform these segregated ethnic communities into sites that presented their own vision of Asia to the outside world. This was done in a way that challenged notions of Chinatowns as manifestations of Yellow Peril while monetizing these sites in a way that allowed Chinese American entrepreneurs to make a living.

In New Chinatown, local Chinese Americans merchants took concepts pioneered in San Francisco's Chinatown and in world's fair expositions and saw them through to their logical end. In fact, New Chinatown was not a neighborhood at all but a corporation, the stock of which was privately held by a select group in the city's emerging Chinese American middle class.[5] These merchants and restaurant owners maintained complete control over their new Chinatown. From the land on which the business district was built, to the architectural style that accompanied the area's businesses, to the advertisements that publicized the district in the city's papers, New Chinatown reflected the desires of its owners to both attract tourist and to challenge the conceptions that had come to dominate Old Chinatown.

The opening day festivities of New Chinatown featured appearances by local Chinese American actors who had made a name for themselves in the China-themed films of the 1930s.[6] Following the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, Hollywood began producing a series of Chinese-themed films many of which featured Chinese American performers from the Los Angeles area. The most high profile of these films was MGM's *The Good Earth* (1937), a film based on Pearl S. Buck award winning 1931 novel. Present at the opening of New Chinatown were Keye Luke and Soo Yung, Chinese American actors with supporting roles in *The Good Earth*. Also present was Anna May Wong, the most recognizable Chinese American star of the period. Despite being passed over for a role in *The Good Earth*, Wong had already appeared in number of high profile films including *Thief of Bagdad* (1924), *Piccadilly* (1929), and *The Shanghai Express* (1932). New Chinatown would soon feature a willow tree dedicated to Ms. Wong. To complete the Hollywood connection, the New Chinatown opening featured an art exhibit by Tyrus Wong, a Hollywood animator who would later work on the classic animated film, *Bambi (1942).*

Despite these connections to Hollywood, in many ways New Chinatown attempted to cast itself as the modern Chinese American alternative to the representation of China seen in films like *The Good Earth*. The opening gala included flags for both the Republic of China and the United States spread around district. The parade featured four-hundred members of the Federation of Chinese Clubs, local Chinese American youth, most of whom were American-born who had banded together to raise financial support for China following the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937.[7] At the same time, a number of prominent state and local officials participated in the festivities including Governor Merriam who was then locked in a difficult re-election campaign and who hoped that his participation could would solidify the small but not

[4] Philip Choy has discussed the ways in which the Orientalist architecture that went up in San Francisco following the 1906 earthquake was the result of Chinese Americans merchants desire to draw tourists to the neighborhood. See Philip Choy, *San Francisco Chinatown: Guide to its History and Architecture*, (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2012), 43-46.

[5] Cheng and Kwok report that 546.5 shares were sold initially sold at $100 per share. Cheng and Kwok, "The Golden Years of Los Angeles Chinatown," 41.

[6] Cheng and Kwok, "The Golden Years of Los Angeles Chinatown," 45.

[7] "Gala Fete to Open New L.A. Chinatown," *Los Angeles Herald and Express*, June 23, 1938, 14.

insignificant Chinese American vote. In these complex and hybrid ways, the founders positioned New Chinatown as a distinctly Chinese *American* business district, one that reflected the increasingly U.S.-born demographics of the nation's Chinese American community.

New Chinatown was not the only Chinatown to open in Los Angeles in the summer of 1938. Two weekends earlier, less than a mile away, a group of white business leaders headed by philanthropist Christine Sterling had opened their own competing Chinatown, which they dubbed China City.[8] If New Chinatown was defined by the ethos of the American-born generation, China City was defined by Hollywood. This was to be a Chinatown that embodied the images that film audiences saw when they entered the theaters to watch Chinese and Chinatown themed films so popular in the 1930s. New Chinatown may have drawn on Hollywood actors to publicize its existence, but China City in many senses was a Hollywood production.

Like New Chinatown, this was a business district not a neighborhood, but unlike New Chinatown, China City adhered much more closely to the Orientalist images of China produced by Hollywood cinema. In China City visitors could attend The Bamboo Theater featuring continuously running films about China. They walk through a recreation of the set for the House of Wang from *The Good Earth.* Many of the Chinese Americans employed in China City had also worked as extras on the MGM film. And so tourists might encounter some of the very people that had seen in the background shots of the film. In China City, tourists could pay to be drawn around by rickshaw. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, visitors to China City could purchase "coolie hats, fans, idols, miniature temples, and images."[9] One of the shops was owned by Tom Gubbins, a local resident of Chinatown who supplied Hollywood with costumes and props for Chinese themed films and connected local residents with jobs as extras.

In both New Chinatown and China City, Chinese Americans utilized Chinatown to mediate dominant ideas about race, gender, and nation.[10] These two Chinatowns were more than physical sites for members of ethnic enclave to make a living. They also represented the apparatus through which the local Chinese American community performed their own cultural representations of China and Chinese people to crowds of largely white visitors. In more ways than one, Chinese American performances in these two districts were the culmination of a fifty-year process through which the Chinese American merchant class challenged Yellow Peril

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[8] There are a limited number of publications that have traced the history of China City and New Chinatown. Recently two different graduate students Josi Ward, from Cornell and Lawrence Lam from UC Riverside have published peer-reviewed articles about these two districts. Despite the lack of peer-reviewed publication on the topic the best source remain Suellen Cheng and Munson Kwok's short essay, "The Golden Years of Los Angeles Chinatown." The book *Linking Our Lives* is also quite good, though the reader should be aware that it contains a number of minor factual errors. Note that neither of *Linking Our Lives* or "Chinatown the Golden Years" contain footnotes or citations. See Suellen Cheng and Munson Kwok, "The Golden Years of Los Angeles Chinatown: The Beginning," *Los Angeles Chinatown 50th Year Guidebook* (Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, 1988); Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, *Linking Our Lives: Chinese American Women of Los Angeles*, (Los Angeles: East West Press, 1984); Lawrence Lan, The Rise and Fall of China City: Race Space, and Cultural Production in Los Angeles Chinatown, 1938-1948," *Amerasia Journal* 42:2 (2016), 2-21. Josi Ward, "Dreams of Oriental Romance," *Buildings & Landscapes* 20. No. 1(March 2013), 19-42.

[9] "China City Lures Crowd," *Los Angeles Times*, June 8, 1938, A1.

[10] The post-structuralist theorist Michel Foucault defines an apparatus, or *dispositif* in French, as "a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourse, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, and philanthropic propositions—in short the said as much as the unsaid." Michel Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, Colin Gordon ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 195.

stereotypes by transforming China and Chinese culture into a nonthreatening commodity that could be sold to white tourists.

Reconstructing the History of Los Angeles Chinatown

Examining a period of national debate over immigration and U.S. citizenship, this dissertation, "Performing Chinatown: Hollywood Cinema, Tourism, and the Making of a Los Angeles Community, 1882-1943," foregrounds the social, economic, and political contexts through which representations of Chinatown in Los Angeles were produced and consumed. Across five chapters the dissertation asks: To what extent did popular representations and economic opportunities in Hollywood inform life in Los Angeles Chinatown? How did Chinese Americans in Los Angeles create, negotiate, and critically engage representations of Chinatown? And in what ways were the rights of citizenship and national belonging related to popular representations of Chinatown? To answer these questions, the project examines four different "Chinatowns" in Los Angeles—Old Chinatown, New Chinatown, the MGM set for *The Good Earth*, and China City—between the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 and its repeal in 1943 during the Second World War.

The relationship between film and Chinatown stretches back to the 1890s to a moment when both featured as "urban amusements" for a newly developing white urban public audience in places like New York, and yet the connection between Chinatown and film reached its nadir in Los Angeles in the 1930s during the height of the Hollywood studio system. San Francisco and New York Chinatown may have been larger in size and attracted more tourists, but Los Angeles Chinatown and the Chinese American residents of the city played a more influential role in defining Hollywood representations of China and Chinese people than any other community in the United States. Long before the outbreak of World War II, the residents of Los Angeles Chinatown developed a distinct relationship to the American film industry, one that was not replicated anywhere else during this period.

Despite this distinct relationship, there have been no dissertations or academic books published about Los Angeles Chinatown and its relationship to Hollywood cinema. Asian American historians who work on Los Angeles have for the most part focused on the city's Japanese American population.[11] Sociologists of the region have focused on Asian Americans in the ethnoburbs of the San Gabriel Valley.[12] Film studies scholars who examine Asian American representations have focused primarily on the films themselves or else on writing biographies of a few well-known Hollywood performers such as Anna May Wong, Philip Ahn and Sessue Hayakawa.[13] With professional academics focused on different but related topics, nearly all of the research that has been done on the history of Chinese Americans in Los Angeles and their

[11] For example, see Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles*. (Princeton NJ: Princeton, 2008); Valerie Matsumoto, *City Girls: The Nisei Social World in Los Angeles, 1920-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[12] Leland Saito*, Race and Politics: Asian Americans, Latinos, and Whites in a Los Angeles Suburb* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988); Wei Li, *Ethnoburb: The New Ethnic Community in Urban* America (Honolulu: Univerisity of Hawai'i, 2009), Wendy Cheng, *The Changs Next Door to the Diazes: Remapping Race in Suburban California* (Minneapolis: University of Minnessota Press, 2013).

[13] Anthong Chan, *Perpetually Cool: The Many Lives of Anna May Wong,* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2007); Graham Russell Hodges, Anna May Wong From Laundreyman's Daughter to Hollywood Legend (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012); Daisuke Miyao, *Sessue Hayakawa: Silent Cinema and Transnational Stardom* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007) Chung, Hye Seung. *Hollywood Asian: Philip Ahn and the Politics of Cross Ethnic Performance.* Philadelphia: Temple University, 2006.

relationship to Hollywood film has been completed by community historians at organization like the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California and the Chinese American Museum of Los Angeles.[14] Most of these community historians are volunteers who research and write because of their passion for the subject matter. Many also have family ties to this history. This familial link is the case with the most popular retelling of this history, Lisa See's novel *Shanghai Girls.* Lisa See is a descendant of the Chinese Americans who lived in Los Angeles before World War II.[15] In contrast, professional academics for their part have all but ignored this history.

What accounts for the relative absence of scholarship on the relationship between the Chinese American community of Los Angeles and the Hollywood film industry? Certainly, the topic of Chinatown remains one of the most thoroughly studied aspects of the Asian American experience. Alongside scholarship examining the political and legal apparatuses used to exclude Asian people from the US, Chinatown is one of the few topics in Asian American studies that elicited significant scholarly consideration before the birth of the field in the late 1960s.[16] More than a dozen monographs have been produced examining various aspects of Chinatowns from the fields of sociology and history. In the popular realm, interests in Chinatown as a site of tourism and as a cultural representation also remains strong. In addition to the long-standing interest in Chinatown as an academic topic, the material traces of this history remain highly visible. New Chinatown still exists as a tourist attraction and remains a center of local Chinese American life. Films like *Shanghai Express* (1932), *Lost Horizon* (1937) and *The Good Earth* (1937), which all employed Chinese American background performers, are available for home viewing. Photographs from Chinatown performances of this period including those of the Mei Wah Drum Corps have been digitized and are available on-line through archives such as those of the Los Angeles Public Library and their *Shades of L.A.* project.

And yet, the distinct theoretical, methodological, and disciplinary tenants of sociology social history, and film studies have limited the types of questions scholars have asked about Chinatown and film, and by extension the types of conclusions these scholars have drawn. The traces of this history may remain in plain sight but reconstructing this history requires more than critical close readings of China-themed films or Chinatown tourism publicity from the period. While close reading methodologies can help us understand the ways in which popular culture structured dominant ideas of race, gender, and nation, these methods tell us little of the motives of the Chinese Americans who helped produced these films and related performances, or of the emotional or social ties that the production of these performances elicited.

To understand these performances in their historical context necessitates both close readings of popular racial representations alongside the use of archival documents and oral history interviews produced by community members. This archival work can help us piece together the lives and actions of the Chinese Americans who played such an important role in producing cultural artifacts from this period. This dissertation unites archival and oral history methodologies from social history with close textual analysis from film studies to foreground the ways seemingly everyday Chinese Americans influenced the process of racial formation. In the

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[14] See for example, Jenny Cho and the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, *Chinese in Hollywood* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Press, 2013).

[15] Lisa See, *Shanghai Girls* (New York: Random House, 2009).

[16] Early pre-1960s works that examine Chinatown in some way include books by former missionaries such as Otis Gibson and of course popular Chinatown guides by authors such as Leong Gor Yun and Charles Dobie. See Charles Caldwell Dobie, *San Francisco Chinatown* (San Francisco, CA: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1936), Leong Gor Yun, *Chinatown Inside Out* (New York: B. Mussey, 1936).

process, this interdisciplinary methodology produces new ways of understanding Chinatown both as a representation and as an ethnic enclave.

As part of this interdisciplinary methodology, this dissertation is closely grounded in a form of social history often referred to in Asian American Studies as community history. As first deployed in the developing field of Asian Americans studies in the 1970s and 1980s, Asian American community history utilizes community-engaged methods such as oral history and collection of family and community documents to create an archive on which the history of a given place-based, ethnic enclave can be written. If the primary goal of mainstream American history has long been to produce academic interventions in society's knowledge of the past, the goal of Asian American community history, as it was originally developed, was much more politically informed. Developing out of the political imperatives of the Asian American Movement of the late 1960s, community history methodology sought to address broader historical silences within mainstream narratives of American history while simultaneously documenting, building, and empowering local Asian American communities.

Often produced collectively, these community histories originated both out of emerging ethnic studies departments as well as out of the first local Asian American historical associations that were then coming into being. While Asian American community history developed around the same time that "public history" was emerging as an accepted academic field within American history, the audience for these early Asian American community histories was not an unidentified public audience but rather the members of the same ethnic enclaves whose history was being told. This project may be written as dissertation in the field of Ethnic Studies, but it maintains the ethos of these earlier Asian American community histories.

In particular, this dissertation builds on the work of community historians at the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California and the Chinese American Museum of Los Angeles. While other archival institutions were used, the collections of these two institutions form the foundation of the dissertation. Central to this dissertation is the Southern California Chinese American Oral History Project. Produced in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a joint effort between the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California (CHSSC) and UCLA's Asian American Studies Center, the project interviewed 165 people about their lives in Los Angeles until 1945. The resulting collection contains four hundred hours taped interviews and 1700 pages of summary transcripts. A collective effort that involved volunteers from both UCLA's Asian American studies center and the CHSSC, the project remains perhaps the most comprehensive archived Chinese American oral history collection of its type focusing on the pre-war period.

I employ these archival and community history methodologies alongside those of cultural studies. Grounded in the work of scholars like Stuart Hall and Edward Said, this project sees culture as intimately tied to social, economics, and political power. Power relations of a given social structure are encoded in popular representations, and subaltern groups, such as Chinese Americans in the 1930 and 1940s, use culture as a means of engaging the intersecting structures of race, class, gender, and sexuality. This project thus sees films, newspaper articles, and above all Chinatown itself, as texts that can be read to better understand the social structure in a given place and period of time. Reading these cultural texts can lead not only to a better understanding of power relations within a given historical moment, but also to a better understanding of the ways those groups contested their subaltern position within the social structure. Historians are often criticized for their over reliance on the written word as a primary source, and certainly few of the existing studies on Chinese Americans in the first half of the twentieth century have given popular cinematic representations from the 1930s and 1940s the same attention as the written

word. In contrast, my dissertation utilizes visual and material culture as "texts" that can be read in a way that will supplement rather than supplant our understanding of community history.

As the first dissertation on the history of Los Angeles Chinatown and its relationship to Hollywood film, this project bridges these methodologies from social history and cultural studies to demonstrate the ways in which members of the Chinese American community in Los Angeles shaped dominant ideas of race, gender, and nation. I contend that the same transformations in the urban environment that facilitated the development of film in the late nineteenth century also transformed Chinatown into a similar type of cultural apparatus. Within the field of film studies, scholars such as Tom Gunning, Ben Singer, Laruen Rabinovitz, and Vanessa Schwartz have advanced what has come to be known as the modernity thesis.[17] This modernity thesis posits that urbanization brought about a transformation in the social act of seeing which facilitated the development of new types of visual amusements, key among which was early silent film.[18] A handful of film studies scholars have touched on this visual transformation and its relationship to both New York and San Francisco Chinatowns.[19]

My project builds on this earlier scholarship by briefly tracing the shared symbiotic history of Chinatowns and cinema from their roots in Chicago in the 1890s and San Francisco after the 1906 Earthquake. The dissertation then moves on to demonstrate the convergence and development of these two mediums—Chinatown and film—in Los Angeles between in the 1910s and the 1940s. Repositioning Chinatown as a medium of cultural production, symbiotically tied to the development of cinema allows for a more nuanced understanding of the amount of agency Chinese Americans were able to exercise over self-representations of their own community over the course of the first half of the twentieth century. It also allows us to see the myriad ways in which Chinese American in Los Angeles challenged, rearticulated, and at times reinforced ideas of American Orientalism.

Edward Said defines the idea of Orientalism as a system of knowledge and power through which the West defines itself against the East.[20] For Said, the Orient is more than simply an idea. Instead it is "a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles."[21] While Said originally advanced the idea of Orientalism in discussing Europe's relationship to the Middle East, a growing number of scholars have examined the way Orientalism functions within the United States. Scholars such as Gordon Chang and John Kuo Wei Tchen have all discussed the roles that discourses and popular conceptions of China played historically in constructing the idea of

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[17] See for example, Tom Gunning, "The World as Object Lesson: Cinema Audiences, Visual Culture, and the St. Louis World's Fair," *Film History* 5:4 (Winter 1994); Leo Charney and Vanessa Schwartz editors, *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), Lauren Rabinovitz, *For the Love of Pleasure: Women Movies and Culture in Turn of the Century Chicago* (New Brunswick N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

[18] Ben Singer traces the contours of this debate in his book. See Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 101-130.

[19] For example, see Sabine Haenni, *The Immigrant Scene: Ethnic Amusements in New York, 1880-1920* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 143-188.

[20] Said's theory is especially useful for examining issues of Chinese American agency because, unlike Foucault, Said emphasized the ability of individual authors to construct discourse. Said writes, "Yet unlike Michel Foucault, to whose work I am greatly indebted, I do believe in the determining imprint of individual writers upon the otherwise anonymous collective body of texts constituting a discursive formation like Orientalism." In this, Said opens up a space theoretically for us to discuss agency and resistance within Orientalism. See Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 3.

[21] Said, *Orientalism*, 2.

the United States as a modern, progressive nation.[22] At the same time, Mary Ting Yi Lui, Anthony Lee, and Kay Anderson have all discussed various aspects of Chinatown and Orientalism.[23] These scholars have demonstrated the ways in which popular ideas about China and Chinese people defined so many aspects of the way the United States understood itself as a nation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

While recognizing the lasting permanence of American Orientalism as a foundational ideology of the United States, scholars have also acknowledged an important shift that occurred around the Second World War in the way Chinese Americans were popularly perceived. During the Chinese Exclusion Act period, American Orientalism defined Chinese Americans as legally, economically, and culturally as outside the boundaries of the US nation state. Throughout the Exclusion act period, the U.S. citizen came to be defined against the Asian immigrant.[24] As such, representations of an American citizen of Chinese descent remained in many ways a cultural impossibility. Beginning around the Second World War, the ideology of racial liberalism took hold within the United States. With racial liberalism, the United States began the process of attempting to incorporate and manage, rather than exclude, a wider range of racial and ethnic groups within the United States.[25] For Chinese Americans this period saw the symbolic end of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943 and the increasing acceptance of Chinese Americans into broader society. For the first time, large numbers of Chinese Americans were able to find jobs outside of the nation's Chinatowns. While Orientalist ideas about Asia and Asian people did not disappear, the advent of racial liberalism transformed the ways in which American Orientalism functioned.

Scholars have argued that the shift toward racial liberalism in general and the increasing incorporation of Chinese Americans into the nation-state in particular was largely the result of geopolitical factors directly linked to the war itself. In this narrative, the U.S. alliance with China during the Second World War, and the broader need to combat Japanese propaganda that labeled the United States as a racist nation, necessitated a transformation in the way in which the country treated its Chinese American residents. This accepted historical narrative leaves little room for the agency of Chinese Americans in the shifting notions of race, gender, and nation, and it further demonstrates Karen Leong observation that too often studies of American Orientalism see only whites as being able to engage these Orientalist discourses.[26]

In contrast to most earlier studies, I contend that Chinese American engagement with American Orientalism, through Chinatown performance, helped lay the foundation for the eventual incorporation of Chinese Americans into the nation state under the logic of racial liberalism during World War II. During the Chinese Exclusion Act era, Chinese Americans were forced to negotiate U.S. citizenship and national belonging through the discourse of American

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[22] Gordon Chang, *Fateful Ties: A History of America's Preoccupation with China* (Harvard University Press, 2015) John Kuo Wei Tchen, *New York Before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776-1882* (John Hopkins University Press 2001).

[23] Kay Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown* (McGill University Press, 1995), Anthony Lee, *Picturing Chinatown: Art and Orientaism in San Francisco (Berkeley*: University of California Press, 2001) Mary Ting Yi Lui, The Chinatown Trunk Mystery: Murder Miscegenation, and Other Dangerous Encounters in Turn-of-the-Century New York City (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

[24] Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 4.

[25] On Racial liberalisms influence on Asian Americans see Ellen Wu, *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

[26] Karen Leong, *The China Mystique: Pearl S. Buck, Anna May Wong, Mayling Soong and the Transformation of American Orientalism*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

Orientalism. During this period, the question was not whether or not Chinese Americans would be defined as an Other against the US citizen, but rather what form this image of the Asian Other would take within the popular imagination. Therefore understanding Chinese American self-representations before the Second World War necessitates an acknowledgement of the discursive possibilities and limits under which Chinese Americans operated during this period. While a few Chinese Americans such as Wong Chin Foo did attempt to present cultural representations of Chinese Americans as U.S. citizens, most Chinese Americans utilized a largely different strategy to combat Orientalist depictions of Chinese immigrants as a Yellow Peril.[27]

Examining what I call, "Chinese American Orientalism," as a challenge to Yellow Peril stereotypes, the project foreground the ways that Chinese merchants, actors, and street performers used the medium of Chinatown to advance a vision of their community that at once challenged earlier Yellow Peril depictions while still maintaining some of the underlying assumptions about Chinese people's differences from whites. In the face of Yellow Peril representations that defined Chinatown as an underground den of violent opium dealing tongs, Chinese American Orientalism cast the nation's Chinatowns as clean, modern commercial areas where whites could shop and eat. These representations remained Orientalist in that they constructed Chinese culture in opposition to that of the West, but this form of Chinese American Orientalism negated rather than perpetuated ideas of Chinese Americans as a threat. This Chinese American Orientalism challenged images of Chinatown as a community of violent, opium-addicted bachelors living in underground dens and presented in its place an image of Chinatown as the modern extension of an ancient Oriental culture and tradition, one that could easily be commodified and sold to white visitors to financially support the needs of an emerging Chinese American middle class. Tracing the development of Chinese American Orientalism from the Chinese Village at the World Columbia Exposition in 1893 through the its presentation in China City and New Chinatown on the eve of the Second World War, I demonstrate how this counter-hegemonic discourse eventually was incorporated back into mainstream Orientalism and used to justify the needs of a diversifying nation-state.

Literature Review

This dissertation makes important contributions to a number of areas of study including racial representations in Hollywood film, Asian American participation in the film industry, the history of California and the American West, and the sociology of race. As an interdisciplinary project produced in the Ethnic Studies Department at U.C. Berkeley, the dissertation remains in conversation with disciplines including film and media studies, U.S. history, and urban sociology. First and foremost though, this project is grounded in the political and epistemological imperatives of Asian American studies.

While the field of film studies has had a robust and wide-ranging engagement with Asian cinema, film studies work on Asian Americans relationship to the Hollywood film industry has remained much more limited. [28] Due in part to the paradigm of national cinema, it seems at times as if the field of film studies has difficulty comprehending an Asian American subjectivity

[27] On Wong Chin Foo see Scott D. Deligman, *The First Chinese American: The Remarkable life of Wong Chin Foo* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013).

[28] One of the paradoxes of the field of Asian American studies is that while film and media scholarship has remained marginal to the field's development, documentary films and videos have a central and indisputable place at the center of the field. Indeed it would be hard to trace a history of the Asian American studies or teach an introduction to Asian American studies class without an acknowledgement of the role that works such as *Who Killed Vincent Chin*, *AKA Don Bonus,* and *Bontoc Eulogy* have had on the development of the field.

outside of the lens of Diaspora. That is to say that film studies scholars are often more comfortable seeing film and media representations produced by people of Chinese descent in North American as part of cultural Diaspora grounded in East Asia, than they are of seeing these works alongside those of African American, Native American and Latinx cultural producers engaged with concepts of race, difference, and social power. Because of this, the limited scholarship on race and cinema in film studies has developed primarily through a focus on African American engagement with film, leaving work on Asian American, Native American, and Latinx film participation much less developed.

Given this paradigm, it should not be surprising that the earliest scholarship on Asian Americans and film developed not out of film studies but rather out of the field of Ethnic Studies in the 1970s. At a moment when film studies was dominated by questions of psychoanalytic film theory with its focus on the cinematic apparatus and its effects of film on the subjectivity of the film spectator, Asian American activists, media makers, and academics were forging the foundations of the scholarship on Asian Americans and film. While there were no essays on film or video included in the earliest Asian American studies reader *Roots* published by UCLA Asian American Studies center in 1971, the follow up reader *Counterpoint* published in 1976 contains a section on "Communication and Mass Media" with an essay by Judy Chu on Anna May Wong.[29] Around the same time the author Frank Chin along with members of the Combined Asian American Research began the process of interviewing Asian American actors and others who associated with the film industry.[30] The decade also witnessed the publication of the first monograph devoted to the topic in Eugene Wong's *On Visual Media Racism*.[31]

Developing out of this earliest scholarship, Asian American studies has advanced its own academic narrative on Asian American engagement with film. This scholarship begins by focusing primarily on issues of Asian American representation on screen during the silent film and classical Hollywood periods. This scholarship on Asian American representation during the silent and classical periods is supplemented by work on well-known Asian American performers such as Anna May Wong, Philip Ahn, and Sessue Hayakawa.[32] The focus of the field then shifts to examine Asian Americans as media producers beginning in the 1970s with the advent of Asian American Asian American media collectives such as Visual Communications (founded in 1970) and Asian Cinevisions (founded in 1975).[33] In this way the scholarship in Asian American

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[29] Amy Tachiki, Eddie Wong, Franklin Odo, and Buck Wong, editors, *Roots: An Asian American Studies Reader* (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1971); Judy Chu, "Anna May Wong," in Emma Gee, editor, *Counterpoint Perspective on Asian America* (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1976).

[30] Interviews conducted by the Combined Asian American Research Project between 1968-1976 are archived in the Regional Oral History Office collection at the Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

[31] The earliest monograph to focus on Asian Americans and film is perhaps Eugene Wong's 1977," On Visual Media Racism," which was based on his earlier dissertation. See Eugene Wong, *On Visual Media Racism: Asians in the American Motion Pictures* (New York: Verso, 1978).

[32] Anthony B. Chan, *Perpetually Cool: The Many Lives of Anna May Wong* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2003); Graham Russel Gao Hodges, *Anna May Wong: From Laundryman's Daughter to Hollywood Legend* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Cynthia W. Liu, "When Dragon Ladies Die, Do they Come Back As Butterflies? Reimagining Anna May Wong," in *Countervisions: Asian American Film Criticism* edited by Darrell Hamamoto and Sandra Liu, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 23-39; Hye Seung Chung, *Hollywood Asian: Philip Ahn and the Politics of Cross-ethnic Performance* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006); Miyao Daisuke, *Sessue Hayakawa: Silent Cinema and Transnational Stardom* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

[33] Renee Tajima, "Moving the Image Asian American Independent Filmmaking, 1970-1990" in *Moving the Image Asian American Media Arts* edited by Russell Leong (Los Angeles: Visual Communications and Asian American Studies Center); Peter Feng, *Identities in Motion: Asian American Film and Video* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Glen Mimura, *Ghostlife of Third Cinema: Asian American Film and Video* (Minneapolis: University of

studies on film moves broadly from a focus on Asian Americans as an object of the cinematic gaze in the period before 1970 and then shifts to focus on film as a medium for Asian American self-representation in the period after 1970.

Work on Chinatown in the silent and classical film periods follows this trend by focusing on Chinese Americans as objects of representation. There exists a number of essays on the D.W. film *Broken Blossoms*, studies of Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan Films, and essays and books about Anna May Wong.[34] All of these works touch on the topic of Chinatown without making it the primary object of focus. There are a handful of exceptions to this, most notably work by Ruth Mayer and Bjorn A. Schmidt.[35] Schmidt's book examines cinematic depictions of Chinese Americans as productive forces that shaped immigration laws and policies in the period between 1910s and the 1930s. In two chapters devoted to Chinatown films, Schmidt shows first the way that Chinatown films constructed dominant conceptions of an old Chinatown (as personified by San Francisco before the 1906 earthquake) as an underground site of violent crime against representations of a new Chinatown (as personified by Chinatown after the 1906 earthquake) as modern and built for tourists. Bjorn then moves on to discuss the ways that many silent Chinatown films replicated the tourist gaze of the Chinatown tour. Mayer in her essay on Chinatown films demonstrates the importance of the curio store to silent cinematic representations of Chinatown during a moment when consumer culture in the United States was both consolidating and diversifying.

This dissertation contributes to and departs from this recent scholarship in that it shifts the focus away from the ways that film represented Chinatowns and instead focuses on the Chinatown residents as cultural producers. While drawing heavily on scholarship within film studies on Asian American representations and stars, this project foregrounds the way members of the ethnic enclave utilized Chinatown as a medium of cultural production. Los Angeles Chinatown's proximity to the film industries magnified the opportunities for local Chinese Americans to utilize Chinatown to mediate dominant ideas of race, gender, and nation, but the film industry did not create these opportunities. Chinese American merchants in New York and San Francisco beginning in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries began using Chinatown as a medium of cultural production to advance their own depictions of Chinese people. The rising popularity of film as one of the most popular forms of leisure ensured that by the 1930s, Chinese Americans in Los Angeles possessed a greater ability to shape the national idea of Chinatown than Chinese Americans in New York and San Francisco.

Given this focus on the development of race and gender as social categories within the United States, this dissertation is also in conversation with the literature within the field of sociology on Chinatowns as ethnic enclaves. Whereas the topic of Asian American engagement with film has remained somewhat marginal to film studies, the topic of Chinatown was central

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Minnesota Press, 2009); Jun Okada, *Making Asian American Film and Video: Histories, Institutions, Movements* (Rutger's University Press, 2015).

[34]See for example, John Kuo Wei Tchen, "Modernizing White Patriarchy: Re-Viewing D.W. Griffith's Broken Blossoms," in *Moving the Image: Independent Asian American Media Arts*, ed. Russell Leong (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center and Visual Communications, 1992) 133-143; Yunte Huan, *Charlie Chan: The Untold Story of the Honorable Detective and His Rendezvous with American History* (New York: Norton and Company, 2010); Ruth Mayer, *Serial Fu Manchu, The Chinese Supervillian and the Spread of Yellow Peril Ideology* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014).

[35] Ruth Mayer, "The Glittering Machine of Modernity: The Chinatown in the American Silent Film" *Modernism/Modernity* 16:4 (November, 2009), 661-684; Bjorn Schmidt, *Visualizing Orientalness: Chinese Immigration and Race in U.S. Motion Pictures, 1910s-1930s* (Bohlau Verlag Koln Weimar Wein, 2017).

not only to the development of sociological theories of ethnic enclaves in the first half of the twentieth century but more broadly to the development of the entire field of urban sociology around the same period. Many early sociological studies on Chinese Americans were influenced by the work by Robert Park and his Chicago School of urban sociology and his work from the first half of the twentieth century. Park argued in his race relations cycle that when two ethnic or racial groups come in contact with one another these groups go through a four-stage cycle of contact, conflict, accommodation, and eventually assimilation.[36]

This and other ideas within the Chicago School of sociology were deeply rooted in notions of human ecology, which is the study of the ways humans relate to one another and to their environment. Park believed that human life was divided into two levels the biotic and the cultural and that social organizations of cities were a direct result of the competition for resources.[37] Focusing on human biology as a basis for difference, scholars in the Chicago School largely rejected earlier continental thinkers like Max Weber, Karl Marx, and George Simmel, who saw the larger social and economic forces of capitalism as being fundamental to understanding human interaction.[38] As such, these early sociologists were not interested in offering a systemic critique of American nationalism, racism, or empire, nor were they concerned in any but the most marginal ways with determining how these and other forms of power structured the lives of Chinese Americans. Rather sociologists studying Chinese Americans influenced by the Chicago School asked a much less critical set of questions about the extent to which Chinatowns facilitated the assimilation of Chinese Americans into US society.[39]

The earliest scholarship on Los Angeles Chinatown developed out of this framework and was produced by a handful of Chinese American graduate students in the Sociology Department at the University of Southern California between the 1930s and 1950s. Master's theses by Kit King Louis, Mabel Sam Lee, and Kim Fong Tom as well as a doctoral dissertation by Wen-hui Chen all addressed issues of Chinese American assimilation and generational differences in Chinese American ethnic enclave in Los Angeles.[40] In addition to these studies in sociology, Master's theses by Charles Ferguson in Political Science at UCLA (1942), Edwin Bingham in History at Occidental College (1942), and by Shan Wu in the business school at USC (1934)

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[36] Stanford Lyman, "The Race Relations Cycle of Robert E. Park," *Pacific Sociological Review*, 11:1. (March, 1968): 16-22.

[37] Mark Gottdiener and Ray Hutchinson, *The New Urban Sociology: Fourth Edition* (Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 2010), 61.

[38] Gottdiener and Hutchinson, *The New Urban Sociology*, 60.

[39] Examples of this early ethnic enclave literature focused on Chinese Americans includes the work of Paul Siu and Rose Hum Lee. See Paul Siu, *The Chinese Laundryman: A study of Isolation*, (New York: NYU Press, 1988), Rose Hum Lee, *The Chinese in the United States of America* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1960).

[40] Kit King Louis, "A study of American-born And American-reared Chinese in Los Angeles." (M.A. thesis, University of Southern California, 1931); Mabel Sam Lee, "The Recreational Interests and Participation of a Selected Group of Chinese Boys and Girls in Los Angeles, California." (M.A. thesis, University of Southern California 1939); Wen-hui Chen, "A Study of Chinese Family Life in Los Angeles as Compared to the Traditional Family Life in China." (M.A. Thesis, University of Southern California, 1940); Kim Fong Tom, "The Participation of The Chinese in The Community Life of Los Angeles," (M.A. thesis, USC, 1944), Wen-hui Chen, "Changing Socio-Cultural Patterns of the Chinese Community in Los Angeles," (Ph.D. Diss, University of Southern California, 1952).

from this same period represent some of the earliest scholarship on Chinese Americans in Los Angeles.[41]

While the model advanced by Park is no longer the central lens used by urban sociologists, the way that scholars in this tradition define Chinatown has remained surprisingly similar to this earlier generation of ethnic enclave scholars. Scholars in sociology continue to use the term Chinatown to mean Chinese American ethnic enclave and in the process these sociologists foreground ties of ethnicity and culture over ties of place and geography. For example in 1992 sociologist Min Zhou wrote, "I treat Chinatown as an economic enclave embedded in the very nature of the community's social structure offering a positive alternative to immigrant incorporation."[42] She goes on to explain that this enclave "is not so much a geographical concept as an organizational one."[43] Zhou is clear that this economic enclave must be distinguished from an ethnic neighborhood. While most of the businesses in Zhou's enclave are concentrated in Manhattan's Chinatown, many are situated elsewhere. Using this definition, she further excludes from her study non-Chinese owned businesses that are based in Chinatown.[44] Peter Kwong was a scholar who was openly critical of many of the arguments advanced by Min Zhou, and yet he nonetheless worked from a similar definition of Chinatown as an ethnic enclave tied together by social and economic relationships.[45] Thus one of the Chicago School's most long lasting influences on the study of Chinese Americans may be a definition of Chinatown as an ethnic enclave, loosely connected by place and bound primarily by social and ethnic ties.

At it's best this ethnic enclave literature remind us that Chinatowns are not homogenous but rather socially stratified collections of individuals, institutions, and organizations. Works in this ethnic enclave tradition like Judy Yung's *Unbound Feet* along with the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California's *Linking our Lives* focus on how gender stratifies and influences the lives of women in San Francisco and Los Angeles Chinatown respectively.[46] Other scholars have taken a more global approach. Work by Peter Kwong foregrounds nationality as opposed to race while discussing divisions of class in New York Chinatown. Jan Lin's *Reconstructing Chinatown* shows how global capital interacted with national, and local forces to shape the nature of Chinatown. Regardless of whether these scholars focus primarily on the stratification within the ethnic community in a way that is US-centric or on stratification within the ethnic

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[41] Shan John S. Wu, "Merchandising Chinese Products on the Los Angeles Market." (M.B.A. thesis, University of Southern California, 1934); Edwin Bingham, "The Saga of the Los Angeles Chinese," (M.A. thesis, Occidental College, 1942); Charles Ferguson, "Political Problems and Activities of Oriental Residents in Los Angeles and the Vicinity," (M.A. thesis, University of California at Los Angeles, 1942).

[42] Min Zhou*, Chinatown: The socioeconomic Potential of an Urban Enclave* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 10.

[43] Zhou, *Chinatown*, 11

[44] Zhou, *Chinatown,* 11.

[45] For a critique of Min Zhou's work by Peter Kwong see Kwong's review of Zhou's book Chinatown, Peter Kwong, review of Min Zhou *Chinatown* in *Contemporary Sociology* 22:4 (Jul, 1993), 562-563.

[46] Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, *Linking Our Lives: Chinese American Women of Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, 1984), a collection of essays written primarily by UCLA graduate students and overseen by UCLA sociologist Lucie Cheng, was one of the earliest works to look at how gender intersected with race and ethnicity to define the lives of Chinese Americans in a Chinese American ethnic enclave. After an introduction by Lucie Cheng and Suellen Chan, the book is organized around a collection of themes, "In the Family," "Traditions and Transitions", "At Work," "Building Community," which map the social networks developed by Chinese American women in Los Angeles in the first half of the twentieth century. Based on Southern California Chinese American Oral History Project, the book foregrounds the voices of everyday women while mapping the basic contours of the social institutions developed by these women.

community in a way that links the global, national, and the local, these and other works in the ethnic enclave tradition remind us that power structures Chinese ethnic enclaves just as it structures the rest of society.

While there have not been many recent academic studies that look at Los Angeles Chinatown in the first half of the twentieth century, key historical studies have focused on the Los Angeles Plaza and the other areas that make up the core of Los Angeles. This project builds on this growing literature on the multiethnic history of Los Angeles. As part of his broader exploration of the Los Angeles Plaza, William Estrada looks at the development of China City in relationship to Olvera Street contrasting Christine Sterling's roles in the two projects.[47] Mark Wild looks at Chinese as one group that lived in what he calls the central districts of Los Angeles in the first three decades of the twentieth century.[48] Natalia Molina traces the relationship between public health in Los Angeles and compares the experiences of Chinese to that of Japanese and Mexican residents in the city in the period between 1879-1939.[49] Taken together these works remind us that Chinatown was only one of the many districts that composed Los Angeles's core in the first half of the twentieth century, and that the actions of Chinese people must be understood in relationship to the other people and ethnic groups that lived in this section of the city.

Perhaps the most interesting work done by an historian on Los Angeles Chinatown has been the work of Isabella Quintana who highlights interactions between Mexican Americans and Chinese Americans in the plaza area between 1871 and 1938 focusing on the racialized and gendered nature of space. In her essay, "Making Do, Making Home: Borders and the Worlds of Chinatown and Sonoratown in Early Twentieth Century Los Angeles," Quintana explores the architecture of Chinese and Mexican homes in the Plaza area to "imagine social worlds created by women that presented alternative ways of living to those dictated by colonialism, industrialization, exclusion, and segregation in Los Angeles."[50] Given a paucity of first-hand accounts by Chinese and Mexican women during the period, Quintana shows how it is possible to understand the interactions between women from these two groups by looking closely at architectural records.

Old Chinatown, New Chinatown, and China City were located adjacent to the Los Angeles Plaza in one of the most diverse sections of Los Angeles. Nonetheless all three districts came to be seen as Chinatowns by those outside the Chinese American community. The process which marked these three communities were marked Chinese in the popular imagination despite the demographic reality of this part of the city can only be understood when we begin to explore Chinatown's place in the popular imagination. Over the last century, representations of Chinatown have become an important site through which whites as well as other non-Asian Americans envision Asia and Asian people. In many ways, Elaine Kim's observation about depictions of Chinese people in Anglo-American literature as a whole holds especially true for Chinatown in particular. Kim writes that, "many depictions of Chinese have been generalized to Asians, particularly since Westerners have found it difficult to distinguish among East Asian

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[47] William Estrata, *The Los Angeles Plaza: Sacred and Contested Space* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008).
[48] Mark Wild*, Street Meetings: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
[49] Natalia Molina, *Fit to be Citizens: Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).
[50] Isabella Seong Leong Quintana, "Making Do, Making Home: Borders and the Worlds of Chinatown and Sonoratown in Early Twentieth Century Los Angeles," *Journal of Urban History*, (July 2014), 2.

nationalities."[51] Certainly, the racialization of Chinatown has had a profound influence not only on the way whites perceive Chinese American communities but also on the way whites perceive many Asian American communities other than Chinatown.

While there exists a substantial amount of scholarly work on the representation of Chinatowns in various works of literary fiction, scholarship that explores the place of Chinatown in popular imagination more generally are much less frequent. Two of the most important studies are to engage the relationship between Orientalism and Chinatown are Anthony Lee's *Picturing Chinatown* and Kay Anderson's *Vancouver Chinatown.* Anthony Lee's *Picturing Chinatown: Art and Orientalism in San Francisco* explores the "history of imaginings" of San Francisco's Chinatown in the period between 1850s and the 1950s, as represented through photography, paintings, and performance.[52] While the last two chapters do deal with ways in which Chinese Americans represented themselves through art, representations made by Chinese Americans are not the primary focus of Lee's study. As Lee states in his introduction, outside of these last two chapters, his book "has precious little to say about the representations of Chinatown by its actual inhabitants."[53] What Lee is more interested in is recovering, "something of the pressure exerted on the art by the daily lives and experiences of Chinatown's inhabitants."[54] Lee sees these artistic representations of Chinatown as being generated by "unequal social and political relations between Chinese and non-Chinese" and thus believes these works ultimately tell us more about larger white society than they are about Chinatown itself. [55]

Equally important for understanding the relationship between Chinatown as place and Chinatown as an idea is geographer Kay Anderson's *Vancouver Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Chinatown, 1875-1980*. Drawing on the concept of hegemony advanced by Antonio Gramsci, Anderson states that Chinatown, "has been a historically specific idea, a cultural concept rooted in the symbolic system of those with the power to define…"[56] Anderson posits that Chinatown is at its heart related to a set of racial and ethnic ideas held by whites about a particular place. She writes that Chinatown "was not a neutral term, referring somehow unproblematically to the physical presence of China in Vancouver. Rather it was an evaluative term ascribed by Europeans no matter how the residents of the territory might have defined themselves."[57] The works of both Anderson and Lee have been deeply influential on my present study and yet my goal in the present study is to complicate the idea that Chinatown is a product of the white imagination and that writing about Orientalism in Chinatown should focus primarily on the representations and actions of whites leaders and cultural producers.

The focus that scholars of American Orientalism have placed on actions and cultural productions produced by white Americans is no doubt a legacy of Said's original work. Said's 1978 text *Orientalism* focuses entirely on the writings of Europeans, and yet in his theoretical elaboration of Orientalism, Said lays the groundwork for understanding the ways in which this discourse could be contested. In fashioning this theory of Orientalism, Said draws on two

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[51] Elaine Kim, *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and their Social Context* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 4.
[52] Lee, Anthony. *Picturing Chinatown: Art and Orientalism in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 7.
[53] Lee, *Picturing Chinatown,* 7.
[54] Lee, *Picturing Chinatown,* 8.
[55] Lee, *Picturing Chinatown*, 8.
[56] Kay Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown, Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980,* (Montreal: McGill Queens University Press, 1995), 31.
[57] Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown*, 30.

theorists with significantly different understandings of power: Michel Foucault and Antonio Gramsci. Drawing from Foucault, Said defines Orientalism as a discourse. Said writes that, "no one writing, thinking, or acting on the Orient could do so without taking account of the limitations on thought and action opposed by Orientalism." He elaborates that Orientalism did not determine what could be said about the Orient but rather that Orientalist "interests" were always involved in discussions of the Orient.[58] But Said breaks with Foucault in one important way. Said writes, "Yet unlike Michel Foucault, to whose work I am greatly indebted, I do believe in the determining imprint of individual writers upon the otherwise anonymous collective body of texts constituting a discursive formation like Orientalism."[59] This is an important ontological distinction that allows him to theorize the way the actions of individual authors created this discourse.

With this theoretical intervention into Foucault's concept of discourse, Said is able to incorporate Gramsci's notion of hegemony. [60] Left unmentioned in Said introduction is that Gramsci believed that hegemony was not stable but rather always contested. As such, Orientalism cannot ever be all encompassing. There remains within Orientalism, fissures through which people can act. Cultural studies scholar Lisa Lowe writes of hegemony,

> The reality of any specific hegemony is that, while it may be for the moment dominant, it is never absolute or conclusive. Hegemony, in Gramsci's thought, is a concept that describes both the social processes through which a particular dominance is maintained and those through which that dominance is challenged and new forces articulated.[61]

Thus we can assume that even though Orientalism as a system of power has remained hegemonic over the last few centuries, it has always been contested.

In advancing my theory of Chinese American Orientalism, I argue that the Chinese American merchant class utilized North American Chinatowns to articulate their own distinct cultural representation of China. This should not simply be seen as an act of "self-Orientalism." Chinese American merchants and others in the Chinese American community did not simply reproduce dominant ideas about China as presented in European and American literature and culture. Rather, Chinese American Orientalism was a distinct cultural formation that functioned for a moment counter-hegemonically. Because Chinese American Orientalism functioned within the larger framework of Orientlalism, Chinese Americans were not free to present Chinatown to tourists anyway they wished. But what they could do was subvert dominant expectations of the community in subtle ways, while still representing the district as a site of Otherness.

While Chinese American Orientalism was deeply linked to visual culture, it manifested itself materially in Chinatowns across North America. Examples of Chinese American Orientalism include the architecture that came to define so many North American Chinatowns, Chinese American cuisine such as Egg Foo Yung and fortune cookies, and the embodied performances of race, gender, and nation enacted by Chinese American merchants and others in Chinatown. Chinese American Orientalism drew on all of the senses of the visiting tourist.[62] Tourists did not simply watch Chinese Americans perform ethnicity from a distance. In

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[58] Said, *Orientalims*, 3.
[59] Said, *Orientalism*, 23.
[60] Said, *Orientalism*, 6-7.
[61] Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Duke University Press, 1996), 29.
[62] Sabine Haenni discusses how New York Chinatown at the turn of the century deployed this full body experience. Sabine Haenni, *The Immigrant Scene: Ethnic Amusements in New York, 1880-1920* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 143-187.

Chinatown, tourists could taste, smell, touch, hear, and see the version of the Orient presented to them by the merchant class. Tactile, visual, and edible, Chinese American Orientalism was also in a way political. Chinese American Orientalism presented a unified non-threatening image of China as a commodity, that appealed to white sensibilities enough to make a profit but did so in a way that did not replicate the worst aspects of Yellow Peril iconography that had left so many in the community disenfranchised.

I tell this history of Los Angeles Chinatown and its relationship to Hollywood film through five chapters. **Chapter One, "**Chinatown and Urban Tourism**,"** traces the development of Chinatowns as sites of tourism and performance beginning with the Chinese Village at the World Columbia Exposition in 1893 in Chicago and continuing on through San Francisco Chinatown after the 1906 earthquake. Placing the development of Chinatown and tourism within the context of the broader transformations in urban visual culture, the chapter discusses the ways that these earlier Chinatowns drew not only on popular representations of the so-called "Orient" to attract tourists but also on a set of visual and theatrical techniques that shared a common history with the cinema. By examining the ways evolution in popular ways of seeing (visuality) in the context of conscious Chinese American performance for an audience (theatricality), the chapter demonstrates the ways Chinese American merchants transformed Chinatown into of cultural production that was in ways both similar and different than early silent cinema. The chapter concludes by demonstrating the impediments that Chinese American merchants in Los Angeles faced before the 1930s in replicating the earlier success of these other Chinatowns. The chapter draws on the Study on Race Relations papers of University of Chicago sociologists from the 1920s, the Southern California Chinese American Oral History Project (SCCAOHP), the holdings of the Chinese American Museum of Los Angeles (CAMLA), and a series of sociology MA theses produced in the 1930's at USC.

Chapter Two entitled "Old Chinatown and the Suburban Dream of Los Angeles," traces the vexed relationship between silent cinema and Old Chinatown in Los Angeles. Placing the arrival of the film industry in Los Angeles in the 1910s within the context of the city's growth, the chapter examines silent cinematic representations of Chinatown produced in Los Angeles alongside local newspaper representations of Old Chinatown near the Los Angeles Plaza. The chapter analyzes Yellow Peril representations of Chinatown in films and the popular press alongside the city's boosters campaign to sell the image of Los Angeles as a racially white, suburban city. In the process, this chapter demonstrates the fundamental role that Old Chinatown played as the site against which the image of Los Angeles as a racially white city was cast. Thus the chapter demonstrates the centrality of Chinatown to constructing ideas of white suburban space in Los Angeles. The chapter concludes by discussing the various ways that Chinese American performers and residents attempted to challenge depictions in silent films that they found offensive. The chapter analyzes booster literature and advertisements, silent films, reports in trade and fan magazines, and the coverage of Old Chinatown in the *Los Angeles Times*.

The connection between Chinatown and Hollywood bears directly on the production and reception of the highly successful 1937 film, *The Good Earth,* one of the first films to employ large numbers of Chinese America extras. With Old Chinatown being razed block by block and the nation in the grips of the Great Depression, extra work in the cycle of China films in the 1930s provided many in the Chinese American community with a means of survival. **Chapter Three**, "The Good Earth Performance as Labor in the Great Depression," analyzes Chinese American performance as labor within the context of the popular press's coverage of the film's production. Juxtaposing first hand accounts of extras and bit players in the SCCAOHP with

newspaper reports of the film's production and release, the chapter foregrounds Chinese American labor as performance within the context of the Great Depression.

Chapter Four, New Chinatown and China City, opens in Los Angeles in the mid-1930s with the impending destruction of Old Chinatown to build Union Station. Peter SooHoo's group of Chinese America merchants competes with the white philanthropist Christine Sterling, whose project was supported by some the city's most powerful men including Harry Chandler, publisher of the *Los Angeles Times*; Louis B. Mayer of MGM studios, and Paramount film director Cecil B. De Mille. This conflict foregrounds the influence popular images of Chinatown had on the daily lives of Chinese Americans. Drawing from the SCCAOHP, the collections of the Los Angeles Public Library, and general holdings of the CAMLA, the chapter examines the personal biographies and economic resources of the backers of these two districts, focusing on the ways money from Hollywood and the Chinese merchant class influenced how race was represented, seen, and consciously performed for tourists in Los Angeles. At the same time, the chapter undertakes a close textual reading of the built environment—as represented in newspaper accounts—in comparison to these promotional activities.

Directly following the release of *The Good Earth*, the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937 dramatically redefined the social context and nature of Chinese American representations. Through a close reading of performances at three war relief festivals held in Los Angeles Chinatown between 1938 and 1941, **Chapter Five,** "China Relief Fundraising Festivals in Old Chinatown," traces the changes that occurred between the 1938 China Nite Festival, featuring actors Keye Luke and Soo Yung from *The Good Earth*, and the 1941 Moon Festival, featuring dozens of mainstream Hollywood stars including Mickey Rooney and Marlene Dietrich. Continuing to focus on the social significance of representations created in the city's various Chinatowns, the chapter recreates the festivals performances and decisions of festival organizers through promotional pamphlets, photos, and newspaper clippings held at CAMLA, the LAPL, and the Y.C. Hong Collection at the Huntington Library; memories of the festivals in the SCCAOHP at UCLA, and the papers of two of the main national aid groups in the 1930s and 1940s: the American Bureau for Aid in China held at Columbia University, the United Service to China Collection at Princeton.

In telling this history this dissertation remains mindful of the fact, that the self-representations that Chinese Americans produced in Chinatown performances and in Hollywood films did not remain subversive forever. Today, many of the cultural artifacts of Chinese American Orientalism from the early part of the twentieth century remain, but they have been stripped of their political efficacy and exist only as depoliticized commercial culture. But, as this dissertation will show, for a short period of time in the beginning of the twentieth century, this early form of Asian American culture played a significantly different role in society than it does today. During this period, members of the Chinese American community—store keepers, performers, and restaurant owners—created a new representation of Chinatown that was in so many ways their own. This dissertation tells their story.

Chapter 1: Chinatown and the Urban Tourism

The Midway Plaisance sat between 59th and 60th Streets on the west side of the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition.[1] Entering on Cottage Grove Avenue and walking east down the Midway toward the "White City" on the official grounds, tourists passed attractions including Sitting Bull Cabin, the National Hungarian Orpheum, and the Panorama of Volcano Kilauea. The Midway represented a hybrid of popular anthropology, commercial spectacle, and urban amusement that placed all of the world's people on a racist continuum from civilization to savagery.[2] Here scientific theories of racial hierarchy mixed with popular entertainment in a competition for the patronage of hundreds of thousands of paying visitors. Admission to various amusements ranged from 10 cents to ride the Ice Railway to $1.10 to participate in all the features of the Streets of Cairo.[3] The official guidebook to the fair informed visitors that all of the attractions of the Midway, "could not well be done in a week."[4]

Fighting for the attention and business of these tourists was the Chinese Village. Like all other attractions on the Midway, the Chinese Village was built to make a profit and provide a return for its investors, and like so many other ventures the Chinese Village did this through the sale and performance of racial difference. Yet unlike most other attractions, which were run primarily by whites, the Chinese Village was established and run by Chinese American merchants. At a time when white mobs were driving Chinese American businesses and communities out of rural towns in the North American West, and when white guides were earning a living by leading groups of tourists through the growing urban Chinese American ethnic enclaves of New York and San Francisco, the World Columbia Exposition provided Chinese American entrepreneurs a place where they could not only profit off this performance of difference without the fear of economic boycott or violent reprisal but do in way where they maintained a relatively large amount of control over their own performances.

Historian Mae Ngai suggests that the Chinese Village at the World Columbia Exposition was "an early prototype for Chinese American efforts to develop urban Chinatowns as tourist destinations which began in San Francisco in the 1910s."[5] In the coming half century, nearly all of the urban Chinese American communities in the United States would transform themselves into tourist destinations that sold a form of Orientalist difference to white visitors. Between the 1890s and the 1930s, Chinese American entrepreneurs utilized the interest of white tourists to transform the nation's urban Chinese American neighborhoods into commercial areas that would ensure their own economic survival. And yet to understand the Chinese Village only through the lens of commodification and commerce misses the important cultural shift that the village, and the growth of tourism in Chinese American ethnic enclaves more broadly, engendered. As this chapter will show, the Chinese Village and the urban Chinatowns that developed from it became

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[1] "The Midway Plaisance Map," in *The Dream City*: *A Portfolio of Photographic Views of the World Columbian Exposition with an Introduction by Halsey C. Ives* (St. Louis: N.D. Thompson Company Company: 1893-1894), http://columbus.iit.edu/dreamcity/midway.html.

[2] Gary Okihiro has argued that Asians were often seen by white visitors to the fair as an intermediate group on this scale of civilzation . See Gary Okihiro, *Common Ground: Reimaging American History*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton: 2001), 36.

[3] John Flinn compiler, *The Official Guidebook of the World's Columbian Exposition* (Chicago: The Columbian Guide Company, 1893), 25, https://archive.org/details/officialguidetow00flin.

[4] Flinn, *The Official Guidebook of the World's Columbian Exposition*, 25.

[5] Mae Ngai, "Transnationalism and the Transformation of the 'Other': Response to the Presidential Address," *American Quarterly* 57:1 (March, 2005): 63.

key sites where national understandings of race, nation, and citizenship were both created and contested.

In the late nineteenth century, during a period of unprecedented anti-Chinese violence throughout the American West as emergent forms of American mass culture swept the nation, Chinese Americans began developing the legal and cultural techniques they would use to reshape the place of Chinese Americans within the United States. The legal part of this strategy has been well documented as the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association and other Chinese American groups and individuals challenged racist and xenophobic laws in the nation's court system.[6] In Supreme Court Cases like Yick Wo v. Hopkins (1886) and United States v. Wong Kim Ark (1898), Chinese Americans won key victories against the structural forces of white supremacy that sought to exclude and limit the rights of Chinese Americans within U.S. society. The Wong Kim Ark case insured Chinese Americans the same legal rights to birthright citizenship granted to European immigrants.

At the same time, scholars have a much less nuanced understanding of the cultural challenge that Chinese Americans mounted to ideas that positioned Chinese Americans as one of the key racial Others against which the idea of the American citizen was defined. While a handful of Chinese American cultural producers in the late nineteenth century were able to utilize novels and newspapers to attempt to reshape popular conceptions of their communities, for the most part Chinese Americans at the turn of the century were excluded from utilizing established media forms to challenge mainstream ideas about the place of Chinese Americans in the national polity.[7] At this moment when middle class whites found themselves attracted to forms of urban amusements ranging from department stores to museums to world's fairs, a set of new commercial and visual practices brought on by modernization and urbanization began to transform Chinese American neighborhoods into "Chinatowns."

As exemplified in the Chinese Village at the World's Columbian Exposition the transformation of North American Chinese American ethnic enclaves into Chinatowns began in the late nineteenth century when the nation urbanization, modernization, and immigration worked in tandem to transform the nation's cities. Between the 1880s and the 1910s, a combination of historical phenomena including the urbanization of the nation's Chinese American community, the emergence of a new type of white urban spectator, and a Chinese American merchant class that was increasingly looking to capitalize on white tourist interest in their neighborhoods transformed the function and place of Chinese American communities in the white public imagination. Alongside other so-called urban amusements such as museums and film, Chinatown became a site where a new white urban public audience sought to encounter and observe its racial Other. But far from simply remaining passive objects of this new white urban crowd, Chinese American entrepreneurs saw in Chinatown an opportunity to simultaneously shape and profit off of this new white fascination. Chinese merchants competing with white tour guides, publishers, showmen transformed Chinatowns into sites of cultural contestation, wherein groups both inside and outside of the Chinese American community sought to shape and profit off the image of Chinese Americans for their own benefit.

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[6] Key texts examining Chinese Americans and the law include: Charles McClain, *In Search of Equality, The Chinese Struggle against Discrimination in the Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Lucy Salyer, *Laws Harsh As Tigers: Chinese immigrants and the Shaping of Modern Immigration Law* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

[7] These included most prominently the writings of Sui Sin Far and the newspaper *The Chinese American* produced by Wong Chin Foo.

Utilizing the new urban crowd as their audience, the Chinese merchant class realized that Chinatown itself could function as a structure of communication through which they could present their own popular image of the Chinese American community.[8] Of course, the self-representations of the Chinese American merchant class were constrained by Orientalist conceptions that had long defined East Asia, and China in particular, as the Other against which the United States defined itself as an emerging Western power. In the face of popular representations of Chinese immigrants as a Yellow Peril that threatened the racial harmony of the nation state, the Chinese American merchant class began to use Chinatown as a medium to construct a popular image of Chinese immigrants as modern, citizen subjects, worthy of inclusion within the emerging view of the United States as a melting pot, and of Chinese culture as a commodity worthy of acceptance and consumption by the West. By the early twentieth century, Chinatown had become the primary means through which members of the Chinese American community mediated broader conceptions of American Orientalism and shaped the dominant understandings of race, nation, and citizenship.

Chinatown as an Urban Amusement

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the increasing urbanization of the nation's population coincided with the growth of a distinct white middle class. In the early nineteenth century, most white men in the United States were independent farmers or artisans living in rural areas.[9] By the end of the nineteenth century the nation's cities had witnessed a growth in white-collar jobs such as office workers and other professionals. These urban bureaucratic jobs transformed not only the nature of work but the nature of home life as well. The growing white middle class increasingly defined itself by a gendered separation of home and work grounded in ideas of the male economic self-sufficiency and female domesticity.[10] As urban workers attempted to separate their work life from their home life the nation's suburbs grew, and the urban core increasingly became home to newly arrived immigrants. At a moment when the increased mobility and circulation of ideas and people brought this growing white middle class into contact with an ever more diverse group of people and cultures, members of this white middle class increasingly turned to new forms of leisure to understand their place in a rapidly changing world. Urban tours of Chinatown soon became one of these forms of leisure.

In the mid-nineteenth century, tourism was a pursuit reserved primarily for upper class whites. For the most part, these early tourists traveled to European cities to appreciate art and architecture. By the early twentieth century tourism had become a middle class activity. With this transformation, middle class whites increasingly saw visits to the nation's ethnic urban communities as a form of leisure. This middle class white tourism was fostered by a number of factors both commercial and ideological. To begin with the physical infrastructure of travel was transformed in the United States between the 1860s and the 1910s making travel to cities across the nation more accessible to the growing white middle class. As part of the revolution in travel, entrepreneurs like George Pullman transformed the nation's rail service facilitating domestic

[8] In building my argument as Chinatown as a media form, I utilize the more expansive definition of media presented by Charles Musser. Musser building on the work of Lisa Gitleman argues that media can be described as a "socially realized structures of communication, where communication is a cultural practice, a ritualized collocation of different people on the same mental map, sharing or engaged in popular ontologies of representation." Charles Musser, *Politicking and Emergent Media* (University of California Press, 2016), 12

[9] On the growth of the middle class see Cindy Aron, *Ladies and Gentlemen of the Civil Service Middle Class Workers in Victorian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 13-39.

[10] Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Race and Gender in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 11-12.

travel for pleasure. As fare structures segregated the wealthy from the working class in the second half of the nineteenth century, trains added a range of amenities that catered to those willing to pay for travelling in luxury. This included not only dining and sleeping cars, but also parlor cars observations cars, and club cars with full bars. By the early twentieth century some trains even included libraries, barbers, and bathtubs.[11] At the same time, increasing numbers of first class hotels in major cities catered to the well to do. Establishments like the San Francisco's Palace Hotel and New York's Waldorf Astoria facilitated luxury travel. These expanding options in accommodations and travel made urban tourism acceptable to the American upper and increasingly middle class patrons.

During this period, a cultural and ideological transformation in the way upper and middle class whites defined their relationship to the public sphere further facilitated an interest in urban tourism. As historian Catherine Cocks has argued in the early to mid-nineteenth centuries, upper-class whites had linked notions of refinement to the idea that the world was divided into two clearly delineated spheres: the pubic and the private. During this period, the wealthy in the United States did not imagine the public as a site of leisure. Upper class white women, in particular, often saw the need to exercise care when moving about in public spaces as walking in the city became "an act fraught with moral and political peril."[12] By the early twentieth century though, understandings of the public sphere had shifted. Upper and middle class white tourists now saw both cityscapes and urban residents as cultural artifacts to be visually consumed. Public leisure became a central element of American life.[13] During this period white women increasingly began to walk city streets without fear of moral judgment from their peers.

With their crowds of people, sidewalks lit with electric lights, and department stores selling the latest factory produced goods, cities at the turn of the century provided a set of visual stimulations unlike any previously experienced. Scholars in the field of film studies have shown the ways in which this new urban environment transformed not only visual culture but urban ways of seeing as well. Classifying many of these transformations as processes of "modernity," these scholars have argued for a connection between modernity, urbanization, and the development of early cinema.[14] Yet as these scholars have shown modernity influenced not only the development of film but also transformed a range of related urban sites from zoos to the city morgue into urban "amusements" for the growing white middle class. This new way of interacting with the urban environment transformed the city itself into a type of visual tableau, which certain segments of this urban population could consume for their own visual pleasure. Wandering the city taking in the urban scene itself became a form of amusement for many in this urban environment.

Drawing on the work of the Walter Benjamin, cinema studies scholar Tom Gunning has suggested that there were three broad types of urban spectators at the turn of twentieth century: the *flaneur*, the gawker (*badaud*) and the detective. Gunning explains that the *flaneur*, "flaunted a characteristic detachment which depended on the leisurely pace of the stroll and the stroller's possession of a fund of knowledge about the city and its inhabitants."[15] He was independent from

[11] Catherine Cocks, *Doing the Town: The Rise of Urban Tourism in the United States, 1850-1915* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 52-60.
[12] Cocks, *Doing the Town*, 5.
[13] Cocks, *Doing the Town*, 6-8.
[14] For a summary of the "modernity thesis" in film studies see Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and it Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 101-130.
[15] Tom Gunning, "From the Kaleidoscope to the X-Ray: Urban Spectatorship, Poe, Benjamin, and the Traffic in Souls (1913)" *Wide Angle* 19.4 (1997): 28.

the urban scene while possessing knowledge about it. In contrast the gawker has lost his detachment, "he merges with the crowd rather than observing it from outside."[16] The gawker could in turn become a sort of "observing detective who keeps the crowd under surveillance."[17] The detective in contrast looked to see what was underneath the surface to separate external appearance from the internal structures. All three of these broad types of urban spectators shared a focus on the city as a site of leisure and amusement. Scholars like Gunning and Benjamin suggest that the urbanization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries brought about a transformation in visuality that changed the way that certain segments of the urban population looked and were looked at. While providing an important framework for understanding urban spectatorship neither Benjamin nor Gunning theorize the ways that race, class, and gender transformed the nature of this new urban spectatorship, yet factors of identity and the social structures which defined them were at the center of this evolving urban scene.

Certainly, not everyone in the city could become an urban spectator who could wander the streets aimlessly, unmolested by other residents, while taking in the sites of the city. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this ideology of urban mobility was most easily accessible to middle class white men. Other groups within this new urban milieu had differing abilities to freely and anonymously move around the city. Middle-class white women did have access to more institutionalized forms of movements such urban tours or as shoppers in the growing number of department stores. Yet in many other instances these same middle class white women found their movement socially restricted or debated by white men.[18] Amongst immigrants, European men had the most freedom to move about the city, though even they were at times imagined as confined to urban ethnic neighborhoods and not participating in this developing regime of circulation.[19]

In this way, social structures of race, class, and gender defined who could circulate within the city and which bodies became objects of the gaze. While Chinese immigrants did move around the city, they could not enjoy the leisurely pace and detached observant position of the *flaneur*, or blend into the crowd to be taken in by the spectacles of the city like the gawker or survey the crowd like the detective. The categories of *flaneur*, gawker, and detective were not accessible to Chinese Americans in the same way they were accessible to middle class white men. Not all Chinese worked and lived in Chinatown. In turn of the century New York, for example, many Chinese worked and lived in the laundries they ran throughout the city.[20] But even though Chinese workers may have traversed the city, their movements were much more proscribed than those of their European immigrant counterparts.

A combination of visual, legal, and bureaucratic mechanisms meant that by the last two decades of the nineteenth century the vast majority of Chinese Americans lived or at least spent most of their leisure time within the confines of the nation's urban Chinatowns. The 1892 Geary Act, which renewed the Chinese Exclusion Act for ten years, also introduced the nation's first system of immigrant photo identification. All Chinese immigrants were expected to carry their identification papers with them at all times, and those who did not were subject to arrest and deportation. This increased government surveillance coupled with mounting anti-immigrant

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[16] Gunning, "From the Kaleidoscope to the X-Ray," 29.
[17] Gunning, "From the Kaleidoscope to the X-Ray," 30.
[18] Sabine Haenni, *The Immigrant Scene: Ethnic Amusements in New York, 1880-1920*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 44.
[19] Haenni, *The Immigrant Scene*, 47-55.
[20] Mary Ting Yi Lui, *Chinatown Trunk Mystery: Murder Miscegenation and Other Dangerous Encounters in Turn of the Century New York* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 66.

violence throughout the American West led large numbers of Chinese Americans to seek refuge in the nation's Chinatowns. Urban Chinatowns offered Chinese residents a type of anonymity unavailable to them in other parts of the nation. So even as the Chinese Exclusion Act decreased the overall number of Chinese Americans living in the United States in the late nineteenth century, most urban Chinatown's witnessed an increase in their Chinese American populations during this same period.

Chinese Americans had not always been a primarily urban population. When the first wave of Chinese immigrants arrived in the mid-nineteenth century shortly after the discovery of Gold in California, they did not settle primarily in urban Chinatowns but rather in rural areas and small towns mostly in the American West.[21] Composed predominantly of young men from the Pearl River Delta area of Guangdong province, this first wave of nineteenth century Chinese immigrants often worked as miners, railroad workers, and agricultural laborers in the Sierra foothills and agricultural areas of California.[22] As late as 1880, only 22% of the nation's Chinese Americans lived in cities whose population was more than 100,000.[23] During this period, San Francisco Chinatown, the largest Chinese American community in the nation, functioned as the social and political center of Chinese American life. Chinese Americans visited San Francisco Chinatown to visit speak their native language, attend the Chinese theater, buy Chinese food and supplies, and interact with fellow immigrants from similar villages and regions of China.[24] In keeping with the rural nature of the Chinese American population during this period, the next most important Chinese American ethnic enclaves in the nation in the mid-nineteenth century were not in Los Angeles and New York, but rather in Stockton, Sacramento, and Marysville in California.[25]

Beginning in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, anti-Chinese sentiments pushed Chinese Americans out of the rural areas across American West and into the nation's cities. The Chinese called this "the Driven Out." According to historian Jean Pfaelzer, this wave of white violence directed at Chinese immigrants represented a form of ethnic cleansing.[26] Pfealzer argues that by the 1880s, white settlers had developed two broad methods of driving Chinese American from their rural homes in the American West. She labels these methods the Eureka method and the Truckee method after two of the California towns where white residents pushed Chinese from out of the community. The Eureka method was typified by a swift, often violent action, against the Chinese. In Eureka, in the wake of the killing of a white councilman in 1885, a mob of angry whites marched on the local Chinatown looting stores and demanding that every Chinese resident board one of two steamships in the local harbor.[27] The entire Chinatown was forced out over a two-day period. In Truckee white residents resorted to a more calculated set of actions. In winter of 1885, Truckee's white residents fired all their Chinese employees and began a boycott of Chinese businesses, slowly driving most Chinese residents from the area over a period of months.[28] These methods were replicated in dozens of towns across the region over the course of the decade.

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[21] Sucheng Chan, *This Bittersweet Soil: The Chinese in California Agriculture, 1860-1910* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1986), 45.
[22] Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 239.
[23] Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 239.
[24] Erika Lee, *The Making of Asian America: A History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015), 78.
[25] Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 79.
[26] Jean Pfealzer, *Driven Out: The Forgotten War Against Chinese Americans* (New York: Random House, 207), 254.
[27] Pfealzer, *Driven Out*, 121-166.
[28] Pfealzer, *Driven Out*, 167-197.

This period witnessed not only the growth of San Francisco Chinatown, but also the growth of other urban Chinatowns across the nation as well. By 1940, with the World War raging in Asia and Europe, 71% of the Chinese American population lived in urban Chinatowns.[29] New York and Los Angeles supplanted Sacramento, Stockton, and Marysville as the most important Chinese American enclaves outside of San Francisco. Chinese Americans became an urban population at a moment when modernity was reshaping the ways in which the new white middle class saw the nation's cities. Within this context, Chinese people increasingly became objects of this new urban white gaze and Chinatowns became key sites for the growing white interest in urban tourism.

Not surprisingly the first to profit off this new white middle class interest in Chinese American urban ethnic neighborhood were not Chinese Americans, but whites selling tales of Yellow Peril. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, at a moment when anti-Chinese sentiments across the nation were at their height, a commercial industry developed to exploit middle class white interest in the nation's Chinatowns. The growing field of travel literature connected published travel accounts in books and magazines with guided tours of the nation's Chinatowns. Within this context the written descriptions, illustrations, and the occasional photographs of Chinatown guidebooks served to preview the experiences of the typical Chinatown tour for the reader allowing the reader to anticipate what he or she would encounter upon visiting an urban Chinese American ethnic enclave.[30] Tour guides then replicated the experiences commonly described in the guidebooks allowing the guidebook and the tour to grow symbiotically with one another.

While travel literature about Chinatown featured descriptions of a range of senses that white visitors would utilize in a visit to the community, these written travel accounts emphasized vision as the key sense through which white visitors could come to understand Chinatown.[31] One such guidebook was *Seen by the Spectator* published in 1902, which included one chapter describing New York Chinatown and another describing San Francisco Chinatown. This travel guide tells the reader, "It is in the evening, and preferably late at night that Chinatown must be seen."[32] According to this travel guide, it is only in the late evening, that "opium joints, the theater, gambling-places, and the restaurants are the liveliest." From the title of the book, to the description of Chinatown, the accounts in *Seen by the Spectator* emphasized vision the primary sense through which whites visitors would experience Chinatown. The need to see Chinatown emphasized in guidebooks of the period facilitated the growth in tour guides then profiting from guiding middle class whites through Chinatown.

As historian Barbara Berglund has demonstrated, the belief that a tour guide was needed for white visitors to view Chinatown stemmed in part on the tourist literature that emphasized the alleged danger these communities posed to white middle class visitors.[33] While occasionally Chinese Americans also acted as Chinatown guides, most of these guides were former policemen

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[29] Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 239.

[30] Baerenholdt, Haldrup, Larsen, and Urry argue that "the times and spaces of tourism are not limited to the particular tourism regions and sites but also comprises the dreamscapes of anticipation and remembrance." For these authors, the acts of anticipating tourism in part through tourism literature and remembering tourist experiences after the event are important parts of the tourist process. See Jorgen Ole Baerenholdt, Michael Haldrup, Jonas Larsen, and John Urry, *Performing Tourist Places* (Burlington, Vt: Ashgate Publishers, 2004), 9.

[31] On the Tourist Gaze see John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011).

[32] Outlook Company, *Seen By the Spectator: Being a Selecction of Rambling Papers First Printed in The Outlook, under the title the Spectator* (New York: The Outlook Company, 1902), 193.

[33] Barbara Berglund, "Chinatown's Tourist Terrain: Representation and Racialization in Ninetenth-Century San Francisco," *American Studies* 46:2 (Summer 2005): 10.

or else other white men who touted their purported expertise on the community. The most famous of these early white tour guides was perhaps New York's Chuck Connors. Connors fame was such that he was featured in a 1903 silent film, "Scene in a Chinese Restaurant," produced by American Mutoscope and Biograph, which showed Connors eating with chopsticks.[34] Connors, who called himself the Mayor Chinatown, became synonymous with tourism in Chinatown and the neighboring bowery district in New York. Similar tour guides worked in San Francisco in the late nineteenth century. *Seen by the Spectator* describes these San Francisco Chinatown guides: "In San Francisco there are men whose profession it is to show visitors through Chinatown by lurid gas light. Let it be said in justice and to their credit that they are entirely familiar with the district, acquainted with most of the Chinamen, sometimes master of a little patois, and thoroughly at home in the district."[35]

Even as it promoted tour guides, *Seen by the Spectator* like most other travel books on San Francisco Chinatown describes a particular set of sites in Chinatown that must be seen on any visit. Key among these sites were the Chinese temple, theater, restaurant, and opium den. Devoting a page or so to describing each location, *Seen by the Spectator* never identifies which restaurant, temple, or theater is visited in Chinatown, as the chapter deems these specifics unimportant. White tourists were not expected to visit Chinatown to eat at specific restaurants or to visit specific temples. Rather all of Chinatown in *Seen by the Spectator* is presented as a series of archetypes standing in for some unchanging cultural object (i.e. the Chinese restaurant, the Chinese theater, etc). These same sites reoccur over and over again in travel literature published during the period. As Berglund points out of tourist literature of San Francisco Chinatown in general, the sites on a Chinatown tour were meant to transmit, "important lessons about the racialization of Chinese immigrants, their position in San Francisco's racial order, and their subsequent status in the American body politic."[36]

Yet it wasn't only places in Chinatown that were treated as archetypes but people as well. Whereas the chapter in *Seen By the Spectator* on New York Chinatown is devoted to classifying locations in Chinatown into archetypes, the chapter on San Francisco Chinatown is devoted to classifying people in Chinatown into archetypes. The chapter opens by stating: "Chinamen, like babies, are distinguishable—when you know them." The chapter goes on to describe various archetypes that make up the Chinese American community: the Chinese woman with bound feet, the Chinese merchant, the Chinese leper, the Chinese opium smoker, and the Chinese fisherman. The author writes: "A good guide never spares his parties a sight of the 'Old Sot,' a battered Chinaman who sleeps his life away where you see him, in a niche in the stone wall, nor of the 'Outcast', a neat, harmless oriental who has out raged some law of the Chinese social or political code and now can find no roof to shelter him and therefore must lie in a small tent of his own making."[37] In utilizing archetypes to define both the places and people of Chinatown, *Seen by the Spectator* presents a visit to Chinatown as a way for the middle class white visitors to understand and categorize Chinese American society and life.

In focusing the Chinatown tour around a set of archetypical sites (the restaurant, the joss house, the theater, and the opium den) and people (the Chinese merchant, the woman with bound feet, the tong member, the opium addict) tourist literature and tour guides made sure the urban Chinatown tour reflected existing trends in nineteenth century. Many nineteenth century U.S.

[34] Lui, *Chinatown Trunk Mystery*, 40-41.
[35] Outlook Company, *Seen by the Spectator,* 207-208.
[36] Berglund, "Chinatown's Tourist Terrain," 17.
[37] Outlook Company, *Seen by The Spectator*, 212-213.

cultural forms where defined by their conglomeration of elements or what film studies scholar Mark Rubin has called "aggregate forms." Dime museums, circuses, minstrel shows, vaudeville performances, and amusement parks were all defined not by their narrative continuity but rather by their diverse elements. For example, Rubin writes that the minstrel show was a "conglomeration of diverse parts in which each act was presented as a self-contained unit designed to stop the show."[38] According to Rubin, these elements even came to define nineteenth century American theater where he claims that audiences were "more receptive to the concept of a theatrical show as a collection of powerful autonomous moments and spectacular effects."[39] When viewed within this context, it becomes clear that the typical Chinatown tour reflected this notion of "aggregate" entertainment. The purpose of the tours was not to allow white visitors to create there own narrative about Chinatown but rather to allow visitors to experience a sequence of related spectacles with each purportedly offering insight into a different aspect of Chinese American life. Rather than guides unifying their tour through an overarching story, the tour was united by the spectacle of various archetypes held together by the location of Chinatown itself.

The historian Raymond Rast has argued that white tourists in the late nineteenth century visited Chinatown out of the need to experience an authentic representations of Chinese American life. For Rast, Chinatown at the turn of the century was a place where both white tour guides and eventually Chinese American entrepreneurs attempted to draw in tourists with competing claims of authenticity. This authenticity was partly a result of conceptions of Chinatown as existing outside of modernity. Rast writes of how bohemian writers and artists in the late nineteenth century "recast Chinatown as a vital preserve of authentic pre-modern culture, conveniently if curiously located amidst the swirl of modernity."[40] In the process he argues that Chinatown became an "antimodern refuge" for many whites. Given the ways in which modernity had come to define so much about the American city, Rast is most certainly correct in foregrounding authenticity as a central element of the Chinatown tourist experience. Yet I will argue that authenticity wasn't the only discourse at work in defining late nineteenth and early twentieth century Chinatown for tourists.

For even as guides and tour books described a visit to Chinatown as a way to see authentic representations of Chinese American life, many white visitors described tours of Chinatown as fake and the people they encountered as nothing more than performers. Writing in 1898, Thaddeus Stevens Kenderdine reflected on his tour of San Francisco Chinatown: "The guides were a pair of fakes, the Joss House seemed like a store, and the opium 'victims' as if sharing the money we paid the guides, and I was glad to leave the scenes and get some fresh air."[41] Certainly, Thaddeus Kenderdine wasn't the only white visitor to feel that Chinatown was fake. By the turn of the century, the "fakeness" of the Chinatown tour and in particular the inautheticity of the visit to the opium den had become such a prominent cultural trope that Chinatown tours were satirized in silent films.[42] White visitors came hoping to experience authenticity, but very quickly they also came to expect that many of the sites they would witness would be performed for their viewing pleasure. By the turn of the century, the promise of

[38] Martin Rubin, "Berkeleyeque Traditions," in *Theater and Film: A Comparative Anthology*, ed. Robert Knopf, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 51.
[39] Rubin, "Berkeleyesque Traditions," 53.
[40] Raymond Rast, "The Cultural Politics of Tourism in San Francisco's Chinatown, 1882-1917," Pacific Historical Review, Vol.76 No. 1 (February 2007): 39.
[41] Thaddeus Stevens Kenderdine, *California Revisited, 1858-1897*, (Doylestown, PA: Doylestown Publishing Company, 1898), 105.
[42] Haenni, *The Immigrant Scene,* 151-154.

authenticity embedded in any Chinatown tour was inextricably linked with suspicions that everything seen on the tour represented a theatrical-style performance. In short, Chinatown tours came to be defined somewhat paradoxically both by discourses of authenticity and theatricality.

Where did this association with Chinatown and theatricality come from? How could a site be seen simultaneously as both an authentic escape from modernity and site of ethnic and racial performance? I would argue that the same bureaucratic, legal, and visual regimes that created Chinatowns as one of the few places where Chinese Americans could circulate in anonymity also produced a break between the white observer and the observed Chinese American. This break between the white observer and the Chinese American resident transformed Chinatown into a type of theatrical space. In the common vernacular, the theatrical is often thought to be confined to the theater. But performance studies scholars have shown that a theater is not a prerequisite for theatricality. Josette Feral defines theatricality as "a process that has to do with a 'gaze' that postulates and creates a distinct virtual space belonging to the other, from which fiction can emerge."[43] According to Feral, the spectator's gaze creates a "spatial cleft" which allows illusion to emerge. She explains that this illusion is selected by the spectator from "events, behaviors, physical objects, and space without regard for the fictional or real nature of the vehicle's origins." [44] In other words, it is through the spectator's gaze that theatricality is produced, and theatricality can be produced regardless of whether or not the subject of the gaze is actually consciously performing.

For most white visitors in the late nineteenth century, Chinatown represented an idea as much as it was an actual place.[45] These white visitors ventured to Chinatown not to interact with its residents in any sort of meaningful way but rather to see an archetypical manifestation of the Orient of the popular imagination.[46] As part of this Orientalist idea, Chinatown was understood to be an authentic representation of a pre-modern culture that was both racially and socially distinct from the rest of the city. This Orientalist idea positioned Chinatown as distinct from the rest of the city while also creating the "spatial cleft" necessary to transform the area into a perceived place of theatricality in the minds of white visitors. In this context, tourists came to see all of Chinatown as a site of ethnographic performance, albeit one whose authenticity they were always doubting. Many white visitors came both hoping to witness the real dangers they had read about in popular accounts of Chinatown while also expecting those dangers to be performed for their viewing pleasure. When most whites entered into Chinatown, they came hoping for authenticity but expecting to see a theatrical type of performance of the imagined world they had long seen represented in popular culture.

The same spatial cleft that transformed Chinatown into a site of ethnographic performance for the white gaze, also transformed the context through which Chinese Americans looked back at white tourists. Because the population of most urban Chinatowns was so overwhelmingly Chinese, white visitors could not engage in the same sort of anonymous observation that they did in the rest of the city. As a result of the racial homogeneity of Chinatown, tourists, artists, and other white visitors that ventured into Chinatown to observe its population could not count on the anonymity of the crowd when the did so. The racial difference

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[43] Josie Feral, "Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language," *SubStance*, 31:2/3, 98/99 (2002): 97.
[44] Feral, "Theatricality," 97
[45] Geographer Kay Anderson argues that in addition to being seen as a physical place, Chinatown should be conceived of as an idea, "one that relied on a range of cultural assumptions held by Europeans about the Chinese as a type. Kay Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980* (McGill-Queen's University Press), 30.
[46] For the origins of Orientalism as a theoretical framework, see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979).

of these visitors rendered them immediately visible to the neighborhood's residents.[47] Because of this racial divide, Chinatown residents knew when whites were observing them. At the same time, many residents of the neighborhood were aware that white visitors came to Chinatown expecting to see the performance of ethnic difference. Within this context more than a few Chinese Americans decided to profit off the creation of this theatrical space by monetizing their performances for visitors. In one of the most popular performed aspects of the nineteenth century Chinatown tour, two Chinese residents were paid play the parts of knife wielding tong members fighting over a Chinese prostitute.[48]

Given the ever present element of theatricality in Chinatown, many Chinese American merchants wanted to perform their own productions for whites in which they would control the representations of Chinatown that tourists consumed.[49] The problem was that Chinese American merchants for the most part did not control the mechanisms necessary to write and publish their own guidebooks. What's more, in San Francisco, New York, and Los Angeles, Chinese Americans merchants owned few of the buildings that they occupied and had little control over the general atmosphere of the community. While some Chinese American entrepreneurs, such as restaurant owners and the occasional tour guides did find ways to profit off the interests of white tourists, for the most part Chinese American interactions with tourists occurred within the larger context of a tourist industry controlled by whites. At the same time, there was one site in the United States during this period that offered Chinese American merchants many more possibilities than the average Chinatown. This site was the nation's world's fairs. It would be at the World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893 that Chinese American entrepreneurs began to develop many of the techniques that would eventually be used in urban Chinatowns across the nation to rearticulate the dominant notions of Orientalism.

The Chinese Village at the World's Columbian Exposition

Like all of the other attractions on the Midway at the World's Columbian Exposition, the Chinese Village was built to make a profit and provide a return for its investors through the sale and performance of racial difference. Yet unlike most other attractions which were run primarily by whites, the Chinese Village was founded and run by Chinese American merchants. At a time when white guides were profiting from leading groups of tourists through the urban Chinatowns of New York and San Francisco, the World's Columbian Exposition provided one Chinese American company a place where they could attempt to make a living from this performance of difference without the fear of economic boycott or violent reprisal. With more than 27 million visitors over the course of six months, the World Columbian Exposition provided an audience of potential consumers unprecedented in size for a Chinese American company in the 1890s.

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[47] Art historian Anthony Lee makes this observation in his discussion of artists Robert Fletcher and Ernest Peixotto and their visits to San Francisco Chinatown to find inspiration for their art. Lee writes, "Fletcher and Peixotto could never remain anonymous figures on Chinatown's streets, and they could never be under any illusion of observing others without themselves being critically observed." Anthony Lee, *Picturing Chinatown: Art and Orientalism in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 67.

[48] Ivan Light, "From Vice District to Tourist Attraction: The Moral Career of American Chinatowns, 1880-1940," *Pacific Historical Review*, 43:3 (Aug.,1974): 390.

[49] Raymond Rast shows Chinatown tourism first fell under the control of whites in Chinatown in the 1880s and 1890s but how increasingly Chinese American merchants during this period attempted to publicize their own representations of Chinatown to tourists. Rast explains that these Chinese entrepreneurs "contested white representations of vice-ridden Chinatown but substituted their own claims that Chinatown authenticity lay in the exoticism of its architecture, theatrical performances, curios, and cuisine." Rast, "Tourism in San Francisco Chinatown 1882-1917," 33.

Scholars have long understood that World's Fairs played a significant role in shaping the dominant racial notions within the United States. Historian Robert Rydell argues that World's Fairs held in the United States between 1876 and 1916 created "symbolic universes," that confirmed "the authority of the country's corporate, political, and scientific leadership."[50] Fairs provided scholars within the nascent field of anthropology a platform to "educate" the public promoting ideas of national progress through scientific racism. As such, Rydell argues that fairs during this period, "reflected the efforts by America's intellectual, political, and business leaders, to establish a consensus about their priorities and their vision of progress as racial dominance and economic growth." [51] According to Rydell, World's Fairs functioned as form of hegemony, by which elites maintained social control and order over the population. Yet within the amusement areas of World Fairs, anthropologists and other elites lost much of their control over

Image 1: Midway with the Chinese Village in the background from *The Dream City* (1893-1894).

[50] Robert Rydell, *All the World's A Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1987), 2.
[51] Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 8.

the way that race and difference was represented.[52] Whereas main exhibits of World's Fairs were often the product of elites, the midways and other related amusement areas were often left under the control various local entrepreneurs. This was certainly the case at the Midway of the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition, which featured attractions including the Sitting Bull's Cabin, the National Hungarian Orpheum, and the Panorama of Volcano Kilauea. In this world of the Midway, three Chinese American entrepreneurs laid the groundwork to challenge the popular ideas of Yellow Peril that had come to dominate the popular representations of Chinatown (Image 1).

Located adjacent to Captive Balloon Ride and across from the Austrian Village, the Chinese Village at the Chicago World's Columbia Exposition was the product of three men, Dr. Gee Wo Chan, a Chinese American herbalist from Chicago, Hong Sling, a labor contractor and merchant from Ogden Utah and Wong Kee, a Chicago grocer who was reportedly the most wealthy Chinese in Chicago.[53] The three men were partners in the Wah Mee Exposition Company, which they founded with the explicit purpose of putting on the exhibit. The men raised over $90,000 dollars from investors in the Chinese American communities in Chicago, Kansas City, and San Francisco.[54] The strange mix of ethnographic science and commercialism at the Columbian Exposition provided Hong Sling, Dr. Gee Wo Chan, and Wong Kee an almost perfect setting on which to redefine the place of Chinatown in the popular imagination.

The opportunity afforded these men to represent China and Chinese culture on the Midway did not come about by chance, but rather in response to the passage of the 1892 Geary Act. The congressional act renewed the Chinese Exclusion Act originally passed in 1882 for another decade, prohibited all new Chinese laborers from entering the country, and reaffirmed the inability of Chinese Americans to become nationalized US citizens. In addition the Geary Act added the requirement that all Chinese immigrants living in the United States register with the government and obtain an identification certificate that included a photo of the immigrant. In fact, the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition opened to the general public just four days before the deadline by which every Chinese immigrant then living in the United States had to register for photo identification certificates or risk deportation.[55] As a result of the passage of the Geary Act, the Chinese government officially boycotted the fair. This opened the door for the Wah Mee Exposition Company to create an exhibit that would represent the nation of China.

Unlike other late nineteenth century urban Chinatowns, the Chinese Village on the Midway was unencumbered by many of the real world restrictions that faced Chinese merchants in places like San Francisco and New York. The Midway provided the owners of the Wah Mee Exposition Company an unprecedented opportunity to produce a Chinatown to their own specifications. Urban tourists were already familiar with the idea of a Chinatown walking tour, yet too often the white guides who facilitated these tours sold Chinatown as a site of Yellow Peril, offering middle-class white tourists to experience the type of depravity and the vice that they had long read about in relationship to the country's Chinese American population. Like white Chinatown tour guides, the merchants of the Wah Mee Company also attracted white

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[52] Allison Griffiths, *Wonderous Difference: Cinema, Anthropology, & Turn-of-the-Century Visual Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 48.
[53] On the location of the Chinese Village see "The Midway Plaisance Map," *The Dream City,* unpaginated; on the three merchants see Ngai, "Transnationalism and the Transformation of the 'Other,'" 62.
[54] "Chinese Nipped in Midway Deal," *Chicago Tribune*, March 16, 1894, 12.
[55] The Chicago World's Columbian Exposition ran from May 1, 1893 to October 31, 1893. The deadline for registration under the Geary Act was May 5, 1893. On the Geary Act, see Jean Pfaelzer, *Driven Out: The Forgotten War Against Chinese Americans*, (New York: Random House, 2007), 302.

tourists by offering them an opportunity to witness Chinese difference. Yet at the same time, rather than grounding their Village in representations of opium dens, tong violence, and secret tunnels, these Chinese American merchants sold visitors on access to Chinese foods, goods, and culture. The merchants of the Wah Mee Company did this by drawing on many of the same dynamic of visuality at play in the typical Chinatown tour.

Certainly white tourists who visited the Chinese Village on the Midway understood the attraction to be a Chinatown. Hurbert Bancroft in his *Book of the Fair*, called the attraction, "the Chinatown of the Fair." As a Chinatown, tourists brought certain expectations to their visit to the Chinese Village, but unlike in urban Chinatowns, where what was seen by visitors was often determined by white tour guides, this Chinatown, and the attractions that tourists encountered within it, was almost completely controlled by Chinese American merchants. A special act of Congress had been passed to allow the Wah Mee Company to recruit actors and others from China to work in the attraction. The bazaar featured what Bancroft described as, "silks and embroideries, toilet appliances and table ware, with other articles such as are offered for sale in Chinese stores of the better class."[56] The Wah Mee Company imported these goods specifically for the exposition. Even the restaurant featured a cook recruited from China for the purpose.[57]

The architecture of the Chinese Village was also distinctive. The entrance was marked by two eighty-foot multi-layered pagoda-esque towers painted in what Bancroft described as, "prismatic colors beginning with violet hue of the rainbow." [58] Designed by a Chicago-based architectural firm towers featured six levels, each with a small ornamental balcony, adorned with bells hanging from each of the four corners. [59] (Image 2) Bancroft further asserted that the theatre building was "of typical Chinese architecture."[60] This architecture replicated a popular expectation many tourists had of Chinatown being defined by ornamentation and façade. Introduced at the midway, this façade preceded a similar, more successful, effort to "Orientalize" the architecture of Chinatowns across the country most

Image 2: The Chinese Village from *The Dream City* (1893-1894)

[56] Hurbert Howe Bancroft, *The Book of the Fair: An Historical and Descriptive Presentation of the World's Science, Art, and Industry as Viewed Through the Columbian Exposition at Chicago in 1893* (Chicago: The Bancroft Company Publishers, 1893), 873.
[57] "Low Luck Will Be Head Cook," *Chicago Tribune*, February 18, 1893, 10.
[58] Bancroft, *The Book of the Fair,* 873.
[59] See photo, "The Chinese Theatre," *The Dream City*, unpaginated, http://columbus.iit.edu/dreamcity/00034048.html.
[60] Bancroft, The Book of the Fair, 873.

notably in San Francisco Chinatown following the destruction the 1906 Earthquake and fire. Sabine Haenni has suggested that, "By the turn of the century an iconography revolving around the consumption of 'surface aesthetic' coexisted with an older sensational paradigm that associated Chinatown with hidden horrors."[61] In many ways the outer façade of the Chinese Village on the Midway was an attempt to keep the sensational surface aesthetic that Haenni describes while jettisoning those aspects of Chinatown associated with "hidden horrors." The flags, tiles and ornamental design were present but gone were the associations of Chinatown to opium dens, tong wars, and hidden passages.

From the beginning the Chinese Village played with these expectations in contradictory ways. Those tourists who decided to enter the attraction passed not into an opium den or underground lair, but rather into a massive building, which held most of the attractions. At 150 feet by 100 feet, the building was large enough to be noted by Hubert Bancroft in his description of the exhibit. As the visitor approached the building, a band played Chinese musical instruments from the balcony above. Entering past two yellow wickerwork dragons and through the doors to first floor of the Temple of China, the visitor was greeted by a bazaar.[62] The *Chicago Tribune* described the scene, "There are long rows of gayly decorated booths containing Chinese curios, bric-a-brac, porcelains and toys presided over by mild-eyed Chinamen—all like their wares actually imported for the Fair."[63] The "long rows," and "gayly decorated booths" present a scene quite unlike the nighttime Chinatown tour that sold exposure to cramped quarters and mystery. Gaiety was not an emotion that the typical Chinatown tour advertised or attempted to convey. While the Chinese Village rejected Yellow Peril iconography, the bazaar did draw on expectations of Chinatown as an extension of the Orient of the western imagination. Certainly

Image 3: The Joss House inside the Chinese Village from *The Dream City* (1893-1894)

[61] Haeni, *Immigrant Scene*, 154.
[62] "Freaks of Chinese Fancy at the Fair," *Chicago Tribune*, September 24, 1893, 33.
[63] "Freaks of Chinese Fancy at the Fair," *Chicago Tribune*, September 24, 1893, 33.

the idea of a bazaar selling porcelains and silks represented the embodiment of particular type of Oriental idea. This Oriental theme was only further enforced by the Joss House and Chinese theater. (Image 3)

While the Chinese Village did sell a form of Orientalism, it did so in a way that was surprisingly more interactive than most tours of Chinatown. In the bazaar was an old man who would tell tourists their fortunes for a fee of ten cents. An assistant sat by the fortune-tellers side to translate for those who paid. By paying and speaking to the "translator," tourists were able to watch and appreciate the performance of the fortune-teller. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, the fortunes that he told were always positive. Thus the visitor paid not for an actual fortune but rather for the experience of watching the performance of a fortune being told.

Adjacent to the bazaar was the Chinese restaurant. By providing a restaurant as part of the Chinese Village, the Wah Mee Company once again challenged the perception that most whites had of Chinatowns. Certainly, Chinese restaurant had existed in San Francisco Chinatowns since the 1850s.[64] During the Gold Rush, most of these restaurants focused on serving Chinese immigrants or white working-class patrons looking for a cheap meal. Yet over the coming decades as the nation's Chinatowns grew and anti-Chinese sentiments increased, the number of Chinese restaurants in the nation's cities stagnated. Few respectable middle class patrons were willing to frequent Chinese restaurants in the 1870s and 1880s.[65] During this period, Chinese and Chinatown itself were often represented as being public health problems and a popular stereotype that circulated during the period linked Chinese with the eating of rats.[66] The Chinese Village on the midway sought to challenge these stereotypes.

A few months before the opening of the exhibit the Dr. Gee Wo Chen described his plans for the restaurant at the Chinese Village to the *Chicago Tribune*. According to the newspaper the restaurant was to be furnished with "ebony tables and stools all artistically inlaid with pearls."[67] The room that was to house the restaurant was planned at 80 by 100 feet. Served in a spacious room, alongside familiar American dishes, the restaurant gave visitors a chance to experience Chinatown and interact with the attraction in the way that the typical tour of Chinatown did not. In contrast to most Chinatown tours, interactivity defined type of theatricality that visitors experienced throughout the attraction. Sabine Haenni has noted that Chinatown tours were often structured to all prevent in-depth encounters with the neighborhood. According to Haenni New York tours never lingered too long at any one part of the community, even those that entered the Chinese theater often stayed only ten or fifteen minutes.[68] Sitting and having one's fortune told or eating Chinese food in at a pace determined by the tourist in spacious and elegantly decorated rooms was antithetical to the limited interaction that most visitors experienced on a Chinatown tour.

Perhaps the most remarked upon aspect of the Chinese Village was the theater itself. For an additional 25 cents visitors could enter the theater in the Chinese Village and watch a play. The theater operated from nine in the morning until ten at night with two one hour-breaks for lunch and dinner. All of the performers had been brought over from China, though a lawsuit following the close of the exhibition suggests that many of the performers were not professional

[64] Haiming Liu, *From Canton to Restaurant to Panda Express: A History of Chinese Food in the United States* (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 18-28.
[65] Haiming Liu, *From Canton Restruant to Panda Express*, 42-48.
[66] Light, "From Vice District to Tourist Attraction," 378.
[67] "Freaks of Chinese Fancy at the Fair," *Chicago Tribune*, September 24, 1893, 33.
[68] Haenni, *The Immigrant Scene*, 157.

actors at all but rather laborers who paid to be brought to the United States.[69] In the English language coverage of the play, most white observers seemed to be utterly perplexed by many of the conventions of the Chinese stage. As historian Jonathan Goldstein explains, Peking Opera of this period did not differentiate between the representational space of the stage and the social space off the stage.[70]

A number of English language newspaper reports focused on this aspect of the performance and the ways in which the world of the play was crossed or broken by various aspects of the performance. The *Chicago Tribune* interviewed American actor, William H. Crane, about his experiences watching the theater at the Chinese Village. Crane reported, "The performance had hardly got underway when lo and behold! out walks the property man and begins to tidy up the stage."[71] Another *Chicago Tribune* article also made a similar observation, "Four of the orchestra are partially concealed behind a table, but two are on the stage with the rich man's guests, as are two or three supers who change the scenery by moving chairs and tables about as the play progresses."[72] A number of reports also noted that the men performed of all the female roles. Herbert Bancroft wrote, "No women appear on the stage, these being represented by female impersonators in raiment of gorgeous hue, their cheeks thickly coated with pink and white paint and on their lips the same meaningless stereotyped grin."[73] This inability to maintain a divide between the representational world and the social world seemed to confuse these writers and kept most of them from enjoying the performance.

While the writers certainly noted this aspect of the performance in part because it differed so starkly from the conventions of the American stage at the time, one also wonders to what extent these white audience members weren't equally taken about by the way in which the presence of stage hands and male actors playing female roles broke the diagetic world that Chinese Village itself was attempting to convey. These aspects of the performance not only called attention to the play as a theatrical space but to the village itself as a theatrical space. Certainly, tourists entered the village expecting a sort of performance of difference—they were of course paying for entrance—but the conventions of the Chinese theater risked reminding these same visitors of the theatrical nature of the entire venture. In this way, the Chinese Village had the same difficulty negotiating authenticity and theatricality as the Chinatown tour.

Whether for these reasons or others, the Chinese Village on the Midway proved to be a financial failure. The Wah Mee Exposition Company was sent into receivership before the summer was over. [74] The collapse of the venture laid bare the financial troubles of the Wah Mee Company. By the fall of 1893, one of the two men who sent to China to recruit performers for the Chinese Village found himself in jail charged with embezzlement.[75] The other recruiter remained in China refusing to return. A second suit was prepared against the white agent who had secured the property at the midway for the exhibit.[76] Hong Sling, the manager of the Chinese

[69] "Chinese Pay to Join the Players," *Chicago Tribune*, March 19, 1894, 8.
[70] Joshua Goldstein, *Drama Kings: Players Publics and the Re-Creation of Peking Opera, 1870-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press: 2007), 75-76.
[71] "Crane's Visit to the Midway Theaters," *Chicago Tribune,* October 15, 1893, 35.
[72] "Freaks of Chinese Fancy at the Fair," *Chicago Tribune*, September 24, 1893, 33.
[73] Bancroft, *The Book of the Fair*, 874.
[74] See "The Chinese Joss-House," in *The Dream City: A portfolio of Photographic views of the World's Columbian exposition with an introduction by Halsey C. Ives* (N.D. Thompson Co: St Louis, MO, 1893-1894), unpaginated, http://columbus.iit.edu/dreamcity/00024045.html.
[75] "Chinese Nipped in Midway Deal," *Chicago Tribune*, March 16, 1894, 12.
[76] "Chinese Nipped in Midway Deal," *Chicago Tribune*, March 16, 1894, 12.

Village and one of its principal investors, lost more than $30,000 of his own money. According to the *Chicago Tribune,* Hong Sling called the whole venture "a gigantic swindle."[77]

Despite the venture's lack of financial success, the Chinese Village on the Midway represents a seminal moment in the development of American Chinatowns. The village provided a model for the way that Chinese American merchants could draw on the existing thematic expectations of a Chinatown tour and rework them for the benefit of the Chinese American merchant class. As operators of their own attraction, these merchants of the Wah Mee Company maintained a control over their own ethnic performances that many other racialized people on display at the fair did not. Writing about the agency of indigenous and other racialized people on display in ethnic villages in world's fairs, film studies scholar Fatimah Rony finds that a primary form of agency for racialized people at the fair in the ever present possibility of their returned gaze, wherein the resident of the "native village" asserted his or her own agency by looking back at the white spectator.[78] For many of those forced on display at world's fairs, returning the spectator's gaze was one of their most potent tools for asserting their own humanity.

But in the Chinese Village, the agency of the Chinese American merchants who owned and operated the attraction went far beyond this "returned gaze." The Chinese Village became a place where rather than break the illusion of performance, the merchants drew on the ethnographic authority of the fair to present a representation of Chinese culture that fit their own social and economic needs. During a moment when a violent form of racial despotism reigned as the dominant political ideology of the United States, the merchants of the Wah Mee company utilized the Chinese Village to mediate the boundaries of American Orientalism and begin the process of redefining their own relationship to American citizenship.[79] At the height of the Chinese Exclusion Era when the nation was developing the mechanisms through which it could expel Chinese Americans in mass from the United States, these Chinese merchants used this Chinatown at the fair as a medium to begin to construct a popular image of themselves as modern, citizen subjects, worthy of tolerance, if not inclusion, within the US nation state.

Chinese immigrants occupied a racial position in the United States distinct from that of European immigrants, and it was this postion that defined the boundaries of Chinese American self-representations to whites. In the late nineteenth century, U.S.-born middle class white tourists also visited Jewish, Italian and other urban European immigrant communities. But even as these white tourist viewed many of these European immigrant groups as ethnic Others, U.S. naturalization laws classified all European ethnic communities as white and allowed the immigrants in these communities to naturalize. Because of this, Southern and Eastern European immigrant communities in the United States could always respond to racist and xenophobic laws and actions through practices of assimilation. Legally, socially, as well as culturally, members of these groups were allowed to become white. In contrast, US law not only banned the immigration of most classes of Chinese immigrants, but it also barred these immigrants, along with all immigrants from Asia, from naturalizing. While some Chinese immigrants would assimilate to white cultural norms and learn to speak English fluently, under the legal and cultural logic of the day, no matter how "American" they became, most whites would not consider these Chinese Americans to be members of the imagined community of the United States or afford them the same equal legal rights as whites.

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[77] "Chinese Nipped in Midway Deal," *Chicago Tribune*, March 16, 1894, 12.

[78] Fatimah Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996), 41-43.

[79] On racial despotism see Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 130.

Within the broader context of Chinese Exclusion, Chinese American merchants across the United States soon realized that the ideal cultural strategy was not to try to present the Chinese American community as white, but rather to rework the boundaries of how Chinese American difference was understood. The nation's Chinatowns would play a key role in this process. Beginning with the Chinese Village at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Chinese American merchants utilized Chinatown to mediate mainstream American Orientalism in ways that redefined ideas of Asian difference to better work for the needs of the community's merchant class. In the process the Chinese American merchant class advanced what can only be described as a form of Chinese American Orientalism. Chinese American Orientalism accepted the premise of Chinese difference from whites. At the same time the Chinese American counter-discourse sought to replace ideals of Yellow Peril with notions of racial difference grounded in a combination of traditional Chinese culture, emergent American mass culture, and distinctively Chinese American cultural forms. Through the advancement of Chinese American Orientalism, these merchants produced their own cultural form that could be commodified and sold for a profit.

The Chinese Village represented a key moment in the transformation of Chinatown into a medium of cultural production as well as the development of a counter-hegemonic form of American Orientalism. In the coming decades, many of the techniques utilized in the Chinese Village would eventually be put to use by Chinese American merchants in urban Chinatowns across the nation. In the process, Chinatowns became the primary medium through which the merchants projected their new image of the ethnic enclave to white visitors.[80] But as would soon become evident in San Francisco, the same mechanisms that Chinese Americans merchants used to advance an image of their communities as non-threatening could be utilized by others to advance the more established image of Chinese Americans as a Yellow Peril.

Chinatown, Tourism, and the Panama Pacific International Exposition

On April 18, 1906 at 5:12 am in the morning, a massive earthquake struck San Francisco. The fires that followed burned for three more days laying waste to the majority of the city. Chinatown was not spared. In the wake of the earthquake and fire, approximately 14,000 Chinese Americans fled the neighborhood. Many relocated to Oakland. Others sought refuge in towns around the Bay Area. More than a handful found their way to Los Angeles. A few hundred remained in Chinatown itself. In the days that followed, white mobs looted the community of valuables. After a pitched battle in which the city tried to move Chinatown to Hunter's Point, Chinese Americans rebuilt their community in its historic location. But the Chinatown that would arise from the ashes would not resemble the neighborhood that had existed there before. Chinese American merchants were intent on banishing forever the image of Chinatown as a den of vice and depravity, and for the most part they succeeded. Yet at the same time, the showmen and tour guides who had long profited from the image of an underground Chinatown populated with opium addicts would not let the image die without a fight. Even as Chinese American merchants of San Francisco were rebuilding the image of Chinatown into something more to their liking, one of these white showmen decided to produce his own underground Chinatown at the fairgrounds of the city's Panama Pacific International Exposition.

[80] In defining Chinatown as a medium, I utilize the more expansive definition of media presented by film studies scholar Charles Musser. Musser building on the work of Lisa Gitelman argues that media can be described as "socially realized structures of communication, where communication is a cultural practice, a ritualized collocation of different people on the same mental map, sharing or engaged in popular ontologies of representation." Charles Musser, *Politicking and Emergent Media* (University of California Press, 2016), 12.

In December of 1906, only a few months after the Great Earthquake and fire leveled most of the city, a group of prominent city residents met in the temporary wooden structure housing the St. Francis Hotel to incorporate the Pacific Ocean and Exposition Company. The organization's primary purpose was to bring a world's exposition to the city. While the idea for an exposition had begun to circulate a few years before the 1906 earthquake and fire, the plan took on new meaning in the wake of the city's destruction. Originally envisioned as a way to "commemorate the 400th anniversary of the discovery of the Pacific Ocean by Balboa and in celebration of the completion of the Panama Canal," the event would now serve the twin purpose of highlighting the city's recovery after the destruction of 1906.[81] As part of the exhibition's broader focus on the Pacific, the event positioned San Francisco as the new American gateway to Asia. As the official guidebook described: "Geographically the Exposition is fittingly placed on the shores of the Pacific, because of the new and immense importance which the nations of the Pacific area, under the stimulus of the Panama Canal, will now assume in the eyes of commerce."[82]

Because of this focus on San Francisco as a commercial gateway to Asia, fair organizers made a special effort to enlist the support and cooperation of the Chinese government. As historian Abigail Markwyn has shown, during a moment of heightened anti-Asian sentiments, the Panama Pacific International Exposition sought the support of both China and Japan in order to ensure that both Asian consumers and American and European manufactures would be present at the fair. Fair organizers made a special effort to ensure that well-off visitors from China and Japan would be able to visit the exposition. In 1904, Chinese merchants on their way to the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis had been harassed and detained by immigration officials in San Francisco. To insure nothing like this happened again, the organizers of the Panama Pacific International Exposition received assurances from immigration enforcement on Angel Island that wealthy guests from China traveling in the first class cabin would be exempt from the standard examination routine inflicted on other passengers from Asia.[83]

The newly formed republican government in China saw its own benefits in participating in the event. The Panama Pacific International Exposition offered the Republic of China an opportunity to promote itself and its industries to the American people. Given this opportunity, the new republic wasted no expense presenting a modern image of itself to exposition visitors. As the Chinese Consul General told *The San Francisco Chronicle* shortly before the fair opened, "Never Before has our nation had an opportunity such as the present to show to the world that China is an up to date and progressive nation."[84] At the official pavilion and at sites across the Exposition, the Chinese government worked to project an image of being rooted in history and culture while simultaneously presenting their nation as one defined by progress and modernity. In addition to its official pavilion, China sponsored a range of exhibits including those displaying Chinese products such as rice and tea, models of Chinese railway lines, samples of Chinese ores, musical instruments, and models of temples.[85]

Within San Francisco's Chinese American community, the merchant class realized that the fair offered an opportunity to further their transformation of San Francisco's Chinatown begun after the 1906 Earthquake and fire. In the nine years since the earthquake and fire, the

[81] Frank Morton Todd, *Story of the Exposition* (New York: G.P. Putnam's The Knickerbocker Press, 1921), 41.
[82] *Panama Pacific International Exposition*, Booklet No. 1 Second Edition (San Francisco: 1915).
[83] Abigail Markwyn, "Economic Partner and Exotic Other: China and Japan a San Francisco's Panama-Pacific International Exposition," *Western Historical Quaterly*, Vol 39. No. 4 (Winter, 2008), 451.
[84] "Relations with Orient Helped by Exposition," *San Francisco Chronicle,* January 15, 1915, 16.
[85] "China at the Panama Pacific Exhibition," *Peking Daily News*, August 30, 1915, 6.

merchants of San Francisco Chinatown had worked hard to remake the image of San Francisco Chinatown, and the Panama Pacific International Exposition offered Chinese American merchants an opportunity to present this image to global audience of visitors and tourists. Throughout the later part of the nineteenth century efforts by the Chinese American merchant class to reshape the ways in which the community was popularly perceived were largely hampered by the fact that Chinese Americans owned little of the property on which Chinatown was built. While Chinese Americans certainly took part in the burgeoning tourism economy of the late nineteenth century, immigrant merchants in Chinatown had long lacked the tools necessary to reshape Orientalist notions of the neighborhood. All of this changed after 1906. In the wake of the destruction, Chinese American merchants hired white-run architectural firms to rebuild the Chinese American quarter in a way that would appeal explicitly to the white tourists. In the process, the Chinese American merchant class in San Francisco, like Chicago's Wah Mee Company before them, presented an image of China and Chinese culture as a non-threatening commodity that could be easily consumed by whites. In the process, these merchants sanitized the area of its associations of drugs, prostitution, and violence.

Among the leaders of these efforts to reshape the popular image of Chinatown was the merchant, Look Tin Eli, who was the manager of the Sing Chong Bazaar. Born in the coastal Northern California town of Mendocino, Look Tin Eli was a U.S. citizen who played an important role rebuilding Chinatown after the 1906 Earthquake and fire. In 1907, he was among the founders and first presidents of the Bank of Canton in San Francisco, one of the first Chinese-owned banks in the nation.[86] But perhaps even more importantly, in the wake of the earthquake, Look Tin Eli was among the Chinese American leaders who pushed the merchant class to hire white firms to create a new architectural motif for the neighborhood that would appeal explicitly to tourists.[87]

As the manager of the Sing Chong Bazaar, Look Tin Eli hired the architect T. Patterson Ross and the engineer A.W. Burgren to redesign the building in a more overtly Orientalist style. The pair also redesigned the Sing Fat Company building, which sat directly across the street from Sing Chong Bazaar. Ross and Burgren designed pagoda-like towers on the top of each building, while using large expanses of glass on the ground floor of the Sing Chong Building for display windows. Designed in conjunction with one another, the two buildings framed the intersection of California Street at Dupont Avenue (later renamed Grant Avenue) when approached from the east.[88] As was the case with most of Chinatown, Sing Chong Bazaar was located on a lot owned by white landowners who leased the building to the Chinese.[89] Despite not owning the land, Look Tin Eli, like so many of the other Chinese American merchants pushed ahead with the redesign of the building that housed his business.

In 1908, Look Tin Eli wrote a piece entitled, "Our New Oriental City—Veritable Fairy Palaces with the Choicest Treasures of the Orient," in which he explained his vision for Chinatown: "San Francisco enjoys the unique distinction of being the one spot in the Occidental world where the traveler may feast his senses on all the treasures of the Orient with none of the hardships and worries incidental to travel in fierce tropical climate not to mention the most

[86] Christopher Yip, "San Francisco Chinatown," (Ph.D. Diss., U.C. Berkeley, 1995), 198.
[87] Emma Teng, "Artifacts of A Lost City: Arnold Genthe's Picture of Old Chinatown and its Intertexts," in *Recollecting Early Asian America: Essays in Cultural History,* ed. Josephine Lee, Imogene Lim and Yuko Matukawa, (Philadelphia: Temple University, 2002), 73-74.
[88] But as Christopher Yip points out they could not act as a gate to Chinatown as they framed California Street, rather than the main thoroughfare of Grant Avenue. See Yip, "San Francisco Chinatown," 200.
[89] Christopher Yip, "San Francisco Chinatown," 200.

primitive facilities for transportation."[90] Look Tin Eli went on to promote this new Chinatown stating that "San Francisco is so much more beautiful, artistic and more emphatically Oriental, that the Old Chinatown, the destruction of which great writers and artists have wept over for two years is not worthy to be mentioned in the same breath." Look Tin Eli took as a given that Chinese American merchants in San Francisco could redirect the western fascination with the Orient in ways that could help them appeal to white tourists. Yet the Orient of Look Tin Eli's imagination was one that was associated with beauty and artistry, rather than with violence, drugs or prostitution. (Image 4)

Image 4: Sing Fat Company and Sing Chong Company from *San Francisco: The Exposition City* (1915)

White contemporaries of Look Tin Eli's who visited the Sing Chong Bazaar after the earthquake were certainly taken in by more than simply the company's architecture. The magazine *Architect and Engineer* wrote an article about the bazaar in 1907 calling it "one of the sites of San Francisco" and stating that it was "truly the gateway to the Orient of the Golden Gate." After describing the building's Pagoda roofs and electric lights the article goes on to state: "the Sing Chong Bazaar is a startling but pleasing combination of flamboyant Far Eastern gaudiness of color and clear Yankee enterprise and up to dateness. Chinese clerks, speaking precise English attend to customers with Oriental politeness." [91] The bazaar, which sold not just items imported from China but also those imported from Japan, thus presented a western-style department store experience, down to the "precise English" spoken by the clerks, but did so in way that transformed the Orient into something that could be monetized for the benefit of merchants like Look Tin Eli. Merchants such as Look Tin Eli understood that if they were to control and shape the tourism industry in Chinatown they could

[90] Look Tin Eli, "Our New Oriental City—Vertibable Fair Palaces Filled with the Choicest Treasures of the Orient," *San Francisco: The Metropolis of the West* (San Francisco: Western Press Association, no date), unpaginated.
[91] "The Sing Chong Bazaar," *Architect and Engineer* Vol. 13 (1907), 96.

do so by appealing to white understandings of Chinese Otherness while simultaneously shifting that Otherness away from Yellow Peril imagery to a form of Orientalism that was more palatable and acceptable to the members of the Chinese American community.

By the time of the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exposition, the official guidebook portrayed the city itself and its various points of interest as an extension of the fairgrounds, and the image of Chinatown promoted by Look Tin Eli and other Chinese American merchants became a key part of this broader tourist experience. Of Chinatown, the official guidebook stated: "the trip most interesting to the tourist is that through Chinatown, visiting the joss houses, the Chinese theaters, bazaars, curio shops, restaurants, markets, etc."[92] No mention was made in guidebook of underground passages, tong wars, opium dens or any of the other symbols of vice that had long defined white tours of Chinatown. Look Tin Eli's aesthetic of Chinese American Orientalism had for the most part replaced the Yellow Peril iconography as far as tourism in Chinatown was concerned.

Yet despite this broader success in the tourism industry, the image of Chinatown promoted by Look Tin Eli and his fellow Chinese American merchants did not signal the end of underground Chinatown as an idea. Instead, at a moment when white guides found it increasingly difficult to lead tours of Chinatown in San Francisco that drew on this Yellow Peril imagery, white promoters and showmen began to look for new ways to profit off the image of Chinatown depravity and mystery they had worked so hard to create over the last quarter century. By the 1910s, these white entrepreneurs realized that they did not need Chinatown itself in order to lead underground tours of opium dens or to weave tales of Yellow Peril. Indeed tourists had long seen tours of Chinatown as nothing more than act. Even as the merchants of San Francisco Chinatown had begun to reshape the image of Chinatown to something more to their liking, another vision of Chinatown was built at the Panama Pacific International Exposition, and this one conformed to the worst of Yellow Peril stereotypes.

In 1915, Sid Grauman was a thirty-six year old Bay Area theater owner and vaudeville showman, who had already developed a long history in Bay Area show business. Before the earthquake and fire of 1906, Sid along with his father David, owned and operated, The Unique, one of the nation's earliest ten-cent vaudeville theaters. At the Unique the elder Grauman experimented with showing short motion pictures as part his vaudeville variety show.[93] A showman even in the wake of tragedy, in the days after the earthquake Sid Grauman erected a huge tent on top of the rubble of The Unique, outfitted it with old church pew and dubbed it "The National Theatre." Sid Grauman was soon offering vaudeville shows and films to a city recovering from catastrophe at his makeshift National Theatre beneath a banner that read, "Nothing to Fall on You Except the Canvas!"[94] By the time the 1915 Exposition opened, Sid Grauman was president of the local Screen Club and owned and operated the Empress Theater at Sixth and Market Streets featuring films and vaudeville acts like Daly's Country Choir and Coleman's Trained Seals to audiences twice nightly in downtown San Francisco.[95]

With hundreds of thousands of visitors set to attend the Panama Pacific Exposition, Sid Grauman could hardly pass up an opportunity to produce a show for what was certain to be the

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[92] *Panama Pacific International Exposition: San Francisco February to December 1915* (San Francisco: The Panama Pacific International Exposition, 1914), 70.
[93] "The Master Showman," *Hollyleaves,* September 9, 1922, 20; "DJ Grauman Early in the Game" *Motion Picture World*, July 15, 1916, 400.
[94] "The Master Showman," *Hollyleaves,* September 9, 1922, 20; Debra Ann Pawlick, *Bringing Up Oscar: The Story of the Men and Women Who Founded the Academy* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2012).
[95] Empress Theatre Advertisements in *The San Francisco Dramatic Review*, December 10, 1910 and December 24, 1910.

largest audience of tourists and visitors the city of San Francisco had ever seen. The carnival area of the exposition was just the place to do so. "The Zone" as it was popularly known resembled the midway at the World's Columbian Exposition. The *Los Angeles Times* described The Zone as a "wonderland of continuous delight and amusement" and the paper claimed in April of 1915 that more than ten million dollars had been spent in this 70-acre section to develop more than 250 attractions.[96] Attractions included the Samoan Village, the Battle of Gettysburg, the Joy Wheel, and Toyland. The Dayton Flood was a three-act show that reproduced the flood of 1913. Alligator Joe's claimed to feature 4500 alligators and crocodiles including Jumbo "the oldest and largest crocodile in captivity."[97] There were attraction size versions of the Panama Canal and the Grand Canyon alongside '49 Camp, " a faithful presentation of life as they lived in the discovery times."[98] In the evening the Zone was lit not only by the newest in electric and gaslights but also by 500 searchlights situated atop towers and domes across the fairgrounds.[99]

Amidst the showmen, animals, and mechanical amusements, Sid Grauman sub-contracted out a space in the Zone's Chinese Village and Pagoda to produced his own attraction. The Chinese Village and Pagoda was a massive structure featuring an eight-story pagoda and three levels of space for various attractions and was distinct from the official Chinese Pavilion constructed and run by the Republic of China. As was common in the Zone, the Chinese Village and Pagoda Company did not directly control the various exhibits housed on its premises but rather subcontracted out portions of the building to various showmen and entrepreneurs. Many of these subcontractors were local Chinese American entrepreneurs such as Leong Kow who operated the bar and grill and Lim S. Sing who operated the Chinese Joss House on the premises.[100] In addition to the bar and grill and the Joss house, the Chinese Village and Pagoda also included a bazaar, a candy shop, a fruit stand, a Chinese theatre, two night clubs, and section for amusements and games.[101]

The most controversial attraction at the Chinese Village and Pagoda was most certainly the one devised by Sid Grauman. Grauman invested $12,000 to produce a walkthrough exhibit that he dubbed, "Underground Chinatown."[102] Underground Chinatown combined elements of a Chinatown guided tour with vaudeville to produce an exhibit that reflected the worst Yellow Peril stereotypes about Chinatown and its residents. Visitors to the exhibit witnessed a series of underground Chinatown scenes featuring both actors and wax figures. These included a Chinatown opium den featuring wax figures of Chinese opium smokers along with actors playing Chinese prostitutes who would call out to white tourists. According to one contemporary account, the scenes performed would change depending on whether or not there were Chinese visitors among the crowds. When no Chinese tourists were present, the exhibit featured scenes of Chinese men plotting to kidnap white women.[103]

The exhibit was met by outrage from the local Chinese American community. Different groups within the ethnic enclave wrote letters to the president of the exposition expressing their desire to see the Underground Chinatown exhibit closed. Eventually the official head of the

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[96] "Where Dull is an Unknown Quantity," *Los Angeles Times*, April 4, 1915, V11.
[97] "Where Dull is an Unknown Quantity," *Los Angeles Times*, April 4, 1915, V11.
[98] "Where Dull is an Unknown Quantity," *Los Angeles Times*, April 4, 1915, V11.
[99] "Novel Features of Fair to Astonish and Delight," *Los Angeles Times*, January 1, 1915, V142.
[100] Panama Pacific International Exposition Records, BANC MSS C-A 190, Carton 24, "Committee on Concessions" Folder, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.
[101] Panama Pacific International Exposition Records, BANC MSS C-A 190, Carton 23, "Concession Committee Minutes," Folder, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.
[102] Todd, *The Story of the Exposition*, Volume 2, 358.
[103] Abagail Markwyn, "Economic Partner and Exotic Other," 460-461.

Chinese delegation added his voice to the protest did the President Moore agree to have the exhibit closed.[104] Sid Grauman stripped the exhibit of all mention of the Chinese and representations of Chinese characters in the show. He then reopened the exhibit with a new title, "Underground Slumming." As Abagail Markwyn has noted the name change could not remove the association of the new exhibit with the Chinese.[105] Afterall, Grauman's Underground Slumming exhibit was still housed in the Chinese Village and Pagoda.

As Anthony Lee, Raymond Rast, and Bjorn Schmidt have pointed out the Underground Chinatown exhibit and Look Tin Eli's vision of San Francisco's Chinatown rebuilt after the 1906 Earthquake presented two widely divergent representations of Chinatown to the throngs of tourists arriving for the Panama Pacific International Exhibition. While it would be tempting to see Underground Chinatown's replacement by Underground Slumming as the end of this conflict of representations and the triumph the Chinese American vision of their own community over the image of Yellow Peril, this was hardly the case. Look Tin Eli and other Chinese American merchants had demonstrated that the Chinatown itself could be used to mediate the worst anti-Chinese cultural representations and that the western fascination with Orientalist difference could be rearticulated in a way that benefited the Chinese American merchant class. Yet at the same time, the reach of San Francisco's Chinatown alone was not great enough to transform the place of Chinese Americans in the popular imagination.[106]

In the years to come even as the Underground Chinatown image faded from the view of tourists visiting San Francisco, the stereotype behind this exhibit lived on in other media forms outside of the city's tourist industry. The years 1918 and 1919 saw the mass production of a portable Underground Chinatown carnival exhibit. The attraction, which first appeared at a carnival in Redondo Beach California in 1913 and then at the San Diego Exposition of 1915, was soon being mass-produced and sold to carnival showmen across the country.[107] The carnival attraction appeared in rural towns and large cities from Beatrice, Nebraska to Coney Island.[108] An advertisement for this portable Underground Chinatown described it as a walkthrough attraction which faithfully reproduced "all the weird and interesting sights of San Francisco's Chinatown as it was before the great fire and days of reform."[109] According to the advertisement the attraction included "opium dens, gambling holes, joss house, secret tunnels, slave girls" in short all of the worst Yellow Peril stereotypes associated with San Francisco Chinatown before the earthquake.[110] Like the Underground Chinatown exhibit at the Panama Pacific International Exposition, this carnival attraction was also protested by Chinese Americans and its success was short lived.[111]

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[104] See Shehong Chen, *Being Chinese, Becoming Chinese Americans* (University of Illinois Press, 2002), 100-104. Markwayn, "Economic Partner and Exotic Other," 462; Rast, "Tourism in San Francisco's Chinatown," 55-57.

[105] Markwyn, "Economic Partner and Exotic Other," 463.

[106] Bjorn Schmidt discusses the shear difficulty merchants in San Francisco Chinatown had in their attempts at shifting ideas popular ideas about Chinatown. Even after Chinatown was rebuilt postcards of Chinatown opium dens from the 1890s were still popular. What's more Schmidt demonstrates how as late as 1909 guidebooks for San Francisco Chinatown still felt the need to demonstrate that Chinese did not eat rats. According to Schmidt, Old Chinatown remained a reference for San Francisco Chinatown well into the 1920s. See Bjorn A Schmidt, *Visualising Orientalness: Chinese Immigration and Race in U.S. Motion Pictures* (Cologne, Germany: Böhlau Verlag Wien Köln Weimar, 2017), 140-150.

[107] On the carnival attraction's origin see "Underground Chinatown," *The Billboard*, May 11, 1918, 72.

[108] On Beatrice Nebraska, see "Parker's Greatest Show," *The Billboard*," July 13, 1918, 38. On Coney Island See "Coney Island Wants Airship Taxi To New York This Year, *The New York Clipper*, May 7, 1919, 6.

[109] See advertisement "Important!!! Showmen!" in *The Billboard,* February 16 1918, 40.

[110] "Important!!! Showmen!" *The Billboard,* February 16 1918, 40.

[111] See "Underground Chinatown Exhibit: Wax Work Called False Picture of Chinese Life," *New York Times,* October 19, 1919, X2; "America is Urged to Cultivate China," *New York Times*, October 17, 1920, E4.

By 1918, the center of the nation's cultural attention though was not focused on carnivals, or world's fairs, or even urban tourism. These forms of late nineteenth century urban amusement, which had captured the imagination of so many for decades, were quickly losing their central place in the nation's cultural imaginary. Even a showman like Sid Grauman who had grown up in vaudeville and made his name in this most aggregated form of entertainment recognized this. In the months following the opening of his exhibit at the Panama Pacific International Exposition, Sid Grauman signed a contract with Fox Studios at his Empress Theater in San Francisco to show the studio's movie serials. The movies would reduce the number of vaudeville acts at the theater.[112] This life-long vaudeville showman soon realized that his future lay not in producing performed vaudeville variety shows but rather in movie theater exhibition. In 1918, Grauman moved to Los Angeles to pursue movie exhibition fulltime. Four year's later he opened Grauman's Egyptian Theatre. Then in 1929 he opened what would become perhaps the world's most famous movie palace, Grauman's Chinese Theater, in Hollywood, California. Grauman was far from the only person in the Los Angeles film industry who saw that a profit could to be made in selling American Orientalism to white audiences. Look Tin Eli and his fellow merchants may have successfully marginalized the image of the underground Chinatown within the tourism industry in San Francisco, but the image of the underground Chinatown soon found a home in the emergent film industry of Southern California.

[112] "Empress Becomes Near Picture House," *Moving Picture World*, October 9, 1915, 304.

Chapter 2: Old Chinatown and the Suburban Dream of Los Angeles

In many ways, the city of Los Angeles was imagined into existence.[1] Following the completion of the Southern Pacific Railway in 1876 and the Santa Fe Railway in 1886, city leaders, boosters, and land speculators began transforming this tiny former Mexican town into a major U.S. metropolis. Railroads hired journalists to promote the area while newspapers publishers like Harrison Gray Otis used his power at the *Los Angeles Times* to sell a carefully crafted image of the city to the nation. These city boosters brought a profound demographic transformation to Southern California. The historian Carey McWilliams described the transformation as the "largest internal migration in United States history."[2] While this characterization is certainly debatable, the rapid growth of the city following the completion of the rail lines and subsequent booster campaign is undeniable. Los Angeles city proper grew from a town of 11,000 people in 1880 to city 100,000 people by the turn of the century. By 1910, there were more than 300,000 people living in the city; in 1920 the number was more than 575,000; and by 1930, more than a million. Rather than being drawn to any specific industry, these new transplants were often attracted by the image of a white family in suburban-style home located in a region of temperate weather.

Yet beneath this vision of what booster Harold Loomis dubbed the "land of sunshine" lay an often violent and exclusionary process that was racialized from the start. Promoted primarily to middle-class Anglo-Saxon protestants in the Midwest, the idea of Los Angeles that the city boosters promoted relied on legal and extra-legal means to marginalize people of color. No amount of advertising could mask the fact that the people of color had been present in Southern California well before boosters like Harold Loomis or Harrison Gray Otis began their aggressive promotions. From the indigenous Tongva people who had inhabited the region since the arrival of the Spanish; to the wealthy Mexican land-grant owners that Anglo settlers encountered following the Mexican American War; to the Chinese railroad workers who helped complete the Southern Pacific and Santa Fe railways, Los Angeles was composed of a vibrant mix of people. In early twentieth century Los Angeles race did not function around a black/white binary. Rather as Natalia Molina has observed of this period, "in Los Angeles, people saw race differently."[3] Whiteness in Los Angeles was cast against a larger non-white category, with various non-white ethnic groups having differing access to power and being afforded different privileges.[4]

As a result, even as the population of Los Angeles grew between the 1880s and 1930s, developers and boosters in Los Angeles worked to find ways to recast the presence of the city's non-white residents in ways that were beneficial to the city's white majority. In 1880, there were around 800 Chinese, Japanese, Mexicans, and Blacks living in a town of a little more than 11,000 people. By 1930, people of color made up more than 150,000 of the city's 1.2 million residents. In the case of Mexican Americans, city image-makers sought to incorporate this population into the image they were meticulously crafting for the region. For example, city

[1] I build on literary scholar David Fine's description of Los Angeles as "boosted into existance." Fine discusses the profound role boosters played in carefully crafting an image for Los Angeles. See David Fine *Imagining Los Angeles: A City in Fiction,* (University of Nevada, 2004), 1-9.
[2] Carey McWilliams, *Southern California: An Island on the Land* (Salt Lake City: Pererine Smith, 1946), 118.
[3] Natalia Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens? Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 6.
[4] Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens*, 6-8.

leaders and boosters worked to create what William Deverell has called a "usable ethnic past" that incorporated the Spanish and Mexican history of the region into a coherent story that matched the image that boosters wanted to sell of the city.[5] To do so, boosters reshaped the public perception of the region's Mexican history into what Carey McWilliam's called a "Spanish Fantasy heritage."[6] Examples of this process included the revival of Spanish Colonial architecture in the closing decades of the twentieth century, the La Fiesta Festival held in the city in 1894, and the refashioning of Olvera Street in the image of a romanticized Mexican market place.[7] In this way the city's Spanish and Mexican past was incorporated into the image of Los Angeles as a racially white city. While less well documented, the presence of Asian Americans, and Chinatown in particular, also played a defining role in the way the city was imagined.

Between 1870 and 1930, the Chinese population of Los Angeles never surpassed 4,000, and yet Chinatown occupied a place in the city's popular imagination that far outweighed the relatively small size of its population. In 1870 Los Angeles had a Chinese population of only 172.[8] This first Chinatown was located on the street *Calle de Los Negros* that most English-speaking whites disparagingly called, "Nigger Alley." In the late nineteenth century the *Los Angeles Times* and other local papers used this moniker to describe the area in headlines and articles the paper ran about the Chinese American community.[9] In the minds of so many of the city's white residents in the nineteenth century, Orientalism and anti-blackness collided to imagine the district as a den of vice and depravity, that was often seen as a threat to the (white) body politic of the city. In 1871, the death of a white man lead an angry mob to lynch nineteen Chinese residents of the city in what would become known as the Chinese Massacre. In the coming decades, this event would become part of Los Angeles lore. As the popular memory of the event shifted from pride to disgust, the Chinese Massacre took on an increasingly important place in the popular history of the city. In part through the legend of the Chinese Massacre, the Chinese American presence in the city came to occupy an originary place in the way the city imagined its history.[10] By 1930, there were a little more than 3,000 Chinese Americans living in the city. Most of the Chinese American community during this period was located along Apablasa, Marchessault, Alameda, and Los Angeles Streets in the area known as Old Chinatown. At the same time, more than 20,000 Japanese Americans and approximately 4,000 Filipinos called Los Angeles home. Nonetheless, it was Chinatown more so than either of these two other Asian American ethnic enclaves that defined the imagined geography of the city.

Scholars have long recognized that Los Angeles was built and promoted around a racialized suburban dream, and yet little scholarship has examined the role that Chinatown played in the way Los Angeles was popularly perceived.[11] Instead most scholarship that deals

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[5] William Deverell, "Privileging the Mission over the Mexican: The Rise of Regional Identity in Southern California," in *Many Wests: Place, Culture and Regional Identity*, ed. David Wrobel and Michael Steiner (University of Kansas, 1997), 250.
[6] McWilliams, *Southern California*, 43.
[7] Stephanie Lethwaite, "Race, Place and Ethnicity in the Progressive Era," in *A Companion to Los Angeles*, ed William Deverel et al (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2010), 43.
[8] Susie Ling, "Our Legacy," in *Bridging the Centuries: History of Chinese American in Southern California* (Los Angeles: Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, 2001), 16.
[9] Beginning in the 1880s, the *Los Angeles Times* ran headlines referring to the community using this derogatory term. See for example "Chinatown Scorched: A Blaze which Threatened to Sweep Nigger Alley," *Los Angeles Times*, October 24, 1886, 1.
[10] On the history of the Calle de Los Negros see Cesar Lopez, "Lost in Translation: From Calle de los Negros to Nigger Alley to North Los Angeles Street to Place Erasure, Los Angeles 1855-1951" *Southern California Quarterly* Vol 94. No. 1 (Spring 2012): 25-90.
[11] Scholarship on both imagining and constructing Los Angeles as racially white city includes, Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Deverell,

with the imagined place of the city's ethnic communities has focused on the ways that the city leaders and boosters attempted to manage the much larger Mexican American community. Even though the Chinese American community in Los Angeles was among the city's smallest ethnic enclaves, Chinatown was indispensable to the way in which Los Angeles came to define itself. From the late nineteenth century until the Second World War, Los Angeles Chinatown came to serve as the perfect foil against which the region's white suburban lifestyle could be cast. This was due in part to the way in which Chinatowns were perceived nationally.

By the time Los Angeles began its population boom in the late nineteenth century, most whites already associated the nation's Chinatowns with urban blight, violence, and racialized difference. In so many ways, the national idea of Chinatown had come to represent the apotheosis of an urban ethnic immigrant mass. With their cramped living quarters and social arrangements that appeared to undermine Victorian ideals of marriage and family, Chinatowns came to represent all that the growing white middle class feared in the nation's rapidly expanding urban centers. If the booster image of Los Angeles was grounded in the idea of a white heterosexual family living in a detached single-family home, then Chinatown was represented as its opposite: a space seemingly devoid of families, where violent tongs fought over control of young Chinese women and where the mixed use buildings hid a labyrinth of secret rooms and tunnels.

These conceptions of Chinatown's differences had been promoted in San Francisco and New York for decades.[12] What was distinct about Los Angeles was the extent to which these popular images of Chinatown represented the polar opposite of Southern California's white suburban ideal. Neither New York nor San Francisco was ever imagined or sold as a racially white space in quite the same way as Los Angeles.[13] Literary scholar David Fine argues that writers like Frank Norris at the turn of the century represented San Francisco as a "polyglot city."[14] According to Fine, Norris and other writers saw San Francisco as "an amalgam of the urban and the backwoods, the instant metropolis and the 'wild west' town…"[15] In contrast, in Los Angeles, boosters promoted an image of the city as representing a new type of city life, one which was grounded in the white family in a suburban-style home.

Because the popular image of Chinatown contrasted so explicitly with the white suburban image promoted by city boosters, representations of Chinatown's ethnic difference became a source of profit for many in the region's film and newspaper industries. Between 1911 when the first permanent film studio was erected in Hollywood and 1930 when the film industry was in the midst of its transition away from silent films, Chinatown played an increasingly important role in

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Whitewashed Adobe; Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race,* 1-35; Natalia Molina, *Fit to be Citizens: Public Health and Race in Los Angeles*, (Berkeley: UC Press, 2006); and Wild, *Street Meetings,* 38-61;

[12] See Mary Ting Yi Lui, *Chinatown Trunk Mystery: Murder Miscegenation and Other Dangerous Encounters in Turn of the Century New York* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco Chinatown,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

[13] This is not to say that San Francisco and New York were not defined by overt policies of white supremacy, such as redlining practices or restrictive convenants on property deeds were not utilized in these cities. Rather, it is to argue that Los Angeles was imagined and sold as a white space in ways that New York and San Francisco were not. Los Angeles city boosters explicity sold Los Angeles a racially white city to white mid-westerners. Harry Chandler was known to refer to Los Angeles as the nation's "white spot," which he in part as a reference to the way he perceived the regions racial character. On the Los Angeles as a white city see, for example, *William Deverell: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of Its Mexan Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Scott Kurashige: *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 1-35; Mark Wild, *Street Meetings: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 38-62.

[14] Fine, *Imagining Los Angeles*, 1.

[15] Fine, *Imagining Los Angeles*, 2.

the way the industry imagined urban difference. Building off tropes that circulated in dime novels and serials, motion pictures produced about Chinatown promoted narratives of tong violence and opium dens. These stories drew from perceived physical and spatial differences in the district, often in ways that incorporated the built environment of the neighborhood as part of the story. While produced in Southern California, few of these Chinatown films were set in Los Angeles. Instead they were usually set in San Francisco or New York thus affirming in the minds of viewers both nationally and locally the association of Chinatown with these cities and their form of urban growth. Los Angeles newspapers and tourist guidebooks then applied the tropes of Chinatown that the film industry promoted nationally specifically to Old Chinatown. The *Los Angeles Times*, *Los Angeles Examiner,* and other major papers ran stories every month over the opening decades of the twentieth century that painted the neighborhood as the physical manifestation of Yellow Peril. In selectively choosing how and they represented Chinatown, the newspaper and film industries used the white public's fear and fascination with Chinatown to increase readership and sell papers.

This does not mean that the image of Chinatown presented by city boosters and media industries went uncontested. Chinese Americans attempted to use their positions as actors, audience members, and—in few instances even as filmmakers—to influence the types of representations of Chinatown that were produced and shown to white audiences. While these differing efforts varied in the extend to which they were able to challenge individual representations of Chinatown and Chinese people, taken as whole the success of these efforts before 1930 was limited at best. During this period, the popular image of Chinatown in Los Angeles remained under the control of the city boosters and their compatriots in the film and newspaper industries.

White Racial Anxiety and the Suburban Ideal in Los Angeles

Over the first three decades of the twentieth century, as the population of Los Angeles soared, many who settled in the region came in search of a dream—a dream that had been built for them by booster advertisements, novels about Hollywood triumph and scandal, and in the backdrops of the motion pictures shot in the region. According to historian Robert Fogelson the vision of Los Angeles during this period, "was epitomized by the residential suburb—spacious, affluent, clean, decent, permanent, predictable, and homogeneous—and violated by the great city—congested, impoverished, filthy, immoral, transient, uncertain, and heterogeneous."[16] Images of healthy, transplanted Midwestern families living in California bungalows surrounded by lush gardens and beautiful weather contrasted explicitly with depictions of dirty tenements, urban crowds, and racialized European immigrants, so often associated with cities like Chicago or New York City. At the center of this Los Angeles image was the single-family house—a site where race, gender, class, and sexuality all intersected to define the normative boundaries of American life.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, Progressive reformers and city leaders in Los Angeles began to draw on the ideas of the City Beautiful movement to plan for the growth of Southern California. As a national movement of planners, reformers, and politicians, the City Beautiful movement attempted to attach Progressive goals to the design, planning, and the built environment of the nation's cities. As such, many in the City Beautiful movement believed that "social uplift" of the masses through the elimination of slums, poverty, and crime began with city planning. If the city were designed properly, they believed there would be no slums. Inherent

[16] Robert Fogelson, *Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles 1850-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 145.

in these notions of social uplift were both implicit notions of racial hierarchy and overt expressions of white supremacy. After all, the same Progressive ideology that led to the city beautiful movement also gave birth to the Eugenics movement and supported the passage of 1924 Immigration Act with its system of racial and ethnic quotas.

One of the most prominent early proponents of the City Beautiful Movement in Los Angeles was the Reverend Dana Bartlett. In his 1907 book, *The Better City,* Bartlett wrote of Los Angeles, "it will be a city of homes and therefore a city without slums. Instead of the pent-up millions in other cities, that from necessity or choice know only a contracted indoor existence, there will be found only healthy, happy families spread over a vast area."[17] Bartlett then contrasted the Los Angeles homes built on open acres of land with the population of New York who live, "high up in the air, in dark contracted rooms, with scarcity of light and sunshine."[18] He presents the slum as not only spreading diseases but also tells his reader: "the slum will breed the criminal, who will rob or burn the mansion in the finer districts."[19] Elsewhere in the book, Bartlett describes the type of people who inhabit this city. He write that Los Angeles is an "American City" and explains that, "The majority of its citizens are of American-birth, and its foreign-born citizen, catching the American spirit, vies with his neighbor in his devotion to high ideals."[20] He then notes the European origin of many who call the city home: "Here is a people within whose veins runs the red blood of the hardy Northmen."[21]

Bartlett believed that the white, American-born majority, living in single-family homes would create in Los Angeles, a new "better city." He contrasts Los Angeles with the characteristics he perceives in the older, East Coast cities such as New York. For Bartlett, Los Angeles was defined by the happy family, the open land, the temperate climate, the plentiful parks, and by the presence of U.S.-born, white Americans. In contrast, Bartlett associates the older East Coast cities with the overcrowding, the cramped tenement, and the inassimilable immigrant. Bartlett thus saw in Los Angeles in 1907, a model in which the moral character, the physical health, the emotional well-being of the population were all grounded in the city's built environment. At the center of Bartlett's dichotomy was the divide between the Los Angeles as city of homes and the older East Coast city defined by its slums. This dichotomy of the home versus the slum would become one of the foundational elements in the way Los Angeles was imagined in the early twentieth century.

Over the next two decades, a combination of Progressive city planning and private developers worked in tandem to transform Los Angeles into an ever-growing decentralized metropolis, increasingly in line with Bartlett's dream. Private developers placed deed restrictions on lots forbidding the owners from building anything but single-family houses. At the same time, city government designed parks, planned streets, built government buildings and established building codes for the region.[22] Perhaps even more importantly, in 1908 Los Angeles became the first city in the nation to zone certain parts of the city for particular purposes.[23] As a result city planners were able to insure that industrial activities would be confined to the central districts and the areas east of the Los Angeles River. These zoning laws also encouraged the development of segregated middle class neighborhoods on the Westside that reflected their bucolic suburban

[17] Dana Bartlett, *The Better City: A Sociological Study of a Modern City* (Los Angeles: The Neuner Company Press 1907), 71.
[18] Bartlett, *The Better City*, 71.
[19] Bartlett, *The Better City*, 247.
[20] Bartlett, *The Better City*, 20.
[21] Bartlett, *The Better City*, 21
[22] Fogelson, *Fragmented Metropolis*, 248-249;
[23] Wild, *Street Meeting,* 54.

ideal. During this period, Progressive reformers and city developers promoted the suburban single-family house as the antidote to the urban overcrowding of older cities on the East Coast and Midwest.[24] Even as Los Angeles grew rapidly over the first three decades of the twentieth century, its population was smaller and more dispersed than Chicago or New York.[25] The single-family house and not the skyscraper became the symbol and engine of the region's growth. The 1920s alone saw the creation of 3,200 subdivisions and 250,000 homes in Los Angeles.[26]

Unlike Chicago or New York, which attracted large numbers of immigrants from Europe during this period, most of the transplants to Los Angeles during the early twentieth century were American-born whites. Between 1910 and 1930, Americans born outside of California made up three-quarters of those who moved to the region. In the 1910s alone, a full one third of all Americans moving west of the Rockies settled in Los Angeles.[27] These Midwestern transplants established state societies to preserve their roots in places like Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa.[28] The influx of native-born whites was so great that Los Angeles was referred to by some as the nation's "white spot" in the period before World War II.[29]

Of course the arrival of so many white Midwesterners in Los Angeles did not occur by happenstance, but rather as a result of a carefully crafted campaign to sell Los Angeles to the nation. At the center of this campaign were organizations like the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce and newspapers like the *Los Angeles Times.* In 1888, Harrison Gray Otis publisher of the *Los Angeles Times* along with a group of the city's business elite organized the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce. [30] For at least the next thirty years this business organization would be at the forefront of selling the region to prospective residents.[31] The major tenants of the white suburban ideal with which the region became associated did not emerge all at once. Rather these ideas evolved as the region itself did.

When it first began in the closing decade of the nineteenth century, the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce focused much of its energy attracting farmers in the Midwest, through a campaign that highlighted the region's climate, soil, and agricultural possibilities. The Chamber sent a railroad car outfitted with agricultural products from California to tour towns in the Midwest and the South. More than one million people visited the traveling exhibit, "California on Wheels," over a two-year period.[32] The Chamber of Commerce also sponsored exhibits at World's Fairs including the 1893 World Columbia Exposition in Chicago. The Times Mirror Company, publisher of the *Los Angeles Times*, printed a guidebook of Los Angeles for the 1893 Exposition. Written by Harry Ellington Brook and sponsored by the city's Board of Supervisors, the guidebook emphasized the region's rich soil and temperate weather. The cover image was entitled, "Los Angeles Oranges at the World's Fair." The guidebook devoted a full third of its thirty pages to "Agricultural resources" while declaring unabashedly that "Horticulture is the

[24] Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight*, 23; Lewthwaite, "Race, Place, and Ethnicity in the Progressive Era," 40-55.
[25] Fogelson, *Fragmented Metropolis*, 142-143.
[26] Scott Kurashige, "Between White Spot and World City," in *A Companion to Los Angeles*, ed William Deverel et al (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2010), 57.
[27] Anthea Hartig, "Promotion and Popular Culture," in *A Companion to Los Angeles*, ed William Deverel et al (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2010), 295
[28] Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight*, 22.
[29] Wild, *Street Meeting*, 38-39.
[30] McWilliams, *Southern California*, 274
[31] Fogelson, *Fragmented Metropolis,* 70.
[32] Richard Orsi, *Sunset Limited the Southern Pacific Railroad and the Development of the American West, 1850-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 324; Fogelson, *Fragmented Metropolis*, 70.

great industry of Los Angeles County…"[33] This heightened focus on the farming potential of the region so prevalent in the early 1890s would not last.

Over the first few decades of the twentieth century, booster campaigns began to treat the agricultural strengths of Southern California as increasingly supplemental to the image they were selling. In place of farming, boosters foregrounded a suburban lifestyle that combined imagery of the region's temperate climate, home gardens, and single-family houses as a way to attract both white visitors and transplants. By the 1920s, the home had come to posses a particularly important symbolic value in the nation's popular imagination. It was none other than President Coolidge who declared in 1924, "The American home is the foundation of our national and individual well being. Its steady improvement, at the same time, a test of our civilization and our ideals."[34] The importance of the home to the region's image can be seen quite clearly in thirty-second edition of Harry Ellington Brook's guidebook to Los Angeles produced by the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce in 1921. The book declared, "After all is said, the chief attraction of Los Angeles to new arrivals lies in its beautiful homes. The rare beauty of the grounds surrounding the attractive homes of Los Angeles, Pasadena, Long Beach and other Los Angeles county cities is a constant theme of admiration on the part of Eastern visitors." [35] The 1921 guidebook contained a full page collage entitled, "Los Angeles, A City of Homey Homes" which featured five homes, each surrounded by a well-manicured lawn and plants.[36] (Image 5) In this way the booklet linked the southern

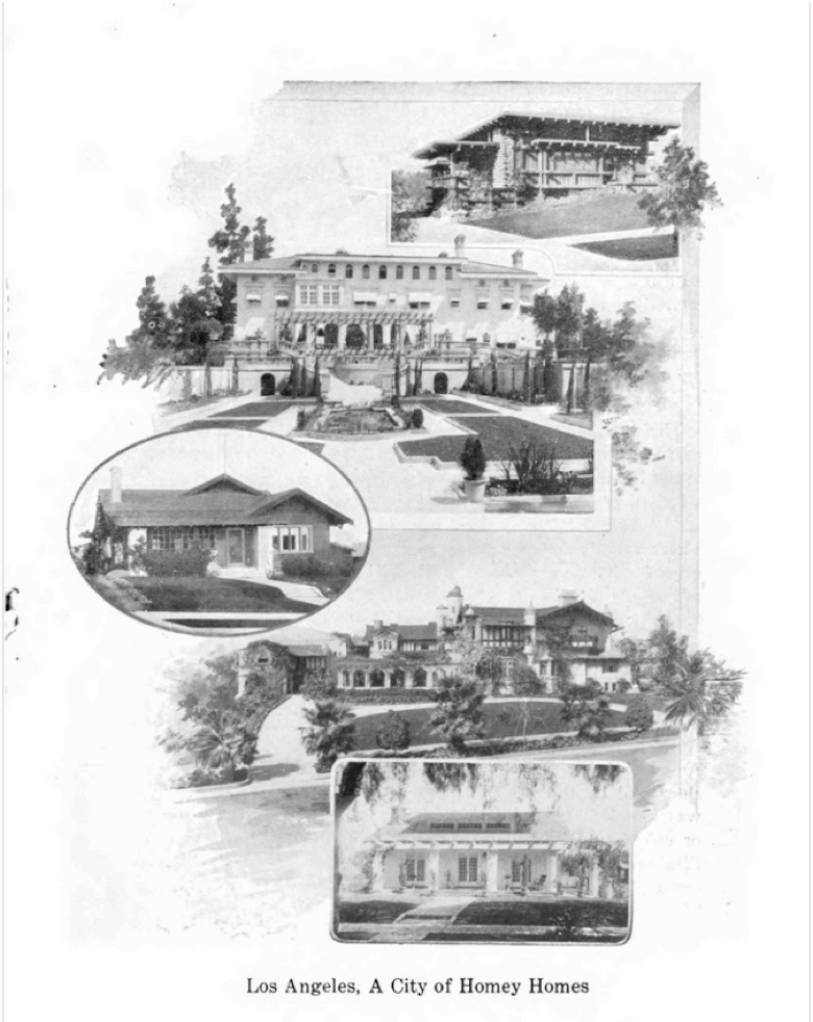

Image 5: Pictures of Homes From *Los Angeles, Califorina: City and County* (1921)

[33] Harry Ellignton Brook, *The County and City of Los Angeles in Southern California* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, 1893), 4-5.
[34] Coolidge's quote was used in an advertisement for View Park Homes in Los Angeles that appeared in *The Los Angeles Examiner* in 1926. See "View Park Homes," *Los Angeles Examiner*, April 25, 1926, IV8.
[35] Harry Ellington Brook, *Los Angeles California: The City and County*, (Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, 1921), 26.
[36] Brook, *Los Angeles, California: The City and County of Los Angeles*, 17.

California home both visually and rhetorically to the idea of the garden and implicitly contrasted this Los Angeles home with the image of urban growth most often associated with places like Chicago, New York, or even San Francisco. Of course, in making the home the center of its efforts to sell Los Angeles to prospective residents, the boosters were attempting to sell much more than the region's distinct patterns of urban growth.

As the center of suburban dream of Los Angeles, the family home became the symbolic site where property, whiteness, and normative notions of gender, sexuality, and family collided. The 1921 Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce guidebook on Los Angeles implied that the Southern California home was a place of leisure whose benefits were available only to whites. Even as the guidebook declared that, "the population of Los Angeles is cosmopolitan," it segregated its suburban imaginary along strictly racial lines. The photos in the book imagine a racialized hierarchy for the region in which whites enjoy the pleasures of leisure in their verdant home gardens while people of color are relegated to working in fields.[37] All three images in the 1921 guidebook that feature people of color show them doing manual labor—harvesting and drying walnuts or picking oranges—as part of the increasingly lucrative California agricultural industry.[38] (Image 6) The images present a Southern California where the "cosmopolitan" nature of the areas residents is portrayed as a benefit to business and industry. Visually the book presents people of color as existing to ensure that economic viability of the Southern California dream not to partake in it.

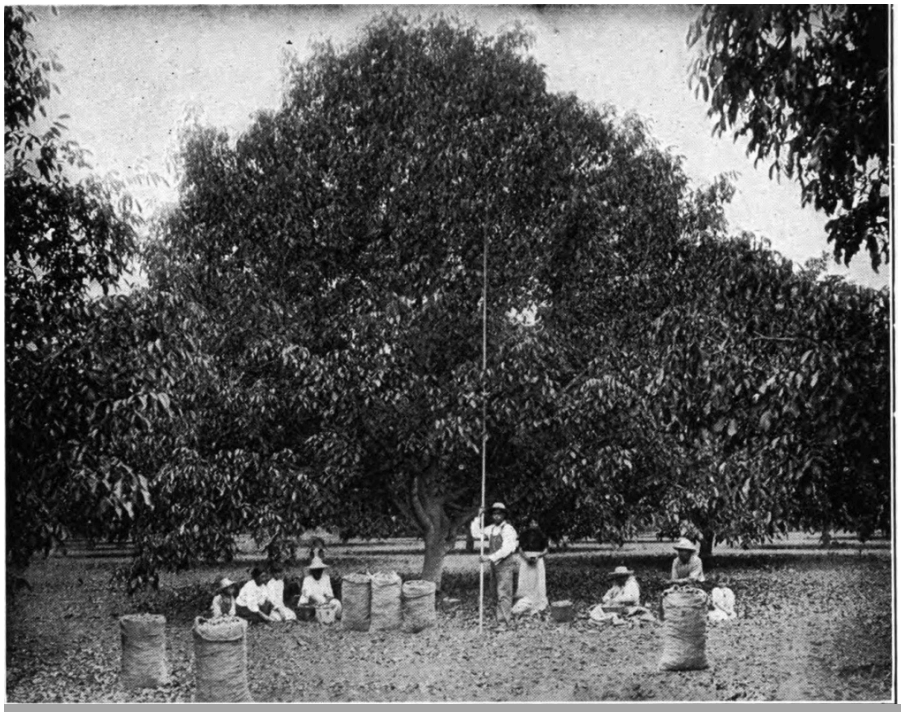

Image 6: Workers harvesting walnuts from *Los Angeles California, City and County* (1921)

[37] Brook, *Los Angeles, California: The City and County of Los Angeles*, 18.
[38] See for example Brook, *Los Angeles, California: City and County*, 10.

Within this context of power and privilege, some of the most interesting photos are those of white residents in the gardens of single-family houses. In one image, entitled "Just Southern California." A young woman stands smiling in a white dress in the front garden of a home. The home is so overgrown with flowers that the plants engulf the entire front porch. The image is composed in such a way as to emphasize the magnitude of the overgrowth, and yet the woman in the image seems happy with the state of the yard. The "just" in the title can be read to imply that this can only happen in Southern California—this is just what Southern California is like. When contrasted against the many images in the book of the region's banks, schools, and government buildings, the "Just Southern California" photo represents the home as a type of garden sanctuary where middle class whites can escape from the stresses of urban life and its "cosmopolitan" diversity. (Image 7)

Image 7: Woman in the garden from *Los Angeles California: City and County* (1921)

The family home was the site where normative notions of sexuality intersected with middle class sensibilities to create the white suburban dream on which Los Angeles was built. That this home was at the center of this booster image of Southern California was no accident. As Richard Dyer has shown in his work in critical whiteness studies, representations of whiteness—as a normative racial category—are deeply linked to heterosexuality. Dyer writes, "Race is a means of categorizing different types of human bodies which reproduce themselves…Heterosexuality is the means of ensuring, but also the site of endangering, the reproduction of those differences."[39] Dyer goes on to explain how the trope of "the fallen woman" lays at the center of constructions of white womanhood. He writes that white women "carry—or in many instances betray—the hopes and achievements of the race."[40] The booster image of Los Angeles implicitly acknowledged this threat to

[39] Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 20.
[40] Dyer, *White*, 21.

white womanhood and presented the home as a type of refuge against this threat. In an era in which white middle class families were still expected to be supported by male breadwinners, the family home was sold to the man of the family through the emphasis of the woman in the garden. Here, the garden represented a site of refuge for the white woman from the temptations modern life. The garden of the Los Angeles family home can be seen as representing the Biblical garden of Christianity and the place where Adam and Eve lived before Eve succumbed to temptation.

While the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce's 1921 guidebook linked race, landscape, and the single-family homes together in implicit ways, some developments and cities in Southern California during the period were more explicit in their advocacy of white supremacy. An advertisement for the new subdivision of Eagle Rock put it in 1925, "as you journey about Eagle Rock, enjoying immeasurably the ideal climate that is ours, you will observe that the residents are all of the white race—and you will note that building restrictions have prevented the construction of unsightly homes."[41] In another local city, the Santa Monica *Weekly Intercept* declared to prospective black residents 1922, "We don't want you here; now and forever, this is to be a white man's town."[42] In selling the idea of Los Angeles to prospective transplants, the promoters of the Los Angeles suburban ideal explicitly linked whiteness and racial exclusion to the notion of the single-family home. Of course, it wasn't only through booster literature that the white suburban idea of Los Angeles was promoted across the nation. In the 1910s, at the moment that the city of Los Angeles was developing and the image of the city as defined by the suburban family home was taking hold, the film industry began its relocation to Southern California. The industry would play a profound role in the way that the city was imagined.

While the exact date is under dispute, most scholars believe that the first temporary studio in Southern California was set up by the Selig Polyscope company at the corner of Seventh and Olive Streets behind a Chinese laundry around 1907.[43] Soon thereafter, the Selig Company moved its studio to a permanent site in Edendale, northwest of downtown. The New York Motion Picture Company followed suit in 1909 opening a studio a block away. The Biograph Company began sending D.W. Griffith to shoot films in the Southern California between 1909 and 1910.[44] In 1911, the Nestor Film Company established the first permanent Hollywood studio at the corner of Gower and Sunset streets.[45] Between 1912 and 1913, most of the nation's major film companies had rented or purchased lots in Southern California including Universal, Famous Players-Lasky, Vitagraph, Kalem and Triangle.[46] By 1915, the film industry had consolidated primarily around two areas in Southern California: Hollywood and Culver City. As studios expanded, across Southern California the process of producing a film became more formalized with studios adopting a division of labor that would remain a hallmark of the studio system in the coming decades. For example by 1916, the New York Motion Picture Company built an expanded film studio in Culver City that included eight stages, an administration building, and 300 dressing rooms. This new studio featured a division of labor that included separate jobs for a producer, script scenario writer, a film director and film editor.[47] Although some studios remained on the East Coast during this period, it was increasingly common by the

[41] "Eagle Rock," *Los Angeles Times*, October 15, 1925, 9.
[42] Quoted in Fogelson, *Fragmented Metropolis*, 200.
[43] Mark Shiel, *Hollywood Cinema and the Real Los Angeles*, (New York: Reaktion Books), 31.
[44] Sklar, *Movie Made America*, 67.
[45] Paul Bahn, *The Archaeology of Hollywood: Traces of the Golden Age* (New York: Rowan & Littlefield, 2014).
[46] Jeffery Charles and Watts, Jill, "(Un)real estate: Marketing Hollywood in the 1910s and 1920s," in Desser and Jowett ed. *Hollywood Goes Shopping* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 258.
[47] Janet Steiger, "Dividing Labor for Production Control: Thomas Ince and the Rise of the Studio System," *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 18. No 2 (Spring, 1979), 16-25.

mid-1910s for the business operations to remain in New York City or Chicago even as production relocated to California.[48]

While not selling Los Angeles to the world in the same ways that the booster literature did, the film industry promoted the suburban image of Los Angeles in other ways. Film historian Mark Sheil has demonstrated the ways in which films shot in Los Angeles in 1910s and 1920s helped to familiarize the American movie-going public with the built environment of Los Angeles with its particular form of urban growth. Sheil argues that more so than any other genre, slapstick comedies by performers such as Harold Lloyd, Charlie Chaplin, and Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy better known as Laurel and Hardy utilized the urban landscape of Los Angeles as key components of both their narratives and *mise-en-scene*. At a time when the urbanization and suburbanization of the nation as whole was rapidly increasing, slapstick comedies familiarized audiences with Los Angeles. Featuring suburban architecture, beaches, palm trees, and open streets with long lines of sight and mobility by streetcar or automobile, the content of these films featured aspects of Los Angeles that would soon become iconic. [49] Yet at the same time, that slapstick comedies were familiarizing audiences with Los Angeles, these films were rarely set in Los Angeles.[50] For example, many of Harold Lloyd's films were often set in unnamed small towns while Chaplin set films shot in Los Angeles in a variety of places.[51] Regardless of where they were set, these slapstick comedies implicitly helped promote the new archetype of urban life that was then explicitly being sold by Los Angeles city boosters and real estate industry. Thus film worked in tandem with booster literature to promote an image of Los Angeles as representing a new, distinct form of city life with the white-owned, suburban family home at its center.

The Chinatown of the Popular Imagination

The image of white suburban life that boosters, newspaper publishers, and real estate brokers sold of Los Angeles was meant to sharply contrast with the image of immigrant tenement living that had long symbolized by East Coast cities like New York. As the booster Charles Loomis declared of Los Angeles in 1895, "the ignorant, hopelessly un-American type of foreigner which infests and largely controls Eastern cities is almost unknown here."[52] Coming at a moment when East Coast cities were experiencing cresting immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe, Loomis's words spoke as much to the image he and other boosters hoped to present of the city as they did of the city's reality. Many US-born whites regarded the large numbers of immigrants from places like Russia, Italy, and Greece with suspicion and even disdain, and yet there was one ethnic group in particular that white Americans regarded as the apotheosis of foreign difference. This immigrant group was the Chinese. Not only did the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act serve as the basis for later laws limiting Southern and Eastern Europeans, but the image of Chinatown that circulated so readily around the nation at the turn of the twentieth century also came to serve as one of the implicit archetypes of a slum against which the new vision of Los Angeles with its single family homes was imagined. As a perceived site of urban disease, violence, and non-normative family life, the imagined space of Chinatown represented one of a handful of imagined racialized threats against which the white woman in her

[48] Sklar, *Movie Made America,* 68.
[49] Sheil, *Hollywood Cinema and the Real Los Angeles*, 83.
[50] Sheil, *Hollywood Cinema and the Real Los Angeles*, 86.
[51] Sheil, *Hollywood Cinema and the Real Los Angeles*, 87-88.
[52] Quoted in Kevin Starr, *Inventing the Dream: California Through the Progressive Era* (Oxford New York: University Press, 1986), 89.

suburban garden ostensibly sought refuge. While dime novels, songs, and theater all played an important role in advancing Yellow Peril stereotypes of Chinatown, it would be trough the visual medium of silent cinema that Yellow Peril stereotypes of the Chinese American ethnic enclaves would find some of their largest audiences.

Chinatown became an object of fascination for motion pictures long before the development of the classical studio system or the relocation of the film industry to Hollywood from the East Coast. In the earliest years of the medium before narrative became the driving force in cinematic productions, images of Chinatown were part of an array of short scenes used by Edison, Biograph, and other earlier film companies to attract viewers. In the period before 1907, Tom Gunning has argued that attraction more so than narrative was the defining aspect of the cinema. According to Gunning this cinema of attractions "directly solicits spectator attention, inciting curiosity and supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle—a unique event, whether fictional or documentary, that is of interest itself."[53] In the earliest years when this cinema of attractions held sway over American films, exhibitors had a huge amount of control over the program of short films that audiences saw. These early audiences often encountered films in vaudeville theaters or on shows put on by touring projectionists.[54] The venue in which these films were seen, the selection of shorts, the order in which films were shown, the music that accompanied them, and the circumstances in which viewers saw these films varied considerably from one exhibitor to the next. This meant that film viewers encountered these early images of Chinatown in widely varied circumstances.

Chinatown-themed films were a common part of this early cinema of attractions. Even though many of these early Chinatown films were so-called *actualities*—short films of daily life—these early documentaries often drew on longstanding stereotypes about Chinese people while helping to lay the groundwork for the image of Chinatown that would follow in the subsequent periods. As early as 1897 the Edison Company produced a two-shot film focused on the arrest of a Chinese man in San Francisco Chinatown. The first shot shows the Chinese man being pushed along by two police officers on a San Francisco Street. The two officers push the man off screen and the camera continues to film the large crowd of well-dressed white male pedestrians in suits and hats following behind the arrested man and officers. The film then cuts to its second shot with the Chinese man in the back of a horse drawn wagon, as the two officers and three other men ride away from the camera.[55]

This early Edison film was not the only early film to associate Chinatown with illegality. Indeed films drew on tropes that had been associated with Chinatowns long before the arrival of cinema and often drew on associations of Chinatown and illicit behavior. For example, films produced by the American Mutoscope and Biograph Company, the main competitor to the Edison Manufacturing Corporation between 1898 and 1907 also featured illicit activity in Chinatown. The Biograph films *A Chinese Opium Joint* (1898) and *A Raid on an Opium Den* (1900) both build on fears of white women being lured into depravity by Chinese men. The 1898 film shows a white woman smoking opium with a Chinese man, while the 1900 film shows a police raid on an opium den where the police manage to rescue the white victims before the Chinese proprietor introduces the drug to them.[56] In 1905 Biograph released the short comedy

[53] Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde" *Wide Angle* 8. No 3/4 (1986), 40.
[54] Sklar, *Movie Made America*, 13-14.
[55] Thomas A. Edison, Inc, *Arrest in Chinatown, San Francisco, Cal*. (United States: Thomas A. Edison, Inc, 1897), film from the Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/item/00694412/.
[56] John Haddad, "The Laundryman's Got a Knife" *Chinese America: History and Perspective* (2001), 31-46.

Rube in an Opium Den. The film depicted a tour guide who led his tour through an opium den filled with white opium addicts.

Even when early silent films did not draw as explicitly on illegality as the films about opium dens and the Chinatown arrest did, many early films still associated Chinese with crime and violence indirectly. In 1903, the Edison camera returned to San Francisco Chinatown and filmed the funeral of Tom Kim Yung, whose death had been covered in papers across the nation.[57] Tom Kim Yung had been a military attaché to the Chinese Legation in Washington D.C. After being mistaken for a criminal and assaulted on a San Francisco street by a police officer, Tom Kim Yung was tied to a fence by his queue and eventually thrown into prison. Tom King Yung was so ashamed by the incident that he committed suicide. These events had been well covered in the nation's press including the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *The Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Chicago Tribune*.[58] The Edison short builds on this publicity. The two-minute-long film shows a large crowd watching a funeral procession pass along DuPont Avenue, the main street in Chinatown. These films show that even from its earliest depictions in film Chinatown drew on both fear and fascination so long associated with the district.

These early films set in Chinatown did not exhaust the catalogue of short silent films about Chinese Americans. As John Haddad has shown, short films about China and Chinese people produced by American film companies between 1894 and 1910 covered a range of related topics from comedies about Chinese laundries to actualities of showing Chinatown guides using chopsticks in Chinese restaurants. Haddad argues that these early films "tend to reflect not the actual life in either China or Chinatown but the numerous images of these that were adrift in the American consciousness at the turn of the century."[59] In addition to numerous films about opium use, Haddad shows how some of the earliest films also focused on Chinese laundries. In 1894, the Edison company cameraman Thomas Heise filmed the vaudeville team of Robetta and Doretto in at Edison's Black Mario Studio in New Jersey. The twenty-one second, one-shot film features two white vaudeville performers dressed as Chinese men. The film represents one of the earliest filmed Yellowface performances—a practice wherein white actors utilized make-up in order perform characters of Asian descent. One man is dressed as a policeman and the other as a Chinese laundry worker in front of a wooden set labeled, "New Fun Laundry." The laundry worker hits the policeman over the head with a wooden bucket before the two men chase around the two doors set. The laundry worker eventually climbs on top of the set before throwing a sign down on the policeman.[60] Biograph also produced Chinese laundry films including *In a Chinese Laundry* (1897) and *Ghosts in a Chinese Laundry* (1900).[61] Early silent films associating Chinatown with illegality, violence, and drugs would continue to appear in more complex narrative films even after film producers began to relocate their operation to the Los Angeles area.

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[57] Thomas Edison Inc., "San Francisco Chinese Funeral" (United States: Thomas Edison, Inc, 1903).
[58] "Insult Cause of Suicide," *Washington Post*, September 18, 1903, 2; "Killed Self to Save Face," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 17, 1903, 12. "Obituary, Tom Kim Yung," *Chicago Daily Tribune* September 24, 1903, 4; "Honor to Tom From Chinese," *Los Angeles Times*, September 24, 1903, 3.
[59] Haddad, "The Laundryman's Got a Knife," 32.
[60] William Heise Camera, *[Robetta and Doretto, no. 2]*, (United States: Edison Manufacturing Co, 1894) film from the Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/item/00694137/.
[61] Haddad, "The Laundryman's Got a Knife," 34.

While Chinatown films continued to be filmed in New York and Chicago throughout the silent period, by the late 1910s, the bulk of the nation's Chinatown films were shot in the Los Angeles area. The earliest Chinatown films shot in Southern California had titles like *The Hop Smugglers* (1914), *The Highbinders* (1916), *The Chinatown Villains* (1916) and *The Flower of Doom* (1916). Unlike the Edison Chinatown films, which had been shot in the streets of San Francisco, most Los Angeles Chinatown films from the 1910s were filmed not on location in Chinatown but rather on quickly made sets in film studios. The films were often cheaply made for a mass audience. Most of these early Chinatown films relied on common tropes such as the presence of a hidden underground Chinatown and stock characters such as nefarious Tong leaders, white women in distress, and white male saviors, to produce films that could be easily understood by popular audiences. These cinematic images of Chinatown combined with other popular representations of Chinatown to fashion the image of Chinatown as the archetypical immigrant slum. At the same time that city boosters were constructing the white suburban ideal of Los Angeles, the region's film producers were constructing an image of the nation's Chinatown as the apotheosis of urban ethnic decay and danger.

One of these earliest Chinatown films produced in Southern California was the 1915 film *The Highbinders.* (Image 8) The film was produced by Majestic Motion pictures, one of the many independent film companies with studios in Los Angeles and business headquarters in New York and was directed by Tod Browning. The film follows the story of Maggie, the daughter of a saloonkeeper who attempts to escape from a forced marriage to one of her father's friends by taking refuge in a Chinatown shop. The Chinese shopkeeper convinces Maggie to marry him. Maggie and the Chinese shopkeeper have a baby girl named, Ah Woo, and then a son. Twenty years later, the Chinese shopkeeper sells his mixed-race daughter to the head of a local tong. The Tong leader takes Ah Woo prisoner in what *Reel Life* magazine describes as "the

Image 8: Stills from *The Highbinders* from *Motion Picture News*, April 17, 1915.

Third Circle, the lowest of the underground passageways in Chinatown."[62] Ah Woo's brother enlists the of Jack Donovan, "an attractive Irishman, who keeps a gambling hall on the border of Chinatown." Ah Woo's brother and Jack Donovan rescue Ah Woo after "a startling series of fights, killings, flights overroofs, and through devious alleys."[63] The film ends when Jack Donovan gives up his saloon, marries Ah Woo, and takes his new bride and her brother to live with him on a ranch.

Similarly, in *Flower of Doom* (1916), which was shot in Los Angeles by Universal's Red Feather studios, Harvey Pearson, a newspaper reporter, and Neva Sacon, a dancer, go to Chinatown together and visit the store of Ah Wong. *Moving Picture World* describes what happens: "There the proprietor sees Neva and makes plans with some of his servants to kidnap her. While Harvey is looking at some silks in another room, a panel opens behind her and she is pulled through the opening."[64] The white female lead is kidnapped and held in a secret room in Chinatown located behind the trap door. Neva is eventually rescued after being exchange for Tea Rose, the wife of Ah Wong who has also been kidnapped. In Thomas Inces' *The Midnight Patrol* (1919), also shot in Southern California, Wu Fang a local tong leader teams up with Jim Murdock a corrupt politician to kidnap a local settlement house worker named Patsy O'Connell in order to prevent the sergeant of the Chinese vice squad from conducting a raid on his opium den. The film ends with the police sergeant killing Wu Fang, arresting Jim Murdock, and freeing Patsy O'Connell. The sergeant is promoted to Police Chief and Patsy O'Connell promises to marry him.[65]

A central theme of these early Chinatown melodramas was the narrative of white women held captive by Asian men. In analyzing cinematic representations from the period, film studies scholar Gina Marchetti foregrounds the central role that the threat of rape played in the formulation of Yellow Peril discourses. Writing of depictions of Asian men and white women, Marchetti states: "these fantasies tend to link together national-cultural and personal fears, so that the rape of the white woman becomes a metaphor for the threat posed to Western culture as well as a racialization for Euroamerican imperial ventures in Asia."[66] And yet as Marchetti points out these melodramas focused on the captivity of white women at the hand of Asian men were not without their contradictions. The popularity of these melodramas arose during a period, when the growth of middle class white society was reshaping domestic space for those in this emergent class. Women became the primary consumers in these households charged with ensuring the family maintained status through consumption. Within this context, Marchetti argues foreign cultures not only represented a threat to Western values but also "a promised release from Victorian constraints and an implicit permission to indulge oneself sensually through the consumption of exquisitely exotic commodities."[67] In these early melodramas about Chinatown, the district itself comes to represent both a site of fear and a site of fascination. For white spectators, these stories about white women's captivity in Chinatown are equally about threat of rape to white women but they are also about a fascination with the exotic and the allure of the Orient at a moment when the white middle class domestic sphere was being transformed.

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[62] "The Highbinders," *Reel Life*, April 03, 1915, 14.
[63] "The Highbinders," *Motion Picture News*, May 1, 1915, 82.
[64] "The Flower of Doom," *Moving Picture Weekly*, April 4, 1916, 12-13.
[65] "The Midnight Patrol," *Motion Picture News*, February 22, 1919, 1224.
[66] Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the Yellow Peril: Race, Sex, and Discursive Startegies in Hollywood Fiction*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 4.
[67] Marchetti, *Romance and the Yellow Peril*, 28.

Recurring tropes such as that of white women in captivity in Chinatown weren't limited to melodramas. Most of the same tropes appeared in slapstick comedies. The theme is visible in *Chinatown Villains,* a comedy produced in 1916 by Southern California-based Mutual Company. *Moving Picture World* writes that a considerable portion of the film "takes place in an opium den where the young woman of the play is brought by an angry suitor and left bound hand and foot. Some good slapstick comedy is contained in this film, and many audiences would enjoy it."[68] In *Freed by Fido* released by Vogue Film Company in 1917, the actress Lillian Hamilton plays, "a pampered child of fortune," who convinces her father to escort her and her friends through Chinatown. She is captured by the local business owner in Chinatown and held against her will in the cellar until she escapes in part with the help of her dog, Fido.[69] *Officer! Call a Cop!* (1917) tells the story of an inept cop called upon to save a white female settlement home worker from a violent tong. *Motion Picture News* writes, "It is the funniest kind of comedy, for Bill is scared stiff and he get the fact over to an audience his own hilarious way."[70]

During the silent film period, producers generally represented Chinatown as being composed of two parts: one area that was visible to white visitors, and then another that existed behind or below the visible surface of Chinatown that lay out of sight to white visitors. This visible Chinatown included storefronts, restaurants, and Chinatown streets—in short all the parts of the community that would be visible to a white visitor without a specialized guide. The visible Chinatown was often the site of commerce for both white visitors and Chinese residents alike. In contrast, the underground Chinatown included opium dens, backroom gambling houses, hidden temples, and secret underground passages all of which were accessible through trapdoors and sliding wall panels and located behind or underneath the stores and restaurants. Silent films most commonly featured narratives that saw white protagonists move from the visible Chinatown to the underground Chinatown. Within silent film narratives, this movement was facilitated by the kidnapping of a white female lead who was held against her will in the underground Chinatown until she was rescued by the film's white male protagonists. Regardless of whether the films were melodramas or comedies, the underlying representation of Chinatown was the same. The visible Chinatown represented in many ways the allure of exotic commodities for the white consumer. In contrast, the underground Chinatown represented the threat to white womanhood.

If the Los Angeles single family home with its private garden was meant to symbolize a space of purity and protection where the married white heterosexual couple came together to raise their children, then the underground Chinatown of the silent film era came to represent the suburban home's symbolic antithesis—a site that symbolized kidnapping, threats of rape, and interracial mixing between Chinese men and white women. As Nayan Shah has shown beginning in the late nineteenth century Chinatown were often popularly portrayed as embodying a type of "queer domesticity" where Chinese American familial relationships were seen as representing deviant forms of heterosexuality.[71] In the popular imagination, Chinese American men were all bachelors living with other men in America separated from their wives and children in China, and Chinese women were all prostitutes living with other women. Chinatown films helped extend this notion of queer domesticity to the build environment itself. Not only did these bachelors live in homosocial environments, but their homes were pictured as webs of hidden underground tunnels, where the threat of violence and captivity was always lurking.

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[68] "The Chinatown Villians," *Moving Picture World*, May 27 1916, 1537.
[69] "Freed By Fido," *Moving Picture World*, April 7, 1917, 156.
[70] "Officer! Call a Cop!" *Motion Picture News*, August 25, 1917, 1294.
[71] Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 13-14.

Beginning in the 1920s, the major studios in Southern California began producing Chinatown films with bigger budgets and well-known stars. In the 1920s studios released Chinatown films staring some of the biggest names of the silent era including Sessue Hayakawa, Buster Keaton, and Harold Lloyd. While the themes of these high-profile Chinatown films often mirrored those of their cheaply made counterparts from the 1910s, the productions values were now much higher. By the 1920s, studios increasingly shot exterior scenes not on back lots but rather in Old Chinatown itself. Films like Shirley Mason's *Wing Toy* (1921), Sessue Hayakawa's *The Tong Man* (1921), Buster Keaton's *Cameraman* (1928), and Harold Lloyd's *Welcome Danger* (1929) featured exterior scenes filmed in Los Angeles's Old Chinatown—even if most of the interior scenes were produced at film studios around Southern California. If the *mise-en-scene* of earlier Chinatown films produced in Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago were indistinguishable from one another in that they were all produced on studio sets, the films produced in the Los Angeles area in the 1920s were now often marked as such by the presence of exterior scenes shot in Old Chinatown.

One of the first major Hollywood films to highly publicize its use of Old Chinatown was *Wing Toy*, which was produced by the Fox Film Corporation. The film was shot in Los Angeles Chinatown over a series of months, a fact that was publicized in the trade press. The *Exhibitor's Herald* announced, "New Vehicle for Shirley Mason Is filmed in Chinatown in Los Angeles."[72] In addition to shooting exteriors of the film in Chinatown, the producers also hired James Wang to serve as a technical advisor and to recruit Chinese American background performers to appear in the film. *Motion Picture World* reported that, "One of the most sensational interiors ever used in a picture is said to be a big Chinese gambling room. This elaborate set has dragons and other grotesque figures form the background for some of the most thrilling scenes of the story." The publication went on to describe the exterior scenes, stating, "The exteriors was taken in Los Angeles' Chinatown, with its alleys runways, narrow stairways and dark corners."[73]

In combining exteriors shot in Los Angeles Chinatown with interiors scenes featuring Chinese props and background performers, *Wing Toy* attempted to distinguish itself as an authentic alternative to its many cheaply made competitors set in Chinatown. Despite these attempts at differentiation, many of the underlying themes of the *Wing Toy* remained the same as earlier Chinatown films, which was noted by the press upon the film's release. *Moving Picture World wrote*, "the plot is one of quite obvious quality since it develops that the girl is of American birth and there is the usual America hero."[74] Another publication wrote, "Shirley Mason turns a conventional type of heroine into a decidedly charming figure, and lends a considerable degree of charm to a somewhat commonplace story."[75] Indeed the film touched on similar themes in earlier more cheaply made Chinatown films even as it claimed authenticity with its exteriors shot in Old Chinatown and its elaborate and detailed Chinatown sets.

The film follows the story of a young girl named Wing Toy played by Shirley Mason. A laundryman named Wong adopted Wing Toy and raised her in Chinatown leading Wing Toy to believe that she is Chinese. When Wing Toy is sixteen Wong tells her that she is not in fact his daughter but rather the daughter of a white woman and that she was left with him by a convict known as the Mole. To secure a better future for her, Wong has promised her in marriage to a local Tong leader named Yen Low. Yen Low already has a white wife named White Lily that he

[72] "New Vehicle for Shirley Mason is Filmed In Chinatown Los Angeles," *Exhibitor's Herald*, January 21, 1921, 71.
[73] "Fox Uses Real Oriental Settings in 'Wing Toy' Shirley Mason's Vehicle," *Motion Picture World*, September 22, 1921, 415.
[74] "Wing Toy," *Moving Picture World*, February 12, 1921, 816-817.
[75] "The Silent Drama" *Life*, March 3, 1921, 320.

captured and married years before, but he plans to divorce White Lily and marry Wing Toy. A local news reporter named Bob Harris investigates and gets Wing Toy released. Eventually White Lily kills Yen Low. Bob Harris then determines that Wing Toy is actually the daughter of the local district attorney. The film ends with the Bob Harris and Wing Toy engaged to marry.[76] The *Exhibitor Herald* reported that "many of the scenes depict life in Chinatown's gambling dens and haunts of the illicit dealer in habit forming drugs with plenty of melodramatic action in the way of fights between the almond eyed denizens…"[77]

Wing Toy continues the dichotomy between the visible and the underground Chinatown seen in earlier Chinatown films. Silent films generally positioned the physical differences of the neighborhood, and in particular the presence of an unseen underground Chinatown, as a symbolic threat to normative ideas of race, gender, and sexuality. Indeed underground Chinatown was portrayed as a threat primarily through its representations as the site of captivity for white women. At the heart of this fear lay the threat that the white woman, who was meant to embody the promise a racially pure white future through her ability to bear children with her white husband, would instead fall prey to illicit sexual encounters with Chinese men. This fear is embodied in the character of Wing Toy. Raised in Chinatown she comes to believe she is Chinese and takes on a Chinese persona. Indeed her characters assumption of the role of the Chinese daughter itself represents a forbidden type of racial mixing. In a sense, living in Chinatown transforms Wing Toy symbolically into a Chinese woman. Like most Chinatown films *Wing Toy* uses its narrative to reestablish the normative order by having the title character of the film being rescued by the young white male reporter and agreeing to marry him.

The themes of the underground Chinatown as an urban threat reached perhaps their largest global audience in the 1929 Harold Lloyd film, *Welcome Danger,* one of the final films of the silent era. Produced at the moment when Hollywood was transitioning between silent pictures and sound films, *Welcome Danger* was shot in Los Angeles and featured exteriors filmed in Old Chinatown. In part because Lloyd was targeting the film for wide international and nation release, and significant numbers of theaters had not made the transition to sound, Lloyd produced two different versions of the film one silent and the other with recorded synchronized dialogue. While the film received mixed reviews, *Welcome Danger* went on to be one of Lloyd's most commercially successful films as his numerous fans lined up to hear his voice on film for the first time.[78] While many films about Chinatown were cheaply produced, and had short runs in a limited number of theaters, *Welcome Danger* was the third most successful film of 1929 and was screened to audiences across the globe.

The film follows the story of Harold Bledsoe, a botanist and son of the late police chief of San Francisco, who is called to the city by his father's former colleagues to help solve a crime wave in Chinatown, which is being led by a figure named "The Dragon." On the way West, Bledsoe's train has engine troubles, and the passengers disembark. Harold Bledsoe meets a young woman named Billie Lee and her younger brother whose car has broken down. The woman and her brother are traveling to San Francisco so the young boy can see Dr. Gow, a well-respected Chinese physician. Bledsoe arrives and goes to the police station where he learns about fingerprinting. Eventually, Bledsoe and Dr. Gow discover opium in a flowerpot Bledsoe purchased at a Chinatown shop. When Dr. Gow goes to Chinatown to confront the opium dealers, he is kidnapped by the henchmen of the Dragon. Bledsoe goes to Chinatown to save Dr.

[76] "Wing Toy," *Moving Picture World*, February 12, 1921, 816-817.
[77] "New Vehicle for Shirley Mason is Filmed in Chinatown in Los Angeles," *Exhibitor's Herald*, January 22, 1921, 71.
[78] "It was Lloyd's First Talkie and Last Silent," *Los Angeles Times*, August 13, 2008, E3.

Gow and with the help of the a bumbling beat police officer, named Clancy, the two discover a maze of hidden tunnels below the Chinatown flower shop and eventually save the kidnapped Dr. Gow. The film ends with Harold Bledsoe engaged to marry Billie Lee.

While the film is replete with stereotypes about Chinese Americans, including showing them as opium smugglers and violent gang members, Chinatown itself also plays an important part in the film's narrative. Likes so many films about Chinatowns, *Welcome Danger* was not set in Los Angeles. None-the-less exterior scenes shot in and around Los Angeles including in Old Chinatown are central to the film's *mise-en-scene*. The film is largely set in three locales: the countryside where the train breaks down; the San Francisco police station where Bledsoe arrives to help solve the Chinatown crime wave; and Chinatown with its underground lairs. Like most Chinatown films, this one involves a kidnapping which lures the main character into the underground Chinatown. Unlike in most Chinatown narrative though, the kidnapping is of the Chinese male doctor not a white woman. Most of the final hour of the film takes place in the underground Chinatown. Beldsoe and Clancy enter the underground lair through a hidden door in the flower shop. The film represents underground Chinatown as a successive series of tunnels each lower than the next. In doing so, the film paints a visual contrast between the rural countryside, where Bledsoe and Billie meet and engage in a series of romantic antics, and underground Chinatown, where Bledsoe and Clancy are pursued by a seemingly increasing number of Chinese tong members as they search for the captured Dr. Gow. The film advances preexisting stereotypes about underground Chinatown to lay the groundwork for its visual and verbal jokes.

By 1930, Los Angeles had become a key site through which two contrasting images of urbanization were promoted to the nation at large. One the one hand, Los Angeles boosters sold the image of Los Angeles as representing a new type of white suburban life grounded in the single-family home. On the other hand, Hollywood films publicized the images of the underground Chinatown as a site of social disorder and interracial mixing that threatened whiteness itself. Los Angeles projected these diametrically opposed visions of urban life across the United States at a moment when the nation's cities and suburbs were both rapidly expanding. Much more than simply representations confined to the nation's movie theaters, these contrasting images of urban development had a profound influence on the lives of people of color who lived in Southern California. White fears of Chinatown had social ramifications far beyond the Chinese American community. Certainly, representations of Chinatown as a site of racial mixing came to stand in for a whole host of fears commonly held by whites about living in proximity to people of color. In Los Angeles, white developers and lawmakers constructed policies based on these fears that defined how the city developed and which groups were allowed to fully take part in this expanding suburban dream. In this way the contrasting images of Los Angeles as a city of homes and Chinatown as a representation of urban blight played an important cultural role in supporting the legal and social mechanisms used to segregate residents of color in Los Angeles during a period of rapid expansion.

Los Angeles Chinatown as the City's Racial Other

Grounded in a politics of white supremacy, the suburban dream of Los Angeles that city boosters sold to whites was often more of a nightmare for the city's Black, Asian American, and Mexican American residents. Most of the designers of the white suburban Southern California dream had little interest in extending opportunities to any of their non-white neighbors. Through the use of restrictive covenants and homeowner's associations, the city's non-white population

was forcibly segregated into certain areas of Los Angeles. While more than 10% of the city of Los Angeles was non-white in 1930, most of these people of color lived in older housing stock in central areas' of Los Angeles. Zoning laws insured that these areas were either adjacent to or located in the industrial areas of the city. These racially mixed neighborhoods had higher instances of industrial pollution and more multi-family dwellings making them incongruent with the booster's white suburban ideal. Yet within this multi-ethnic environment, particular neighborhoods in this central district were imaged as having different racial characteristics. Despite the relatively small size of the local Chinese American community, Old Chinatown became one of the most visible, and symbolically important neighborhoods to the way in which white Angelenos imagined the city's racial composition.

While Los Angeles had a sizable Japanese American, African American, and Mexican American population, Chinese Americans made up a less numerically significant part of the city's residents. In 1900 there were only 2,062 Chinese in a city of 102,479. The 1930 census, listed 3,009 in the city. This still represented less than one quarter of one percent of the total population. In 1930, the number of Chinese was far less than the 21,081 Japanese Americans or 38,894 African Americans that called Los Angeles home in 1930, and fewer than the estimated 4,000 Filipinos that lived in the city on a permanent basis.[79] Furthermore, increasing numbers of Chinese Americans chose not to live in Chinatown. Large numbers of Chinese Americans had decided to settle in the multi-ethnic neighborhood that surrounded the City Market—a wholesale produce market at the intersection of Ninth and San Pedro Streets that provided produce to the city's groceries and restaurants. In this sense Los Angeles actually had two Chinese American neighborhoods, though only one of these was popularly known as Chinatown. In the first three decades of the twentieth century it was Chinatown more so than any other Asian immigrant enclave in the city that captured the imagination of the city's white residents. Chinatown and not Little Tokyo, Little Manila or Ninth Street, became the local embodiment of the Orient of the Western imagination and in particular Yellow Peril fears.

	White	Negro	Japanese	Chinese	Foreign-born Mexican	Total
1900	98,082	2,131	150	2,111	498	102,479
1910	305, 307	5,101	4,238	1,594	5,632	319,198
1920	546,864	15,579	11,618	2,062	21,598	576,673
1930	1,073,584	38,894	21,081	3,009	97,116*	1,238,048
1940	1,406,430	63,774	23,321	4,736	36,840	1,504,277

US CENSUS POPULATION OF THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES[80]

*In 1930, the census classified Mexicans as a non-white group. As a result the census count for that year includes both US born and Mexican born populations. In 1910, 1920 and 1940, Mexicans were considered white.

[79] Linda Espana-Maram, *Creating Masculinity in Los Angeles's Little Manila: Working Class Filipinos and Popular Culture 1920s-1950s,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 20.
[80] Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens*, 7.

Over the first three decades of the twentieth century, the city's Japanese American community grew much more rapidly than the Chinese American community. By 1930, there were seven times more Japanese Americans than Chinese Americans living in the city. While the white residents of Los Angeles were certainly aware of the Japanese American community, and Japanese Americans as a group were often the targets of Yellow Peril stereotyping, the neighborhood of Little Tokyo was rarely portrayed as having the same Yellow Peril attributes in the same way that Chinatown was. Hollywood produced few films about the nation's Japan towns, and Los Angeles newspaper ran few stories about the Little Tokyo neighborhood. Indeed reportage on Little Tokyo was so sparse that in 1929, *the Los Angeles Times* had to run a story introducing the neighborhood to its readers. The paper reported, "Los Angeles is a cosmopolitan city. Embraced in her ever expanding boundaries are many smaller cities. 'Little Tokio' [sic] is one."[81] The article describes the neighborhood using none of the imagery of vice and depravity used to describe Chinatown around the same period, instead painting a picture of an upwardly mobile, professional immigrant community: "Upstairs in these and other buildings are the offices of Japanese professionals, scores of them—brokers, lawyers, and doctors, specializing in eye, ear nose and throat, osteopathy, chiropractic, gynecology, dentistry, optometry, general surgery." Even as the Japanese established an identifiable neighborhood in and around first and Los Angeles Streets in the late 1920s, the city imagined this community as clean, modern, with a population that was increasingly willing to adopt western ways.[82]

By 1930, the number of Filipinos living in Los Angeles was slightly larger than the number of Chinese Americans and yet Little Manila occupied an even less prominent place in the city's popular imagination than Little Tokyo. When the local Filipino community wanted to celebrate Rizal Day, in celebration of the Filipino nationalist hero Jose Rizal, the community applied to hang flags on Broadway from First to Tenth Street in part as a way of introducing their presence to their white neighbors. Furthermore, the city's papers in the 1920s and 1930s almost never identified Little Manila as a distinct neighborhood in the city. Between 1920 and 1930 at a period of increasing anti-Filipino sentiments, the *Los Angeles Times* used the phrase Little Manila or Filipinotown less than a half dozen times in total in its reporting.[83] Even during a period of heightened anti-Filipino sentiments when reporting on violent crimes committed by Filipinos in the heart of the Filipino neighborhood, the paper did not identify the neighborhood as the center of the city's Filipino community.[84] This is not to say that Little Manila did not exist

[81] Ben S. Lemmon, "The Corners of Los Angeles: First and Los Angeles," *Los Angeles Times*, May 13, 1929, A4. Note that "Tokio" was a common spelling of the Japanese capital in the first half of the twentieth century.

[82] It should be noted that the period leading up the 1924 immigration was a period verilient anti-Japanese racism, when whites throughout Southern California linked Japanese with the worst aspects of Yellow Peril. As Natalia Molina has shown public health official in Los Angeles County in the late 1910s routinely depicted rural Japanese homes as unclean while suggesting that Japanese immigrant famers might be responsible for food-borne illnesses. These same depictions do not appear in *Los Angeles Times* depcitions of Little Tokyo from 1929. See Natalia Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens: Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 55-60.

[83] During this period Lee Shippey mentions "Filipinotown" once in his columns. He mentions the community again in 1932. See columns published on January 27, 1930 and April 2, 1932. In 1937, the *Los Angeles Times* ran an entire article introducing the Filipino neighborhood to its readers as part of series on the city's different communities. See "Cosmopolitan Los Angeles—Filipinos," December 5, 1937, A2. These articles though were exceptions since for the most part the city's reporters did not imagine Filipinos living in a distinct Filipino neighborhood in the same way as they did the Chinese.

[84] When Jack Dizon was murdered by another Filipino on East First Street in Los Angeles in the heart of the Filipino community, the *Los Angeles Times* described the events without ever attributing them in anyway to the surrounding neighborhood. This was in stark conrtast to the ways in which reportage of crime in Chinatown nearly portrayed as occurring in Chinatown. In this way

or was not a vibrant ethnic enclave, but simply to point out that the neighborhood barely occupied a space in the way most whites imagined the city. Newspapers often portrayed Filipinos as threat to the city's white residents, but it was through the city's dancehalls and not the Little Manila neighborhood, that white residents of the city imagined this threat. While white fear of Filipino men certainly played a prominent role in the racial formation the region's residents, Little Manila as an urban space did not play a role in the racialized imagination of the city's in the same way that Chinatown did.

In the period between 1910 and 1930, even as increasing numbers of Chinese Americans moved out of Chinatown into the area around Ninth and San Pedro Streets, this growing Chinese American neighborhood also hardly registered in the popular consciousness of the white residents of the city. Few newspaper articles followed the growth of the Chinese American community in this part of the city, and fewer, if any films, were set in this multiethnic Chinese American community. Led by the efforts of Chinese American wholesale produce dealers such as Louie Gwan, the Chinese took the lead in establishing the Ninth Street City Market in 1909. When the final number of shares were tallied, 373 Chinese investors held 81,850 shares, 94 Japanese investors held 36,250 shares, and 45 whites held 81,900 shares.[85] While whites controlled a slightly larger percentage of the corporation, Chinese made up the largest group of investors. In many ways this made sense. At the turn of the century, Chinese vegetable peddlers selling their goods from the back of hours drawn trucks dominated the market for fresh fruit and vegetables. One health official estimated in 1914 that there were no less than 500 Chinese vegetable peddlers at work in the city that year and incredible number when one considers that the 1910 census listed only 1,594 Chinese living in the city proper. The City Market not only provided fresh fruit and vegetables to hundreds of Chinese vegetable peddlers, but it also supplied fresh produce to restaurants and grocers around the city that were not Chinese. As such, the market soon became one of two major wholesale produce markets in the city during this period. In the decade after its 1909 opening the City Market soon became the center of the city's second Chinese American community. The large numbers of Chinese that chose to live in the vicinity of the City Market often did so alongside Japanese, Mexican, and European immigrants. As a result even though the area held a growing number of Chinese American residents, including a majority by the mid-1930s, the neighborhood had a decidedly multi-racial character.

The neighborhood and the market itself remained so far outside of the popular consciousness that when the *Los Angeles Times* ran an article profiling the Japanese presence at the market in 1922, the paper wrote of the market, "Do you know that Los Angeles is fed by foreigners, very largely by the Japs?"[86] The article went on to describe the market, "And among the big produce companies one finds these names, T.S. Takeuchi, Goo Hoo Kong and Co, Jafaris Bros., JP Millogiav, Harry Lukoff, Wing Jan, Shaprio Produce Co. Morris Rosenberg." The *Times* reporter does not attempt to hide her disdain or shock that such a integrated community of Chinese, Japanese, and Jewish immigrants working side-by-side could survive in Los Angeles without more American-born whites realizing the integral role this mix of players at the City Market played in supplying food to the entire city. Far from exemplifying a trend in reporting, this article represented one of the few *Los Angeles Times* articles to focus on the community.

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while Chinatown occupied an important place in the imagined geography of the city, Little Manila did not. See. "Filipino's Death Laid to Enemy," *Los Angeles Times*, April 23, 1931, 13.

[85] Elsie Yee and George Yee, "Chinese and the Los Angeles Produce Market," in Susie Ling ed., *Bridging the Centuries: History of Chinese in Southern California*, (Los Angeles: Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, 2001), 45-51.

[86] Myrtle Gebhart, "Americans Will Not Work," *Los Angeles Times*, September 10, 1922, III13.

By 1930, a significant portion of the city's Chinese Americans lived in the area around the Ninth Street City Market, and yet whites almost never referred to the Ninth Street Chinese American community as a Chinatown.[87] There were a number of reasons for this. First and foremost, the Ninth Street neighborhood did not conform to the popular idea of a Chinatown. Most of the housing stock was made up of older single-family homes. There were few if any of the multi-family units or large boarding houses for single men that existed in Chinatown. While the area did support a number of Chinese restaurants, markets, and even the Chinese Congregational Church, none of the businesses catered exclusively toward white tourists. As a result the Chinese American business owners in the Ninth Street area had little need for the overt performance of racialized Otherness that many businesses in Old Chinatown were forced to engage in. In addition to this, the area as a whole remained multi-ethnic even as it became home to significant portion of the city's Chinese American community.

In these ways, Little Tokyo, Little Manila, and the Chinese American enclave near Ninth Street did not capture the popular imagination of Los Angeles the way that Old Chinatown did. The city's paper barely covered these neighborhoods even though each of these neighborhoods was larger in size than Chinatown. At the same time the film industry had produced films about the nation's Chinatowns since its inception in the 1890s, but over this same period, the film industry almost never produced films that focused on Japantowns or Filipino American communities. Not just through film, but more broadly in popular culture, the imagined geography of Chinatown played a role in the cities across the United States had conceived of themselves since the late nineteenth century. Even as Chinese Exclusion reduced the overall size of the Chinese American community, and other waves of Asian immigrants began to arrive, these newer Asian immigrant urban communities never supplanted the place of Chinatown in the national imaginary. For all of these reasons, it was Chinatown more so than any other Asian immigrant neighborhood against which Los Angeles defined itself as a white city.

Old Chinatown during this period must have seemed to many whites like a throwback to another era. Taking up only a few square blocks in central Los Angeles directly off the Old Plaza, the boom times of the prior few decades that had brought the accouterments of modern living to the most of Los Angeles had largely passed the neighborhood by. Stretching east from Los Angeles Street, the area was criss-crossed by a series of small, narrow streets and alleys that gave parts of the community an almost claustrophobic feel. Old red brick buildings many with wooden balconies dotted the area. Most of the area's residents that called the neighborhood home lived in a situation of abject poverty, crowded into boarding houses or living in small, often windowless rooms behind their storefronts. Buildings often lacked bathing facilities, forcing residents to bathe at one of the community's Japanese-owned bathhouses. At night the streets were dark, the neighborhood's few streetlights leaving much of the area shrouded in darkness.[88]According to historian Mark Wild, the district did not receive streetlights until 1913,

[87] Chinese Americans refered to the area as *Giu Gai* in the Toisanese dialect, which meant "Ninth Street," but in English, Chinese Americans refered to the area as the Nineth Street Chinatown or simply "Ninth and San Pedro." On *Giu Gai* see Gilbert Hom, "Chinese Angelenos Before World War II," in *Duty and Honor: A Tribute to Chinese American World War II Veterans of Southern California*, Marjorie Lee ed. (Los Angeles: Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, 1998), 22. For an example of the use of "Nineth Street Chinatown" see Walter Chung Interview, Southern California Chinese American Oral History Project, January 8, 1980, Tape 2 Side B.

[88] For much of its history, Old Chinatown was slow to get infrastructural improvements in part because much of the community was claimed as private property of the Apablasa family. See Lynn C. Kronzek and Roberta S. Greenwood, "Historical Background" in *Down By the Station* by Roberta S. Greenwood (Los Angeles: Institute of Archeology, University of California, Los Angeles), 17.

and as late as 1922 the city had paved only two of the Chinatown's roads.[89] In part because much of the community lay on private land, many infrastructural improvements had been largely ignored over the prior decades leaving residents who couldn't afford to move out the neighborhood to deal with the conditions as best the could.

With its narrow alleyways and multifamily dwellings, Chinatown stood in stark contrast to the image of Southern California sold by city boosters, developers, and leaders. Unlike the Chinese community near Ninth and San Pedro Streets, with its single-family homes in a racially mixed neighborhood, Chinatown conformed closely to popular representations of Chinese American communities as insular segregated urban enclaves that circulated so regularly through American popular culture. Defined by multi-use buildings, narrow alleyways, and darkness rather than by single-family homes, front yards, and streetlights, Old Chinatown seemed to match Dana Bartlett's definition of a slum from his book, *The Better City*. Recall Bartlett's claim that the moral character of a people was reflected in the built environment and the ways in which he linked the family home with the happy, heteronormative white family. In many ways, white resident of Los Angeles saw Old Chinatown as the slum that Bartlett said did not exist in the city and attributed to this slum all of those moral and ethical characteristics that Bartlett claimed were inherent in slums. Thus, the urban space of Old Chinatown came to be racialized in way that the Ninth Street, Little Manila and Little Tokyo never were.

Throughout the early twentieth century, many in the city's competitive newspaper business used sensationalized stories set in Chinatown to increase their profits. On some level newspaper publishers must have recognized that the sentiments of fear and fascination so long associated with Chinatown could be used for their own economic benefit. As a result, the place of Chinatown in the cultural imaginary of the city came to far out-weigh the numerically limited size of the ethnic enclave's population. At the local level, the city newspapers helped construct an image of Los Angeles Chinatown very much in line with representations found in popular films, books and plays about Chinatowns that had circulated in the national imaginary. But they did so in a city that was in the process of promoting itself as a suburban alternative to places like New York and San Francisco. Therefore, even as popular representations of Chinatown in Los Angeles helped constitute notions of Chinese American racialized difference, they also helped constitute the way the city as a whole saw itself.

Despite being home to only a few thousand residents for most of the first three decades of the twentieth century, the city's papers devoted an inordinate amount of coverage to Chinatown. In the 1920s, for example, *the Los Angeles Times* ran more than eight hundred articles about various Chinatowns in the United States. In 1926 alone the paper contained more than eighty Chinatown stories. Readers of the *Los Angeles Times* who encountered stories about Chinatown, often found those articles focused on opium, gambling, and tongs. This is quite evident from the news coverage of Old Chinatown in the first four months of 1926 year in the *Los Angeles Times*. January opened with a headline in *Los Angeles Times* that read, "Tong outbreak in city feared." The article reported that "a heavy police guard was thrown into Chinatown" in Los Angeles in order to prevent a possible tong war following the killing of a member of the Hop Sing Tong in San Francisco. Later in the month, the paper ran a story entitled "Chinese Mission Thrives Amid Squalor" about the Chinese mission in Los Angeles Chinatown. The story described Old Chinatown as "a section of small homes of an older civilization in which custom outweighs sanitation," and went on to report "every home in Chinatown seems a gambling concession."[90]

[89] Wild, *Street Meeting*, 23.
[90] Myre Paule, "Chinese Mission Thrives Amid Squalor" *Los Angeles Times*, January 25, 1926, C20.

March brought the headline, "Pair of Chinese Seized in Drug Raid," with the *Los Angeles Times* reporting that one of the people arrested on Apablasa Street in Old Chinatown was possibly the fugitive known as "Hatchet Charlie."[91]

These were only stories about the Chinatown in Los Angeles. The stories in the Los Angeles papers about other Chinatowns during these first four months in 1936 were no better than of those about the local community. In February following a vice raid in Oxnard, the District Attorney called that Oxnard's China Alley the "place that has harbored more criminals than any other in Southern California." March brought reports again from Oxnard that police had confiscated $10,000 in opium after a "spectacular" raid. The *Los Angeles Times* reported, "Small dark rooms with barred windows, rooms without windows, bunks for opium smoking and other amazing things were uncovered when the doors were battered. One aged Chinaman too filled with opium to move was found by officers." That same month brought a report from the Chinatown in Liverpool, England of a Chinese man who was sent to the gallows for killing his wife and two daughters.[92] The associations with Chinatown and Chinese people were not subtle. Violence, squalor, gambling, drugs, and implied illicit sexual relations were all included in news stories about Chinatown published in Los Angeles in the first four month of 1926. Newspapers like the *Los Angeles Times*, selectively reported on the community in ways that reaffirmed the popular image that circulated of the nation's Chinatowns for more than half a century.

Chinese Americans Respond

Chinese Americans in Los Angeles and across the nation vehemently disagreed with depictions of the nation's Chinatowns as crime-ridden and contested their representations in newspapers and Hollywood films. Chinese Americans wrote letters to various newspapers, protesting the depictions of their communities. Chinese Americans also protested the screening of films they found offensive, and in a number of instances also tried to stop motion pictures from using Chinatown as a backdrop. A handful of Chinese Americans even produced and performed in their own films during the silent film period. Despite these efforts, Chinese Americans were largely locked out of both the larger studio system that produced, marketed, and distributed most films in United States and were generally not hired as writers or publishers in newspaper publishing industry. Thus while these actions certainly had some limited effects on individual representations of Chinese Americans, these and similar actions taken by Chinese Americans to shift dominant representations before 1930 had at best a limited effect.

On multiple occasions in the 1910s and 1920s, the residents of various Chinatowns protested cinematic representations of their community that they felt were demeaning. One of the earliest films to elicit protest by Chinese Americans was a film entitled, *The Chinatown Trunk Mystery*, which depicted the kidnapping and murder of Elsie Sigel by Chinese men. The film was based on one of the biggest news stories of 1909. Siegel was a white woman who worked with Chinese at missionary school in New York. She was found murdered in 1909 in a trunk and her death was blamed on Leon Ling one of her former students. Her death garnered national news coverage. When a film based on the news stories surrounding her death was released in 1911, Chinese up and down the West Coast protested. The Chinese consul in San Francisco was able to keep the film from being screened in that city. Protests also occurred in Los Angeles. *Moving Picture World* reported that Los Angeles Chinatown "had been flooded with yellow posters advertising the show at local theater." Several prominent Chinese Americans in Los Angeles

[91] "Pair of Chinese Seized in Raid By Drug Squad," *Los Angeles Times,* March 10 1926.
[92] "Gallows Victim Mourned," *Los Angeles Times*, March, 24, 1926, 11.

protested to the chief of police because they felt the film would reflect poorly on the character of Chinese people.[93] According to *Moving Picture World*, the police chief agreed to "prevent the screening of the film if he found it to be improper."

When the serial film the *Yellow Menace* was released in Chicago in 1916, local Chinese Americans protested the films release. According to a review of the film by *Motion Picture News* tells the story of Ali Singh, "the master Chinese criminal," as he spreads "his reign of terror and the futile attempts of the police and secret service men to capture him."[94] When the *World Theater* in Chicago tried to screen *Yellow Menace*, the theater's owner, Mr. Seaver, was met with protests. The theater was adjacent to two Chinese restaurants whose stores were tenants in the same building as the World Theater. The magazine *Motography* reported:

> As Oriental tenants became aware of his [Mr. Seaver's] intention of showing 'The Yellow Menace,' they protested mildly to him. Seaver made very little of these protests and passed them up without further consideration. However, the protests became more strenuous as time went on, and reached their climax when the Orientals declared that they would cancel their rental leases if he ran the picture. They maintained that if they permitted it to be shown it would result in considerable race hatred and consequent loss of business to them.[95]

Under pressure from his Chinese tenants Mr. Seaver canceled the film. In 1920, Chinese Americans in Portland, Oregon "filed a vigorous protest with the mayor" in an attempt to keep *The Tong Man* from being screened in that city, but the protests were unsuccessful.[96]

Yet Chinese American protests were not limited to after a film was released. Throughout the silent period, Chinese Americans on both the East Coast and the West Coast tried to stop various motion pictures scenes from being filmed when they deemed them to be demeaning. In Los Angeles, when the 1921 film *Shame* was being produced, Chinese American actors refused to appear in a scene from the film they found exploitative and degrading. Tom Gubbins, one of the primary recruiters of Chinese American acting talent who was often employed as a technical expert on the set of films with Chinese or Chinese American themes, recalls the reaction of the performers who were asked to perform in series of opium den scenes. Gubbins stated, "Do you think the Chinese would appear in those scenes? Not on your life! When they found out what was to be filmed they began moving away. Called to go on set, they would not budge."[97] Gubbins then recalled, "I was called and had to take great pains to explain that though the scene showed an opium den, the action would teach a splendid moral lesson and that it was their duty to help teach that lesson." Gubbins eventually convinced the Chinese American actors to perform in the scene but not without much hesitation.[98] Perhaps because of this general reticence by so many Chinese American performers to appear in films that they felt perpetuated stereotypes about their community during the silent period many silent studios and producers hired either white actors in yellowface or else Japanese American performers to play roles of Chinatown villains in films.

It wasn't only Chinese American performers who protested depictions of Chinatown, but residents as well. On at least two separate occasions, once in New York and once in Los Angeles, Chinese American crowds attempted to stop film crews from shooting the exteriors

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[93] "Chinese protest," *The Moving Picture World,* April 4, 1911, 705.
[94] "The Yellow Menace," *Motion Picture News*, September 23, 1916, 1891.
[95] "War in Chicago," *Motography*, September 23, 1916, 718.
[96] "Injunction Protects 'Tong Man' Opening," *Exhibitors Herald*, March 13, 1920, 46.
[97] "Our Chinese Movie Actors," *Picture Play Magazine*, September 1926, 83-85
[98] "Our Chinese Movie Actors," *Picture Play Magazine*, September 1926, 83-85.

scenes in Chinatown. One protest occurred in 1923 when the actor Thomas Meighan brought his cast and crew to New York Chinatown to film a scene without asking permission of the local residents. According to Associated Press, the film crew was met with "a shower of lamps, old furniture, and the ingredients of chop suey."[99] The news organization went on to report:

> A Chinatown merchant tonight pointed out that virtually every motion picture showing scenes of Chinatown portrayed the section as being made up of "dives and disreputable places," with "murder and shooting matches rife." Such an impression, he declared, was false and acted against all the law-abiding persons who lived there.[100]

A similar protest occurred in 1926 in Los Angeles Chinatown when George Melford and his crew attempted to film scenes for his film *Going Crooked*. *Motion Picture News* reported:

> Everything was 'set' and Melford had taken long shots of a taxi driving to the door of a Chinese shop when he noticed a crowd assembling at the entrance of the alley [...] The crowd suddenly began to close in around the camera. The younger Chinese began hooting and yelling at the actors in Chinese, blocking the camera and holding up the action. Requests to clear the scene availed to nothing and finally when shots began to fly Melford sent in a hurry to call for the police. It took two extra squads to quell the near riot that followed.[101]

Residents of the nation's Chinatowns were often quite angry with the racist representations found in stories told by major film producers and were more than willing to express those sentiments.

On a handful of occasions during the silent film period Chinese Americans in San Francisco or Los Angeles produced their own films of Chinese people in response to the dominant representations. Perhaps the most high profile of these efforts was the film *Lotus Blossom* released in 1921. The film was largely the result of the Chinese American actor and Hollywood technical advisor, James B. Leong, who also went by the name Leong But Jung. In 1919, Leong incorporated a film company, called Wah Ming Motion Picture Company in Los Angeles with the support of a number of prominent Chinatown merchants.[102] Leong set about writing the story for film, which he originally titled, *The Porcelain Bell of China,* but later changed to *Lotus Blossom*.[103] To shoot the film, Leong built a Chinese City set on a studio lot in Boyle Heights and hired Frank Gordon to direct the film.[104] The film featured the actors, Lady Tsen Mei, Jack Abbe, James Wang, Tully Marshal and Noah Berry and was distributed by National Exchanges Inc. Grace Kingsley of the *Los Angeles Times* described the plot of *Lotus Blossom*:

> The story has to do with a maiden, the daughter of an ancient bell maker of China. Bells must have a certain timbre in their clang, and when they do not, according to the Chinese legend, only the blood of a virgin will perfect their metal. So when the bell of the story is found to be of insufficient musical quality, the Chinese heroine of the "Lotus Blossom" sacrifices herself for the sake of her parent, the old bell maker by throwing herself into the boiling metal.[105]

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[99] "Film Folk Bombarded By Chinese," *Los Angeles Times*, December 16, 1923, I1.
[100] "Film Folk Bombarded By Chinese," *Los Angeles Times*, December 16, 1923, I1.
[101] "Chinese Complications," *Motion Picture News*, September 9, 1926, 1236.
[102] "Chinese Merchants Organize Production Company," *Camera*, May 29, 1920, 6.
[103] "In News Net," *New York Times*, June 5, 1920, 65.
[104] "Activities at Boyle Heights Studio," *Camera*, June 11, 1921, 8.
[105] "A Celestial Enterprise," *Los Angeles Times*, November 27, 1921, III33.

As *Education Film Magazine* reported a few months after the film's release, Leong aspired to use film "to reclaim China from opium, gambling, superstitions, ignorance, and prejudice against foreigners…"[106] While the extent to which he did so is certainly debatable, his film certainly garnered publicity in a range mainstream newspapers like the *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times* and the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, in trade magazines like *Variety* and *Exhibitors Herald,* and in fan magazines like *Camera* and *Motion Picture News*. (Image 9) In this regard, *Lotus Blossom* was the most high profile example of Chinese American cinematic self-representations during the silent film era.

The most successful protest over a cinematic depiction of Chinatown during this period was staged not in the United States but in Shanghai in 1930 over the film *Welcome Danger*. In late February of 1930, the sound-version of the film was released at the Grand and Capitol Theaters in Shanghai's international district, which both attracted mixed audiences of Chinese and foreign residents. At the 5 o'clock showing at the Grand Theatre on February 22, Hung Sung, a local university professor, filmmaker and screenwriter who had lived and trained in the

Image 9: Lady Tsen Mei in *Camera* Magazine (1920)

[106] "Chinese films to Regenerate China," *Education's Film Magazine*, Vol 11. No 2-3 (February/March 1922), 26.

United States, rose from his seat to address the crowd gathered to see the film. He told the assembled audience that he had seen an earlier screening of the film and that the film degraded the Chinese people. He led a crowd of more than 300 people to the box office to demand their money back, where according to Hung Sung, the manager of the theater, who was foreign resident of Shanghai, grabbed hold of Hung Sung and injured his neck.[107] The management called the police of the international settlement to control the protest. Hung Sung was arrested and held in police custody for a few hours where the western police officers attempted to convince Hung Sung that the film was a comedy and not meant to offend.[108] The film censorship committee in Shanghai, which was controlled by the Nationalist government, ordered local papers to stop carrying the advertisements of the two papers until they apologized and agreed to submit all future films for review by their office. The Nationalist government also banned the screening of all Harold Lloyd film's throughout China until Lloyd apologized.[109] Lloyd eventually acquiesced and wrote a formal letter of apology to the Chinese consulate in San Francisco, in which he claimed that he thought that *Welcome Danger* was nothing more than, "an innocent bit of fun," and that he was a "great admirer of your [the Chinese] people, civilization, and culture..."[110] Both theaters also eventually apologized, though, the loss of business from the protests forced the Grand Theatre to close shortly after issuing their apology.[111]

Chinese Americans understood well the ways that representations of Chinatown and Chinese people more broadly influenced their daily lives. Cinematic representations associating Chinese people with violence and Chinatown with illicit activity demonstrated the outsized role that Orientalism played in constructing race, gender, and nation during the first few decades of the twentieth century. Far from simply misrepresenting Chinese people, popular depictions of Chinatown played a definitive role in defining the way the nation imagined itself and its citizens. Yellow Peril representations of Chinese played a role in both stripping Chinese immigrants of the political rights of US citizenship and denying American-born citizens of Chinese descent access to the citizenship rights they were legally entitled to by birth.

Citizenship is never defined solely in the legal realm. As Lisa Lowe has noted, over the last century and a half, "the American citizen has been defined over and against the Asian immigrant legally, economically, and culturally."[112] Cultural representations not only played a role in linking conceptions of United States and its citizens to whiteness but popular representations also simultaneously imagined the Asian bodies and Asian communities in the United States as inherently outside of the imagined community of the nation. Chinese Americans began to imagine themselves as part of the nation state from at least the 1880s—when Wong Chin Foo published the first Chinese American newspaper, *The Chinese American*. Despite this, before the symbolic repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943 and the wartime advent of policies of racial liberalism, the pull of American Orientalism was so great, that the nation as a whole found it difficult to imagine any role for Chinese Americans within the imagined community of the nation.

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[107] "'Welcome Danger,' Motion Film Case Adjourned Again, *The China Press*, March 22, 1930, 3.
[108] Yiman Wang, "The Crisscrossed Stare," Protest and Propaganda in China's Not-So-Silent Era," in Jennifer M. Bean, Laura Horak, and Anupama Kapse editors, *Silent Cinema and the Politics of Space* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2014), 192.
[109] Yiman Wang, "The Crisscrossed Stare," 192.
[110] "Harold Lloyd Apologizes for 'Welcome Danger,'" The China Press, August 1, 1930, 3.
[111] Yiman Wang, "The Crisscossed Stare," 192.
[112] Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Duke, 1996), 4.

In the early twentieth century after the arrival of the film industry, popular ideas of Chinatown remained central to the cultural, legal, and economic discourses of American Orientalism. While this was true across the United States, in Los Angeles, Chinatown came to take on a cultural influence in the imagining of the city far greater than its relatively small population might have suggested. As was the case in other large American cities, in Los Angeles local white residents tended to view Chinatown with a combination of fear and fascination. The difference was that in Los Angeles whiteness and suburban growth were synonymous with the city's representation of itself in ways that they never were in San Francisco or New York. As such, in the same way that the American citizen came to be defined against the Chinese immigrant, in Los Angeles the normative white heterosexual family home came to define itself, in part, against representations of hidden underground Chinatown. In the silent film period, Chinese Americans found only marginal success in protesting dominant cinematic images of their community that depicted underground Chinatown as the antithesis of this new suburban idea. Instead, Chinese Americans found another medium through which they could more effectively shape dominant ideas of American Orientalism. Between the turn of the century and the outbreak of the Second World War, Chinese American performers, merchants, and others transformed Chinatown itself into a medium for performing self-representations that challenged the popular representations of the community as a site of Yellow Peril.

Chapter 3: Chinese American Background Performers and MGM's *The Good Earth*

By August of 1936, the demolition of Old Chinatown in Los Angeles was well underway. In what had once been the center of the old neighborhood, construction crews were at work on the new Union Station. Even as the Great Depression ravaged the Chinese American community hundreds of Chinese Americans had already been evicted from the area. Those who remained faced an uncertain future. That summer the *Los Angeles Times* columnist Lee Shippey visited the construction site and described his impressions to his readers. Shippey noted the baggage, mail, and express unit of the station nearing completion. A few yards away, he observed the Chinese American merchants on Apablasa Street going about their lives as best they could in the face of their eminent eviction from the area.[1] Of Chinatown's presence in the middle of a construction site, Shippey wrote, "a walk down Apablasa street gives one who knew old Chinatown something of a shock. It is cut off as abruptly as a movie set, and modern America is very busy on ground from which transplanted China had been rudely sliced." Shippey's conflation of Chinatown with a movie set reflected the longstanding relationship between the old neighborhood and Hollywood, a relationship that was much more complex and interconnected than most visitors like Shippey ever understood.

At the very moment that Shippey made his comparison, thirty miles to the north in the foothills of the San Fernando Valley, MGM Studios had built a replica Chinese village. Before those within the community were able to secure a site for the new Chinatown, Hollywood had already envisioned its own answer to Old Chinatown's demise. Built on a 500-acre lot in Chatsworth, California, the Chinese village was part of an elaborate set for the Hollywood remake of Pearl Buck's novel, *The Good Earth*. The village featured water buffalo, rice fields, and more than 200 buildings many imported directly from China.[2] In order to populate this village and other scenes in the film, MGM reportedly employed more than one thousand Chinese American background extras, most from the Los Angeles area.[3] While the film's producers passed over the well-known actress Anna May Wong for the film's lead, and instead hired Louise Rainer to star alongside Paul Muni as the characters of Wang Lung and O-Lan, the film did feature an unprecedented number of Asian American performers in speaking roles. Prior to the film's 1937 release, the national press publicized the verisimilitude provided by the large number of Chinese Americans performers hired by MGM, while also highlighting the fact that the film only cast Chinese American performers who "spoke perfect English."[4] In the midst of the Great Depression, this replica Chinese Village became a site of performance, labor, and economic subsistence for large sections of the Chinese American community displaced from their homes and businesses by the construction of Union Station while simultaneously struggling with the worst economic downturn the nation had ever seen.

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[1] Lee Shippey, "The Lee Side," *Los Angeles Times*, August 24, 1936, A4.
[2] See John R. Woolfenden, "Location Sets So Realistic Swallows Build Nests There," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 June 1936, C1; and "Pearl Buck's 'Good Earth' in Celluloid Soil," *Christian Science Monitor,* March, 4 1937.
[3] News reports give different accounts of the number of extras employed on the film. The number of one thousand extras is seen in numerous reports but is difficult to verify. Oral history interviews though seem to confirm that *The Good Earth* was one of the films which employed the most Chinese American extras. For one example of the estimate of around a thousand Chinese Americans extras see "'Good Earth' Casting Stirs Feud Among Chinese Actors," *Los Angeles Times*, December 1, 1935, C1.
[4] See "English Speaking Chinese Sought for 'The Good Earth,'" *The China Press*, December 20, 1935, 9. This is a Reuters wire service article that would have run in different forms in a variety of newspapers.

Scholars have long pointed to *The Good Earth* and the 1931 novel on which it was based as a turning point in U.S. depictions of China. Undoubtedly, the film and the book reached a global audience matched by few other pieces of American popular culture of the day. The book sold more than half a million copies in its first year and was translated into thirty languages.[5] On the strength of the book's appeal, its author Pearl S. Buck would be awarded the Pulitzer Prize in literature. As literary scholar Colleen Lye notes, Buck's book was popular not because the representations of Chinese people were necessarily accurate portrayals of people then living in China. Rather, Lye asserts, Bucks's book became popular because the text "strove for a reality effect."[6] In doing so, it allowed Americans to feel as if they had read a book about real Chinese people.

While Pearl S. Buck's novel won critical acclaim for its author, positioning Buck as one of the nation's foremost experts on China, MGM's film had a far greater reach. The 1937 film was reported seen by some 23,000,000 Americans and by another 42,000,000 people around the world.[7] Publicity for the film in the nation's papers began in earnest and peaked in the 1937, the year the film was released. In the *Los Angeles Times*, there were at least forty articles related to the films release and at least 70 more that referred to either the film or book in passing in 1937 alone. The film would go on to be nominated for five Academy Awards including Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Cinematography. Louise Rainer won the Oscar for Best Actress. Between the book, the film, and the media coverage surrounding the two, *The Good Earth* was the defining cultural text about China for large parts of the American public in the 1930s.

With the book's release shortly after the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, and the film's release shortly before the start of the Sino-Japanese war in the summer of 1937, *The Good Earth* entered into the national imaginary at a moment when China and Chinese people were very much becoming a topic of interest for many Americans. Within this context, scholars have long credited *the Good Earth* with contributing to shifting attitudes toward China and Chinese people in the United States. As early as 1958, scholar Harold Isaacs noted,

> Book and film together, *The Good Earth*, almost singlehandedly replaced the fantasy images of China and Chinese held by most American with a somewhat more realistic picture of what the China was like and a new more appealing picture of the Chinese themselves. Indeed *The Good Earth* accomplished this feat of providing faces for the faceless.[8]

While more recent scholarship has complicated this notion that the *Good Earth* "almost singlehandedly" transformed notions of Chinese people or that the film or book accurately portrayed Chinese people, the impact of *The Good Earth* on popular notions of Asia and Asian people in the United States cannot be denied.

But who were these "faces of the faceless" that tens of millions of moviegoers encountered when they saw the film? Scholars and more contemporary popular critics who focus only on the Yellowface make-up of the film's leading performers miss the broader significance of the film to the Asian American community. The film's use of Yellowface performance was hardly notable. The practice of white performers using make-up and costumes to play roles as Asian characters dates back to the earliest years of cinema and was a standard practice in the 1930s. Rather what made *The Good Earth* distinct was the dozens of speaking roles occupied by

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[5] Colleen Lye, *America's Asia: Racial Form and American Literature, 1893-1945*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 204.
[6] Lye, *America's Asia*, 205.
[7] Harold Isaacs, *Scratches on the Mind: American Images of China and India* (New York: The John Day Complany, 1958), 156.
[8] Isaacs, *Scratches on the Mind*, 156.

Asian American actors. These bit-players were supported by a reported cast of more than a thousand background extras, a significant number of whom had been recruited from the Chinese American ethnic enclave in Los Angeles. Thus most of the faces of China in the film were Chinese American residents of Los Angeles. In this practice, *The Good Earth* was similar to many other Hollywood films produced during the decade.

As war and civil unrest swept across Asia, Hollywood studios began producing films such as *Shanghai Express* (1932), *The Bitter Tea of General Yen* (1933) and *the General Dies at Dawn* (1936) that employed Chinese American extras and bit players in large numbers. Garding Liu who published one of the few English language guidebooks on Los Angeles Chinatown during the period, estimated that one in every fourteen people in the Chinese American community worked in the Hollywood film industry.[9] If anything Liu's estimate was too low. A number of these China films shot in Southern California employed hundreds of Chinese Americans extras, with *The Good Earth* alone claiming to have hired more than a thousand background players. In 1930, the US Census counted 3,009 Chinese Americans living in Los Angeles city proper and 3,572 Chinese Americans living in Los Angeles County. If MGM employed even half the number of extras from Los Angeles Chinatown that it stipulated, this film alone would have hired a much greater proportion than Garding Liu proposed for the entire industry. Regardless of the actual number of Chinese Americans employed, extra work was undoubtedly an integral part of the Chinese American economy in Southern California.

Despite the importance of extra work to the residents of Los Angeles Chinatown, Asian American historians, film studies scholars, and Los Angeles labor historians have largely overlooked Chinese American extras in Hollywood during the Great Depression. Beginning in the 1990s, film studies scholars like Barry King and Danae Clark began to produce scholarship that shifted the study of Hollywood stars away from textual readings of films and toward a more materially grounded and historically rooted methodology that examined acting as a form of labor.[10] Building on the earlier work of Los Angeles labor historians like Luis Perry, Richard Perry, and Murray Ross, film studies scholars like King and Clark helped facilitate a historical turn in the study of performance in Hollywood that has produced a number of important studies of the historical and material conditions under which extras and bit players in Classical Hollywood performed.[11] When applied to the experiences of racialized performers in Los Angeles in the 1930s, this turn toward performance as labor allows us to rethink major Hollywood productions from the period in ways that foreground the experiences of the background performers whose labor was so important to the image on the screen yet whose stories remain silenced in standard histories of Hollywood. This focus on racialized labor allows us to see that the influence that Hollywood productions had on communities of color in Los

[9] Garding Liu, *Inside Los Angeles Chinatown* (1948), 29.

[10] Clark and King can be seen as following on the footsteps of scholars like David Bordwell, Kristen Thomas, and Janet Staiger. See Danae Clark, "Acting in Hollywood's Best Interest: Representations of Actor's labor During the National Recovery Administration," *Journal of Film and Video*, Volume 42 No. 4, (Winter, 1990) 3-19; Danae Clark, *Negotiating Hollywood: The Cultural Politics of Actors* Labor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); Barry King, "Stardom as an Occupation, in *The Hollywood Film Industry: A Reader*, ed. Paul Kerr (London and New York: Routledge, 1986); Barry King, "The Star and the Commodity: Notes towards a Performance theory of stardom," *Cultural Studies* Volume 1 Number 2. (1987), 145-161.

[11] Labor histories that focus in whole or in part on Hollywood in the 1930s includes Louis Perry and Richard Perry, *A History of the Los Angeles Labor Movement, 1911-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963); Murray Ross, "Stars and Strikes" (Ph.D. Diss., Columbia University, 1942); Film studies scholarship that focuses on performance as labor in Hollywood in the period before the Second World War includes Sean Holmes, "The Hollywood Star System and the regulation of actor's labor, 1916-1934, *Film History*, Vol 12. No. 1 (2000), 97-114; Denise McKenna, "The Photoplay or the pickaxe: extras, gender, and the labor in early Hollywood," *Film History*, Volume 23. No 1. (2011), 5-19; Anthony Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns A History of Bit Players, and Stand-in*s (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2012).

Angeles reached far beyond the racial representations seen on the silver screen. In African American studies and Native American studies, scholars have begun to examine the history of Black and Native American extras and bit-players in the classical Hollywood period, even as work on Asian American background and bit players has remained limited.[12]

Through an examination of the production of *The Good Earth*, this chapter foregrounds the history of Chinese American extras and bit-players in Hollywood in the 1930s within the contexts of the political unrest in Asia, the economic uncertainty of the Great Depression, and the social instability brought by the destruction of Old Chinatown. In the process, I demonstrate the ways in which the Chinese American background performers utilized *The Good Earth* as a vehicle to advance their own social, economic and political conditions. Scholars have long noted the importance of the novel and film adaption of *The Good Earth* in shifting dominant American ideas about Asia, but little work has been done on what this film's production meant for background performers employed as extras and bit players or on how labor conditions on the film set related to the lives or livelihood of the Chinese American residents of Los Angeles. Approaching the Chinese Village in Chatsworth as a type of surrogate Chinatown, this chapter traces the economic, social, and emotional ramifications of this type of performative labor for the Chinese American community of Los Angeles.

While few if any of the Chinese Americans who performed in the film made their living solely as performers in Hollywood, the production of the film at the Chinese Village in Chatsworth over a few months in 1936 had a far-reaching influence on both the labor conditions of Chinese Americans in Hollywood and in the broader understandings of the place of Chinese Americans in U.S. society. Far from being passive background performers with no influence over their working conditions, Chinese American extras and bit players hoping to be employed on *The Good Earth* leveraged the clout of the Chinese Nationalist government in Nanking (*Nanjing*), along with the increasing demand for Chinese American extras in Hollywood, to challenge racist and exploitative labor practices that had left Chinese American performers as one of the few groups not covered by the rules and regulations of Central Casting—the primary organization in charge of hiring background extras for Hollywood films. At the same time, the coverage of the film's production brought a heightened visibility to the Chinese American population on the West Coast. In highlighting the large number of acculturated, English-speaking Chinese American performers employed in the Chinese Village in Chatsworth, the news coverage helped to facilitate the inclusion of Chinese Americans under the then emerging logic of racial liberalism—the idea that the nation could manage its racial and ethnic differences through assimilation and inclusion.[13]

This narrative of inclusion was conditional and incomplete. Even as the film provided a heightened visibility of the English-speaking Chinese American supporting cast, the film also continued the long-held tradition of casting white actors in all of the major roles—even rejecting Anna May Wong, the nation's most visible Chinese American actor for any role in the film. Thus, the Chinese Village in Chatsworth simultaneously transformed the labor practices used for

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[12] See for example, Charlene Regester, "African American Extras in Hollywood during the 1920s and 1930s," *Film History,* Vol. 09 No. 1 (1997), 95-115; Nicolas G. Rosenthal, *Reimagining Indian Country: Native Migration & Identity in in Twentieth Century Los Angeles*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 31-49; Anthony Slide devotes one chapter to his history of Hollywood extras to what he dubs, "ethnic extras." This chapter includes three pages on Chinese American extras. Slides mentions some of the major players involved in recruiting extras in Chinatown including Jimmie Wang, who recruited Anna May Wong, and Tom Gubbins. Slide does not discuss the influence that extra work had on the Chinese American community or on other communities of color in Los Angeles. See Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns*, 192-195.

[13] On racial liberalism see Ellen Wu, *Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority* (Princeton, N,J.: Princeton University Press, 2014), 4.

the hiring of Chinese background and bit-players while reinforcing the idea that Chinese Americans were not capable of occupying leading roles in major Hollywood productions. In these ways, the influence of the film on Chinese Americans was far greater than the simply the reach of the visual representations in the film itself. Rather the production of *The Good Earth* and the coverage surrounding it, profoundly influenced the economic, social, and political realities that defined the lives of so many Chinese Americans in Los Angeles in the 1930s.

Chinese American Background Players, Labor, and the Great Depression

Legend has it that the first film studio in Southern California was built on a vacant lot adjacent to a Chinese laundry in 1909.[14] While there is no record of Chinese performing in the earliest film produced in Southern California, within a decade this had begun to change. High-profile silent films such as *Red Lantern* (1919), *Broken Blossoms* (1919), and *Wing Toy* (1921) featured Los Angeles Chinatown residents. Despite these visibility of these high profile Chinese themed films, extra work for Chinese Americans during the silent period remained an irregular form of supplemental income. At a time when the popular press was increasingly portraying extra work as primarily the work of white women, and when stories of "extra girls" where being published with regular frequency in the popular press, studios saw Chinese Americans as special "types" who could not be cast through the standard casting methods. Rather than being hired directly by studios as many white performers were, Chinese American extras during the silent era generally found work through middlemen who specialized in their recruitment. By examining Chinese American opportunities as extras through the lens of these middlemen who recruited Chinese American performers we can better understand the marginalization that Chinese American extras faced in the early decades of film production in Los Angeles and thus better appreciate the change brought about by the production of *The Good Earth* in the mid-1930s.

By the mid-1910s, extras had become a standard part of studio productions in Los Angeles with hundreds of people seeking work directly from the film studios. Film studios maintained a card system of records for hundreds of people who could perform in background roles, with prospective performers applying everyday for this type of work.[15] Yet when large numbers of extras were needed the studios had to reach beyond their card systems. A 1914 article entitled "How Famous Film Stars Have Been Discovered" in the *Los Angeles Times* describes the process: "First all the extras on the lists are called in. Then extra people are advertised for. If not enough respond, agents are sent to the parks out on the streets and regular extra people call in their friends and relatives." Some of these background performers, often those with prior stage experience, became "steady extras," and were offered salaried positions to perform more regularly. A select few performers went on to become stars.

Yet not all performers had equal access to the film industry. Race, class, body type, and physical attributes all played roles determining which actors could become stars or even who could secure regular work. Indeed, when the studios were searching for large numbers of what they called "types" they did not rely on methods used to hire most other extras. The *Los Angeles Times* article goes on to state: "Hindus were searched out by special agents," while "Negroes were advertised for," and that "Irish types" were "carefully selected." While the number of Chinese Americans in Los Angeles in the 1910s was only slightly smaller than the number of African Americans in the city, studios relied primarily on the services of a these select "special agents," rather than advertisements, to secure Chinese American performers. For example, the

[14] Otto Friedrich, *City of Nets: A Portrait of Hollywood in the 1940s* (University of California Press, 1997), 4.
[15] "How Famous Film Stars Have Been Discovered," *Los Angeles Times*, October 18, 1914, III2.

1919 film *Red Lantern* relied on a local actor named James Wang to recruit hundreds of performers for from Chinatown for the film's crowd scenes. Wang, who had arrived in the United States more than three decades earlier, was a former Baptist minister who had left the ministry to pursue an acting career. He had played minor roles in a number of silent films of the period including *Broken Blossoms*.[16]

Among those who Wang helped to recruit as a background player for the *Red Lantern* was Anna May Wong, then a fourteen-year-old high school student with no prior acting experience.[17] Ana May Wong would later recount the recruitment experience to the *Los Angeles Times:*

> One day I happened to see a movie in which was a Chinese actor. I ran around to an old Chinese who helped out the movies by getting Chinese actors for them. He looked me over critically. "Well," he said, "you have big eyes; you will do." I felt flattered until I learned that he had an order for 600 actors in a hurry and hadn't been able to find but fifty. [18]

The difficulty in securing extras that Anna May Wong alludes to in her interview was a real one. The 1920 census listed only 2,062 residents in the city of Los Angeles and so six hundred extras represented nearly thirty percent of the entire Chinese American population. Given these limitations recruiters like James Wang extend their search well beyond Los Angeles. Reporting on Wang's work recruiting Chinese American performers for the 1922 film *Wing Toy,* which was filmed in Los Angeles Chinatown, *Exhibitor's Herald* reported that Wang, "scoured the nearby Pacific Coast for several weeks prior to filming and gathered a corps of players embracing all the most experienced and intelligent of the Chinese mummers."[19] James Wang was far from the only Chinese American labor recruiter working during this period. Others recruiters of Chinese American talent included the actor and Chinese American film producer James Leong, and the comedian Charlie Feng on the East Coast.[20]

In her book *Brokering Belonging*, historian Lisa Rose Mar discusses the particular importance of Chinese brokers in North America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Mar defines brokers as, "individual ethnic leaders who acted as intermediaries between Chinese and Anglo worlds of North America's West Coast."[21] Chinese American performers like James Wang, certainly occupied roles as brokers between the Chinese American community and the film industry. Not only did these performers help recruit Chinese Americans, they also acted as on-set translators, and as so-called technical advisors for all aspects of Chinese culture in Hollywood films. Perhaps even more importantly brokers allowed studio producers to focus their on-set interactions with one Chinese American, who was often well educated, fluent in English, and sometimes even American born. In the process, white producers avoided having to deal with Chinese American performers as a group. This reliance on recruiters to hire Chinese American performers speaks both to the extent to which the lives of Chinese Americans in Southern California were segregated from the labor market as whole and also to the extent to which white

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[16] See Kevin Brownlow, *Behind the Mask of Innocence* (New York: Knopf, 1990), 332; Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns,* 193.
[17] See Graham Russel Hodges, *Anna May Wong From Laundreyman's Daughter to Hollywood Legend* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012), 56.
[18] See "I am Growing More Chinese with Each Passing Year," *Los Angeles Times*, September 9, 1934, H3.
[19] "New Vehicle for Shirley Mason is Filmed in Chinatown in Los Angeles," *Exhibitor's Herald*, January 22, 1921, 71.
[20] On James Leong see Ramona Curry, "The Historiographic Import of Pioneering Screenwriter-Director James B. Leong (1889-1967) and his 1921 film Lotus Blossom" paper presented at the Society for Cinema and Media Studies Conference, Chicago 2017. On Charlie Feng see "Singapore Repeopled From Our Bagdad on the Subway," *Washington Post*, December 9, 1928, A3.
[21] Lisa Rose Mar, *Brokering Belonging: Chinese in Canada's Exclusion Era, 1885-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 4.

Americans imagined Chinese Americans as separate and distinct from the rest of the population. It wasn't so much that white movie producers didn't know where to look to find Chinese Americans, but rather that many white film producers imagined Chinese immigrants to be so culturally distinct from their white counterparts as to necessitate a reliance on recruiters.

With film studios reliance on a few select brokers, the system for recruiting Chinese American extras bore more commonalities with the system used to hire migrant Chinese American farm workers in California in the decades before the arrival of the film industry than it did with the existing card system used to hire the majority of early silent film extras. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, White farmers in California relied on Chinese labor bosses within the Chinese American community to recruit laborers for seasonal work. These farmers developed relationships with particular Chinese American labor bosses and called on them when to recruit laborers.[22] The farmers also paid the labor bosses directly and the labor bosses paid the farm workers. In a similar manner, Chinese brokers used in the film industry held considerable influence over background performers. In addition to translating directions for those performers who did not speak English fluently, brokers at times also controlled the pay the performers received with the studio's paying the broker and the broker then paying individual performers. Because of their reliance on labor brokers, most Chinese American performers during the silent period had even less control over their own working conditions than did white actors employed in the same film.

While background performance certainly provided economic opportunities for a large cross section of the population of Los Angeles including Chinese Americans, popular narratives about extra work followed a set of recurring tropes that usually did not include Chinese Americans and other racialized performers. Within the popular imaginary, the idea of the extra during the silent period was associated predominantly with young white women. As Denise McKenna has shown, the idea of the "extra girl" became a common trope in popular writings about the silent film industry. Stories about young women seeking stardom in the film industry played an important role in catering to the expanding demographic of female film fans. As a result of the popular coverage of the "extra girl," extra work soon came to be associated with women's work despite the fact that men were as likely, if not more likely, to serve as extras as women.[23] McKenna shows how "the discovery narrative," in which a young female extra came to Hollywood, found work in the film industry, and went on to become a film star, became a prominent part of the popular press portrayal during the industry's first decade in Los Angeles. While men were sometimes included in this discovery narrative, women came to be most closely associated with being discovered in the film industry.[24]

The association of extra work with white women was not only a narrative of discovery and stardom. Rather, the narrative of the "extra girl" being discovered was often an extension of white women in peril narrative. In fact, the moral hazard this type of work was thought to represent would eventually lead to structural changes in the industry meant to protect extras from the worst of labor abuses. According to Denise McKenna popular representations of young women looking for work as background performers in Hollywood became another incarnation of the trope of the "fallen woman" as newspapers covered charges against male directors who

[22] On Chinese American crew bosses in the late nineteenth century see Richard Street, *Beasts of the Fields: A Narrative History of California Farmworkers, 1769-1913* (Stanford University Press, 2004), 258-285.

[23] KcKenna cites figures between 1926 and 1941 showing that there were nearly twice as many men working as extras during this period as women. McKenna, "The Photoplay or the Pickaxe," 5.

[24] For an examination of one male extra during the silent period, see Charlie Keil, "Leo Rosencrans, Movie-Struck Boy," *Film History Journal*, Volume 26, Number 2, (2014), 31-51.

attempted to take advantage of aspiring female performers. [25] In particular the "Fatty" Arbuckle trial of the early 1920s, in which Arbuckle was tried for the death of the actress and model Virginia Rappe brought national attention to the exploitation of female performers in the film industry.[26] The press coverage of the Arbuckle trial occurred alongside the much less public forms of abuse that occurred to so many extras on a daily basis. By 1925, the state labor authorities had received so many complaints of labor abuse in the film industry that the California Industrial Welfare Commission decided to investigate working conditions for extras. Allegations included women being forced to work overtime without overtime pay and also performers being asked to arrive at the studio hours earlier than they were needed on set, but not being paid for the time they waited.[27] As a result, the California State Industrial Commission issued orders for regulating of the employment of women and children—but not men—as extras in the film industry. In addition to mandating overtime pay, the new state regulations also stated that women had to either be allowed to leave the set early enough to be able to take public transportation home or else the studio had to furnish return transportation. At the same time, the California State Labor Commissioner urged state lawmakers to pass a law that made it illegal for the employment agencies, middlemen, and contractors who placed extras to collect the seven to ten percent commission that they charged for placement.

In part as a response to the commission's orders, the Hollywood studios agreed to eliminate the worst labor abuses in the industry and to apply these new standards to all extras regardless of gender or background. By December of 1925, The Motion Picture Producers Association had finalized plans for the creation of the formation of a Central Casting Bureau, which would begin registering extras in January on 1926.[28] According to the California Bureau of Labor Statistics, there were four main goals for the new organization:

> (1) To do away with the high fees charged by private employment agencies to extras in the motion picture industry.
> (2) To eliminate the violations of law arising out of the method of paying off extras
> (3) To discourage the constantly increasing influx of persons as extras in the industry.
> (4) To develop a residue of the efficient extra who would be called upon frequently and who would be able to derive a decent living from their employment as extras.[29]

In many ways, Central Casting proved to be an immediate success. Over the first six months of 1926, Central Casting played 113,837 background performers in Hollywood films. Of this roughly 75,000 jobs went to men and 35,000 to women.[30] According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics by 1926, ninety percent of all extras were recruited through Central Casting.[31]

Despite Central Castings goal of being a clearinghouse through which all background performers would be employed, the ethnic difference and social standing of a various groups of

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[25] Denise McKenna, "The Photo Play or the Pickaxe," 6.
[26] Heidi Kenaga, Making the 'Studio Girl:' The Hollywood Studio Club and Industry Regulation Female Labor," *Film History,* 18:2 (2006), 129-139.
[27] Kerry Seagrave, *Film Actors Organize: Union Formation Efforts in America, 1912-1937* (Jefferson North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2009), 25.
[28] Murray Ross, "Hollywood's Extras" in the *Movie in Our Midst Documents in the Cultural History of Film in America*, ed. Gerald Mast, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 223-228.
[29] California Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Twenty Second Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the State of California*, (California State Printing Office, 1926), 149.
[30] Seagrave, *Film Actors Organize,* 29
[31] California Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Twenty Second Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the State of California*, (California State Printing Office, 1926), 149.

extras played an important role in which performers had access to the bureau's services. Well into the early 1930s, many non-white performers were forced to find employment through outside labor recruiters. Central Casting made a concerted effort to recruit African American extras.[32] Other so-called racial or ethnic "types" were not so lucky. In a 1932 article entitled, "Racial Casters Corner Types," *Variety* reported, "Besides Central Casting Bureau there are a number of small casting agencies who supply extras for studios." The article went on to list a number of these individual agents who specialized in particular ethnic groups, "Jamiel Hanson handles nothing but Arabs…Nick Koblainsky, president of the Russian-American club and Alexis Davidoff handle all the Russians…Hawaiians and Filipinos are hustled by Allesandro Gambo. Mexicans report for work to John Eiberts."[33] Like Mexican Americans, Hawaiians, and Filipinos, Chinese American extras did not find their work through Central Casting and instead continued to work through the older system of labor recruiters. But whereas there was once a number of labor recruiters who focused on placing Chinese Americans in Hollywood films, by 1930 all recruitment of Chinese Americans, and a significant amount of the recruitment of Japanese Americans fell under the control of one man: local casting agent, and Chinatown resident, Tom Gubbins.

Gubbins occupies an important place in the history of Chinese American's relationship with Hollywood because of his position as the most influential broker between the Chinese American community and Hollywood film industry in the period before the Second World War. Raised in China where he learned to speak Chinese fluently, Gubbins immigrated to the West Coast and worked in San Francisco, before relocating to Los Angeles in 1916 at the age of 37. [34] After arriving in Los Angeles, he began work as one of a number of recruiters of Chinese American talent for silent motion pictures. The height of his influence came between the end of the silent period in the mid-1920s and the production of *The Good Earth* in mid-1930, when Gubbins served as the sole labor recruiter of Chinese American talent in Hollywood. The influence of Gubbins in Hollywood would continue in some capacity through the end of World War II.

Over the course of his long career in Hollywood, Gubbins occupied a number of positions in the Hollywood studio system in addition to his work as a labor recruiter of Chinese American talent. He ran a store on North Los Angeles Street in Old Chinatown called Asiatic Costumes, which supplied Chinese costumes and props to studios. He also served as a technical advisor on numerous China-themed films. As technical advisor he was responsible for ensuring the authenticity of all Chinese aspects of a film. His job as technical advisor on set also meant that he serve as an informal translator on set between those Chinese background performers who did not speak English well and the films director and other creative personnel.[35] An advertisement that Gubbins ran in a casting directory in 1925 gives an idea of the ways in which Gubbins sold his services to Hollywood studios. The advertisement for Asiatic Costumes read: "The man who put ease in Chin-ese pictures for you. Let him dress your Chinese sets, select your types, and assist in directing Chinese scenes. He knows, He speaks the language, 10 years in

[32] In 1927, Central Casting hired Charles Butler in a salaried position to perform duties of a casting director for Black performers in a segregated division of the organization. In 1928 alone, the bureau placed more than 10,000 African American extras in Hollywood films earning a combined total of more than $89,000 See Regester, "African American Extras in Hollywood, 99.
[33] "Racial Caster Corner Types," *Variety*, March 8, 1932, 6.
[34] "In Hollywood with Jimmy Fiddler," *Washington Post*, August 9, 1937, 9.
[35] On Gubbins work as an on set translator see "Hollywood's 'Fast Set' on the Tennis Courts," *The Film Weekly*, December 5, 1931, 14.

China."[36] Gubbins expertise and experience in China along with his connections with the Chinatown community helped him build a successful business in the1920s and positioned him well for the surge in Chinese themed productions that began appearing in the early 1930s.

Because of his influence in the film industry, many Chinese Americans who grew up in Los Angeles during the 1930s remember Gubbins. Swan Yee was a teenager when he arrived in Chinatown in 1931. Gubbins took him in and gave him a job in his store. Gubbins paid Yee twenty dollars a month and gave him room and board. "Tom Gubbins is a very nice fellow, very kind hearted," Yee recalled many years later.[37] Yee took a job in Gubbins' store, Asiatic Costumes, where he worked alongside four other people. Soon, with Gubbins help, Yee began supplementing his income by working as an extra: "Then he [Gubbins] puts me in the motion pictures. The first picture I work on was *the Hatchetman*…my dream came true. So I began to work as an extra here. He made an agreement. He said if I make more than 20 dollars. I take it. If not he pays me." Thus regardless of whether Yee found work as an extra, Gubbins guaranteed him 20 dollars a month in pay. Yee was only one of many Chinatown residents that Gubbins helped. In fact Gubbins was known for the regular dinners he hosted for Chinese American extras in the area.

Because Gubbins controlled nearly all casting opportunities available to Chinatown residents in the late 1920s and early1930s, he became a controversial figure within the Chinatown community. Swan Yee recalled, "Lot of people don't like him [Gubbins] because people say he favors certain person… Naturally he is going to call the people he thinks are dependable. He makes a lot of enemies as you call it…Some people are jealous because some people maybe need the money." But other Chinatown residents suggested that Gubbins position was controversial for more reasons than who he decided to cast. Jennie Lee, who worked as an extra on *the Good Earth*, recalled, "There was Tom Gubbins. He used to cast Chinese people for the movies and he rented out costumes and everything…If they needed any extras, he'd take a cut… and he made himself a rich man doing that."[38] Part-time performers like Jennie Lee saw quite clearly through the structure of Gubbins' business model and how he profited from the employment of Chinese American extras.

Regardless if Chinatown residents saw Tom Gubbins as a supportive member of the Chinatown community who helped Chinese Americans navigate the employment system in Hollywood or as exploitative labor boss who profited from the hard work of others, the very fact that Tom Gubbins was able to occupy the position as the sole supplier of Chinese American extras, demonstrated the extent to which Chinatown and its residents remained socially and economically segregated from much of the rest of the Los Angeles economy. Because of this, Gubbins was able to maintain his influence over Chinese American background performers even after the creation of Central Casting in 1926. This was in part because in many ways he represented the perfect broker in the eyes of many white film producers. Not only did he grow up in China and speak Cantonese fluently, but he was also a person of Irish descent. For this reason alone, many white studio producers must have preferred working with him to brokers like James Wang. Despite his racial advantages, Gubbins would not retain his control over Chinese American extras for much longer. By the 1930s, shifting local, national, and global factors would

[36] *The Standard*, No.3 Vol. 6 (July, 1925) 137.
[37] Swan Yee Interview, June 23, 1983, Interview No. 163, Box 20 Folder 2, Southern California Chinese American Oral History Project, UCLA Special Collections.
[38] Jennie Lee Taylor Interview, May 9, 2007, Chinatown Remembered Project, Chinese Historical Society of Southern California.

challenge Gubbins' role as the sole recruiter of Chinese American performers in the film industry.

Casting *The Good Earth*

In the 1930s, at the very moment that the Great Depression was ravaging the Chinese American community, Hollywood studios began producing a cycle of films about China, bringing opportunities for Chinese Americans to work as extras. Hollywood's increased interest in China-themed films was facilitated in part by increased interest in China throughout the United States brought on by events then occurring across the Pacific. Beginning in the nineteenth century, Japan began to shift from an insular nation, closed off to much outside contact, into a growing military and imperial power whose colonial reach slowly began to expand across Asia challenging the hegemony in the region of Great Britain, the U.S. and other Western powers. The defeat of Russia in 1905 demonstrated the ability of this island nation to defeat a Western power and by the end of the first world War, Japan had brought under its influence or direct colonial a region that included the Sakhalin Islands, the Korean peninsula, and the island of Taiwan. While the American press had certainly covered these and other events in the Pacific region, the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 thrust Asia as a continent into the popular consciousness of Americans in ways that prior events had not.[39] It would not take long for Hollywood to realize the potential financial gain to be found in producing films about East Asia. The resulting a cycle of China films helped redefine the nation's popular understanding of China and Chinese people while also providing a source of income for hundreds of Chinese American background performers in the Los Angeles during the Great Depression.

No single Hollywood film in the 1930s would have a greater influence on the local Chinese American community than *The Good Earth* (1937), which began casting in 1935. With casting calls held on both sides of the Pacific and MGM studio's going to great lengths to try to appease the Chinese governments demands over the film's representations, *The Good Earth* was in many ways an international production. In part because of its global publicity, the film provided the perfect vehicle for Chinese American performers in Los Angeles to challenge the discriminatory employment practices that had long governed their participation in Hollywood film. Examining the actions of the Chinese American community in Los Angeles within the geopolitical context of the Pacific World and the economic context of the Great Depression allows us to better understand the motives and possibilities available to Chinese American background performers during this transitional moment in the community's history.

Throughout the 1930s, social, political, and economic unrest in Asia brought improved economic opportunities to Chinese American performers hoping to appear in Hollywood films. At the start of the 1930s Anna May Wong was probably the only Chinese American performer who made her living as a full-time performer within the movie industry. By the time the United States entered the Second World War in 1941, a handful of other Chinese American supporting players had begun to have a limited amount of success in Hollywood. These included most prominently Keye Luke, Victor Sen Yung and Richard Loo. A handful of other bit-players also found increasing success in this cycle of China films, including Moy Ming, Roland Got, Chester Gan, Willie Fung, Lotus Liu, and Soo Yung. While many of these performers obtained minor speaking roles, often performing little more than a line or two, the most profound economic

[39] Surveying a group of 135 Americans in 1958 about the views on Asia, Harold Isaacs found that more repondants identified the Japanese invasion of Manchuria as the event that brought Asia to their attention than any other event. Isaacs, *Scratches on the Mind*, 51.

impact of the cycle of China films was not on the bit-players or supporting actors but on Chinese American background performers.

Extra work at the height of the Great Depression brought needed supplemental income to everyday Chinese Americans in Los Angeles, many of whom were much more concerned with surviving one of the worst economic downturns in the nation's history than they were about seeing themselves on screen. In June of 1932, *The Los Angeles Times* ran a story entitled, "Warfare in Orient Brings Film Gold to Chinatown." The article reported "front page news of China has inspired Hollywood studios to produce more big oriental pictures this year than ever before."[40] According to an interview with Tom Gubbins, Hollywood studios planned to provide 30,000 total days of work for Chinese extras in 1932. Gubbins told the paper that three films—Columbia Pictures' *War Correspondent*, RKO's *Roar of the Dragon,* and Paramount's *Shanghai Express*—had already provided 20,000 days of work for Chinese Americans. The paper went on to state that the average Chinese American performer could earn $7.50 a day for a non-speaking role while those performers who landed speaking parts could earn between $10 and $15 dollars a day. In total the article estimated that between $200,000 and $250,000 would be divided among Chinese American performers employed on these films.

This economic windfall could not have come at a greater time of social and political upheaval within the Chinese American community in Los Angeles. In the fall of 1933, the Union Pacific, Central Pacific and Santa Fe railroads finally agreed to build a Union passenger station at the Old Chinatown site. The agreement brought to an end a 22-year battle with the city, which involved local, state, and national agencies as well as litigation all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court.[41] With the railroads acquiescing to the city demands, the fate of Old Chinatown was now set. The majority of the community would be demolished to make way for the rail station. Even as residents of Old Chinatown begged for more time, those living on the construction site were told to vacate their properties by November 30th.[42] In late December, the first crews arrived to demolish the old Bing Hing Company building along with the Chinese vegetable market, which was home to fifty Chinese vegetable peddlers. Some residents were still removing their belongings even as work crews began to demolish their former homes.[43]

Certainly the demolition of most of Old Chinatown and the subsequent eviction of most the neighborhood's residents could not have occurred at a worse time for Chinese Americans. As the Great Depression swept across the nation, American racism rendered Chinese Americans especially vulnerable to its economic effects. Simultaneously excluded from most organized labor unions by the longstanding racist policies of these organizations and kept out of many white-collar professions by a similar, if albeit less overtly confrontational, structure of white supremacy, most Chinese Americans found themselves relegated to work within the nation's Chinatowns or else segregated to certain segments of the service economy such as restaurant, domestic, or laundry work.

Barred from many New Deal programs as aliens ineligible for citizenship, many in the nation's Chinatowns turned inward. Some Chinese Americans relied on the generosity of relatives. Walter Chung remembered that Chinese who had relatives who worked in the restaurant industry would visit their restaurants and eat the food that patrons did not finish from their plates.[44] Others relied on district or family associations. Lew Kay, a resident of Seattle's

[40] "Warfare in Orient Brings Film Gold to Chinatown," *Los Angeles Times*, June 26, 1932, B11.
[41] "Los Angeles Wins Terminal Battle," *New York Times*, September 17, 1933, E6.
[42] "Station May Start Soon," *Los Angeles Times*, November 11, 1933, A1.
[43] "Wrecking Crews Begin Clearing Depot's Site," *Los Angeles Times,* December 23, 1933, A1.
[44] Walter Chung Interview, January 20, 1980, Summary Transcript, Southern California Chinese American Oral History Project.

Chinatown described how mutual aid worked in the Northeast in 1933, "When a Chinese has exhausted his savings he appeals to clansmen. They may not necessarily be relatives; they may be very distant relatives. Maybe they are related in name only but a clan is sort of a family. His clansmen take care of him or his wife and children. They may not take him into their homes, but they'll see he has a place to stay and something to eat and a little something to do."[45] Yet this did not mean that all Chinese refused to seek out public assistance. On September 21, 1933, *The Los Angeles Times* reported that eight elderly Chinese men had applied to County Welfare Department with hopes of financial support to help pay to have their bones sent back to China once they passed away. The paper reported that "because of scarcity of money, the county cannot, this year, like in the past, repatriate elderly Chinese so they could be buried in their native soil." Even in death these Chinese were denied the support of the state.

Like other Americans, most Chinese Americans sought to survive on whatever work they could find. Yet even within those industries such as the restaurant business in which Chinese Americans found moderate levels of success, Chinese American wages remained significantly less than whites. Heather Lee has estimated that Chinese restaurant workers in New York City in the 1930s made on average 30% less than the national average. According to Lee the average partner at a Chinese restaurant took home about 100 dollars a month; cooks earned between sixty and seventy dollars a month, and the lowest paid waiter made only 50 dollars a month even when including tips.[46] Those in other positions fared little better. According to the US Bureau of Agricultural Economics, the average farm worker, an occupation a number of Chinese Americans in Southern California still occupied, made an average of $1.11 a day in 1933, if they worked without board.[47]

Given the dearth of economic opportunities it is not surprising that so many Chinese Americans turned toward extra work to help support themselves. In 1934, *The Chicago Tribune* reported that, "Most Los Angeles Chinese are on the ragged edge of penury. An occasional few days' of work in the studios as part of oriental mob scenes bridges the gap between near starvation and comparative affluence."[48] According to *Variety*, in 1930, more than a year after the stock market crash, extras in Hollywood were still being paid between $3 and $15 dollars a day, with the bulk of these performers making the $10 a day rate.[49] As the Depression worsened and Hollywood studios began to feel the effects of the economic downturn, the rates for extras dropped as well. After an Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences investigation in 1933 revealed that some extras were being paid as little as $1.50 a day, the federal governments National Recovery Administration sought to develop a code for the film industry that would cover minimum wages and maximum working hours.[50] As a result, by 1934 wages for extras were raised to between $5 dollars a day for crowd scenes to $25 for extras who spoke "atmospheric words."[51] If the average Chinese cook made around sixty dollars a month, he could earn this amount in a little more than half the time working at the rate of the lowest paid extras

[45] "Chinese Ask No Aid; They're used to Depressions," *The China Press*, April 22, 1933, 13.
[46] Heather R. Lee, "A Life Cooking For Others: The Work and Migration Experiences of a Chinese Restaurant Worker in New York City, 1920-1946," in *Eating Asian America: A Food Studies Reader*, Ed. Robert Ji-Song Ku (New York University Press, 2013), 62-63.
[47] "Wages and Incomes of Farm Workers," *Monthly Labor Review*, Volume 49 Issue 1 (1939), 60.
[48] George Shaffer, "Movie Change Threatens Rule in Chinatown," *Chicago Tribune*, August 4, 1934, 11.
[49] Fred Stanley, "The Extra," *Variety*, Vol. 101 Issue 3, December 31, 1930, 15.
[50] "Sweat Shop Charge of Penny –Ante Pay Takes Extra's Plight to Code," *Variety*, September 12, 1933, 7.
[51] "Wage Provisions for Extras Clarified," *Variety*, March 13, 1934, 7; "Film Code Revamped," *Los Angeles Times*, October 1, 1933, 1.

and in three days at the highest extra rate.[52] Within this context, the decision by Hollywood to begin to produce films about China could not have come at a better time for Chinese Americans in Los Angeles.

Oral history interviews with community members who grew up in Chinatown and found work in Hollywood in the 1930s, show the importance that extra work provided for many Chinese American families. Esther Lee recalled the difficult times her family faced in the Depression: "We didn't go out to buy shoes. We didn't have three, four, five pairs of shoes. We have one pair for school and that was it, and we didn't have Sunday shoes or tennis shoes to play. I give credit to my parents for raising us right to make us hard workers." Esther's first film was *The Good Earth* at the age of 8. Esther was far from the only family in Chinatown who encouraged their children to work as film extras to help support the family during the Depression. Lilly Mu and her brothers were born in Old Chinatown on Marchessault Street. All of them appeared in Hollywood films during the 1930s. Lily's first film was *The Good Earth* in the mid-1930s when she still a baby. She would continue working in films through the end of elementary school. As an infant, Lily and her family would have made much more than older performers in the industry. By 1939 the rates for infants as extras were 75 dollars a day for babies under thirty days old, 50 dollars a day for those between one month and three months, and 25 dollars for children three months to six months. While paid more, children under six-months a day were not allowed to be on the studio set for more than two hours a day.[53] Lily recalls that there was still some stigma in Chinatown about appearing in films in the mid-1930s, but that her family needed the money and so they encouraged their children to perform.[54] Her father knew Tom Gubbins, which facilitated the Mu siblings' entry into Hollywood performance.

While many Chinese Americans background performers were happy just to have any work in Hollywood regardless of the type of role they were asked to perform, the Chinese government, in contrast, soon took an active interest in the types of cinematic representations that Hollywood was producing during the period. Soon after consolidating power in 1927, the Chinese Nationalist government and Chiang Kai-shek in particular began to exert its influence on the domestic film industry. Censors in Nanking (*Nanjing*) monitored film scripts and the government itself shutdown fourteen film studies in the mid-1930s.[55] The Nationalist government soon turned their attention to films produced in Hollywood. In 1931 the Chinese government passed a law that mandated that all films that screened within China had to be approved first by government censors at the National Board of Film Censors.[56] By summer of 1932, the Chinese censors had already rejected twenty-six films produced in the United States. Most of those films that were rejected by the Chinese government were found to be "derogatory to the dignity of the Chinese race."[57]

Chinese government censors became interested in the production of *The Good Earth* almost as soon as they learned that MGM was trying to adapt the film to the screen in 1933. The

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[52] Major studios agreed to continue to abide by the NRA labor codes even after the NRA was found unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1935. See "Major Studios Continuing to Op. NRA Pro Tem Regardless, Although Eagle was no Help; Chisel already, *Variety*, May 29, 1933, 3.

[53] Federal Writers Project of the Works Project Administration, *Los Angeles in the 1930s: The WPA Guide to the City of Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 84.

[54] Lily Mu Lee Interview, July 24, 1982, Interview number 162, Box 20, Folder 1, Southern California Chinese American Oral History Project, UCLA Special Collections.

[55] Eric Smoodin, *Regarding Frank Capra: Audience, Celebrity, and American FilmSstudies, 1930-1960* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 57.

[56] Smoodin, *Regarding Frank Capra*, 57.

[57] Smoodin, *Regarding Frank Capra*, 58.

novel had been a global sensation and had been first translated into Chinese in 1932. By the end of the 1940s, Chinese translators had produced no less than eight different translations of the work. But as historian Zhiwei Xiao points out, Chinese interest in the book was driven more by curiosity over how Americans represented China than in interest in the novel itself. Xiao notes that the first translator of the novel, English professor Wu Lifu saw the novel as a disgraceful representation of the nation, going so far as to ask in his introduction to the book, "In writing all of this does the author not have some sense of white supremacy and propose saving China through invading it?"[58] Given the high profile of the novel in China, it should come as little surprise that the Chinese government took an early and active interest in the MGM's production of the film.

When MGM sent a crew to China in 1933 under the film's director George Hill to shoot background footage for the film, the studio had to obtain permission from the Chinese government to film in China. While the Chinese government had been reticent at first to allow Hill and his crew to film in the country—in part because the novel's depiction of the nation had been seen as offensive to many Chinese—the government eventually acquiesced. Before agreeing to allow Hill and his crew to film in China, the Chinese government asked MGM to agree to a few conditions. Included in these conditions were stipulations that the film would "present a truthful picture of China and her people," that the Chinese government would be allowed to appoint a representative to supervise the film's production, and that the entire cast would be Chinese.[59]

For a while it seemed as if MGM seriously considered employing an all-Chinese cast for the film. In November of 1934, *The Los Angeles Times* reported: "an all Chinese version of *The Good Earth* is not beyond the horizon of possibilities."[60] Citing the precedent set by the 1933 MGM film *Eskimo*—which had been shot in Alaska, using the Inupiaq language with English intertitles, and released to critical acclaim in November of 1933—the reporter Edwin Shallert suggested that the story of *The Good Earth*, "would be told in action as far as possible and that the native flavor preserved by having characters talk Chinese."[61] But whereas in *Eskimo*, MGM cast an Asian American performer who memorized her lines in Inupiaq verbatim as one of the two leads in the film, in *The Good Earth* MGM was considering casting exclusively Mandarin-speaking Chinese actors from China.[62]

Yet even within the studio, this proposition proved controversial. In the closing months of 1934, MGM was divided on whether or not the film should be shot in English or Chinese, with one fraction within the studio going so far as to suggest the company make two versions of the film and then decide which was better.[63] In December of 1934, advertisements were run in papers in China seeking Chinese actors between 24 and 26 years of age who spoke both Mandarin and English for the lead roles.[64] The studio conducted at least fifteen screen and voice

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[58] Zhiwei Xiao, "Nationalism, Orientalism, and Unequal Treatise of Ethnography," in *The Chinese in America: A History from Gold Mountain to the New Millennium*, edited by Susie Lan Cassel (New York: AltaMira: 2002), 276.
[59] Xiao, "Nationalism, Orientalism, and Unequal Treatise of Ethnography," 278-279.
[60] "Chinese language may be used in 'Good Earth,'" *Los Angeles Times*, November 23, 1933, 11.
[61] "Chinese language may be used in 'Good Earth,'" *Los Angeles Times*, November 23, 1933, 11. On *Eskimo* see Angela Aleiss, *Making the White Man's Indian: Native Americans and Hollywood Movies*, (Greenwood Publishing, 2005), 42-45.
[62] The film *Eskimo* co-starred an Asian American actress identified at the time of the film's release as Lotus. The actress would later go by the screen name Lotus Long. According to at least one Alaska Native who saw the film, Long's attempts to speak Inupiaq were unintelligible. See Alan Gevison, "Eskimo," in *Within Our Gates: Ethnicity in American Feature Films, 1911-1960* (University of California Press, 1997), 317. On Lotus Long being unable to speak Inupiaq see Margaret Blackman, *Sadie Brower Neakok: An Inupiaq Woman* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1989), 92.
[63] "'The Good Earth' Still Causes MGM Trouble," *The China Press*, September 6, 1934, 8.
[64] "'Olan', 'Wang Lung' Sought Here for 'Good Earth' Film," *The China Press*, December 28, 1934, 9.

tests with Chinese actors for the films lead roles.[65] Yet even as casting calls were being made in China, the Chinese government had already sent a representative, General Ting-shiu Tu (*Du Tingxiu*) of the Chinese National Army, to Hollywood to oversee the US production of the film, and MGM had already begun testing white actors for the lead.[66] By May of 1935, some press reports even suggested that Richard Barthlemess, who had come to fame in D.W. Griffith's *Broken Blossoms*, would be considered for the lead.[67] By October of 1935, Paul Muni, had been cast in the film's lead as the peasant Wang.[68] In November, Louise Rainer was cast as the female lead in the film, with the studio also deciding to shoot the film in a replica village built in Chatsworth, California.[69] In December, Anna May Wong was called in for a screen test for the role of Lotus, a major character who nonetheless fell in line with many of the more stereotypical roles she had been forced to play earlier in the her career. [70] Wong was not chosen for the role, and early in the new year she embarked on an eight month trip to China, where she expressed her doubts that the film would ever be completed successfully.[71]

Even as the nation's most successful and visible Chinese American actress was being passed over for a major role in the film, MGM had decided to cast Chinese American performers in all of the bit rolls and some of the supporting rules. In November *Reuters* ran a story across its wire service, announcing that "Chinese who can talk perfect English" were being sought for the film.[72] Paul Muni, General Tu, and the other representatives of the film embarked on a tour of the West Coast to identify Chinese American performers for supporting roles. In San Francisco, the *Associated Press* reported that the tour brought out, "hundreds of holiday-garbed Chinese from doddering septuagenarians to babbling infants milled about the Chinese YMCA today, bent on crashing filmdom's gate."[73] The November trip to San Francisco proved a success with the studio identifying Ching Wah Lee, a Chinatown tour guide and publisher of the magazine, *Chinese Digest*, and William Law, a merchant and President of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association in San Francisco, to play supporting roles in the film.[74] Other supporting roles in the film went to established bit-players such as Keye Luke and Soo Yung. In all the film included 68 non-principal speaking parts.[75]

With the increased national and global scrutiny given to casting the film's supporting and bit roles, a group of Chinese American performers decided to take the opportunity to challenge Tom Gubbins place as the sole provider of extras to Hollywood's studios. By the time MGM

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[65] "Work on the Film of the 'Good Earth' at a Standstill," *The China Press*, August 3, 1935, 9.
[66] On General Tu's arrival see, "Parsian Locale For Tuneful Production," *The Los Angeles Times*, December 20, 1934, 19; "Chinese General a Film Censor," *New York Times*, Jun 3, 1935, 22; On white actors see, "Asther Back at M-G For 'Good Earth Test," *Variety*, January 15, 1934, 2.
[67] Edwin and Elza Shallert, "Hollywood Highlights," *Picture Play Magazine*, Volume XLII Number 3, May, 1935, 72.
[68] "'The Life of John Paul Jones' Will Be Produced by Darryl F. Zanuck," *Los Angeles Times*, October 22, 1935, A9.
[69] On Luise Rianer see "A Little from Hollywood," *Film Daily*, November 19, 1935, 12; On the Chinese Village see, "Metro Will Transform Five Hundred Acres into Northern Chinese Community," *Los Angeles Times*, November 20, 1935, A17.
[70] *The Washington Post's* Hollywood columnist Sidney Skolsky reported from the set where Anna May Wong tested for the role of Lotus. See Sidney Skolsky, "Hollywood: Watching Them Make Pictures," *The Washington Post,* December 18, 1935, 20; Variety also reported that Anna May Wong and Princess Der Ling were tested for a role on the film. See "Chatter, Hollywood" *Variety*, December 11, 1935, 69.
[71] "Mob Meets Chinese Film Star," *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, February 19, 1936, 310.
[72] "English Speaking Chinese Sought for "The Good Earth"" *The China Press,* December 20, 1935, 9. The story is dated November 30, even though it ran in the *China Press* in December.
[73] "Chinese Throngs in Rush to Get Film Work," *Los Angeles Times*, November 3, 1935, 19. Casting calls for Chinese American performers were also held in Portland in November. See "Muni Seeking Talent," *Motion Picture Daily*, November 19, 1935, 2.
[74] "Casual Casting," *Variety*, December 11, 1935, 2; "Chatter, Hollywood" *Variety*, April 22, 1936, 69. The 1935 article mentions Lita Ming and Laure Lowe as being considered for roles.
[75] Hye Seung Chung, *Hollywood Asian: Philip Ahn and the Politics of Cross Ethnic Performance* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 2006), 96.

launched its West Coast search for Chinese American talent Tom Gubbins' position in Hollywood was already being challenged from a number of different sides. With Hollywood's increased interest in China as a subject of Hollywood film, the Nationalist government had begun to increase its influence over the ways that American film studios represented China. In 1930, the Chinese government banned Harold Lloyd's film *Welcome Danger* after a screening in Shanghai sparked public outrage. The Nanking government had also begun to sign agreements with other countries to ban films that Chiang Kai-shek's government found offensive to the dignity of China.[76] In 1932, China's Nationalist government established a consular office in Los Angeles and appointed, twenty-four-year old, Yi-seng Kiang (*Jiang Yang-sheng*), as the area's first Vice-Consul. After Tom Gubbins was fired from the MGM set of the Greta Garbo film, *The Painted Veil*, Yi-seng Kiang pressured the studio to hire one of his friends from within Chinatown, Dr. George Lew Chee, as Gubbins' replacement. *The Chicago Tribune* reported on Dr. Chee's appointment, "Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer has the favor of the Chinese government to think about, for when its current Garbo picture is complete, the same studio is to film Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth* and each film represents a studio outlay of close to a half million."[77]

In 1934, MGM was desperate to court the favor of the government in Nanking in order to ensure the success of *The Good Earth*. As one of the best-selling books of the early 1930s, *The Good Earth* offered MGM the promise of commercial and critical success. The hiring of the George Lew Chee as technical director thus allowed the MGM to court the favor the new Chinese government.[78] As *The Chicago Tribune* reported, "Each film may need more background scenes shot in China, and the cooperation which vice-consul Yi-Seng Kiang, and the government might extend or withhold from future movie expeditions makes the vice-consuls friend Lew Chee, important to the studio."[79] While Dr. Lew Chee's untimely death in March of 1935, would ensure that he would not challenge Tom Gubbins' primacy as technical expert in Chinatown, casting for *The Good Earth* would bring about a new challenge to Tom Gubbins' role as Chinatown's sole casting director, and once again the Chinese Vice-Consul would play a role in this as well.

Tom Gubbins found his position in Hollywood challenged not only from across the Pacific but also from within Chinatown. By December of 1935, with the demand for Chinese extras on the rise and production of *The Good Earth* set to begin, a short-lived rival casting agency sprung up in Chinatown to provide extras to Hollywood film. On December 1, 1935, *The Los Angeles Times* ran an article declaring, "*Good Earth* Casting Stirs Feud Among Chinese Actors."[80] The paper reported the existence of a second casting agency within Chinatown that was actively challenging Tom Gubbins' primacy in the industry. The article quoted an MGM representative who stated that the studio did not care who supplied them the performers: "Anyone who can supply what we want will certainly get a hearing."[81] Facing challenges to his position in Chinatown both from the government in Nanking and from within Chinatown itself, Gubbins' position as the sole casting director and technical advisor in Chinatown could not last.

With heightened publicity over the presence of Chinese American performers and with demand for these background performers at unprecedented levels, a group of Chinese American actors within Chinatown challenged Gubbins' role as the gatekeeper to Chinese American talent

[76] Zhiwei Xiao, "Nationalism, Orientalism, and Unequal Treatise of Ethnography," 284.
[77] George Shaffer, "Movie Change Threatens Rule in Chinatown," *Chicago Tribune*, August 4, 1934, 11.
[78] "Purely Chinese," *Variety*, Los Angeles, 114:1 April 3, 1934, 3.
[79] George Shaffer, "Movie Change Threatens Rule in Chinatown," *Chicago Tribune*, August 4, 1934, 11.
[80] John Scott, "'Good Earth' Casting Stirs Feud Among Chinese Actors," *Los Angeles Times*, December 1, 1935, C1.
[81] John Scott, "'Good Earth' Casting Stirs Feud Among Chinese Actors," *Los Angeles Times*, December 1, 1935, C1.

in Hollywood. In mid-December of 1935, fifty performers complained to the new vice-consul about the additional fees that Tom Gubbins' charged Asian American background performers. Yi-seng Kiang then filed a complaint on the performers behalf with the California State Labor Commission. *Variety* reported, "More than 50 Chinese complained that they must pay the 10%, plus an extra charge for costumes, whenever furnished by Gubbins, reducing their net below figure on studio payroll."[82] Two days of hearings attended by both State Labor Commissioner Thomas Barker and Campbell MacCulloch of Central Casting were held in the producers' association offices. By Christmas the charges had been dropped and a settlement reached. Tom Gubbins would become a runner for Central Casting, with the agency, not the performers, paying his commission. On Christmas Day, *Variety* reported, "Chinese extras hereafter will get their cure form Central Casting Bureau. And, free of charge."[83] Thus *The Good Earth* brought a profound change in the way Chinatown residents were cast in Hollywood films.

By the end of the 1930s, Central Casting hired Bessie Loo, a performer who held a small bit roll in *The Good Earth*, to serve as its lead runner for Chinese American performers. Like Gubbins she drew on her knowledge of the community to recruit performers. Yet unlike Gubbins, she was employed directly by Central Casting and was beholden to all of the labor laws and practices by which this organization was governed. Thus, Chinese American background performers in Los Angeles were able to use the heightened demand for their services along with the increased publicity of the film to demand their own incorporation into the mainstream practice of labor hiring and employment. The film became the vehicle which transformed the ways in which Chinese American performers were hired for background work in Hollywood. Yet even as *The Good Earth* improved the labor conditions of Chinese American background performers, the experience of performers on the film's set remained quite different from those of their white counterparts performing as extras on other films during the same period.

The Chinese Village, Performative Labor, and Dreams of Hollywood Stardom

For a few months in the summer and fall of 1936, MGM studios reportedly brought more than a thousand Chinese Americans to the Chinese Village in the San Fernando Valley to perform roles as background extras. The film's production, and the participation of the Chinese American background performers, elicited the interest of the national press in ways that few earlier films about China ever had. While the coverage of Chinese Americans employed by *The Good Earth* at times seemed to construct a narrative of a Chinese American experience that was part of, rather than distinct from, the larger American immigrant experience, this narrative of Chinese American inclusion was never complete. Even as the film provided a heightened visibility for the English-speaking, Chinese American background and bit performers, the realities of Hollywood casting, in which white performers in Yellowface performed in nearly all of the lead and supporting roles in Hollywood films in the 1930s, meant that Chinese American performers could not aspire to the lead roles in the film.[84] As a result, Chinese American performers had a profoundly different emotional and aspirational relationship to their work than did white extra employed in Hollywood during this period.

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[82] "L.A. Chinatown 'Mayor' Probed on Film Extras," *Variety*, 121:1, December 18, 1935, 2.
[83] "Cueing the Chinese," *Variety*, December 25, 1935, 2.
[84] The history of white performers assuming the roles of whites has a long history. On Yellowface performance see for example, Josephine Lee, *Japan of Pure Invention: Gilbert and Sullivans The Mikado* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2010); Kent Ono and Vincent Pham, *Asian Americans and the Media* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2009), 45-62; Eugene Wong, "On Visual Media Racism," (Ph.D. Diss., University of Denver, 1978), 40-51.

In late 1935, as MGM began to explore the possibility of producing *The Good Earth* in the United States, the nation's press began to focus increasingly on the Chinese American performers who might participate in the film's production. In the waning months of 1935 when these stories first began to appear, the press grappled with how the background performers relationship to the United States should be portrayed. Reporting on MGM's open casting call in San Francisco in early November, the Associated Press stated: "About 500 Chinese will be chosen from the local population, Maj-Gen. Tingshu Tu of the Chinese army, in charge of recruiting native talent, declared." On November 17, the *Washington Post* reported: "Except for the three principal roles of Wang, O-lan, the wife, and Lotus, all the parts will be filled by Chinese."[85] On November 19, the *Los Angeles Times* wrote: "Chinese from Los Angeles are to be recruited for extras and bit players and other are to be brought in if enough cannot be found." As these early stories about potential background players began to circulate in the press in November of 1935, this coverage initially did little to distinguish between the Chinese Americans living in places like Los Angeles who were being considered for background and bit roles from the Chinese performers in Asia who had previously been considered. After all, MGM wanted the presence of these performers to bolster its claims that the film was an authentic representation of China.

In the coming months, the coverage of the background talent would shift decidedly as the press increasingly began to emphasize the English fluency and acculturation to American norms of the Chinese American extras. On December 1, the *New York Times* ran an article about the film's casting: "Cured of all-native casts by '*Eskimo*,' Irving Thalberberg has placed Paul Muni in the role of Wang and Luise Rainer in the part of O-lan […] The supporting parts will be carried by Chinese performers who speak good English."[86] The article went on to state, "Hollywood is over the idea that films supposedly made abroad must have natives speaking English with an accent."[87] While emphasizing the fact that whites would play in the main roles, the article still highlighted not only the English-speaking ability of the Chinese American performers but also their ability to speak English without a Chinese accent. In reporting on the English language ability of the background performers, a Reuters article released around the same time went even further, stating: "Hollywood experts think it will be somewhat difficult to find older Chinese who can fill such requirements. Younger ones are much more easily available." Whereas the *New York Times* article had only mentioned that Chinese background performers needed to speak English well—a skill that could theoretically be acquired any number of ways—the Reuters articles describes a generational divide in the Chinese American community and in the process shows the community to be a multi-faceted entity with different generations having varying degrees of acculturation. While earlier representations presented all people of Chinese descent, whether born abroad or in the U.S. as subjects of China, the Reuters article implicitly endorsed the possibility of a subjectivity that was both Chinese and American. In doing so, the paper granted Chinese the possibility to become part of the American immigrant melting pot narrative and broke with the longstanding representation that people of Chinese descent could only exist within the United States as inassimilable foreigners.

In the coming year, the national coverage of the film's production would bring a sustained focus to the presence of an acculturated, English speaking, US-born Chinese American population. This coverage would take many forms from longer articles in fan magazines and

[85] Hubbard Keavy, "Many Kinds of Drama Make Up this Odd List," *The Washington Post*, November 17, 1935, H3.
[86] "News and Gossip from Film City," *New York Times*, December 1, 1935, X9.
[87] "News and Gossip from Film City," *New York Times*, December 1, 1935, X9.

newspapers detailing the films productions, to shorter stories about individual background and bit players in the film. A feature article in the fan magazine *Movie Classic* exemplifies this coverage: "Aside from a few principals, the entire cast is Chinese. Players recruited from Hollywood are augmented by Orientals from all over the Pacific Coast. Some speak perfect English. Others speak none…"[88] The article moved from a discussion of casting to describe the ways in which Chinese American extras spent their down time in the Chinese Village at Chatsworth, "Behind the Great Wall one inevitably finds a group of small Chinese boys, who attend American school, play baseball, just like American youngsters. In a shady corner one may see a group of Chinese elders engrossed in a game of cards, and on close scrutiny discover that the game is American draw poker!" By first acknowledging the presence of Chinese American population on the West Coast and then emphasizing the ways in which both the American-born generation and the immigrant generation have acculturated to American society, the article portrayed Chinese Americans as similar to other American immigrant groups.

While Chinese American extras were being described as having acculturated to American society, these representations never fully allowed for the idea that people of Chinese descent could become Americans themselves. An article that ran in November in *Picture Play Magazine* about Paul Muni's attempts to learn to play a Chinese character in the film clearly demonstrates this contradiction:

> He [Paul Muni] visited San Francisco in search of a Chinese family, a family still living in the traditions of the Orient. But he was doomed to disappointment. "I thought I might live with a family of this kind for a week and perhaps steal something from them, something of their inner feelings: absorb some old country atmosphere. But they are all Americanized," he said sadly. "They are more American than Americans.[89]

Muni statement that "they are more American than Americans" demonstrates both the possibilities and limits placed on the idea of Chinese American acculturation and acceptance into U.S. society. Chinese people could adopt American customs and even learn to speak English, but the article implied that the incorporation of Chinese Americans into the imagined community of the nation would never be complete. Chinese were represented as becoming "more American than Americans," but in making this statement the article also implied they could never become Americans themselves.

The representations of Chinese Americans extras in the film showed the ways in which the coverage of the film helped shift dominant idea of Chinese Americans away from representations of the Yellow Peril that had dominated the cultural imaginary up until that point. But the representations also show the limits of challenging Yellow Peril rhetoric. Yellow Peril representations in the coverage of the film were replaced by representations of Chinese who had fully adopted American norm but who still remained outside of the imagined community of the nation. Thus, the representation of the performers as "more American than the Americans" portrayed the Chinese American performers as what historian Ellen Wu has called, "assimilating Others." Wu describes the assimilating other as "persons acknowledged as capable of acting like white Americans while remaining distinct from them." Wu explains how during the Cold War, "state authorities, academicians, cultural producers, and common folk renovated Asian America's perceived differences from a liability to an asset."[90]

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[88] "The Good Earth," *Movie Classic*, October 1936
[89] Francis Dillon, "Paul Muni Worries Along," *Picture Play*, Volume XLV Number 3, (November, 1936), 54-55.
[90] Wu, *Color of Success*, 4.

In a similar way, coverage of Chinese American performers in *The Good Earth* shows how this process of portraying Chinese Americans as assimilating Others began even before the outbreak of the Second World War. Chinese Americans who spoke "perfect English" could be used in the background of *The Good Earth* to bolster claims of the films authenticity, while their ability to speak English could be used to appeal more readily to film going audiences in the United States. This idea that the Chinese American performers were now seen as similar to white performers but never exactly the same as their white counterparts had profound implications beyond the realm of representations. Film producers now saw Chinese Americans who hoped to perform in *The Good Earth* as both too Chinese and not Chinese enough to occupy the role of the film's leads. As a result these Chinese Americans were constantly relegated to the background of the film. This in turn had a profound influence on the way in which Chinese American performers on the film saw their own work.

Immigrant European performers were allowed to transform themselves into Chinese characters on screen and thus dream of becoming movie stars. In contrast, the average Chinese American background performer could not dream of being discovered and becoming a famous movie star in the same way that many white background performers did. Since the silent period, Chinese-themed films had been popular in Hollywood. But for the most part it was immigrant white actors played the most prominent roles as Chinese characters on in the 1910s and 1920s. These included the Russian-American actor Richard Barthelmess who played the role of Cheng Huang in *Broken Blossoms* and also the Swedish-American actor Warner Oland whose Chinese roles included parts in *Mandarin's Gold* (1919), *East Is West,* (1922) and *The Fighting American* (1924) in the silent era and eventually as Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan in sound era. In fact in the silent film era, casting Chinese Americans in supporting roles was so rare that when James Wang landed a minor role in the 1922 film *East is West, The Sacramento Union* reported with surprise that "a real Chinaman, Jim Wang will portray the proprietor of the Love Boat."[91] While *The Good Earth* transformed the narrative about Chinese American background extras in the nation's papers, the film did not transform the narrative of who had access to stardom.

The most famous Chinese American actor of the period by far was Anna May Wong, and the ways in which Chinese Americans perceived her speak volumes to the extent to which they could imagine themselves on screen. Oral histories with Chinese Americans who lived in Los Angeles in the 1930s demonstrate an appreciation for Anna May Wong's ability to land roles in Hollywood films even as they acknowledged the limitations of her portrayals. Ella Chung, who was a teenager in the early 1930s, admired Anna May Wong for her beauty but did not feel the roles she played were beneficial to the Chinese.[92] Herbert Leong recalled that many Chinese Americans admired Anna May Wong or Keye Luke for their ability to find employment in the film industry even as they saw the roles the two actors were cast in to be stereotypical.[93] Jennie Lee, who worked as an extra on *the Good Earth* was even more explicit in acknowledging the reasons Anna May Wong ended up in the roles that she did: "She didn't get treated right by the studio. They didn't give her a chance to play what she really wanted to be. Not one of these sinister mean women… I mean give her a chance to play a good person. But they didn't want to do it, and that's not right."[94] Chinese Americans who came of age in the Depression appreciate

[91] " 'East is West,' Cast Is All Complete," *Sacrament Union*, September 24, 1922.
[92] Ella Chung Interview, August 16, 1980, Summary Transcript, Southern California Chinese American Oral History Project.
[93] Herbert Leong Interview, December 22, 1980, Summary Transcript, Southern California Chinese American Oral History Project.
[94] Jennie Lee Taylor Interview, May 9, 2007, Chinatown Remembered Project, Chinese Historical Society of Southern California.

Anna May Wong's ability to navigate the film industry even as they recognize that many of the roles she was given were less than ideal. Certainly Wong's inability to land a leading role in *The Good Earth* only reinforced the conception that stardom was out of reach for those Chinese American extras who appeared in the film.

With stardom out of reach for most Chinese American performers, the work that they were asked to perform on the set of *The Good Earth* more closely resembled the type of labor that Chinese Americans undertook in Old Chinatown's tourist industry than it did the type of labor undertaken by the film's lead actors. Scholars working in the sociology of tourism have long recognized that tourism itself embodies a type of performance. Dean MacCannell has argued that tourism is always defined by a type of staged authenticity in which tourists seek authenticity and hosts are obliged to perform that authenticity to meet the visitors expectations.[95] Building on MacCannell's thesis, the historian Raymond Rast has shown this type of staged authenticity was an integral part of the tourist economy of San Francisco American Chinatown in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But performance in American Chinatowns went far beyond simply staged authenticity. Chinese Americans who catered to white tourists in restaurants, curio shops, and other sites in Chinatowns undertook what Alan Bryman, calls performative labor. According to Bryman performative labor entails the rendering of work "as akin to a theatrical performance in which the workplace is constructed as a type of stage."[96] Certainly in the case of urban Chinatowns in the early twentieth century, Chinese Americans restaurant owners and shopkeepers catering to white customers were called upon to engage in a type of performative labor that included a complex performance of racial and ethnic difference in order to meet visitors expectations.

Whereas the white leads of a given Hollywood film were asked to take on the persona, personality, feelings and back story of given character, background extras only had to perform basic emotions while going about particular background tasks. In the case of *The Good Earth* these might have included farming a field, drinking in a teahouse, or shopping in an outdoor marketplace. Above all Chinese American background performers were expected to perform a type of Chinese-ness that would lend the film a type of authenticity.[97] Indeed as Janette Roan has shown depictions of Chinese American extras employed on the set were used as one of a number of markers of the film's authenticity once MGM decided to shoot the film in California as opposed to China.[98]

While the possibilities of stardom transformed white extras affective relationship to their performances leaving many hoping that they would one day become movie stars, Chinese American background performers did not have the same sort of affective or asperational relationship to their performances as extras. Rather, Chinese Americans who performed on *The Good Earth* and other Hollywood films describe the situation as a type of labor. Like most jobs, work on *The Good Earth*, and other Chinese-themed pictures after 1935, followed a similar routine. Louise Leong, who was the only Chinese American reporter for the *Los Angeles Times* in the mid-1930s, reported for the paper on her experiences as an extra filming a night scene. While she does not name the picture, given the year that she was reporting and the description she provides of the process it seems likely that she was employed on *The Good Earth*. The

[95] Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (University of California Press, 1999), 91-107.
[96] Alan Bryman, *The Disneyization of Society* (London: Sage Publishers, 2004), 103.
[97] In her discussion of *The Good Earth,* Janette Roan demonstrates the ways in which the producers of the film were concerned first and foremost with selling the film's authenticity to audience members; Janette Roan, *Envisioning Asia: On Location, Travel and the Cinematic Geography of U.S. Orientalism*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).
[98] Roan, *Envisioning Asia*, 113-156.

process began with studios sending busses to Chinatown to pick up the performers. Leong described the crowd of extras that gathered at the Plaza waiting for their transportation, "Youngsters, Hollywood stylish in gaucho shirts and berets, stood alongside Chinatown grandfathers who had never become reconciled to American shoes. In line, also because they family income needed extra dollars were weary-eyed Chinese women in trousers and jackets."[99] Far from being excited to appear in a Hollywood film, the scene at the Plaza that Leong describes shows the extent to which many Chinese Americans actively disliked the process they were undertaking: "'We work all night, and I'll have no sleep in the morning,' wailed one woman. 'My son-in-law gets up at 5, o'clock to work in the market. The kids are up at 6 and play on my bed how can I get sleep.'"

Once the background performers arrived on set they went to the costume department to pick-up their wardrobe for the day. Whereas extras that performed on films set in the present-day often provided their own wardrobe, extras on period pieces like *The Good Earth* had their costumes provided by the studios. Charles Leong who was employed as a farmer on *The Good Earth* recalled the irony of being assigned a set of dirty looking clothes for the role only to be reassured by the casting department that the costume was sterilized each day. [100] After receiving their costumes the extras went to the make-up department. Louise Leong describes, "A make-up man grabbed me and another splattered me with mud form the set, giggling self-consciously. The stuff was damp and cold…The old ladies tried to run away from the spray gun and were grabbed back. They shut their eyes, trembled and yelled, 'Ai yah, a yah,' as they were splashed with mud." Charles Leong recalls having his head shaved by the studio for his role as a farmer in *The Good Earth*, but also recalling that the three-month job came with a special agreement and an additional reimbursement.

While extras did spend some of their time performing for the camera, a number of performers who worked as background extras during the period recall performing for the camera being punctuated by long period of down time for which the performers were still paid. Indeed Charles Leong recalls that most of the time on set was spent waiting for a scene hoping they would not have to perform: "It's a routine of sitting around most of the time—and hoping the stars, directors, cameramen and technical workers don't cooperate. Because the longer they stall the longer we work." Far from wanting to perform on film, Leong hoped that the leads of the film slowed down production, so that extras were on set longer—and got paid more—without having perform. Leong was hardly the only extra who when asked to recall their time in Hollywood focused on the downtime as opposed to the actual performance. Decades later, Richard Chee could not remember the names of the films he performed in, but he did remember quite fondly the poker games he would play with other Chinese background players during down time on set.[101] But perhaps most telling was Jennie Lee's story. She recalled performing as an extra during the day at the same time she was working nights, "I worked the graveyard shift. And they were asking for extras to go to work. So we went to the MGM studios. I went there and laid down and fell asleep. All during the time, I don't know. After so many hours someone woke me up saying it's time to go home! And they gave me my money and that was that!"[102]

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[99] Louise Leong, "Nightcall--In Chinatown, *Los Angeles Times*, July 26, 1936, I3.
[100] Charles Leong, "Mandarins in Hollywood," in *Moving the Image: Independent Asian Pacific American Media Arts* (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center and Visual Communications, 1991), 127.
[101] Richard Chee Interview, October 5, 2008, Chinatown Remembered Project, Chinese Historical Society of Southern California.
[102] Jennie Lee Taylor Interview, May 9 2007, Chinatown Remembered Project, Chinese Historical Society of Southern California.

Despite Jennie Lee's experience, most background performers were not so lucky as to be able to arrive on set and not be asked to perform in a scene. Louise Leong reported on the directions given to the mob scene by a Chinese speaking interpreter on set, "This is supposed to be a revolution. Anything in the town is yours for the taking. Rush into the markets and loot. Grab things—fight over them. Be greedy—have fire in your eyes." Louise Leong then recalled that later the same translator told them explicitly, "Don't laugh." The admonition to not laugh was a reminder to the extras that not only were they expected to physically perform specific tasks that would be filmed, but they had to do so while adopting the expected emotional state. In his discussion of the work of the movie actress Shirley Temple in the 1930s, historian John Kasson draws on the sociological idea of emotional labor to describe the type of work that Temple was asked to perform—particularly as she was asked to smile in role after role.[103] While not in the foreground, background performers like Charles Leong and Louise Leong performed a similar type of emotional labor.

While this type of performance was expected of all extras employed in Hollywood regardless of the film or their ethnic background, the descriptions of background performance provided by Louise Leong and Charles Leong suggest that being a Chinese American performing on one of these China-themed films could sometimes involuntarily elicit a much deeper emotional response in the performers than simply not laughing. Charles Leong recalls working in the race paddies at the Chinese Village in Chatsworth:

> I was barefoot and hoeing a thin row of rice shoots. I felt the warmth of the soil. I was in China. And back of me, a camera followed my every move. Twenty other brown bodies gleamed in the California sun, tilling the rice fields. Glistening, actually working and covered with more sweat than clothing. Here we were, twenty young American-born Chinese, trying to simulate, to reenact, for the movies a scene in which was part of the national fiber of our forefathers. My mind was far from the usual prosaic things. Was this a dream, a fantasy, realism? Was this China or Hollywood?[104]

Charles Leong's memory that he was "actually working" shows the extent to which the background performances as Chinese peasants on *The Good Earth* sometimes required strenuous physical labor.

Yet this above passage also points to a far deeper emotional resonance that performing in these China-themed films may have elicited in the Chinese American performers. Charles Leong description shows the ways in which the seeming authenticity of the film set caused him to reflect on his own relationship to his ancestors and his relationship as a Chinese American to forms of labor in rural China that had been such an important part of the lives of so many nineteenth-century Chinese people. He describes the difficulty of trying to "simulate" an act that was "part of the national fiber of forefathers." In this way Leong's performance seems to go far beyond the surface level emotional performances that those in the service industry are regularly asked to perform—or for that matter the type of emotional performance called upon by Chinatown shopkeepers and restaurant owners in interacting with tourists. Leong's description implies that the film caused an almost existential reflection on his part on the nature of his work.

Louise Leong's reporting on the night call suggests a similar reaction in one of the extras she observed on the set:

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[103] John f. Kasson, "Behind Shirley Temples Smile," in *The Cultural Turn in U.S. History: Past Present and Future* edited by James W Cook, Lawrence B. Glickman, and Michael O'Malley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 185-216.
[104] Charles Leong, "Mandarins in Hollywood," 131.

> Ah Bok squatted on the ground in front of a hut by the stone gate. A far-away look came into his eyes as he watched groups of peasants strolling about the marketplace where dried ducks, salted fish, and sausages were strung on bamboo poles…To Ah Bok it was good. So long since he had been in Canton—thirty, no forty years. He shut his eyes in deep enjoyment. Then—"Places everybody!" some one shouted…The spell was broken but he had imagined himself at his old home at least for a few minutes. Now that the arc lights blazed overhead and the camera like some monstrous animal was being wheeled onto the set, it was no longer China, but Hollywood.[105]

Like Charles Leong, Louise Leong's description of Ah Bok's performance shows the ways in which performance in these China films sparked a deep emotional resonance with many of the background performers. By the 1930s, the Chinese American community was predominantly urban. This was nowhere more true than among Chinese American background performers, the vast majority of whom came from Los Angeles. Most young urban Chinese American like Charles Leong and Louise Leong would have had little connection with the farming or even with manual labor. At the same time older Chinese Americans like Ah Bok who were decades removed from China had very different lives in the urban Chinatowns of the West Coast.

Whether or not actual Chinese villagers in the 1930s lived in the ways the film portrayed village life was irrelevant. The performances on the film created a type of shock that seems to have caused some Chinese American background performers to contemplate their connections to rural life in Southern China. Both Charles Leong and Ah Bok—Chinese from two different generations, one born in China and the other in the United States—appear to have had moments where extra work produced a type of emotional connection to China far different from the connection they experienced to that country in their daily lives as urban Californians. This made the labor that Chinese Americans background performers were asked to perform quite different from the labor of most of their white counterparts on other Hollywood films.

More than simply offering a paycheck, the Chinese Village in Chatsworth in many ways became a surrogate Chinatown for many who had been displaced by the destruction of Union Station. For a few months in 1936, the Chinese Village came alive. While the leading actors and the film crew made up a large portion of this village, the largest number of those employed in this replica Chinatown in the San Fernando Valley were the Chinese American background performers. For these performers *The Good Earth* represented a form of performative labor that helped supplement their incomes during the Great Depression. Of course, the set of *The Good Earth* was never meant to be a permanent replacement for Old Chinatown. As the production of *The Good Earth* in Chatsworth came to end, the struggle over who would control this new Chinatown was already well underway near downtown Los Angeles.

[105] Louise Leong, "Nightcall in Chinatown, *Los Angeles Times*, July 26, 1936, I3.

Chapter 4: New Chinatown and China City

By the spring of 1937, the steel girders of the planned Union Station rose over Old Chinatown casting a grim reminder of the impending demolition of most of the old Chinese American neighborhood.[1] Four years earlier, in the winter of 1933, the first crew from the Union Station project began their slow demolition of the neighborhood block by block, a process that in 1937 had yet to be completed. Over the prior four years, Peter SooHoo, a thirty-eight year old city employee and leader in the Chinese American community, had worked tirelessly to slow the neighborhood's removal while simultaneously seeking to secure a proper site for a new Chinatown. On the night of April 22, 1937, Peter SooHoo along with the other members of the Los Angeles Chinatown Project Association met with Herbert Lapham, a land agent for the Santa Fe Railway, owner of a nearby storage lot which they hoped would become the site for a new Chinatown.[2]

Already a competing group headed by Christine Sterling with the backing of a consortium of business leaders and film executives was planning a business district dubbed China City. Sterling was a city booster and socialite who had had already experienced success in developing and selling her Mexican-themed district Olvera Street to the city's tourists. Now Sterling hoped to recruit local Chinese Americans to work and local whites to shop in her new Chinese-themed district located a short walk from Olvera Street. Despite the challenge from Ms. Sterling's group, SooHoo and the others involved in the Los Angeles Chinatown Project Association had their own vision and economic plan. Theirs would be a first for an American Chinatown: a California corporation, wholly owned, controlled, and operated by Chinese Americans, whose place in the popular imagination was defined by the investors themselves.

Placing the construction of these two new Chinese American business districts within the broader context of the building of Union Station and the destruction of Old Chinatown, this chapter shows how both New Chinatown and China City became key sites through which Chinese Americans mediated the dominant discourses of American Orientalism to shape the place of ethnic enclave with the imaginary of the city and the nation. By the 1930s, Chinatown had become a defining part of the iconography of the Los Angeles. Over the prior decades, the district had become a key site against which boosters and city image-makers constructed their vision of Los Angeles as a racially white city. As the local embodiment of Orientalism, Chinatown served a necessary purpose in the way in which the city constructed and maintained its racial hierarchies. For more than a half-century there had been calls by various city leaders to destroy Chinatown, but for almost as long, various developers had offered competing visions of how Chinatown would be rebuilt once Old Chinatown was destroyed. Chinatown it seems was essential to the way the city imagined itself. Now with the impending destruction of Old Chinatown, both Peter SooHoo and Christine Sterling saw an opportunity to present the city and the nation with their own vision of for the city's Chinatown.

SooHoo and his colleagues presented an image that drew directly on the iconography seen in San Francisco's Chinatown after the earthquake. In the process, New Chinatown claimed

[1] By April of 1937, construction was well underway on the mail and baggage claim buildings. See "Station Work Progresses," *Los Angeles Times*, September 28, 1936, A3. Construction on the main terminal would begin in early May. See "Terminal Depot Work Started," *Los Angeles Times,* May 4, 1937, A1.

[2] Historian Edwin S. Bingham, gives a brief description of the April 22, 1937 meeting. See Edwin S. Bingham, "The Saga of the Los Angeles Chinese" (Master's thesis, Occidental College, 1942), 148.

a rhetoric of authenticity rooted in the Chinese heritage of the district's owners. Like other Chinese American merchants before them, they rearticulated mainstream Orientalism to present a vision of Chinese difference that was non-threatening and could be sold to white visitors in ways that would support their own livelihood. The merchants did this while also explicitly linking their Chinatown to their roots as U.S. residents and citizens. In this sense, Peter SooHoo and his cohort sought to position their community as worthy of inclusion in the imagination of the U.S. as a melting pot. By highlighting the district's Chinese American ownership and positioning the district in opposition to Sterling's Hollywood-themed China City, SooHoo helped create a Chinatown that the general public perceived as simultaneously modern and authentic. Thus, the project was the culmination of the form of Chinese American Orientalism developed by the Chinese American merchant class over the last half century as a direct challenge to Yellow Peril perceptions of their community.

In contrast Sterling's project attempted to craft a type of ethnic theme park that drew on shifting Orientalist narratives about Chinese people seen in films like MGM's 1937 adaption of Pearl S. Buck's *The Good Earth*. Unlike New Chinatown, Sterling's China City foregrounded it's own theatricality. With it's backing by Hollywood studios, China City claimed to show visitors not an authentic representation of China, but rather an authentic re-creation of the popular American cinematic depiction of China. Many of the background extras who appeared in the film also found work in China City and a few of the emerging Chinese American bit-players such as Roland Got ran businesses in the Christine Sterling's district. China City then offered tourists an opportunity to experience the China of Hollywood's imagination.

At the same time, the presentation of New Chinatown as the authentic Chinatown and China City as the Hollywood theme park masks the very real forms of opportunity that China City offered aspiring Chinese American business-owners who could not afford to invest in New Chinatown. Gripped by the economic uncertainty of the Great Depression, many local Chinese American who were priced out of New Chinatown rented space with China City, which was much more accommodating to diverse elements within the local Chinese American community. In providing low-cost stalls for rent to aspiring Chinese business owner, China City provided a way for a Chinese American entrepreneurs to open a small business with far less capital than was required to invest in New Chinatown. While neither Peter SooHoo nor Christine Sterling was able to unify the community behind a single plan, both entrepreneurs drew on the techniques and the broader apparatus developed by Chinese American merchants primarily in World's Fairs exhibits about China and urban Chinatowns like New York and San Francisco to fashion their respective Chinatowns to the visitors and residents of Los Angeles. While different in their representations, these two projects represented the logical culmination of the development of various urban Chinatowns as sites of tourism and performance over the prior half-century.

Old Chinatown and the Construction of Union Station

The battle for control over a new Chinatown began well before the first demolition crews arrived in Old Chinatown and even before the arrival of the film industry in the 1910s. For nearly as long as those in power had envisioned the destruction of Old Chinatown, various groups in the city had discussed destroying Old Chinatown and building a new one. Chinese American merchants in the city understood as well as anyone that if they were to survive they needed to be able to control the image of Chinatown that was presented to white tourists. As such the Chinese American merchants of Los Angeles were among the first to propose a new Chinatown for the city under their own control. At the same time there were white developers that also harbored

aspirations of building a new Chinatown and these aspirations clashed with those of the city's Chinese American merchants. Certainly many white residents of the city could not envision Los Angeles without a Chinatown. As such, these same residents of Los Angeles saw Chinatown not as antithetical to the idea of Los Angeles as a racially white city but rather as integral to it. Even as plans began to circulate for building the long-debated Union passenger station on the site of Old Chinatown, the question that many whites asked was where Chinatown would be rebuilt. That a new Chinatown was to be built in Los Angeles was hardly in doubt. The question was: when would this Chinatown be built, under what circumstances, and under whose control?

In 1906, shortly after accusations of scarlet fever and diphtheria in Chinatown and after the destruction of San Francisco Chinatown by the earthquake and fire in April of that year, the *Los Angeles Times* ran an article about an effort lead by Chinese Chamber of Commerce president George Lem to move Chinatown to an area where the Chinese American merchant elite could have more control over the community. The article pointed out that Chinatown was on private land owned by Mrs. C.A. Sepulveda and J.R. Shaffer, and that even though the residents of the community kept "their buildings in sanitary condition, the owners of the streets make no effort to put them in proper shape and thus the reputation of the Chinese suffers." According to the article, the Chinese American merchants believed that paved streets would do much to counter accusations of "filth" in Chinatown. As outlined by the *Los Angeles Times*, George Lem's proposal included a plan for a new "Chinese village" on a plot of at least five acres that would contain a "park in which Chinese flowers, herbs and trees would be cultivated." To make this dream a reality, the merchants sought a half-million-dollar investment from the broader city business community. George Lem and the Chinese Chamber of Commerce believed that the new Chinatown "would be well worth the aid of American men of affairs as an attraction for tourists."[3] While George Lem and his associates could see quite clearly that there was business to be made from middle class white tourists, he and his associates were unable to transform their plan for a Chinese village in Los Angeles into a reality.

George Lem and his group of Chinese American merchants weren't the only ones to seek to profit off the popular demand for Chinatown tourism. While Los Angeles Chinatown was much smaller than the communities in San Francisco or New York, the district still attracted white tour guides who made a living from the interests of middle class white tourists. Two years after the failure of George Lem's project, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Los Angeles held a meeting in Chinatown in 1909 to find ways to address the Yellow Peril associations of Chinatown and in particular the depictions of the community perpetuated by white guides. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that the Chinese merchants in Los Angeles were tired of tales of "imaginary bloodshed, underground passages, opium hells and white slaves."[4] The article went on to explain that Chinatown had no underground dens and that there were only two rooms in the community where opium was smoked, one of which was maintained primarily to entertain white visitors. Of the Chinese man employed to perform in the opium den for tourists, the paper wrote, "Frequently he is required to leave his supper to perform for the visitors, much as a child is called upon to give a parlor recitation and as a result he is oft time sick at his stomach from mixing opium with his food."[5] While white tour guides in Los Angeles Chinatown were never as prevalent as they had been in San Francisco Chinatown before the earthquake, those that did

[3] "Orient City for Chinese," *Los Angeles Times*, November 18, 1906, II27.
[4] "Guides' Tales are Resented," *Los Angeles Times*, July 31 1909, II1.
[5] "Guides Tales are resented," *Los Angeles Times*, July 31, 1909, II1.

operate in Southern California followed much of the same script as their colleagues in Northern California.

The meeting of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce on July 31, 1909, to address tourist guide depictions of Old Chinatown resulted in a newspaper article published the following day. Written by Fook Chong Wong, the article was entitled, "Suggestions to Visitors to Chinatown: by a Chinese Graduate of Los Angeles High School."[6] In the piece, Wong wrote that white tourists to Chinatown, "only observe a 'freakshow' made up by a few of the low-down Chinese, under the direction of the guides and maintained directly by them. This sort of sight-seeing represents only the lowest class of Chinese that ever trod the soil of this country, and who betray their country's name for a few dollars." Wong went on to implore his readers to visit some of the mission schools of Chinatown to witness the Chinese there. These two articles in the *Los Angeles Times* point to the extent to which Chinatown in Los Angeles had become a site of contestation long before the debate over building a Union Station on the site of Old Chinatown became a point of major concern for the city's residents. White entrepreneurs, Chinatown merchants, and working-class Chinese struggling to make a living all understood that there was a profit to be made in performing Orientalist difference to white tourists. The theatrical nature of these Chinatown tours was hardly a secret but the ability to control these performances and who profited from them remained contested.

With the success of Chinese American merchants in transforming the image of San Francisco Chinatown in the decade after 1906 earthquake and fire, another plan for a new Chinatown began to circulate around Los Angeles in 1914. This new round of speculation was set off by the purchase of most of the private land on which Chinatown was located by San Francisco developer L.F. Hachett. Under the heading "Best Chinatown in World Started in Los Angeles," the *Los Angeles Times* claimed that "preliminary plans have already been prepared by the Los Angeles architects for the buildings of the new Chinese district."[7] The paper then went on to describe the plan in detail. The project would include, "living quarters, retail stores, restaurants, tearooms, and other features common to the average Chinatown." The paper also stated that this new Chinatown would be "surrounded by a Chinese wall with four main entrance gates, patterned after famous portals in the Great Wall of China." The article even included an artists sketch imagining what the project would look when completed. While nothing came of either the George Lem or L.F. Hatchet plans, both followed a similar pattern of proposing a new Chinatown in the face of calls for the community's destruction. Meanwhile guided tours of the community persisted.

By the 1920s, tourism had become a major force in the regional economy with more than a million visitors traveling to Southern California each year. While tourists were most interested in visiting celebrity homes and orange groves, bus tours of the major sites of the region often included a stop in Chinatown. An interview with the general manager of the largest sightseeing line in Southern California described the bus stop in Chinatown to the *Los Angeles Times* described their fascination with Chinatown:

> The Chinatown excursion is taken by throngs of tourist. The sight of a Chinese smoking an opium pipe (filled with tobacco) gives a thrill. The tourists want to know if there have been any tong wars fought there, if lottery games are operated and if the Chinese still

[6] Fook Chong Wong, "Suggestions to Visitors to Chinatown," Los Angeles Times, August 1, 1909, II9.
[7] "Best Chinatown in the World Started in Los Angeles," *Los Angeles Times*, Nov 19, 1914, II1.

wear queues. We stop at one place run by a Chinese where the tourist buys ginger candy, Chinese nuts, cookies, and curios.[8]

Even as tourism in Chinatown shifted from guided tours on foot to bus tours, Yellow Peril tropes remained similar. Indeed the same article prefaces its description of the stop in Chinatown with a claim that while women constitute the majority of bus tour patrons, it was men who most wanted to visit Chinatown. In this way the article hinted that many visitors still conceived of the area as somehow unsafe for white women.

Just as Chinatown represented a site of urban blight and ethnic difference in the minds of many white Angelenos, the Union Station project, like the railways themselves, came to symbolize for many the possibility of growth, renewal, and modernity. Early promoters of Union Station saw the project not only as a way to improve city safety by eliminating dangerous railway crossings, but also as a way to bring about an aesthetic and social transformation to the central core of the city. In 1909, the recently formed Los Angeles Union Station Association asserted that "the different railroads centering in the Los Angeles derive an immense revenue through the tourist travel that comes to Los Angeles," and yet the association argued that "the deplorable condition of the terminal facilities of the different railroad creates an unfavorable impression and is undoubtedly a detriment to Los Angles, which seriously affects the pride of our citizens."[9] The Union Station Association implied that building the station would offer an opportunity to project a different image of the city to tourists and citizens alike.

The plan for Union Station pitted some of the strongest interest groups in the city against one another. The Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce along with *Los Angeles Times* became the primary backers of a Union Station project at the Plaza. In contrast, the three major transcontinental railroads in Los Angeles—The Santa Fe, The Southern Pacific, and the Salt Lake—along with William Randolph Hearst's *Los Angeles Examiner* all opposed the Plaza plan. Between 1909 and 1933, the city of Los Angeles, two major newspapers, the railroad companies, as well as myriad other competing interests remained locked in a web of proposals, litigation and land deals.[10] By 1920, the heart of the dispute centered on whether, in an effort to eliminate grade crossings—the dangerous points were railroads crossed city roads—the railroads could be forced to build a station at their own expense. That year the California Railroad Commission issued a report under the direction of the railroad commission's Chief Engineer Richard Sachse recommended a union passenger station as a key way to address the issue of grade crossings. The Sachse report further identified the Plaza as the best of three considered sites for this new station.[11]

In making a recommendation to build Union Station adjacent to the Los Angeles Plaza, the Sachse report drew heavily on earlier proponents of the City Beautiful movement. One of the key tenants of the City Beautiful movement was the notion that transformations in the aesthetic layout of the city could improve the moral character of its people. Charles Mulford Robinson wrote in 1918 of this relationship between aesthetic aspects of city design and the people who lived in the city: "As this environment is lovely and uplifting, or mean and depressing, as it feeds

[8] "Movie Making Lures Tourists," *Los Angeles Times*, September 7, 1924, B21.
[9] "Want Ripley to Urge Big Depot," *Los Angeles Herald*, April 30, 1909, 5.
[10] For descriptions of the land dispute and other related issues see Suellen Cheng and Munson Kwok, "Chinatown the Golden Years: The Beginning" in Susie Ling ed., *Bridging the Centuries: History of Chinese in Southern California*, (Los Angeles: Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, 2001), 34 Kroznek and Greenwood, "Historical Background" 35-37; Edwin Bingham, "The Saga of the Los Angeles Chinese, (Occidental College, Masters Thesis, 1942), 136-140.
[11] Marlyn Musciant, "In Search of a Site for Union Station, 1918-1933" in Maryln Musican ed. *Los Angeles Union Station* (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2014), 21.

or starves the brains and spirits whose outlook upon the earth it compasses, it may be supposed to influence the battle to help forward or retrograde the movement of the race."[12] The Sachse report drew both on two earlier reports one produced by Charles Mulford Robinson and the other by Bion J Arnold, another City Beautiful proponent.[13] Quoting Bion J Arnold, the Sachse report made the case for the Plaza site: "It is pleasing to find this splendid opening for a portal which will allow the city to display at its gates the evidence of its growth, it prosperity, its progress in government and its possibilities in art."[14] The Sachse report further lauded the Plaza site for its, "greater architectural and aesthetic possibilities." Read through the lens of 1920s Los Angeles, it is not difficult to understand the ways in which city's leadership saw the Plaza as both a site of "aesthetic possibilities," and one that could help "forward" the "movement of the race." Indeed to many City Beautiful adherents these goals were one and the same. At a time when city boosters were actively working to promote an image of the city as a home for mid-Western whites, Union Station project's broader connection with the City Beautiful movement eventually sparked the question of whether or not it was possible for a new Chinatown to adhere to the tenets of this City Beautiful movement.

In the early 1920s, the Los Angeles Plaza was home to vibrant mix of Mexican, European, and Asian immigrant groups, few of whom conformed to the racial ideals promoted in the city's booster literature. Despite the presence of a number of overlapping communities at the Plaza, the Sachse plan only addressed in passing the presence of the people who lived or ran businesses in the area. The Sachse report argued: "At the Plaza a suitable park to set the station off is possible with the least damage to business, and at least cost, and at the intersection of important streets."[15] The report did acknowledge that some of the property was located on "a section of Chinatown, being partially occupied by two-story brick buildings leased to Chinese," but it did so without further considering the ways that building a Union Passenger station would impact the Chinese American community. Certainly when viewed through the lens of the city's Chinese American residents, the construction of Union Station at the Plaza site could not be read as inflicting minimal damage on the community's businesses. At the same time, the report never explicitly called for the *permanent* destruction and removal Chinatown from the city of Los Angeles. Instead, the Sachse report left unanswered what was to happen to the Chinese American community in Los Angeles if and when Union Station was built. In this way the report left open the possibility that a new Chinatown could be built that also conformed to the ideals of the city Beautiful Movement.

While the report itself may have left the question of a replacement Chinatown unanswered, the *Los Angeles Times,* one of the major backers of the plan for the Union Station at the Plaza, was not as reticent to broach the issue. Shortly after the Sachse report raised the issue of Chinatown's destruction, the *Times* ran an article entitled, "Wanted: New Chinatown Site."[16] The article declared that the Sachse report, "foretells that Chinatown must go to another section." The paper then gestured to American-born youth in Chinatown as evidence that "the new spirit of today's Chinatown is in ascendency."[17] Claiming that at least 15% of the population of

[12] Charles Robinson, *Modern Civic Art or the City Made Beautiful* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1918), 229.
[13] The Sachse report quoted on two earlier reports one a 1907 report by Charles Robinson and the other by Bion Arnold. See Richard Sachse, "Report on Railroad Crossing Elimination and Passenger and Freight Terminals in Los Angeles (California Railroad Commission Engineering Department, 1920).
[14] Quoted in Sachse, "Report on Railroad Crossing," 306.
[15] Sachse, "Report on Railroad Crossing," 28.
[16] Guy W. Finney, "Wanted New Chinatown Site," *Los Angeles Times*, February 22, 1920, II1.
[17] Guy W. Finney, "Wanted New Chinatown Site," *Los Angeles Times*, February 22, 1920, II1.

Chinatown was born in the United States—the actual figure was undoubtedly much higher—the article went on to describe, "Chinese young men, garbed in up-to-date suits, snappy and entertaining in their way," and to describe the young women of Chinatown who "have mastered the gentle art of feminine make-up and wear their hair in the late occidental way." The paper contrasts this younger generation of Chinese Americans with their immigrant parents, tying its calls for a new Chinatown to the ethos embodied in this younger generation. Articles like this one seem to point to the possibility of a new Chinatown fitting into the vision of aesthetic transformation called for by promoters of the City Beautiful movement and alluded to in the Sachse report.

Even as the Sachse report set off another round of discussions about Chinatown's destruction and renewal, the report did not portend Old Chinatown's immediate demise. In the years following the 1920 release of Sachse's railway commission report, the battle over the Union Terminal at the Plaza would intensify as the railroad fought the report's suggestions.[18] Within this context, the merchants in Old Chinatown were busy doing what they could to reshape popular notions of Chinatown as a site of urban blight. In 1924, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce issued a statement to perspective tourists on the eve of the Chinese New Year inviting visitors to the community. In this statement the Chinese merchants made four resolutions. First the merchants resolved that they would "use every opportunity to induce white people of the city and tourists to visit Chinatown." Second, that they would work to let the entire community realize that "Chinatown is safe for white women to come to, whether escorted or alone." Third, that they would "suppress rowdyism among the lower class of white people visiting Chinatown." The merchants ended the statement by inviting visitors to Chinatown to celebrate Chinese New Year and to "see for themselves the conditions that prevail here."[19] But like the attempts by Chinese American merchants fifteen years earlier, it seemed that the efforts of the Chinese merchants to utilize the press to change public opinions of Old Chinatown had little effect on popular opinions of the neighborhood. Indeed two short years after the Chinese Chamber of Commerce issued their statement to perspective white visitors and tourists, the city held its vote on whether or not build the new Union Station on the site of Old Chinatown destroying most of the community and displacing most of its residents.

In the fall of 1926, the City Council attempted to build momentum for Union Station by putting the project before the voters in a non-binding vote. In a special municipal election, Los Angeles city voters were asked to vote on two separate propositions: the first, Proposition 8 asked if a union rail station for all steam railroads should be established in Los Angeles; the second, Proposition 9, asked whether or not the station should be built at the plaza site. The voters were given no other options for the location of the prospective depot. In addition to these two propositions, the ballot also contained a separate proposition which asked for approval of the plan for a new City Hall, which would be twenty-eight stories in height—and another proposition which sought to allow business zoning along Wilshire Boulevard. As historian Jeremiah Axelrod has noted, the special election forced Angelenos to decide between two visions of urban growth for the city: one model featured skyscrapers and an elevated transit

[18] In 1921, the railroads defied an order by the California Railroad Commission to build a Union Station at their own expense and moved the battle over the fate the union station to the courts. Shortly thereafter, in an attempt to convince the city to drop all legal challenges against them, the railroads offered to connect their stations through a system of elevated tracks thereby eliminating all dangerous grade crossings from the streets. The city rejected this offer and pushed ahead with its plan to for a union station at the Plaza. Musicant, "In Search of a Site for Union Station," 30.

[19] "Chinese To Tell World," *Los Angeles Times*, January 25, 1924, A1.

infrastructure similar in design to New York and Chicago; and the other which preserved the city's low-density plans for growth.[20]

The battle over the union passenger station played out across the city's papers and pitted the *Los Angeles Times,* which supported a Union Station at the Plaza*,* against the pro-railroad, anti-Union Station, *Los Angeles Examiner*. In its attempt to derail the Union Station project, the *Los Angeles Examiner* opposed the two Union Station ballot measures by explicitly linking the plan in the minds of the city's voters with Chinatown.[21] An April 12th editorial declared, "Depot in Chinese District or No More Grade Crossings?"[22] The editorial linked the project to Chinatown even as it argued that the Plaza site would not eliminate grade crossings for local Pacific Electric Street Cars. In an April 20th editorial, the *Examiner* attempted to argue that the Plaza should no longer be regarded as the center of the city: "The Plaza ceased, 100 years ago to be the city's center." The editorial later went on to say, "If ever there is to be a Union Station, let it at least not be located between Chinatown and "Little Mexico."[23] On April 24th the paper's editorial section, again opined against a "passenger terminal on the Chinatown site," by arguing that it would create an "amount of traffic that would make congestion intolerable."[24] The paper's editorial staff saw symbolic value in linking the Union Station project to the cultural fear long attached to Old Chinatown.

In response, the *Los Angeles Times* reassured its readers that a completed Union Station project would not mean that passengers would exit the new depot in Chinatown. On April 20th the paper ran a front page story entitled, "People Vs. Railroads: Union Station Issue."[25] The article began with an extended quote from a speech made by city attorney the previous day: "As a matter of fact, the steam shovels are at work now creating the great civic center which will mark the passing of Chinatown and in its place will be the great city, county, state, and federal buildings and the Union depot."[26] The paper had its answer to the *Examiner's* so-called "Depot in Chinatown." A vote for Union Station would be a vote for the destruction of Chinatown. The newspaper reiterated this point in an editorial two days before the election assuring readers that the Union Station at the Plaza would "forever do away with Chinatown and its environs."[27] With the both papers effectively tying the issue of Union Station to Chinatown, the vote held on April 30, 1926, allowed the voters of Los Angeles to choose whether or not they wanted a Union Station built at the plaza site. When the returns were counted, more than 70% of the city's voters approved of the measure to build a Union Station in Los Angeles. Proposition 9, which asked whether or not the station should be built at the Plaza site, passed barely, winning by a margin of

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[20] Jeremiah Axelrod, "Keep the 'L' Out of Los Angeles: Race, Discourse and Urban Modernity in 1920s Southern California," Journal of Urban History Vol 34. No 1. (2007): 7.

[21] Axelrod also discusses the importance of Chinatown as a symbol in the campaign for propositions 8 and 9. See Axelrod, "Keep the 'L' Out of Los Angeles," 26-27. I broadly agree with Axelrod that that the campaign for Union Station was about promoting a vision of Los Angeles that was modern and Progressive and that Chinatown was held up as the antithesis of this sort of vision. Yet were as Axelrod argues that the "depot opponents were mobilizing in order to suggest that previously (properly) hidden ethnic districts were now threatening to become prominent," and that the Union Station project itself represented an "ambitious program of ethnic cleansing," I would argue that Chinatown had long been hypervisible to white tourists and residents alike and that campaign to destroy Chinatown was part of a larger history of in which narrative of the community's destruction were closely tied to its renewal. In fact the city could not imagine itself without a Chinatown. As such while the 1926 vote certainly threatened the existence of Old Chinatown located near the Plaza, it also set into motion a conflict over who would control Old Chinatown's replacement and where that replacement would be located. See Axelrod, "Keep the 'L' Out of Los Angeles," 26.

[22] "Depot in Chiense District or No More Grade Cossings," *Los Angeles Examiner*, April 12, 1926.

[23] Quoted in Axelrod, "Keep the L Out of Los Angeles," 26.

[24] "Sane View of Plaza Plan by City's Traffic Experts" Los Angeles Examiner, April 20, 1926.

[25] "People vs. Railroads, Union Station Issue," *Los Angeles Times*, April 20 1926, A1.

[26] "People vs. Railroads, Union Station Issue," *Los Angeles Times*, April 20 1926, A1.

[27] "Fabrication vs. Fact," *Los Angeles Times*, April 28, 1926. A1.

less than 4,000 of the more than 180,000 votes cast.[28] By a small margin, the voters of Los Angeles had build Chinatown near the Plaza and in the process to displace most of Old Chinatown. Less than two weeks after the vote, the *Los Angeles Times* ran an article which declared that "the march of progress" would soon erase a district which was "once the city's most exotic attraction."[29] Yet, even as the paper predicted the Chinatown's demise, the same article asked, "Where will the Chinese go?"

This question of where the Chinese would go would not be answered any time soon. Seven years later, and only after decisions by the California Railroad Commission, the Interstate Commerce Commission, United States Supreme Court and the California State Supreme Court, the railroads finally announced that they would build a Union Passenger station at the Plaza on the site of Old Chinatown.[30] Two days before Christmas day in 1933, the first demolition crews arrived to begin the destruction of the neighborhood. Little could those crews have known that the process of removing and replacing Old Chinatown would last until 1938, and would result in not one but two replacement Chinatowns competing for the business of city tourists and residents and that one of these competing Chinatowns would be heavily backed by none other than Harry Chandler publisher of the *Los Angeles Times.*

Los Angeles and the Building of a New Chinatown and China City

By the 1930s, San Francisco Chinatown had demonstrated that there was real money to be made in Chinatown tourism. As the destruction of Old Chinatown in Los Angeles began block by block in Los Angeles, it was not only members of the established Chinese American merchant elite that aspired to build and control the new Chinatown. Outside of Chinatown, wealthy white investors also wanted a stake in the new project. Over a five-year period beginning in 1933, the competition to build a new Chinatown would pit some of the most established members of the Los Angeles business community against a group of longtime Chinese American merchants, many of whom had owned successful shops and restaurants in Old Chinatown. The result was the opening in 1938 of two distinct Chinatown projects—New Chinatown and China City—which competed for tourist dollars in central Los Angeles. As the two projects developed between 1933 and 1938, each project sought to position itself as Old Chinatown's true replacement. Well before either New Chinatown or China City opened, the two projects utilized coverage in the city's press in an attempt shape the public perception of their respective projects.

The plans to replace Old Chinatown began well before the destruction of the neighborhood commenced in the winter of 1933. One of the first seemingly viable plans was one put forward by George Eastman, a former president of the city's Chamber of Commerce. The Eastman plan combined an open, modern and inviting layout with a Chinese architectural theme. In reporting on the Eastman project, the *Los Angeles Times* described, "picturesque, colorful streets," and stated that, "a wide variety of interesting details will make this proposed little city within a great metropolis an especially delightful bit of the Orient re-created in America."[31] "Delightful," "picturesque," and "colorful," were not words that the most mainstream papers would have used to describe Old Chinatown. Presented to the City Planning Commission in mid-October of 1933, the Eastman plan called for shops, cafes, tea gardens, a theater, a temple, a plaza and a gate to welcome visitors.[32] The plan included space for 2,500 residents. What's

[28] Musicant, "In Search of a Site for Union Station," 35.
[29] J.M. Scanland, "Quaint Chinese Quarter By Civic Center," *Los Angeles Times*, May 6, 1926, B9.
[30] Musicant, "In Search of Site for Union Station," 35.
[31] "New Colorful Oriental Town Projected Here," *Los Angeles Times*, October 22, 1933, 19.
[32] "New Chinatown Proposed" *Los Angeles Times*, October 18, 1933, A3.

more, by making use of many existing buildings, Eastman promised have his plan sufficiently completed in time to allow those Chinese who would be displaced with the construction of Union State to relocate. Yet at the same time, the Eastman project featured an ambitious timeline and a projected price tag of more than one million dollars. Despite the scope of the project, the City Planning Commission approved Eastman's plan.

With the Eastman project approved, plans for the demolition of Old Chinatown proceeded. The demolition of the neighborhood was scheduled to occur in sections, beginning with the old Chinese vegetable market and the surrounding buildings, one block east of Alameda Street. In early November, the first set of eviction notices were sent to Chinatown residents.[33] Final negotiations between the railroads dragged on until December 19, 1933 before the three major railroads reached agreement on their remaining points of contention. The first crew of thirty young men arrived in Old Chinatown on the morning of December 22, 1933. Equipped with crowbars and sledgehammers, they began the demolition with the Chinese school in the old Bong Hing Company Building at the corner of Apablasa and Juan streets.[34] In the coming weeks, the Whittier Wrecking Company proceeded to demolish the Apablasa playground where local children once played baseball and the old horse stables for where Chinese vegetable peddlers once gathered to eat.

While these structures were destroyed relatively quickly, not every building in the station construction zone was scheduled to be destroyed immediately. Only a few blocks away, life in the remaining part of Old Chinatown continued on as best it could. Many of the major markets and restaurants remained opened. Despite early estimates that the razing of the old Chinese community would take only 30-days and that the train station, "would be in operation in a year and a half," work on the new site progressed slowly.[35] Much of the neighborhood faced eventual destruction, but parts of Old Chinatown outside of the construction zone were scheduled to remain indefinitely. As the demolition of parts of the neighborhood moved forward, the Eastman plan slowly began to unravel under its own prospective costs. Soon the residents and businesses of Old Chinatown where left without a viable plan for relocating. Those who remained in Old Chinatown were unsure how long they would be allowed to stay in the old neighborhood.

The struggle to slow the demolition of Old Chinatown played itself out in the local press. In the coming years, Chinatown's destruction became a local media event. Just as the press had contributed to the way so many in the city perceived of the neighborhood for much of its history, the local newspapers continued to have a say in how and when Old Chinatown was perceived to end. Soon newspaper articles declaring the end of Old Chinatown began to appear in the city papers, even as businesses in the community continued to operate. As organizations outside of Chinatown attempted to proclaim the community's early demise, residents found themselves fighting not only eviction but also the perception that their entire community had already been destroyed. This was especially detrimental to the businesses in Old Chinatown. A number of Chinese American businesses remained open even as the building of Union Station proceed at pace. Many of these businesses were scheduled for removal, but a few key streets in Old Chinatown included a section of Los Angeles Street were scheduled to remain indefinitely. News reports of the community's passing threatened the economic livelihood of many of these small business owners.

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[33] "Station May Start Soon," *Los Angeles Times*, November 11, 1933, A1.
[34] "Sledges Sound Old Chinatown's knell in Preparing Place for New Railway Terminal," *Los Angeles Times*, December 23, 1933,A1; "Old Chinatown in Exodus as Wreckers Start Work," *Los Angeles Examiner,* December 23, 1933.
[35] "Old Chinatown in Exodus as Wreckers Start Work," *Los Angeles Examiner,* December 23, 1933.

The *Los Angeles Times* was among those paper's eager to declare Old Chinatown's end. The paper ran a story on September 21, 1934, declaring, "Farewell Fete Tomorrow to Mark Chinatown's Passing and Coming of New Street." The story was accompanied by a picture of child radio star Barbara Jean Wong—niece to Mr. SooHoo—standing next to a miniature model of a planned "Chinese Village" that was to replace Old Chinatown. The next day Wong and a cast of other children representing twenty-one nationalities took part in a parade and ceremony, scheduled to mark the end of Old Chinatown. Replete with the release of a dove and an operatic-style performance of the Star-Spangled Banner, the ceremony was broadcast live over the radio.[36] Even as Barbara Jean Wong participated in the ceremonies, few in the community seemed to have been consulted about the ceremony thrown to mark the end of their neighborhood. The *Los Angeles Times* reported: "In order that even those who cannot read English shall be present, a special international newspaper has been issued, with two pages in Chinese announcing the farewell party"[37] One can only wonder what these Chinese immigrants must have felt to learn first that they would be evicted and then that a ceremony would be held to celebrate their neighborhood's passing.

This type of publicity sent a chill through the community, bringing economic hardship to already struggling businesses. With the ceremony marking the end of Chinatown receiving so much publicity, local businesses such as Jerry's Joynt, the popular restaurant at the entrance of Ferguson Alley in the heart of Old Chinatown, found it necessary to publicize their continued existence. [38] While businesses in Chinatown owned by non-Chinese such as Jerry's Joynt may have found it possible to publicize that they would remain open despite the construction of Union Station, many immigrant business owners were not so lucky. Indeed, when the *Los Angeles Times* columnist Harry Carr visited Old Chinatown the month after the "farewell fete," he was shocked by what he saw. In his column for the paper, he described the Chinese American community as being in "a desperate condition" and went on to state that "no other part of Los Angeles has been hit so hard by the depression."[39] Publicity announcing the passing of Chinatown only worsened the economic conditions of the Great Depression.

Chinese American business leaders knew they had to fight the public perception that the destruction of all of Old Chinatown was already complete. The community turned to Peter SooHoo to serve as their spokesperson. Certainly Peter SooHoo's life experiences had positioned him well for this position as the public face of Chinatown. Peter SooHoo was born in Old Chinatown on September 6, 1899. His father, SooHoo Leong immigrated to America as a young boy in the 1870s from Hoiping, China. SooHoo Leong established a store in Ventura where he married Peter's mother, the California-born SooHoo Yee. The two eventually moved to Los Angeles where they lived in a house in Old Chinatown on Apablasa Street and ran the Sang Yuen Company store. The eldest son, in a family of nine children, Peter grew up attending Los Angeles public schools. He graduated from Polytechnic High School before attending the University of Southern California.[40] In 1933, when the demolition of Old Chinatown began,

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[36] "Home for Oriental Population Planned," *Los Angeles Times*, September 21, 1934, A10; "Farewell Fete on Today," *Los Angeles Times*, September 22, 1934, A1; and "Ceremony Hails New Era in City Construction," *Los Angeles Times,* September 23, 1934, 3.

[37] "Home for Oriental Population Planned," *Los Angeles Times*, September 21, 1934, A10.

[38] See for example, "News of the Cafes," *Los Angeles Times*, October 10, 1934, A8.

[39] Harry Car, "The Lancer," *Los Angeles Times,* October 3, 1934, A1.

[40] On the SooHoo Family background and Peter SooHoo's life as a young man see Ella Yee Quan, "Pioneer Families Share Their History," *Chinatown: The Golden Years* (Los Angeles: Chinese Chamber of Commerce, 1988), 29-30; see also Eleanor SooHoo Yee, interview October 7, 2007, Chinatown Remembered Project, Chinese Historical Society of Southern California; Peter SooHoo Jr., Chinatown Remembered Project interview, Chinese Historical Society of Southern California.

Peter SooHoo was a thirty-four year old employee of the city's the Bureau of Power and Light (today's Department of Water and Power). Like many of other Chinese Americans who were born in Los Angeles, SooHoo left Chinatown as he entered adulthood and now lived with his wife and two children in a bungalow in Hollywood. But unlike many others who moved away, he remained devoted to the neighborhood of his birth.[41]

Peter SooHoo was part of a larger demographic shift then occurring in the Chinese American community. In 1900, one year after SooHoo's birth, ten percent of the total Chinese American population was U.S.-born. By 1940, when SooHoo was 41, U.S.-born Chinese Americans outnumbered immigrants.[42] In this way, SooHoo was part of a generational shift in the Chinese American community. SooHoo was slightly older than most in this generation, but he still reflected many of the tendencies of this U.S-born Chinese American population. After all, SooHoo was educated in American schools, married to a Chinese American wife, and had lived most of his adult life in an integrated neighborhood outside of Chinatown. In these ways, Peter SooHoo was part of this new U.S.-born generation of Chinese Americans who increasingly saw themselves as more American than Chinese.[43]

Throughout the United States, and in particular in Los Angeles, these second generation Chinese Americans maintained a broad desire to integrate into mainstream U.S. society. In Los Angeles most Chinese American youth attended multiethnic public schools where they interacted with others from outside of the Chinese American community. As a result, many young Chinese Americans hoped to move out of Chinatown and gain jobs commensurate with their education and life experiences. Yet those who came of age in the interwar period, often experienced the racism and xenophobia that defined so much of U.S. society during this period. While many of these Chinese Americans were able to attend college, more often than not they experienced discrimination as they tried to enter the workforce or buy property outside of a few limited areas. As one Chinese American recent college graduate in Los Angeles put it in the early 1930s, "I have tired to get a position in several firms since I graduated from college, but I have been unable to do so. I have been told by several men they could employ me because I was Chinese."[44]

Peter SooHoo's first experiences of trying to locate employment after graduating from college were typical of Chinese Americans his age. In 1925, Peter SooHoo had recently graduated from the U.S.C with a B.S. in Electrical Engineering. Despite these qualifications, he had difficulty finding work in his field. He related these difficulties to a sociological researcher interviewing Chinese Americans for the Study of Race Relations overseen by Chicago sociologist Dr. Robert Park. SooHoo described the obstacles he faced finding work as a U.S. citizen of Chinese descent: "I am an American-born Chinese and have spent all my life in America…I have tried to get positions with several of the local public service corporations but

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[41] On attitudes of American-born Chinese to Chinatown, see Kit King Louis, "A study of American-born And American-reared Chinese in Los Angeles." (M.A. thesis, University of Southern California, 1931).

[42] In Los Angeles in 1940, 2,540 of the city's 4,736 Chinese Americans were born in the United States. Thus 53.6% of the population was native-born. See U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Population, Characteristics of the Nonwhite Population by Race,* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1943), 86. Available at http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/41271189ch1.pdf.

[43] On the attitudes of native-born Chinese American's see K. Scott Wong, *Americans First: Chinese Americans and the Second World War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); and Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). On the attitudes of this generation in Los Angeles specifically see Kit King Louis, "A Study of American-Born and American-Reared Chinese in Los Angeles," (M.A. Thesis, University of Southern California, 1931).

[44] Louis, "A Study of American-Born and American-Reared Chinese in Los Angeles," 79.

have been unable to do so. I have been told by several men that they could not employ me because I was Chinese. I have not given up yet…I expect to stand up for my rights as an American citizen."[45] In his interview, he displayed the same drive and tenacity that he would show later in life fighting the demolition of Old Chinatown.

Even though SooHoo moved out of Old Chinatown once he entered adulthood, he remained a community leader. Shortly after graduating, SooHoo joined the Chinese American Citizens Alliance (CACA), an organization devoted to protecting the civil rights of Chinese Americans. Still in his early twenties, SooHoo took part in the organization's national campaign to overturn a law that barred American citizens of Chinese descent from bringing foreign-born wives into the United States. SooHoo joined a group of CACA members who journeyed to Washington D.C. to testify before a congressional sub-committee in an attempt to have the law over-turned.[46] Later in his life, SooHoo served as President of the Chinese American Citizens Alliance, President of the China Society of Southern California, Director of the CACA Band, and Secretary of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA). He also volunteered to register U.S.-born Chinese American voters for the local Republican Party.[47] Undoubtedly he would have accomplished even more had he not passed away at the age of 45. Despite this long list of accomplishments, it would be his actions in the 1930s, for which he would be most remembered.

As Chinatown's primary representative to the local press, SooHoo's first task was to inform the public that a large section of Old Chinatown was still open for business. Events like those signaling the end of the Old Chinatown covered in the *Los Angeles Times* led many outside of the community to assume that Chinatown had already been destroyed. In mid-December of 1934, a year after the destruction of Old Chinatown began and three months after the event proclaiming the community's demise, Peter SooHoo addressed the press on behalf of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association. SooHoo told the press, "Only a small section of the Chinese quarter has been affected by the construction. The remaining stores along Alameda and Ferguson Alley will continue to do business for years to come."[48] In making this statement, SooHoo reasserted the community's existence for the paper's readers. SooHoo understood that the publicity marking the reported demise of Old Chinatown had driven away customers.

SooHoo also realized Chinatown suffered from an image problem, and he used this first press conference to try to shape public opinion on the community. Addressing the widespread perception that Chinatown was gang ridden, SooHoo told the press, "Hatchet men are only bugaboos woven into fabricated yarns by those who are not acquainted with the culture and tradition of the Chinese people." [49] As with similar associations of the Chinese with disease and vermin, tongs and tong wars composed a major part of the yellow peril iconography. By attacking the notion that Chinatown was controlled by tongs, SooHoo addressed the predominant

[45] Survey of Race Relations, "Interview with Peter SooHoo," by William C. Smith, August 7, 1925; Box 37/Folder 442, Hoover Institution Archives. Available at http://collections.stanford.edu/srr/bin/detail?fileID=396554086
[46] Xiaojian Zhao, *Remaking Chinese America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 18.
[47] On president of the China Society and President of the CACA see Peter SooHoo Jr., interview. On the Chinese Militia see Norine Dresser, "Chinatown Militia Units, 1942: Los Angeles and San Francisco," *Gum Saan Journal* 15 No. 2 (December, 1992). On Boy Scout troop leader see "New Chinatown Scouts Hold First meet at their Log Cabin," *Chinese Press*, February 21, 1941. On voter registration see, "GOP Drive Opens Today," *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 1934, A1.
[48] "Chinatown Will Stay Despite New Union Depot," *Los Angeles Daily News*, December 17, 1934, 2.
[49] "Chinatown Will Stay Despite New Union Depot," *Los Angeles Daily News*, December 17, 1934, 2; Harry Carr, "The Lancer," *Los Angeles Times*, December 19, 1934, A1.

notion that Chinatown was gang infested. In the coming years, SooHoo would prove quite adept at using the local media to publicize and shape popular perceptions of Chinatown.

As SooHoo and other leaders of the ethnic enclave worked to forestall the destruction of the remaining section of Old Chinatown, many businessmen in the district remained uncertain how to proceed. The plans for Union Station called for the destruction of most of the community east of Alameda Street. This would leave a few sections of Old Chinatown unchanged, particularly the stretch of Los Angeles Street that housed, the CACA, CCBA, and many of the family associations. But it meant that the heart of the business district, including such venerable Chinatown institutions as the old Man Jen Low restaurant were scheduled for demolition sometime in the near future. In contrast, many of those businesses lucky enough to lie outside the proposed construction zone, continued on and in some cases even prospered. In June of 1935, the owners of Jerry's Joynt expanded their entire restaurant, adding a cocktail lounge, and hiring a group, "the Three Vagabond Crooners," to serenade guests.[50] In February of 1935, the See family opened the Dragon's Den. Even in the midst of Old Chinatown's destruction the basement restaurant witnessed much success.[51] Both restaurants attracted interested whites and the Hollywood elite to Old Chinatown. East of Alameda, in the heart of the construction zone, many businessmen were either unable or unwilling to move even as construction on Union Station proceeded and the threat of demolition moved ever closer. Both Man Jen Low and Tuey Far Low remained open throughout the period despite being located firmly in the construction zone.[52]

A collective uncertainty descended on the remaining residents and businesses of Chinatown. The CCBA tried mostly without success to alleviate the tension between the various factions within the community. SooHoo's calm demeanor before the English-speaking press belied a community wracked by indecision on how to proceed. The destruction of Old Chinatown threatened many established businesses and restaurants that relied on Chinatown itself to draw in customers. At the same time, many outside of the construction zone saw no threat to their immediate livelihood. At the CCBA offices on Los Angeles Street, diverging groups met to express their opinions as to what the best location for a new Chinatown would be.[53] With the Eastman plan no longer viable, Peter SooHoo began looking for a way to relocate the major businesses in Chinatown to one centralized area. In 1935, he turned toward the entrepreneur and philanthropist Christine Sterling.

Only a few years earlier Sterling had overseen the opening of the Mexican-themed attraction Olvera Street and she was already developing her own plans for a new Chinese-themed district.[54] Given her prior history of promoting the area around the Plaza to tourists, Christine Sterling must have seem like the ideal candidate to the Chinese merchants realize their goal of a new centralized Chinatown. A master of publicity, who had proven with her Olvera Street project that she could turn a neighborhood into a tourist destination, Sterling was eager to lend her vision to the development of a new Chinese district. With Olvera Street, Sterling sought to

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[50] News of the Cafes, *Los Angeles Times,* June 12, 1935, 24.
[51] Lisa See, *On Gold Mountain: The One-Hundred-Year Odyssey of My Chinese American Family* (New York, Vintage Books, 1995), 193-205.
[52] Man Jen Low is listed at its location on Marchessault Street in the city directory until 1938. See *Los Angeles City Directory 1938* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles City Directory Company, 1938), 1312. Tuey Far Low opened a second location but kept the original open as well. See News of the Cafes, *Los Angeles Times*, August 29, 1935, A5; News of the Cafes, *Los Angeles Times,* June 12, 1933, 24.
[53] See Kim Fong Tom, "Participation of the Chinese in the Community Life of Los Angeles," (M.A. Thesis, University of Southern California, 1944), 13.
[54] Bingham, "Saga of Los Angeles Chinese," 144.

repackage the city's Spanish and Mexican past in a way that could be easily digested by the area's tourists. Olvera Street, though, was not the Old Plaza as it had actually existed under Spanish and Mexican rule, but rather, as the historian William Estrada has shown, a selective re-imagining of that era's history in a way that "celebrated a mythic pre-industrial past that was both appealing and useful to Anglos while at the same time obscuring the contemporary reality of Mexicans in Los Angeles."[55] Nevertheless, despite, or possibly because of, her interpretation of the area's history, by 1935 Olvera Street was a rousing success.

Christine Sterling and the merchants of Old Chinatown shared many goals. Key among these was the desire to build a Chinese-themed district that could attract tourists. The East Adams neighborhood adjacent to the City Market already provided an area to which many residents of Old Chinatown could relocate. As a result, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the CCBA were primarily concerned with finding a central location to relocate the businesses of Old Chinatown. Like the Chinese merchants, Sterling also wanted to build a new Chinese-themed business district. What's more she had experience, as demonstrated in Olvera Street, in promoting an economically viable tourist attraction.

While Sterling and SooHoo shared similar goals, they found themselves in disagreement over the form this new Chinese-themed district should take. By the 1930s, China had become a popular theme in films and literature, and Sterling hoped to capitalize on this trend by promoting a district modeled on these new circulating images of the "Orient." Drawing on these themes, she wanted to create a Chinese village that would give visitors the impression of visiting a Hollywood film set. She aimed to attract Chinese American businesses with reasonable rents, but with the understanding that all who participated in her district were contributing to her vision. In contrast, Peter SooHoo felt that first and foremost the new Chinatown needed to be developed and controlled by members of the Chinese American community. As result, a partnership between SooHoo and Sterling never came to fruition.

While never mentioning Sterling by name, SooHoo expressed his views on the aborted-Sterling partnership in a speech given to the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, "It takes a Chinese heart to feel the needs of the people; it requires a Chinese mind to understand their needs, and it demands a sense of public responsibility and service from those who seek to administer such needs."[56] SooHoo would continue on: "Every American who has a Chinese acquaintance thought he had a deal cooked up. Every Chinese who has an American friend thought likewise. Consequently one promotional scheme after another came to the attention of the Chinese people."[57]

By the fall of 1937, the community was divided on how to proceed. A few major restaurant owners, like Woo Fon Lee and Quon S. Doon, remained in the construction zone, even as their restaurants faced the eminent threat of removal. A handful of merchants reestablished their businesses on various parts of North Spring Street. Many others moved to the City Market Chinatown or to the adjacent East Adams neighborhood.[58] The CCBA along with the major family associations remained rooted on Los Angeles Street. All the while, the CCBA, which was

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[55] William Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza: Sacred and Contested Space* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 192-193.
[56] Peter SooHoo, "Speech to the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce," August 16, 1937 quoted in Bingham, "The Saga of Los Angeles Chinese," 141.
[57] Peter SooHoo, "Speech to the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce," August 16, 1937 quoted in Bingham, "The Saga of Los Angeles Chinese," 141.
[58] Beginning in the late 1920s, the East Adams neighborhood developed into a bedroom community for Chinese Americans who worked in the City Market or ran other businesses in south Los Angeles. See *Revisiting East Adams,* DVD, directed by Jenny Cho (Los Angeles: CHSSC, 2005). See also Wen-Hui Chung Chen, "Changing Socio-Cultural Patterns of the Chinese Community in Los Angeles," 82-83.

supposed to function as a type of forum for the community, remained hopelessly deadlocked. If Chinatown wanted to maintain control of its own financial future, it seemed that someone had to act.

Despite the ongoing turmoil within the CCBA, SooHoo continued serving as the face of Chinatown to the broader public while working behind the scenes to find an alternative plan for the community's businesses. [59] Earlier, at an arranged meeting with Mr. Barclay, the engineer of Union Terminal, SooHoo was able to forestall the destruction of the remaining part of Old Chinatown. The terminal would continue collecting rent, and the residents would not have to move until that part of the construction zone was needed.[60] At the same time, SooHoo continued to look for alternative locations for a new Chinatown. Three year after New Chinatown opened, Peter SooHoo recalled his efforts, "Always hoping that some new site could be found, I would go to Mr. Barclay, the engineer of the Union Terminal, time and time again to ask for an extension, because those who remained had not yet found a place to move to…For nearly four years I would get one extension from Mr. Barclay after another."[61] Eventually his persistence paid off, when during another meeting Mr. Barclay and the assistant superintendent of the Union Terminal referred SooHoo to Herbert Lapham.[62] Lapham was a land agent for the Santa Fe Railroad that owned the property SooHoo was eyeing, and he would play a pivotal role in the realization of SooHoo's plan. An ideal site seemed to be within reach.

With the institutional leadership of Chinatown unable to come to a consensus on how to proceed, SooHoo and a group of other prominent community leaders decided to move forward on their own. They did so without the backing of most of the other major organizations in Chinatown. SooHoo's group included some of the most influential people in Chinatown. In addition to SooHoo, there was Woo Fon Lee, owner of Man Jen Low restaurant; Quon S. Doon, owner of Tuey Far Low restaurant; Lee Wah-Shew, proprietor of the Yee Sing Chong grocery; Dr. John Lum, former president of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce; and Y.C. Hong, the only Chinese American lawyer practicing in Southern California. The members had to act quickly. Construction of the main terminal at Union Station was scheduled to begin in May, and the demolition and removal of most of the remaining portion of Chinatown east of Alameda Street had to commence by then.

SooHoo organized the meeting at the old Tuey Far Low restaurant on April 22, 1937, bringing together the core of what would become the Los Angeles Chinatown Project Association with Herbert Lapham.[63] There was much that the group had to figure out. Not only fundraising for the project, but site acquisition, design and construction all had to be handled with equal care. Over the coming year this group would try to create a Chinatown unlike any other in existence in America at that time. In a novel idea for control, the group formed a California corporation, with the intent of buying the lot for their new Chinatown from the railway company. Many of the original investors in the corporation were Chinese immigrants who as aliens ineligible for citizenship were barred from purchasing land in California by the state's Alien Land law of 1913.[64] By August, the association had raised 40,000 dollars and had

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[59] See "New Chinese Section Planned," *Los Angeles Times*, April 1, 1937, A9; and "New Chinatown to be Discussed Tonight," *Los Angeles Times,* April 9, 1937, A8.
[60] Lee Shippey, "Lee Side o' LA," *Los Angeles Times*, August 24, 1936, A4.
[61] Peter SooHoo, "Proceedings of the Two Hundred Eighty-First Meeting of the Pacific Railway Club," P*roceedings: The Journal of the Pacific Railway Club*, Vol. 23, No. 11. (February, 1941), 5.
[62] Peter SooHoo, "Proceedings," 5.
[63] Bingham, "The Saga of Los Angeles Chinatown," 148.
[64] On the history and origins of the state's alien land law see Edwin E. Ferguson, "California Alien Land Law and the Fourteenth Amendment*," California Law Review* 61 (March 1947).

grown in size from 28 members to thirty-three.[65] Ownership, control, and vision for their corporation would remain in the hand of the members of the association, and they soon hired architects Erle Webster and Adrian Wilson to realize their vision. [66]

While the association was laying the groundwork for their new Chinatown, the Sterling group remained hard at work on their own planned Chinese district. Given Sterling's close relationship with Harry Chandler of the *Los Angeles Times*, its no surprise that China City garnered positive press in this major daily. In August of 1937, the *Times* ran a front page article entitled, "Chinatown to Rise Again" which quoted Sterling extensively: "Los Angeles is under obligation to the hundreds of Chinese, many of them early-day residents here, who have been up rooted from the place where they have made their home for many years…The new China City will give the Chinese a new opportunity to preserve their racial and cultural integrity by bringing them together in one district."[67] While China City was certainly a business venture, Sterling saw her project as providing a space and indeed a service to the Chinese American community. As such, she must have been startled to learn that her project would be challenged by a group from within the Chinese American community.

Five days after the *Times* story ran, the members of the Los Angeles Chinatown Project Association launched a publicity campaign aimed at introducing their plan to both the local news media and the city's business community. Peter SooHoo addressed the Chamber of Commerce while Quon S. Doon, Walter Yip, and Lee Wah-Shew held a press conference and unveiled their plan to the media, emphasizing their all-Chinese American financial backing.[68] While the association's New Chinatown continued to raise money exclusively within the Chinese American community, Sterling and the China City group looked for support from the general public for the creation of the wall set to surround China City.[69] While neither side was willing to admit it, both projects were now locked in a race, not only against the Union Station construction crews but against each other.

Even as wealthy merchants invested in New Chinatown hoping to create a business district that they controlled, those who could not afford to move elsewhere remained in Old Chinatown paralyzed, in many cases, by the depths of the economic depression. Notices in English were sent to those who occupied the buildings, giving them 30-days-notice in which to vacate. House by house, the workmen came. Many residents in Chinatown remained, unwilling or unable to leave even after the sidewalks had been removed and the water and power had been cut off from their buildings. The *Los Angeles Times* reported the desperate situation that descended on Old Chinatown early in 1938, "Poverty of the extremist kind, has been disclosed as laborers enter tiny rooms that are meant for living quarters. A sink and a table are all of the furnishings. The occupant sleeps on the table, under newspapers. Lack of running water makes the sink a filthy catch-all."[70] Sterling pulled no punches in her criticism that New Chinatown was well out of reach of many citizens of old Chinatown.[71] SooHoo and the association were aware of these accusations and responded, by reassuring the public that Chinatown did in fact contain reasonable rentals.

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[65] Cheng and Kwok, "The Golden Years," 41.
[66] Cheng and Kwok, "The Golden Years," 41.
[67] "Chinatown to Rise Again," *Los Angeles Times*, August 11, 1937, A1.
[68] "Chinese Quarter Launched Today," *Los Angeles Daily News*, August 16, 1937.
[69] "'China City' Development Has Large Civic Importance," *Los Angeles Times*, September 26, 1937, F1.
[70] "Razing Puzzles Chinatown Folk," *Los Angeles Times*, January 30, 1938, A5.
[71] "Conflict of Views in New Plans," August 16, 1937, Unidentified newspaper clipping in Peter SooHoo Collection.

As spring of 1938 drew to a close, the local press began to report on the competition between the two new Chinatowns. According to the *Hollywood Citizen News*, "It probably won't effect the international balance of power, but within a month or so Spanish-descended Los Angeles will have two new Chinatowns custom made to impart to natives and tourists the color of old Cathay…A race to open first and to establish their Oriental authenticity and glamour appears to be being waged between the two Chinatowns."[72] While local papers like the *Hollywood Citizen News* devoted time to both projects, Harry Chandler and his *Los Angeles Times* threw their support behind China City. Chandler had been a backer of Sterling since her Olvera Street project. Sterling did not try to hide the link between the *Times* and China City, going so far as to name the main gate in China City after recently deceased *Los Angeles Times* columnist Harry Carr.[73]

China City was the first of the two new Chinese American business districts to hold its gala opening and the *Los Angeles Times* lent the event all of the support that Harry Chandler's publication could offer. On June 7th the newspaper ran a front page story which declared, "Curtain Raised on City's Bit of the Orient: New Chinatown Previewed; Opens tonight." Alongside the article were three photos, one of which featured Harry Chandler with Christine Sterling and one other guest eating food in China City. Chandler was far from the only powerful member of the city elite to attend the preview event. Others included the Chief of Police, representatives from MGM and Paramount studios, the Chamber of Commerce and the Automobile Club of Southern California. In all 150 influential backers attended the event. None of those listed in the *Los Angeles Times* article were Chinese.

The article went on to describe the official preview held for backers of the project before the public opening that evening. The paper declared of the preview event, "Mrs. Christine Sterling, creator of Olvera Street across the way, was the hostess by right of having created this newest and most bizarre addition to Los Angeles' tourist attractions. Out of a dream she had fashioned the nucleus of a new Chinatown to take the place of the traditional old one being destroyed to make way for the new Union Station." Thus the paper portrayed Sterling as a savior figure who had created China City as a gift for the Chinese residents of the city to help them rebuild in the face of displacement and removal. In what would become a recurring trope in the way China City was sold to white tourists, the paper also described the district as arising as if "out of a dream." No mention in the article was made of the competing Chinatown on Broadway soon to be opened by SooHoo and his fellow Chinese American merchants.

SooHoo and the Los Angeles Chinatown Project Association were determined not to secede local news coverage to Sterling and her project. Showing a perceptive understanding of the importance of the press in the development of their new community, they held a number of press conferences throughout the process and were able to get coverage in most of the major papers. While the coverage of their project in the *Los Angeles Times* remained limited at best, neither the *Los Angeles Examiner* nor the *Los Angeles Evening Herald Express* showed the same reticence. On June 22, a few days before New Chinatown's gala opening celebration, the Los Angeles Chinatown Project Association invited the press to a preview dinner in New Chinatown. The *Los Angeles Times* buried the story in short two-sentence article on the bottom of page 12.[74]

[72] "Streamlined Chinatowns Rising in LA," *Hollywood Citizen News*, April 30, 1938, 3.
[73] "Harry Carr Memorial Gate featured in Community Project," *Los Angeles Times*, October 3, 1937, E1.
[74] "Chinese Entertains," *Los Angeles Times*, June 23, 1938, 12.

In contrast, the *Examiner* devoted an entire page to the event, while the *Evening Herald Express* featured the story on the front page with a series of photos and a short article.[75]

The front-page story in the *Evening Herald and Express* featured a large image of the West Gate of this competing Chinese American development. Hung across the gate was a sign declaring "New Chinatown Welcomes You." Accompanying the image was an article which declared, "Gala Fete to Open New L.A. Chinatown," The article announced that Consul General Wong of San Francisco, Consul T.K. Chang from Los Angeles, and Governor Merriam would all be in attendance at the opening event as would local film stars Anna May Wong and Keye Luke. The backers of this new Chinatown on Broadway were well aware that that they were competing with Sterling's venture and every effort was made to produce an event that rivaled the spectacle of China City's opening with its movie studio backing. The Governor attended at urging of Y.C. Hong who served in the national leadership of the Chinese American Citizens Alliance, the largest organization for US-born Chinese Americans in the nation. Hong would later tell a researcher from UCLA that the governor agreed to attend only after Hong assured him that he would urge the membership of CACA to support him in his upcoming re-election campaign.

With their competing sets of high profile backers and their support by differing local papers, China City and New Chinatown both opened to much fanfare in the summer of 1938. Each project presented a distinct vision for how the Chinese American community in Los Angeles should be sold to tourists. While it would be easy to dismiss China City as an Orientalist façade, and embrace New Chinatown as the authentic Chinese American enclave, doing so would oversimplify the social and historical complexity of these two communities. Rather as the next section will show, these two distinct Chinese American business districts not only presented differing visions of Chinese America to white tourists, but they also came to represent the interests of different social groups within the Chinese American community.

New Chinatown and China City

Both China City and New Chinatown launched in June of 1938. China City held the first gala opening on the evening of June 7, 1938. New Chinatown's opening celebration followed on June 26. Separated from one another by a matter of weeks, both projects claimed to be the authentic replacement for Old Chinatown. Despite their obvious differences, the projects shared a common lineage. In design and execution, China City and New Chinatown were both an outgrowth of nineteenth century Chinatown tours and Chinese Village exhibits at the turn of the century World's Fairs. While the representation of both China and Chinese American life that the two districts presented to the broader public could not have been more different, the structuring apparatus that both these new Chinatowns used to guide the expectations, experiences, and post-visit memories of visitors were surprisingly similar. Both projects utilized a similar set of techniques developed largely in the changing urban environment of late nineteenth-century North American cities to mediate dominant conceptions of race, nation, and citizenship. It was the image of Chinese people, not the techniques used to present the image, that these two projects differed most significantly

China City was dubbed by one *Los Angeles Times* columnist as "Chinatown in Movieland."[76] Opening to the public on June 7, China City featured rickshaw rides, bronze gongs, cymbals, and a bamboo theater playing films of the "land of rice fields and great

[75] "Gala Feat to Open New Chinatown," Los *Angeles Evening Herald Express,* June 23, 1938, 1; "New Chinatown Opens," *Los Angeles Examiner,* June 25, 1938.
[76] Lee Shippey, "Lee Side o' LA," *Los Angeles Times*, June 9, 1938, A4.

temples."[77] Guests could visit re-creations of the set from the *Good Earth* or an incense-filled temple devoted to the Goddess Quan Yin. There were lotus pools filled with flowers, landscaped gardens, and ox carts. In this way, China City utilized both representations of a timeless Orient alongside associations with Hollywood film to attract tourists and other paying customers. With its rickshaw rides, and costumed Chinese American workers, China City sold itself as the Orient of the popular imagination filtered through Hollywood of the 1930s.[78]

This strategy was evident in a description written by Christine Sterling of China City for perspective tourists in 1939: "Dreams of oriental romance were woven like silken threads thru the fabric of little China City, and we ask Your Honorable Person to see the brilliant colors of its hopes and ideals and to forget the imperfections in its creation."[79] In this same piece, Sterling goes on to tout the project's association with Harry Chandler and to note that the district featured both a recreation of the House of Wang and the set from Paramount Studio's film *Blue Beards Eighth Wife*. Sterling ends her description of China City by linking her new business district to Old Chinatown: "the loyalty of citizens and visitors in Los Angeles rightfully belong to old Chinatown at the Plaza, and new little China City stands respectfully and reverently beside the older one, hoping to follow someday in its illustrious footsteps."[80]

In juxtaposing "dreams of Oriental romance," with Hollywood sets, Christine Sterling was in some ways acknowledging the lineage of Orientalism and theatricality that had defined the white fascination with Chinatown since the first Chinatown tours of the nineteenth century. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, the Orientalism associated with Chinatown in the nineteenth century produced a break between the white observer and the Chinese American residents that transformed everyday encounters between these two groups into literal sites of theatrical performance. By the turn of the century, Chinatown tour guides hired Chinese performers to act out scenes of violence and depravity long associated with the neighborhood. In the process these tour guides confirmed the suspicions of the tourists who took their tours of the faked nature of the Chinatown tour. White visitors who took part in Chinatown tours often came expecting to see authentic performances of ethnic difference, yet at the same time, the theatricality inherent in Orientalist understandings of Chinatown led many white visitors to assume that these performances were fake. This dialectic of theatricality and authenticity defined nearly every encounter that white visitors had with the Chinese Americans in Chinatown.

Christine Sterling explicitly linked China City's relationship to Hollywood film while presenting it as a dream of "Oriental romance." In the process she attempted to harness notions of theatricality and Orientalism long associated with Chinatown in ways that would help her sell China City to tourists. Rather than attempt to present China City as an authentic representation of China as it actually existed at some point in time, Sterling presented China City as an authentic representation of Hollywood cinematic representations of Asia, which visitors recognized as fake to begin with. In this sense, the performative nature of Hollywood was meant to negate any

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[77] "China City Lures Crowd," *Los Angeles Times*, June 8, 1938, A1.

[78] There have been only a few published pieces examining the growth of China City. See Lawrence Lan, "The Rise and Fall of China City: Race, Space, and Cultural Production in Los Angeles Chinatown, 1938-1948, *Amerasia Journal,* 42:2 (2016), 2-21; Dr. Ruby Ling Louie: "Reliving China City," in *Bridging the Centuries: History of Chinese Americans in Southern California*, (Los Angeles: Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, 2001), 39-43; Josi Ward, "Dreams of Oriental Romance: Reinventing Chinatown in 1930s Los Angeles" *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum,* Vol 20, No. 1 (Spring, 2013), 19-42.

[79] Christine Sterling, "China City," July, 1938 on CD of scanned documents related to China City and New Chinatown, Chinese Historical Society of Southern California.

[80] Christine Sterling, "China City," July 1938 on CD of scanned documents related to China City and New Chinatown, Chinese Historical Society of Southern California.

objections by tourist that China City was fake. China City was sold as fake, but authentically so. That is to say, China City did not claim to be authentically Chinese; it claimed to be an authentic recreation of Hollywood's representation of China. The district did this by offering visitors an experience that was billed as an authentic interaction with the Chinatown of Hollywood.

In contrast to China City, the June 26 opening of New Chinatown was meant to highlight the American aspects of the community. New Chinatown's opening featured flags from the United States and the Republic of China. There was a parade of 400 mostly American-born youth who represented the Federation of Chinese Clubs in Los Angeles. Guests danced under Chinese lanterns to popular American music from the 1930s. California Governor Frank F. Merriam was there to dedicate a plaque to the "Chinese pioneers who participated in the Constructive History of California."[81] A military veteran's band played both the Chinese and American national anthems. Unlike China City, which played up an Orientalist film-set aesthetic, this new Chinatown embraced the sensibilities of a generation of American-born generation like Peter SooHoo and Y.C Hong. As the historian K. Scott Wong has shown, this generation of Chinese Americans saw themselves as Americans first.[82] New Chinatown was a project for this U.S.-born generation. It was a Chinatown that attempted to balance aspects of American popular culture and Chinese American historical contributions to the state with the selling of a Chinese American form of Orientalism.

T.K. Chang, the Chinese Consul who took part in the opening ceremonies congratulated the local Chinese Americans on the new district: "In the past Americans always viewed the Chinese and their Chinatown with very negative eyes. The Chinatown was considered unsanitary and filled with vices. Today's opening of New Chinatown presents a complete new look to Americans. It shows not only the traditional beauty of the Chinese architectural arts, but also demonstrates the new spirit of the Chinese in Los Angeles."[83] In making these remarks, Consul Chang's placed this Chinatown on Broadway within the context of the history of Chinatown's in the United States emphasizing the "spirit" of the local Chinese Americans. His remarks point to the conscious efforts that the local Chinese Americans who built the project made to use this New Chinatown to combat long-standing stereotypes of the community as grounded in vice.

Certainly, this opening of New Chinatown reflected the sensibilities of Peter SooHoo, and many other Chinese Americans of his generation. SooHoo was part of a generation of Chinese Americans with a deep investment in their American identity. This was a generation who had grown up in America, attended American schools, and who would serve their country in large numbers in the coming World War. Many took pride in their American citizenship, making a concerted effort to stay civically involved. Some, like SooHoo, had never been to China and thus the connection to the land of their ancestors remained solely a familial one. Many of these second-generation Chinese Americans, saw themselves first and foremost as Americans. The flags, the bands, and the plaque all served the same function: to remind visitors that Chinese played an important part in the American experience.

Thus while New Chinatown certainly played up its Chinese-themed architecture, Chinese restaurants, and curio shops selling Chinese imports, SooHoo and the other leaders of the community made a concerted effort to frame the community in its relationship to America and place its residents within the history of the American immigrant experience. New Chinatown

[81] "New Chinatown Has Tribute to Pioneers," *Los Angeles Daily News*, June 27, 1938.
[82] K. Scott Wong, *Americans First: Chinese Americans and the Second World War*, (Cambridge, MA, Harvard, 2005).
[83] T.K. Chang, "Congratulations Upon the Grand Opening of New Chinatown" (1938) translated by Suellen Chang, "Chinatown Los Angeles: The Golden Years 1938-1988" (Chinese Historical Society of Southern California), 46.

replaced the notion of Chinatown as a "foreign colony" with a narrative that fore-grounded the place of the Chinese American "pioneers" in the history of California. In this way, New Chinatown presented itself not as an authentic look at Chinese life, but rather as an authentically Chinese American experience. New Chinatown was presented not as a visit to the Orient of the Western imagination but rather as a visit to a new authentically American Chinatown.

Despite these differing representations, the structuring apparatus that both of these districts used to present their visions to tourists drew on many of the same components. At a moment when tour buses had come to dominate the Los Angeles tourist scene, both business districts attempted to control the ways in which visitors to the community interacted with the stores, restaurants and other attractions they housed. Both districts went out of their way to eliminate the possibility that they could be experienced by car and instead to emphasize walking. As enclosed business districts that did not allow for vehicular traffic on their walkways, both Chinatown and China City utilized their design to force visitors to walk through their collection of businesses. To differing degrees, China City and New Chinatown each attempted to replicate the experience of the *flaneur* walking the streets of a turn of the century city. Drawing on and rearticulating many of the techniques first employed in the Chinatown walking tours of the nineteenth century both China City and New Chinatown engaged all of the visitors senses while simultaneously foregrounding vision as the primary experience.

New Chinatown opened in the summer of 1938 before the development was complete with eighteen tenants and original space for a total of 62. Visitors entering the distinct from Casetlar Street would have passed under one of two large Chinese gates acting as entrances to the community.[84] To the left of the gate was Yee Hung Guey one of the restaurants to move into New Chinatown on the right of the gate was Yee Sing Chong, a Chinese grocery store. As visitors walked east through the plaza they passed Tin Hing Company Jewelry, Man Jen Low restaurant and the Y.C Hong building that housed Ginling Gifts and the Forbidden Palace on the first floor and Hong's law office on the second floor. Across from Man Jen Lowe was a wishing well based on the Seven Star Sacred Caverns in China, a Willow Tree donated by Paramount studios in honor of Anna May Wong, and the Charlie Chan Fortune Telling Stand. As visitors continued through the development they passed the large neo-lit sign reading "Chop Suey" that adorned the new Tuey Far Lowe restaurant.[85] The building also housed K.G. Louie Gifts and Chinese Jade restaurant and cocktail lounge. Finally on Broadway stood Chinatown's East Gate, which was sponsored by Chinatown founder, Y.C. Hong and dedicated to the memory of his mother.

While Consul Chang lauded to the "traditional beauty of Chinese architectural arts" in the district, it's pagoda style and Chinese-themed roofs more closely reflected the architectural motifs of the rebuilt San Francisco Chinatown than they did any traditional Chinese architectural styles. In fact, like the most of San Francisco Chinatown after the earthquake and the Chinese Village at the World's Fair in Chicago before that, the Los Angeles Project Association utilized white architects—in this case, Erle Webster and Adrian Wilson—to design the architectural motif for New Chinatown. Early in the process, Y.C. Hong went so far as to send Erle Webster to San Francisco to collect ideas for the buildings he was building for Mr. Hong.[86] By the 1930s, San Francisco had come to represent the archetypical Chinatown in the minds of many white

[84] This is now Hill Street.
[85] On Chinese food see Haiming Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express: A History of Chinese Food in the United States* (New Brunswick N.J.:Routledge, 2015); *Yong Chen, Chop Suey USA: The Story of Chinese Food in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).
[86] Josi Ward, "Dreams of Oriental Romance," *Buildings and Landscape*, 20. No1 (Spring 2013), 34.

visitors. Given this it is no surprise the owners of New Chinatown wanted to emulate its architectural motifs. As manifested in New Chinatown, this popular Chinese American architectural style became a key component of the Chinese American Orientalist theme developed by members of the ethnic enclave.

New Chinatown's pagoda-style roofs were lined with neon lights. In 1948, ten years after the opening of New Chinatown, local resident Garding Liu described the district in his published guidebook, *Inside Los Angeles Chinatown*:

> When trains from the north and the east enter Los Angeles at night, children o the west side of the coaches flatten their noses against the windowpanes and say, "Look at Fairland!" The last thing that is seen before the train gets into Union Depot, are the lights of New Chinatown. The electrical display, outlining these buildings and the prominent North Broadway location, put New Chinatown very prominently on the map. The grounds are spacious and future growth is anticipated.[87]

In this way, New Chinatown eventually came to be associated in the minds of the larger public with wide-open, brightly lit boulevards in the same way that Old Chinatown had been associated with dark narrow ally ways. As a result, New Chinatown quickly became a popular evening meeting place for whites as well as Chinese Americans.

While tourism was perhaps the driving force behind New Chinatown, the district was not designed only with tourists in mind. SooHoo and the other members of the Los Angeles Chinatown Project Association, also hoped that New Chinatown would become a community replacement for Old Chinatown and that it would be utilized by members of the Chinese American community as well as whites. As one of the local Chinese Americans told the *Los Angeles Examiner* on the eve of New Chinatown's opening celebration, "This is not just a showplace."[88] The speaker went on to elaborate, "This is a place where the Chinese are coming to do their own trading, where they are locating their own homes, schools, and churches."[89] The founders of New Chinatown envisioned the district as both a replacement to Old Chiatown that would draw both more tourists and serve the needs of the Chinese American community.

A few of the early businesses in the New Chinatown point to this dual nature. On Castelar Street adjacent to the West Gate the Yee Sing Chong grocery was frequented by curious white visitors but also popular within the Chinese American community. The presence of a tofu shop among New Chinatown's original businesses further demonstrates that the district was not designed for tourists alone.[90] But perhaps the best example of the intended dual nature of New Chinatown is the Dun Sow Hong herb shop, which moved from Old Chinatown.[91] When the store reopened in New Chinatown, the owners began selling both traditional Chinese herbs and small trinkets to tourists in an attempt to serve both local community members and visitors. According to one community member, the trinkets proved so much more popular that they soon dominated the business.[92] New Chinatown was designed for both tourists and Chinese Americans alike, but it appears as if tourists were soon the primary partrons of many of the district's businesses.

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[87] Liu, *Inside Los Angeles Chinatown*, 20.
[88] "New Chinatown Opens," *Los Angeles Examiner*, June 25 1938.
[89] "New Chinatown Opens," *Los Angeles Examiner*, June 25 1938.
[90] Mu Family Interview, August 14, 1982, Interview 164, Box 20 Folder 3, Southern California Chinese American Oral History Project.
[91] Jenny Cho and the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, *Chinatown and China City in Los Angeles* (Charleston, S.C.: Carolina, 2011), 16;
[92] Gilbert Hom interview with William Gow, June 4, 2016.

While Christine Sterling claimed to also want China City to serve as a replacement for Old Chinatown, the stores and attractions within the Sterling's development were meant primarily for tourists. Like New Chinatown, China City was also designed as walking mall. Arranged around a number of plazas with names like the Court of Four Seasons and the Court of Lotus Pools, the walkways in China City were narrower than those in New Chinatown. What's more, architecture did not play as important a role in China City as New Chinatown. As architectural historian Josi Ward has demonstrated, many of the adobe and brick building were already on site and simply decorated by the Hollywood set designers that Sterling employed. As historian Ward notes, "Street furniture, signage, kiosks, props, and costumed employees identified the spaces as Chinese rather than the buildings, which were rather nondescript."[93] In perhaps the most overt manifestation of China City's embrace of Orientalist theatricality, it was the performers in China City, not the stage itself that defined the district to white visitors.

Featuring more than 100 small rented stalls, rather than the few large buildings present in New Chinatown meant that the collection of shops in China City was much more eclectic in Christine Sterling's district. Among the stalls were restaurants, gift shops, bakeries, a flower shop, a jeweler, a candy store, a pajama shop, curio shops, and a penny arcade. Yet among these many stalls, stood out a few larger attractions that defined the district. These included the *House of Wang* display, which recreated part of the set of the *Good Earth* as a walk through exhibit; The Chinese Junk restaurant, whose dining room was built as a recreation of an alleged Chinese pirate ship; Dr. Fung Po-Chee's Rainbow Tea Room and Art shop, which featured "reading and psychic interpretation"; Chan Loo, a magician who offered daily shows; The Shrine of Quan Yin, which was recreation of a Chinese temple; and a Chinese Theater.[94] While theatrical elements were not completely missing in New Chinatown—the Charlie Chan Fortune Teller Stand being the most obvious example—in China City, the entire district seemed to be defined first and foremost by its elements of theatricality. From the stage shows, to the rickshaw rides, to the fortune telling, visitors were constantly made aware of the overtly performative nature of China City. In this way, if New Chinatown generally made use of the theatrical elements long inherent in urban Chinatowns in some-what more subtle ways, China City, emphasized these elements as the district's primary selling point.

Given both China City's history as a district envisioned and executed by Christine Sterling and the district's backing by the media elite of Los Angeles, it would be easy to dismiss China City as nothing more than an Orientalist theme-park, where Chinese performed a vision created by the district's white owners and media backers. In this type of reading it becomes easy to hold up New Chinatown as Old Chinatown's only authentic successor. However, this type of a reading misses much of the complexity inherent in the building, design, and promotion of the two districts. While on its face, the overt theatricality that defined China City makes it easy to dismiss, China City's place as a provider of jobs and livelihood for a group of Chinese American were priced out of New Chinatown must be acknowledged.

Opened during a moment when Old Chinatown's destruction left many unable to cope with the effects of the Great Depression, China City provided a means of subsistence for a group of Chinese Americans who either could not afford the one hundred dollar a share buy-in for the Los Angeles Chinatown Project Association, or else who felt marginalized for other reasons by

[93] Josi Ward, "Dreams of Oriental Romance," 29.
[94] An extensive description of the China City can be found in a publicity guidebook put out by the district in 1938, Raymond Cannon, *China City* (Los Angeles: China City Publishing, 1938) available in the Los Angeles Public Library clipping file on China City.

the traditional Chinese American elite who had long dominated the social and political scene in the ethnic enclave. One contemporary scholar of China City writing in the 1940s called the district the more "democratic" of the two Chinatowns precisely because participation in the district was open to a larger cross-section of the Chinese American community. With its low rents and group of white owners, China City was accessible to many Chinese Americans who may have found themselves ostracized by more ethnic enclaves traditional social structures.

Because China City sold itself on its theatricality, it could accommodate a wide cross-section of the Chinese American community without ever challenging its image as an authentic re-creation of China as seen in Hollywood films. As is to be expected, China City attracted a good share of the Hollywood bit players and background performers. This was not only because these performers enjoyed the theatricality of the district but also because China City afforded them the flexibility to continue performing. Spencer Chan, who was a Hollywood performer and labor organizer in the film industry recalled many of those who ran stores in China City: "They could work in the picture or not work in the picture, and any day they wanted to, they could close the store."[95] In this way China City was perfect for those who were reliant in part on the irregular nature of work in the Hollywood film industry. China City offered low rents and at the same time the flexibility to work in Hollywood when needed, closing their stalls without any fear of larger repercussion.

The theatrical nature of China City attracted performers of all sorts. Dorothy Siu and her husband Jake had worked in the circus before opening the Flower Hut in China City. Dorothy had been a performer most of her life. She began performing in the theater as a student at Pasadena High School. After marrying, she and her husband worked in the film industry as extras but the work was irregular. She was soon attracted to the circus by its higher pay. After joining the circus, the couple traveled the West Coast from San Diego to Seattle. Dorothy performed in an Aladdin routine, while her husband worked in the commissary car. While the job paid well, it was short-lived. Eventually Dorothy and her husband returned to the Los Angeles area, and the two of them opened a shop, which sold imported silk flowers from China among other items. Not only were Dorothy and Jake performers, which made them outliers in the Chinese American community, but Jake was mixed race—his father was Chinese and his mother was Norwegian. At a time when interracial marriage was still illegal in California, mixed race Chinese Americans like Jake faced potential discrimination from both whites and Chinese. In this China City provided a perfect starting point for the couple's new business. They stayed in China City for only a few years before moving their business out of the district.[96]

Undoubtedly many of these performers in China City worked in Hollywood because they loved performing, while others were forced into Hollywood by lack of opportunity in other social situations. Spencer Chan recalled the experience of one of the China City shopkeepers who had was raised in Mexico but driven from that country by Pancho Villa's anti-Chinese violence.[97] He arrived in the Los Angeles in the late 1910s able to speak Spanish but with little command of Chinese. Eventually he found work in Hollywood as an extra while also running a stand in China City. A Chinese Mexican entrepreneur who spoke more English than Chinese would have had difficulty starting a business most places in 1930s Los Angeles. By running a

[95] Spencer Chan Interview, April 7, 1983, Interview 154, Box 18, Folder 3, Southern California Chinese American Oral History Project, UCLA Special Collections.
[96] Dorothy Siu Interview, January 12, 1979, Box 8 Folder 6, Southern California Chinese American Oral History Project, UCLA Special Collections.
[97] On Chinese in Mexico, see Jason Oliver Chang, *Chino: Anti-Chinese Racism in Mexico, 1880-1940* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 2017).

business in Hollywood while acting as a background performer in Hollywood film he was able to make a living in Depression-era Los Angeles.

Of course not everyone in China City was a performer. Tsin Nan Ling was a merchant and importer from Chekiang province (*Zhejiang*) in China. Before moving to Los Angeles and opening a business in China City, he traveled the country selling carved soap stones from his native village in China at World's Fairs. China City offered Ling an opportunity to finally settle down. Ling began with a table in front of Jake and Dorothy Siu's *Flower Hut*. Soon he earned enough capital to rent his own stall in China City. He eventually would go on to rent three stalls in China City and become the head of the China City merchant association. As a non-Cantonese immigrant, Ling did not have the support of a large network of fellow immigrants from a similar region of China. There was no district association that he could join. In this context, China City provided him and many others in similar situations an opportunity that New Chinatown never did.[98]

While both New Chinatown and China City owed a significant debt to World Fair exhibits and the growing Chinese American controlled tourism industry in San Francisco, the vision that these two districts offered of China and those involved in selling that vision were quite different. Christine Sterling's vision for China City presented a vision of China grounded in the Orient of the Western imagination and filtered through Hollywood film of the 1930s. The district embraced theatricality as a selling point and offered a wider cross section of the Chinese American community an opportunity to profit of white tourist interest in China than did New Chinatown. In contrast, New Chinatown was the product of the Chinese American merchant elite. In a novel twist, Peter SooHoo and his colleagues formed a corporation to control the district, and set initial stock prices at $100 a share. This ensured that the entire venture was controlled completely by Chinese Americans, even as it limited which members of the Chinese American community could contribute and control the project. The image that the Los Angeles Chinatown Project Association presented to white tourists owed a significant debt to the one first advanced by merchants like Look Tin Eli in San Francisco Chinatown. New Chinatown was the logical successor of nearly a half-century of prior efforts by the Chinese American merchant elite in cities and at World's Fairs across North America. In this way, New Chinatown continued a tradition of advancing a vision grounded in Chinese American Orientalism, which challenged long-held Yellow Peril stereotypes of the community.

In the summer of 1938, as the city and the nation turned their attention to these two competing Chinatowns in downtown Los Angeles, the remaining section of Old Chinatown struggled to remind prospective white visitors of its existence. For nearly a half a century, the residents of Old Chinatown had struggled to reshape the image of their community as den of vice and a site of Yellow Peril. Even as New Chinatown and China City challenged these long-held stereotypes of the community, those who remained in the old district were in danger of being forgotten, overshadowed by these two newer Chinese-themed business districts. The opportunity to remind the city of their presence would come to the residents and businesses of Old Chinatown sooner than many expected. Later that summer the sudden national popularity of China relief fundraising festivals would provide Old Chinatown the stage that it needed to begin to reshape its popular image.

[98] William Gow, "Building a Chinese Village in Los Angeles: Christine Sterling and the Residents of China City," *Gum Saan Journal*, Volume 32, No 1, (2010): 39-53.

Chapter 5: China War Relief Festivals in Old Chinatown

On October 8, 1938, as dusk fell over Los Angeles, crowds from around the city converged on what remained of Old Chinatown for a celebration of the Moon Festival. Passing under one of three elaborate gates constructed for the festival, visitors entered a roped-off section of Los Angeles Street decorated with lanterns and flags and lined with concession stands. In the center of the festival area, adjacent to the Lung Kong Tin Yee Association headquarters, Chinese American youth volunteers had constructed an "Alter of Blessings" to the Moon Goddess, where Dr. Edward Lee told fortunes and sold horned nuts to interested visitors.[1] The Chinese Cinema Players, a group of U.S.-born, Chinese Americans who worked in the film industry as bit-players, designers, and artists, were responsible for most of the festival decorations. At one booth, the Los Angeles-born movie star Anna May Wong signed autographs and took photos with fans. The festivities included street dancing, music, and a shadow boxing performance. At the height of the festival, a Chinese dragon operated by dozens of residents wound its way along Los Angeles Street to the delight of curious onlookers while Chinese lion dancers performed for the crowds. [2]

Alongside the Chinese dragon and lion dancers, fourteen-year-old Barbara Jean Wong prepared to lead eleven other Mei Wah Club members in their first official public performance as a marching drum corps. The Mei Wah Club began seven years earlier as a girls' basketball team, and many of its members were teenagers who attended local high schools like Belmont and Polytechnic. American citizens by birth, these young women were part of a generation of Chinese Americans then coming of age, and many shared interests similar to other American youth. Under the guidance of Barbara's mother, Maye Wong, and her uncle, David SooHoo, the teenagers designed costumes and choreographed a routine.[3] Their performance as an all-female Chinese American youth marching band that night stood in sharp contrast to many of the more Orientalist aspects of the festival.

With its panoply of Chinese Americans performing for white audiences, the 1938 Moon Festival bore little resemblance to the centuries-old Mid-Autumn Festival from which it borrowed its name. The event was not a traditional ethnic festival, but rather a theatrical fundraising performance that mixed tropes from Chinese culture with representations from the Orient of the Western imagination. This was the second such fundraiser held in Los Angeles in 1938 after the success of the China Nite Festival held earlier that summer. Both China Nite and the 1938 Moon Festival resembled national "Bowl of Rice" fundraisers more closely than they did customary Chinese festivals. Held largely between the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937 and the entry of the United States into World War II in 1941, these fundraisers were hosted as war relief events created through partnerships between newly-formed China Aid societies—controlled primarily by white businessmen and former missionaries to China—and local Chinese American organizations. From New York to San Francisco, Portland to Santa Barbara, Bowl of Rice fundraisers brought large crowds into Chinese American communities, raised millions of dollars

[1] *The Federation News* Vol. 1, No. 8 (November, 1938), Chinese American Museum at El Pueblo Historical Monument, David and Dora SooHoo Collection; "Chinese Plan Celebration of Eighth Moon Festival," *Los Angeles Times*, October 5, 1938, A16.
[2] "Chinese Hold Moon Festival," *Los Angeles Times,* October 9, 1938, A16, see also *The Federation News* 1: 8 (November, 1938).
[3] Marjorie Lee, "Building Community," in *Linking Our Lives: Chinese American Women of Los Angeles*, (Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, 1984), 97.

for China war relief, and garnered extensive coverage in the nation's press.[4] As historian K. Scott Wong has argued, the popularity of Bowl of Rice fundraisers increased the visibility of Chinese Americans and in the process played a fundamental role in eroding the negative image many whites held about China and Chinese people.[5]

In Los Angeles, the 1938 Moon Festival took on an added importance when the Chinese American merchants who controlled the local Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association decided to hold the fundraiser in Old Chinatown. This decision not only offered the merchants an opportunity to reshape long-held stereotypes about the neighborhood as an urban slum, but it also gave them an opportunity to reassert the neighborhoods continued existence in the face of the on-going demolition of most of Old Chinatown by Union Station construction. With the demolition of Old Chinatown well underway, only a few blocks of Old Chinatown remained by the 1938.[6] Like the openings of New Chinatown and China City, which occurred only a few months earlier, the Moon Festival provided the Chinese American residents of Los Angeles a chance to reshape Old Chinatown's popular image. But unlike in China City and New Chinatown where backers of these projects were able to construct new buildings and sets to facilitate their respective visions, in local organizers of the China relief festivals were forced to utilize existing elements in Old Chinatown and attempt to rearticulate the meaning of those elements.

As a result of the festival being held in Old Chinatown, the Moon Festival engaged with the twin stereotypes at the center of Yellow Peril depictions of the neighborhood: first, the idea that Old Chinatown was a distinct space defined by underground tunnels and secret passages with its own relationship to time and modernity; and second, the depiction of the community as a homosocial environment composed of primarily male bachelors, who had long been portrayed as violent tong members who sold opium and fought over the control of the few Chinese women in the community. These twin stereotypes had long been seen as interrelated. The perceived inscrutability of the community was seen as facilitating the illegal actions of the districts tongs. At the same time, the homosocial nature of the tongs and their perceived affront to the heteronormative white family in its suburban home was symbolized spatially in the representation of the underground lair. In Hollywood films of the silent period, the underground lair had always the threat of white female captivity, and a challenge to the white family united in Christian marriage. Thus the perceived spatial elements of Old Chinatown were inextricably linked to the stereotypes of race, gender, and sexuality that defined popular representations of the old neighborhood.

To challenge these stereotypes festival organizers foregrounded the performances of Chinese American women. The 1938 Moon Festival included a dragon boat with young Chinese women, a parade of more than two hundred lantern-carrying Chinese American female youth, and the presence of Anna May Wong, whose star persona embodied the contradictions inherent in many popular representations of Chinese women of the period. Many of the self-representations performed by Chinese Americans at the festival challenged older representations of the neighborhood as a violent, slum of male bachelors in part by promoting a related set of

[4] Him Mark Lai, "Roles Played by Chinese in America during China's Resistance to Japanese Aggression and during World War II," *Chinese America: History and Perspective* (1997): 75-128.
[5] K. Scott Wong, *American's First: Chinese Americans and the Second World War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 42.
[6] "Sledges Sound Old Chinatown's knell in Preparing Place for New Railway Terminal," *Los Angeles Times*, December 23, 1933, A1.

representations of a romantic and feminine Orient.[7] Yet the festival's relationship to Orientalism was much more complex than simply replacing one set of Orientalist representations with another. The 1938 Moon Festival also contained subversive elements that did not conformed to either the long circulating Yellow Peril representations of Old Chinatown or to the representations of a romantic and feminine Orient. Key among these elements was the performance of the Mei Wah Drum Corp. The group's costuming and mode of performance as a marching band produced a contradiction in the festival that allowed the young women of the Mei Wah Club to be seen in ways that challenged the more Orientalist representations in other parts of the festival.

By analyzing the Moon Festival in this way, this chapter contextualizes the 1938 Moon Festival within a growing historiography on ethnic festivals, pageants, and street performance as complex sites engaged in the negotiation of social power. [8] The chapter also demonstrates the limits and contradictions inherent in the Chinese American merchant class's attempts to rearticulate American Orientalism for their own benefit. Even representations like those of the performance of the Mei Wah Drum Corps would be utilized by the media producers at United China Relief for their own benefit a few years later. By 1941 when United China Relief presented its own Moon Festival fundraiser in Los Angeles, the vision of Chinese Americans was no longer central. Chinese American organizations lost much of their control as elements and performances originated by Chinese Americans in 1938 were incorporated into the 1941 Moon Festival to promote the vision of United China Relief. Yet even if the 1938 Moon Festival did not transform the fundamental nature of American Orientalism, the complex engagement with American Orientalism did create a stage on which local Chinese Americans performed their own representations of China and Chinese people during a formative moment in many of their lives.

War Comes to Chinatown

On September 18, 1931, long before much of the nation focused its attention on events in Asia, the Japanese invasion of Manchuria thrust war onto the consciousness of Chinese immigrants throughout the United States. Japan's invasion of Manchuria was the extension of decades of military expansion by the island nation across the Pacific region. Beginning in the later part of the nineteenth century Japan had transformed itself from an insular nation into an aspiring global power. Challenging the hegemony of the U.S., Russia, and other Western powers in the Pacific, Japan had extended both its sphere of influence and its direct colonial control over an increasingly larger portion of East Asia. The Korean peninsula, the island of Taiwan, port cities and regions along the China coast were all now under Japanese control or influence. In Manchuria, Japan now set up the puppet state of Manchukuo and prepared to launch itself into a war that would soon become global in scope.

Between 1931 and 1937, the Chinese immigrant generation across the U.S. worked to support China in the face of Japanese colonial aggression. These first U.S. fundraising efforts for China fell under the auspices of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association in San

[7] Nayan Shah discusses the ways in which representations of Chinatown were seen as challenging the percieveed respectibale domesticity of middle class white society. He argues that representations of the community as being composed of Chinese male bachelors and Chinese women in brothels as prostitutes came to represent a type of deviant sexuality in the minds of many middle class whites. Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 13.

[8] See for example, Robert Anthony Orsi, *The Madonna on 115th Street: Faith and community in Italian Harlem* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), Susan Davis, *Parades and Power: Street Theater in Nineteenth Century Philadelphia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), April Schultz, *Ethnicity on Parade: Inventing the Norwegian American Through Celebration* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994); Yeh, *Making an American Festival*; Kurashige, *Japanese American Celebration and Conflict*.

Francisco.[9] Officially founded in 1882, and incorporated in California in 1901, the CCBA in San Francisco was often referred to in English as the Chinese Six Companies after the earlier, more loosely defined federation from which it developed.[10] Formed in part to provide an organized response to the Chinese Exclusion Act, the CCBA was composed of representatives from the city's district and family associations that acted as immigrant mutual aid organizations based on members' common surnames and regions of origin in Southern China.[11] The organizations' functions included granting temporary lodging, providing burial expenses for the indigent, and settling disputes about members. Larger communities like Los Angeles developed their own CCBAs that operated autonomously from the San Francisco CCBA, though these regional associations generally recognized the CCBA in San Francisco as the head of a confederation of CCBAs that reached throughout the United States and into areas of Latin America that lacked Chinese diplomatic representation.[12]

Shortly after the invasion of Manchuria the CCBA in San Francisco passed a number of resolutions, including one calling for a fundraising drive to support Chinese troops under General Ma Chan-Shan (*Ma Zhanshan*), who had decided to fight the Japanese against the orders of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek (*Jiang Jieshi*) and his ruling Kuomintang party (*Guomintang*). San Francisco's Chinese language press was overwhelmingly critical of the Kuomintang's decision to seek resolution through the League of Nations rather than through armed resistance. Community members angry at Chiang Kai-shek's decision held a parade in San Francisco's Chinatown with hundreds marching to protest Japan's actions in late September of 1931. Over the next three months, Chinese in America raised over $625,000 to support those Chinese troops engaged in the fight against the Japanese.[13] Political divisions in China soon reflected themselves in Chinese American fundraising efforts. Following the invasion of Manchuria, the San Francisco CCBA called on the Chiang to end one-party rule in China and to actively resist the Japanese invasion. These demands proved controversial within the Chinese American community. Soon the conservative faction in San Francisco supporting the Chiang formed a rival aid organization.[14]

These political divisions within the Chinese American community were largely put aside after the Japanese army invaded China on July 7, 1937, sparking the Sino-Japanese War. With the outbreak of the war, Chinese American communities formed war relief organizations. In San Francisco, the CCBA organized the Chinese War Relief Association (CWRA) to coordinate war relief efforts. With forty-seven branches in over three hundred smaller cities and towns, the organization oversaw relief efforts in smaller cities and municipalities across the United States and Latin America.[15] Unlike the earlier efforts spearheaded by the CCBA, the CWRA united various political factions within the Chinese American community in ways that had proved impossible in the earlier fundraising efforts. While the CWRA was one of the most visible Chinese American aid organizations nationally, it did not hold jurisdiction over all communities in the United States. Chinese American communities in larger cities formed their own war relief

[9] On the earliest fundraisers begun after the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 see Yung, *Unbound Feet*, 225.
[10] Him Mark Lai, "The Historical Development of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association/Higuan System," *Chinese America: History and Perspective*, (1987): 24-25.
[11] Throughout the nineteenth century the CCBA hired white lawyers and provided financial backing to legal challenges of the anti-Chinese legislation like the Exclusion Act. See Peter Kwong and Duskana Miscevic, *Chinese America: The Untold Story of America's Oldest New Community* (New York: The New Press, 2007), 111, 125.
[12] Lai, "Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association," 27, 39.
[13] Yung, *Unbound Feet*, 225.
[14] Lai, "Roles Played by Chinese in America during China's Resistance to Japanese Aggression and during World War II," 78.
[15] See Lai, "Roles Played by Chinese in America during China's Resistance to Japanese Aggression and during World War II,"89-90. See also Yung, *Unbound Feet,* 227.

associations. In all, Chinese immigrants founded ninety-five war relief organizations in communities across the United States, some with as few as fifty Chinese American residents.[16]

In the first year after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, groups like the CWRA were more focused on raising money for war relief from within the Chinese immigrant community than in changing the popular opinions of whites about the situation in China. Within the nation's Chinatowns, donations to groups like the CWRA were ostensibly voluntary, and yet many Chinese American relief organizations devised quotas that local members of the immigrant community were expected to meet. According to historian Him Mark Lai, in San Francisco three Chinese Americans in 1937 and four in 1939 were paraded around Chinatown and publicly humiliated for failing to contribute to the war relief effort.[17] One Chinese American in Sacramento went so far as to threaten members of the Chinese immigrant relief association with his pistol when they tried to coerce him into contributing to the cause.[18] Similar pressure was applied in Los Angeles.[19] Despite the presence of resisters, the vast majority of Chinese immigrants donated voluntarily out of a sense of patriotism and duty to the land of their birth. The combination of pressure and appeals to patriotism that the CWRA and other local Chinese American relief organizations utilized proved effective in raising funding within the Chinese immigrant community.

In Los Angeles, the local Chinese American relief association was dubbed the Chinese Patriotic Society, and the group immediately began working to raise money for the war effort. While officially a distinct group, the Chinese Patriotic Society appears to have worked closely with the local CCBA. Between 1937 and 1939, the Chinese Patriotic Society in Los Angeles, along with Chinese American aid groups in Fresno, San Francisco, and San Diego were at the forefront of efforts to sell Chinese government issued bonds in Chinese American communities. After the Japanese government complained that the sales violated US neutrality, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) stepped in and stopped the practice, but not before Chinese Americans raised more than three million dollars in aid for China.[20] While the English language press in the United States extensively covered the war in Asia, there was scant coverage of the efforts of Chinese Americans to support the war effort. The press largely ignored the war bond campaign until the SEC challenged these fundraising efforts. Other similar efforts to raise funds also continued to receive minimal media coverage. These campaigns within the nations Chinatown's may have been successful in raising funds for China, but they largely had little to no influence on the American public's popular opinion of the war.

In contrast, the launch of the first national Bowl of Rice campaign in 1938 had a significant influence on broader public opinion about the war in Asia. In the summer off 1938, the United Council for Civilian Relief in China, a recently formed umbrella aid organization that included the American Bureau for Medical Aid in China (ABMAC) among other white-led aid groups, partnered with Chinese American organizations to hold a nationwide day of fundraising on June 17, 1938. The national chairman of the United Council for Civilian Relief was Colonel Theodore Roosevelt Jr., the son of the former president.[21] The influx of prominent white

[16] Lai, "Roles Played by Chinese in America," 89.
[17] Lai, "Roles Played by Chinese in America," 93.
[18] Lai, "Roles Played by Chinese in America," 93
[19] Lai, "Roles Played by Chinese in America," 93.
[20] The Chinese government bonds are not to be confused with US war bonds sold after the United States entered the war in 1941. For general background on Chinese government bond sales see Lai, 91. For the involvement of the Chinese Patriotic League in these sales and the total amount raised through sales see "China Bond Sales Halted By Judge," *Los Angeles Times*, November 3, 1939, A2.
[21] "Chinatown Throng Aids War Refugees," *New York Times*, June 18, 1938, 1.

spokespeople and affluent white donors thrust the June 17 fundraisers into the national spotlight. These Bowl of Rice fundraisers were first envisioned as banquets for wealthy donors. In May, the *New York Times* reported, "Millions of Americans will be invited to pay high prices for bowls of rce [sic] in order that China's 50,000 civilians may eat..."[22] This original party was soon transformed into a national event. By early June, fundraisers were planned in over 2,000 cities in states across the nation. More than seven hundred mayors proclaimed June 17 as "Humanity Day."[23] The so-called "Humanity Day" brought national attention to the issue of Chinese war relief, and focused the nation's eyes on the Chinese American community.

The first national Bowl of Rice campaign in June of 1938 drew on the increased American awareness of China brought about by the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War. National polling from the period suggests the nature of this shift. An Elmo Ropper poll conducted in July of 1938 asked Americans which recent acts of military aggression disturbed them the most. The poll found that more Americans were disturbed by Japan's invasion of China than Germany's seizure of Austria.[24] In addition to this increased awareness of events in Asia, Americans were also becoming increasingly sympathetic to China. A Gallup poll on American opinions of whom they supported in the Sino-Japanese War in August 1937 found that 43% of Americas were pro-Chinese; 55% were neutral; and 2% were Pro-Japan. By May of 1939, the same poll found that 74% of Americans now supported China; only 24% were neutral, while 2% remained supportive of Japan.[25] No doubt some of this change was due to publicity garnered by the Bowl of Rice movement.

While most of the limited existing academic literature on the Bowl of Rice fundraisers has focused on the events' social and economic significance, the Bowl of Rice movement probably had more cultural than economic influence. Judy Wu and Karen Leong point out that the China war relief fundraising did not garner the same levels of success as the British and Greek war relief efforts in the United States. In 1940, China war relief organizations in the United States raised slightly more than one million dollars, while Greek organizations raised $5 million and British organizations raised $10 million.[26] Indeed the leadership of ABMAC, one of the main coordinating organizations for the Bowl of Rice campaign, appears to have felt similarly. A report prepared for the ABMAC Executive Committee at the end of 1940 stated that Bowl of Rice Parties sponsored by ABMAC member committees had raised only $11,543 so far that year and yet the report's author urged the Executive Committee to remember the important value of the publicity that these events garnered.[27]

Drawing tens of thousands of spectators while being covered by the local and national press, the Bowl of Rice fundraising festivals were held simultaneously on the same day, June 17, 1938, in communities large and small across the United States. Organized as part of the national Bowl of Rice Campaign, these national Bowl of Rice fundraisers directed local and national media at Chinese American communities and in the process presented a stage on which Chinese Americans could shape popular opinions of China and Chinese people through performances for largely white audiences. For example, New York's Bowl of Rice Festival brought tens of

[22] "Bowl of Rice Fetes to Aid China June 17," *New York Times,* May 8, 1938, 39.
[23] "1,000,000 to Attend Chinese Aid Fetes," *New York Times*, June 14, 1938, 14.
[24] Cited in Harold Isaac, *Scratched on the Mind:American Images of China and India* (New York: The John Daly Company, 1958), 173.
[25] Quoted in Isaac, *Scratches on the Mind*, 173.
[26] Wu and Leong, *Filling the Rice Bowls of China*, 136.
[27] Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, December 17, 1940, pg 3, Box 95, American Bureau for Medical Aid in China collection; Columbia University Rare Book Library.

thousands of spectators to Chinatown, an area between Pell, Mott, and Doyer Streets was closed off for the night's festivities. Restaurants sold seven-course meals; paper lanterns decorated the streets. A large stage was erected on Mott Street. Milton Britton's jazz orchestra played along with two "Chinese bands," while guests danced and enjoyed the evening. Chinese Ambassador C.T. Wang attended and a message was read from Madame Chiang Kai-shek. *The New York Times* estimated a crowd of 85,000.[28] In San Francisco, the festival also became a cultural festival. Chinatown was also blocked off. Visitors to the fair purchased "Humanity badges" for fifty cents to gain entry to the event that lasted until 4am. The festivities included a dragon dance and other performances by local Chinese Americans. District, family, and fraternal organizations in Chinatown all opened their doors to spectators at the event. *The Chinese Digest* reported that the residents of San Francisco's Chinatown, "recreated something of the splendor and exotic atmosphere of old Chinatown— the Chinatown that Will Irwin once wrote in ecstatic prose and once Arnold Genthe captured in treasured photographs."[29] Paul Smith, the editor of the *San Francisco Chronicle,* was the chairman of the event and the event was covered in the city's papers. Ranging from large-scale spectacles like those held in New York to local banquets held in towns across the nation, these Bowl of Rice parties played an important role in the cultural shift occurring in American culture's representations of China.

As the fourth largest Chinese American community in the United States, one may have expected the Bowl of Rice party in Los Angeles to mirror festivities held in San Francisco and New York. But the Southern California party drew only a few thousand people to the Los Angeles Breakfast Club.[30] The local party featured Chairmen Princess Der Ling, a self-proclaimed "princess," and the daughter of a former Chinese diplomat to Paris who claimed to have served as a lady in waiting to the Empress Dowager in China. The featured entertainment was a beauty contest to find a woman who could symbolize "the Humanitarian Heart of America."[31] Local Chinese Americans did not make up a significant portion of the night's entertainment nor did local Chinese American groups like the Los Angeles CCBA lend their support in any noticeable way.

The Chinese American community's comparative lack of support for the local Humanity Day festival was primarily the result of local factors. National Humanity day was held on June 17 across the nation, which in Los Angeles fell between the opening celebrations of New Chinatown and China City. The opening ceremonies of New Chinatown and China City occupied the attention of nearly the entire Chinese American community and attracted tens of thousands of white visitors, including local celebrities, politicians, and dignitaries to their respective festivities. The failure to fully embrace National Humanity Day was only one of many ways that fundraising in the Chinese American community in Los Angeles differed from that of San Francisco and New York. The community would soon throw two of its own fundraising festivals, China Nite and the Moon Festival, without the support of either the United Council for Civilian Relief in China or the CWRA. The U.S.-born generation would play a fundamental role in planning and executing these two festivals.

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[28] "Chinatown Throng Aids War Refugees," *New York Times*, June 18, 1938, 1.
[29] *Chinese Digest*, July 1938.
[30] "Nation to Rally Tomorrow to Aid Civilians In China," *Los Angeles Times*, June 16, 1938, 18; "Miss Model Los Angeles Sought for China Aid Fete," *Los Angeles Times*, June 12, 1938, A8; "Rice Bowl Beauty Qualifications Given," *Los Angeles Times*, June 7, 1938, 29.
[31] "Miss Model Los Angeles Sought for China Aid Fete," *Los Angeles Times*, June 12, 1938, A8.

Chinese American Youth Fundraising Participation

Because Los Angeles was large enough to support its own CCBA, war relief fundraising in the Chinese American community of Los Angeles fell under the control of a local war relief association, dubbed the Chinese Patriotic Society that was distinct from the CWRA in San Francisco. Ostensibly an independent organization Chinese Patriotic Society was housed inside of CCBA headquarters at 415 ½ Los Angeles Street in Old Chinatown and appears to have functioned as an extension of the local CCBA.[32] Run almost completely by volunteers, only the general secretary and office administrator of the Chinese Patriotic Society received a salary.[33] While the society did occasionally print broadsides in English in an attempt to influence popular white opinion, the Chinese Patriotic Society focused its efforts on Chinese immigrants.[34] Each month, CCBA representatives, most likely on behalf of the Chinese Patriotic Society, went house-to-house in Los Angeles collecting funds from Chinese immigrants in support of war relief.[35]

Despite its focus on the immigrant community, the leadership of the Chinese Patriotic Society appears to have been composed in part of American-born members who served as a bridge between the Chinese immigrant community and the larger white English-speaking world.[36] Based on the limited existing historical record, it appears that the society was founded by a group of CCBA officers including Dick Tom, an American-born Chinese grocery store owner, and Thomas Wong, an American-born wholesale-produce businessman who was married to the Mei Wah Club sponsor, Maye Wong.[37] Both Thomas Wong, and to a lesser extent Dick Tom, were "Chinese brokers," a term that historian Lisa Rose Mar employs to describe members of the Chinese community in North America who served as intermediaries between the Chinese-speaking immigrant community and the English-speaking world.[38] Wong in particular exemplified this role. It appears that he used his position as a leader in the community to work with United China Relief in planning the Moon Festival held in 1941.[39] Having leaders who could negotiate both the internal politics of the community and also interact with larger white society became increasingly important as organizations within the Chinese American community began to partner with newly formed white-run aid groups to create a national, yet decentralized, structure for war relief fundraising.[40]

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[32] According to *Federation News*, the Los Angeles CCBA was located at 415 ½ Los Angeles Street. Charles Ferguson in his 1942 Master's thesis lists the address of the Chinese Patriotic Society as 415 ½ Los Angeles Street. Charles Ferguson, "Political problems and activities of Oriental Residents in Los Angeles and the Vicinity," (UCLA, Master's Thesis, 1942), 81.

[33] Tom, "Participation of the Chinese," 70; *Federation News* No.1: Vol.8 (November, 1938).

[34] Chinese Patriotic Society, "Chinese Appeal To Americans", Oviatt Library, Special Collections, California State University Northridge.

[35] Chen, "Chinese Community in Los Angeles," 243-244; Tom, "Participation of the Chinese," 71.

[36] In her 1952 doctoral dissertation, Wen-hui Chung Chen makes a similar observation about the leadership of the Los Angeles CCBA explaining that while the organization's membership was primarily immigrants with limited English speaking abilities, the leaders of the organization tended to be well-educated and bilingual; Chen, "Chinese Community in Los Angeles," 250.

[37] Dick Tom recalled helping to found a group to raise funds for China within the Los Angeles CCBA with the help of Thomas Wong and other CCBA officers. He does not provide the group's English name. It is almost certain that this was the Chinese Patriotic Society. See Dick Tom Interview, February 13, 1980, Southern California Chinese American Oral History Project (SCCAOHP), Box 11, Folder 5, UCLA Special Collections; see also the finding aid summary transcript for this interview.

[38] Lisa Rose Mar, *Brokering Belonging: Chinese in Canada's Exclusion Era, 1885-1945* (Oxford University Press, 2010)

[39] Billy Lew Interview, October 19, 1979, SCCAOHP, Box 4, Folder 2, UCLA Special Collections.

[40] The president of the CCBA in 1938 was a man by the name of Lim Suey Chong, but as Kim Fong Tom notes, in Los Angeles the president of the CCBA during this period was not necessarily the organization's most powerful member. In fact she suggests the presidency was a role that many leaders avoided. Chinese brokers like Thomas Wong, Dick Tom, or CCBA English secretary, Peter SooHoo almost certainly had more influence over the development of China war relief fundraisers than Lim Suey Chung. On Lim Suey Chung as president see *Federation News*, Vol1: No. 8 (November, 1938): unpaginated; On the desirability of the leadership of Los Angeles CCBA presidency see Tom, "Participation of the Chinese," 52.

Even with U.S.-born Chinese Americans at the forefront of many early fundraising efforts, younger members of the U.S.-born generation did not always feel connected to war relief efforts organized by their parents' generation. Barbara Quon expressed this sense of ambivalence in an article she wrote for the *Los Angeles Times* in February 1938,

> I have taken part in the local activities, and what I have done has partly been at the suggestion of my parents. Mother asked me to gather together my old clothes so she could take them to the relief station. I was glad to do it. Of course, there were cash contributions too. It's not that I think the war is none of my business, for that isn't true. It's just that it doesn't affect my personal life as much as it does my mother's. [41]

Quon was representative of a demographic shift underway in the Chinese American community as she undoubtedly reflected the viewpoints of a growing number of her U.S.-born peers.

By 1930, the composition of the Chinese American community was changing from comprising primarily men separated from their families in China to families living in the United States, often with their American-born children. In 1900, only 10 percent of Chinese Americans were born in the United States; by 1930, 41 percent were born in the United States.[42] The relationship of this U.S.-born generation to American society was distinct from that of their immigrant parents, and this was especially so in Southern California. Since the Chinese American community in Los Angeles was more geographically dispersed than other urban Chinese American communities, second- and third-generation youth attended racially mixed high schools and often shared similar interests with other American youth their age: playing football, basketball, and tennis, organizing and attending their own dances, reading popular fiction, and watching Hollywood films.[43] These youth were citizens by birth, but because they were of Chinese descent, once they entered the work force, overt racism and xenophobia often limited their employment opportunities keeping them from fully integrating into the larger white-dominated society.[44]

Following the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, Chinese American youth in Los Angeles began organizing their own fundraisers. These youth-led efforts took on different forms than the efforts organized by their parents' generation and as such were more effective in galvanizing the interest of the younger generation. Between the winter of 1937 and the spring of 1938, local Chinese American youth organized a series of charity football games against Chinese American youth in San Francisco.[45] During this period, the Mei Wah Club sponsored a joint fundraiser that featured musical dance performances held at the Nationalist Hall in Los Angeles.[46] Young Chinese Americans in Los Angeles also organized benefit dances for war relief. *The Chinese Digest,* an English-language publication based in San Francisco, written for and by second generation Chinese Americans, explained why activities such as dances were important for involving the younger generation: "In times of financial need, whether that need is within one's community or in the homeland, the older generation contributes without any thought of any kind of return. But somehow you don't approach any second generation youth and ask for a direct donation. You ask 'Won't you buy a ticket to a benefit dance?' Somehow the psychology is

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[41] Barbara Quon, "By Barbara Quon," *Los Angeles Times*, February 13, 1938, H9.
[42] Yung, *Unbound Feet*, 303.
[43] Mabel Sam Lee, "The Recreational Interests and Participation of a select group of Chinese Boys and Girls in Los Angeles California," (USC Master's Thesis, 1939), 39-48. On Chinese American youth participation in sports during this period see Kathleen Yep, *Outside the Pain: When Basketball Ruled The Chinese Playground* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009).
[44] Louis, "Chinese in Los Angeles," 73-94.
[45] *Chinese Digest*, December 1937, Ethnic Studies Library, UC Berkeley.
[46] See Lee, *Linking Our Lives*, 96.

different."[47] Football games, musical performances, benefit dances—the fundraising efforts of these U.S.-born youth reflected their own life experiences.

In April 1938, under the guidance of the Chinese Patriotic Society, seventeen Chinese American youth clubs formed the Los Angeles Federation of Chinese Clubs to raise funds for war relief.[48] The groups included the Mei Wah Club, the Kwan Ying Club, the Guardsmen, the Lo Wah Club, the Lo Wah Auxiliary, the Chinese Cinema Players, and the Chinese student clubs at Jefferson, Belmont, and Polytechnic high schools.[49] Following on the formation of a similar federation in San Francisco, the Federation of Chinese Clubs issued a statement at its inception that read in part: "We the Chinese youth of Southern California, whether citizens of China or citizens of the sympathetic democracy of the USA should… assume the responsibilities which are ours."[50] The Federation boasted more than four hundred members at its founding and included Chinese students studying in the U.S. as well as U.S.-born youth.[51]

Even though many of its members were still of high school age, the Federation chose twenty-seven-year-old Marshall Hoo as its president.[52] Originally from Oakland Chinatown, Hoo moved to Los Angeles in 1930 in the hope of finding employment during the Depression. Hoo was active in social movements around Los Angeles and held an interest in the evolving geo-political situation in Asia. A charismatic speaker, Hoo exerted much of his energy toward increasing awareness of evolving events in Asia among his fellow Chinese American youth in Los Angeles.[53] Under the leadership of young people like Hoo, the Federation of Chinese Clubs put out its own bilingual newsletter as a way to keep both Chinese-born and U.S.-born youth in the organization informed.[54] The bilingual nature of the organization's newsletter made it distinct from the San Francisco-based *Chinese Digest*, and spoke to the organization's attempts to incorporate both Chinese and U.S.-born youth into the local war relief effort. Once established, the Federation of Chinese Clubs became the main venue through which members of the younger generation became involved in war relief.

By the time the CCBA in Los Angeles sponsored their first wartime fundraising festival, China Nite, in the summer of 1938, the Federation of Chinese Clubs played a fundamental role in making the event a success. China Nite was so successful, in fact, that it attracted more than 40,000 visitors to Old Chinatown. The Federation of Chinese Clubs formed its own division to support the event, chaired by the twenty-one-year-old Mei Wah Club president, Eleanor SooHoo.[55] Building on the Federation of Chinese Clubs success managing concession stands at the New Chinatown opening, the CCBA handed control of the concession stands at China Nite over to the local youth groups.[56] The influence of the youth on China Nite was reflected not just in concessions, but also in the festival's entertainment, which included live music by Suen Luen Due, identified in the souvenir program as "the Chinese Bing Crosby," and an area of the plaza

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[47] " The Chinatown Crier," *Chinese Digest*, March, 1938, 3, Ethnic Studies Library, UC Berkeley.
[48] On the relationship to the Chinese Patriotic Society, see Marshall Hoo, "In Which Federation is Believed," *Federation News*, Vol 1 No. 1 (April, 1938), Box EO50, Folder 14, Y.C. Hong Collection, Huntington Library; on the number of clubs in the federation see, *Chinese Digest*, April 1938.
[49] *Federation News* 1:4 (August), Chinese American Museum; Billy Lew Interview, SCCAOHP, UCLA.
[50] Quoted in *Chinese Digest*, Vol. 4, No 4, (April 1938), 2.
[51] *Federation News*, No.1, Vol. 1, (April, 1938): unpaginated.
[52] Marshall Hoo Interview, May 24, 1980, *SCCAOHP*, Box 13, Folder 4, UCLA Special Collections.
[53] Marshall Hoo Interview, May 24, 1980, *SCCAOHP*, Box 13, Folder 4, UCLA Special Collections.
[54] *Federation News* 1:1 (April, 1938): unpaginated.
[55] *China Nite Souvenir Program and Directory*, Chinese American Museum.
[56] "New Chinatown Opening a Grand Success," and "China Nite" in *Federation News* No 1. Vol. 4. (July): unpaginated; David and Dora SooHoo Collection, Chinese American Museum of Los Angeles.

that was reserved for "street dancing."[57] China Nite would provide the template for the Moon Festival held later that same year.

The Federation of Chinese Clubs lent their support to the CCBA-sponsored event at a time when many of district and family associations in Los Angeles where reeling from the effects of the destruction of much of Old Chinatown. In fact, the Kong Chow Association, which helped manage the local temple, was the only district association whose headquarters was not destroyed by the construction of Union Station.[58] Indeed, the construction of Union Station brought a period of uncertainty to many older immigrant organizations.[59] While the existing archival record provides no way of knowing the role individual family or district associations played in the planning of either China Nite or the 1938 Moon Festival, the general turmoil brought about by the construction of Union Station certainly hindered the ability of these groups to contribute. In contrast to the family and district organizations, the groups comprising the Federation of Chinese Clubs were based throughout Los Angeles, not just in Old Chinatown. Working alongside an older generation of U.S.-born leaders like Wong and SooHoo, these youth groups played a significant role in presenting a vision at these two festivals that challenged long help Yellow Peril representations of the festival.[60]

American Orientalism and the 1938 Moon Festival

Taking place over the Saturday and Sunday evenings of October 8 and 9 in Old Chinatown, the Moon Festival attracted 25,000 people and garnered media coverage in most of the city's major papers. [61] Even as Chinese American self-representations at the festival largely rejected older Yellow Peril stereotypes that defined Old Chinatown by the presence of Chinese bachelors, the festival remained deeply engaged with the discourse of American Orientalism. Rather than try to challenge the Orientalism at heart of so many mainstream conceptions of Chinatown, Chinese American organizers and performers utilized the illusionary and theatrical elements inherent in Orientalist conceptions of the neighborhood to draw visitors to the event while simultaneously asserting the neighborhood's presence in the face of Union Station construction.

Unlike earlier largely unsuccessful attempts by the Chinese American merchant class to define the theatrical elements present in the tourist economy of Old Chinatown, Chinese American organizers and performers of the Moon Festival controlled nearly every element of the event. The festival was roped off from the rest of the city and open only to paying visitors. Within the festival area, the Federation of Chinese Clubs ran concession stands with games and food. Side stages along Los Angeles Street featured performances by both the "Chinese Bing Crosby" and the Chinese Cultural Mission, while Anna May Wong took photos with fans and signed photos at a booth near the entrance to Ferguson Alley. On both Friday and Saturday night, Los Angeles Street became a stage for scheduled performances beginning at seven o'clock in the

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[57] *China Nite Souvenir Program and Directory*, Chinese American Museum.
[58] Chen, "Chinese Community in Los Angeles," 235-236.
[59] Tom, "The Participation of the Chinese," 56. Chen, "Chinese Community in Los Angeles," 235.
[60] Gilbert Leung mentions in passing that a younger group was responsible for the 1938 Moon Festival; Gilbert Leung Interview, March 27, 1979, SCCAOHP, Box 4 Folder 1; UCLA Special Collections; the *Federation News* also mentions many of the duties that various youth groups were responsible for at the festival; *Federation News* 1:8 (November, 1938): unpaginated, Chinese American Museum.
[61] See, "Chinese Festival of Moon," Los Angeles *Daily News*, October 7, 1938, 33; "Moon Festival to Begin Tonight," Los Angeles *Daily News*, October 8, 1938, 9; "Chinese Plan Celebration of the Eighth Moon Festival, *Los Angeles Times*, October 5, 1938, A2; "Gigantic Dragon to Feature Chinese Moon Fete Tonight," *Los Angeles Times*, October 8, *Los Angeles Times,* A1; "Chinese Hold Moon Festival," *Los Angeles Times*, October 9, 1938, 6.

evening and continuing on until eleven o'clock. This included not only performances by the Mei Wah Drum Corps, but also a children's parade, a performance by a 1,000 foot golden dragon, and a dragon boat proceeded by more than 200 local Chinese American women carrying lanterns and dressed in Chinese gowns. On Saturday night the Jinnistan Grotto Band also performed.

In order to highlight these performances, festival organizers drew on the experiences of local community members in the Hollywood film industry in defining the atmosphere of the festival. The Chinese Cinema Players—an organization in the Federation of Chinese Clubs whose members worked as actors, set designers, and artists in Hollywood—decorated sections of Chinatown in a manner similar to that of a Hollywood set. The group placed a giant smiling moon on the top of a building at the entrance to Ferguson Alley next to Anna Wong's autograph booth. With one eye closed and a large grin, the cutout bore more than a passing resemblance to the moon made famous in Georges Melies 1902 silent film, *A Trip to the Moon*. Across the top of the building adjacent to the smiling moon, the club members crafted letters that spelled out "Moon Festival Oct 8-9." By decorating the corner of Ferguson Alley in this way, the Chinese cinema players gave the street corner adjacent to Wong's autograph booth a movie set-like quality distinct from the way the corner would have appeared to tourists who visited after or before the festival.[62]

Unlike the later 1941 Moon Festival, which featured more than a hundred Hollywood stars sitting in a parade of open-air vehicles, Wong was the biggest Hollywood movie star at 1938 Moon Festival. As a Chinese American born in Los Angeles, Wong was an important member of the local Chinese American community even if she had not been born in Chinatown. By 1938, she was a rising star who had taken high profile supporting roles in Hollywood films. In much the same way that the Moon Festival did, Wong simultaneously drew on and challenged aspects of American Orientalism. Her most famous role of the decade had been opposite Marlene Dietrich in the 1932 film *Shanghai Express*, in which Wong played a Chinese prostitute. Even as her performance in the film was lauded in the American press, Chinese papers were heavily critical of Wong's role in the film, which many in China saw as a disgrace to China and Chinese people.[63] Despite her growing prominence in Hollywood, Wong's role at the 1938 festival appears to have been limited to signing autographs and taking pictures with fans, which proved to be a popular attraction. The *Federation News* stated that her booth "was always filled to capacity with her fans."[64]

At the same time that organizers used set design techniques to highlight the presence of Wong, they also drew on the existing architectural environment to promote the idea that the Moon Festival would allow visitors to see parts of Old Chinatown usually not open to those outside the community. Like the earlier China Nite event held in August, the Moon Festival utilized the setting of Old Chinatown as a draw for spectators. In doing so, the CCBA linked the fundraisers to Old Chinatown at a time when the idea of Chinatown itself was being contested in the popular imagination of the city's residents. Old Chinatown had been the heart of the Chinese American community for more than fifty years, but by the summer of 1938 as result of Union Station construction, all that was left was of Old Chinatown was Los Angeles Street and a few connecting alleyways. Despite the destruction that the train station had wrought on the old community, on a

[62] Missing from the archival record are written sources documenting the way the 1938 Moon Festival was perceived by attendees. In fact, with the exception of the one article in the *Federation News*, the articles in the English language press only publicize what is scheduled to occur at the festival, and do not provide analysis or descriptions on what has already occurred. Thus the archival record limits the way perceptions of the event can be understood by contemporary scholars.
[63] Leong, *China Mystique*, 73-74.
[64] "Colorful Moon Festival," *Federation News,* November Vol 1, No 8 (November, 1938): unpaginated.

pragmatic level holding the Moon Festival on Los Angeles Street in Old Chinatown made sense. In 1938, Los Angeles Street was still home to the headquarters of the local CCBA, along with the offices of the Chinese Patriotic Society, and a number of the district and family associations. While most of the major businesses and restaurants had relocated to New Chinatown or elsewhere in the city, Old Chinatown continued to be the civic hub of the Chinese immigrant community.

In addition to these pragmatic considerations, holding the event on Los Angeles Street in Old Chinatown meant that the festival organizers could utilize existing conceptions of Old Chinatown as impervious to change to draw spectators.[65] Over the preceding years, as the destruction of Old Chinatown proceeded slowly, the popular press depicted Old Chinatown as a mystical world untouched by modernity or progress. In December 1933, the *Los Angeles Times* ran an article and photo essay, entitled, "Chinatown, Hail and Farewell," in which these sentiments were expressed:

> "There is to be a new Chinatown; the plans for it already have been drawn. Of old Chinatown, fronting on the Plaza's oval oasis all that will be left will be memories of pungent, complicated, Oriental odors, the slup, slup of slippered feet or the throbbing from the joss house of a gong to mark hours that, somehow, march much more slowly there than in the outside Occidental world…"[66]

The author's description paints a picture of the neighborhood as an extension of the mystical and timeless Orient of the Western imagination. This is a place of odors, sounds, and other sensations that cannot be captured by photos or film. The passage positions Old Chinatown as a place soon to be relegated to the realm of memory, the technologies of the present unable to capture or retain its essence. In Old Chinatown not only is the passing of time signaled differently—with the beating of a gong—but the nature of time itself passes "more slowly" than in the rest of the "Occidental world." In this sense, Old Chinatown does not simply draw on notions of Orientalism; rather, Old Chinatown *becomes* the Orient of the European imagination.[67]

Organizers drew on these Orientalist conceptions when they used the Kong Chow Temple to attract tourists to the event. The temple, which had proven to be an important draw in publicizing the earlier China Nite Festival, was featured on a map in the festival program and remained open for visitors throughout the event. In promoting the temple as part of the festivities, *The Los Angeles Times* announced, "Through the closed shutters of an overhanging balcony near Ferguson Alley, the reverberating boom and clang of a huge prayer drum and gong will sound a call for devout worshipers to the Altar of Blessings in the Kong Chow Temple, which will be open to visitors. Sightseers will learn much of the ancient Chinese worship." [68] In this way, pre-festival news coverage turned the temple into an attraction where spectators could consume Chinese religious practices. Like so much of the rest of the festival, these Orientalist depictions of Chinese culture and heritage were certainly missing much of the Yellow Peril iconography that had for so long been used by outsiders to define the community. Rather than depict the temple or other sites in Chinatown as embodying Yellow Peril, the Los Angeles Times article presents

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[65] As geographer of Kay Anderson has pointed out, the notion of Chinatown is itself a social construction "with a cultural history and tradition of imaginary and institutional practice that has given it a cognitive and material reality in and for the West." See Kay Anderson, "The Idea of Chinatown: The Power of Place and Institutional Practice in the making of a Racial Category," *The Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 77, No 4 (Dec. 1987), 581.

[66] "Chinatown Hail and Farewell," *Los Angeles Times*, December 3, 1933, G1.

[67] Kay Anderson has argued that Chinatown, much like the Orient, is itself a creation of the white imaginary. See Anderson, "The Idea of Chinatown, "581.

[68] "Chinese Plan Celebration of Eighth Moon Festival," *Los Angeles Times*, October 5, 1938, A2.

Chinese culture as an unchanging site of culture and difference that visitors to the festival can consume.

While the *Los Angeles Times* article did mention "devout visitors," the article did not encompass the full range of activities and services that the temple provided to the Chinese American community in Los Angeles. Rather, the Orientalism of the festival made the Kong Chow Temple visible to whites in ways that belied the temple's place as a functioning house of worship in daily use by people in the community. The temple was overseen by a priest and visited regularly by local residents.[69] By the mid-1930s, in the midst of the Great Depression, the temple housed at least five indigent, elderly members of the community who had nowhere else to turn for support. One man in his late seventies had come to America as a fourteen-year-old and worked as a cook for railroad workers. Now too frail to support himself, he relayed his story to an interviewer from the Federal Writers Project in 1936, "I am such an old man now that I can't work at all. If I try to stand long on my feet I fall down and I have nothing to do… I am so helpless that I wish I die because I can't get along well enough without working. I live in the temple with four other men who old like myself and can't work either."[70]

Yet the temple wasn't the only way in which the festival organizer utilized the existing built environment to attract spectators to the event. Like other major Chinatowns across the country, Old Chinatown had long been represented as a world of underground passages and secret rooms. A 1930 *Los Angeles Times* article described the community in this way, "Tong wars, murders, dope raids, hop-house scandals, white and yellow slavery, underground tunnels, secret trap doors; all have been here. Outside in the streets old men bask lazily in the sunshine and life is peaceful to the eye, but behind barred doors one feels that mystery is eternally seething."[71] In popular articles like these, Old Chinatown was depicted as being not just *unseen* but *unseeable* to the eyes of the city's white population. The stories of underground tunnels reflected broader fears that many whites held of Chinatown and Chinese people somehow being invisible to police and government power. In this way, Old Chinatown was represented as existing outside the legal and juridical boundaries that defined so much of the rest of the city. Indeed one might argue that the idea of being seen or seeable to the broader white population correlated directly with popular perceptions of the perceived governability of the residents of the community. The notion that Chinatown was ridden with tunnels and secret passages reflected dominant fears that the neighborhood's residents not only could not be seen by the state, the police, or by the white power structure but also that they could not be governed in the same way.

Stereotypes of an unseen, underground labyrinth hidden just out of the view of white visitors were an important part of the popular mythology of American Chinatowns. These stereotypes of tunnels and secret rooms played the function of denying the residents of Chinatown a place of inclusion in the cultural imaginary of the nation by marking the physical site of Chinatown itself as deviant. In popular representations, Chinatown was not just a place where Chinese people lived. The buildings and basements of the neighborhood itself were portrayed as taking on the perceived inscrutable characteristics of its inhabitants. If the perceived ungovernability of Chinese people was expressed through depictions of Chinese as a horde of violent, drug-using young men, prone to kidnapping and sleeping with white women, the

[69] "God of War Rules Heavan," *Los Angeles Times*, December 8, 1935, A1.
[70] Federal Writer Project of California Records, 1930-1942, Box 95, Folder 10, Racial Minorities Survey, 1936-1937, UCLA Special Collections.
[71] Gordon L'Allemand, "Old Chinatown," *Los Angeles Times*, October 5, 1930, K8.

perceived ungovernability of Chinatown itself was expressed through the depictions of secret tunnels or lairs.

China Nite and the 1938 Moon Festival provided venues through which residents of Old Chinatown could actively engage these popular perceptions of inscrutability. While on the one hand, notions of Chinatown as a place distinct from the rest of the city were used to lure spectators and tourists to the fundraisers; on the other hand, the festivals actively challenged the notion that Chinatown was unseeable to whites. This was done most explicitly by allowing visitors to the events access to buildings and areas that they otherwise may not have visited. The Bing Kong Tong, the Lung Kung Tin Yee Family Association, and the CCBA all opened their halls to the public, and in the process they challenged visitors' visual perceptions of the community.[72] Visitors to the CCBA hall watched the performances below on Los Angeles Street from the building's balconies and windows. By allowing visitors to view the festival from the second floor of the CCBA building, organizers provided visitors a way to see the neighborhood from a vantage point usually reserved only for Chinese members of these organizations. In this way, the festival presented an opportunity for organizers to respond to popular depictions of Old Chinatown as a labyrinth of underground tunnels and secret rooms outside of the visual control of whites. It did so by inviting visitors to view the festivities and performances from the inside of buildings that housed some of the community's foremost established organizations. In short, the Moon Festival drew in visitors with the promise of seeing parts of the community they may not have had access to otherwise, only to then subvert those expectations by positioning visitors to watch the festival from the point of view of the community's residents.

Of course, presenting Chinatown as embodying an unchanging and ancient culture wasn't the only Orientalist trope that the 1938 Moon Festival engaged. At the center of the festival schedule was the large number of Chinese American youth performances, many of which featured young women. In several of the festival's performances, Chinese American women in their teens and twenties were often used to promote Orientalist ideas of Asian femininity. As historians Karen Leong and Judy Wu have argued, Bowl of Rice festivals appealed to particular representations of Chinese American womanhood.[73] In particular, Leong and Wu argue that Bowl of Rice festivals portrayed Chinese women as either exotic or as helpless and suffering. Descriptions of a number of the performances at the 1938 Moon Festival support Leong and Wu's observations. The Federation of Chinese Club's newsletter described "two hundred girls dressed in colorful Chinese gowns, forming Chinese characters" carrying lanterns that proceeded the Dragon Boat.[74] Similarly, on the Saturday morning following the first night of the festival the *Los Angeles Times* described that "Pretty Chinese girls rode in a grotesque dragon boat, seeking to appease the wrath of the dragon on the fifteenth day of the eight moon in the Chinese Calendar." The descriptions from both of these publications reaffirm Leong and Wu's observations that fundraising festivals featured exaggerated exotic representations of Chinese women.

While the performances by Chinese American women at the lantern parade and dragon boat promoted the idea of a mystical feminine fantasy world that was divorced temporally and spatially from the rest of the city, embedded within this narrative were also counter-narratives that contradicted these exotic images. Nowhere was this expectation challenged more than by the Mei Wah Club. The club, which held its first meeting at the YWCA's International Institute in the

[72] "Chinese Hold Moon Festival," *Los Angeles Times*, October 9, 1938, 6; Moon Festival Program, YC Hong Collection, Huntington Library, Box E50 Folder, 14
[73] Leong and Wu, "Filling Bowls of Rice," 144-147.
[74] *Federation News,* No1, Vol.8, (November, 1938): unpaginated.

early 1930s under the guidance adult sponsor Maye Wong, began as a girls' basketball club.[75] While Wong did not perform in the group's Drum Corps, she and her brother David were instrumental in shaping the club's direction.

The Drum Corps began in July of 1938, shortly after the opening of New Chinatown when the CCBA invited the Mei Wah Club to perform for China Nite.[76] The invitation was hardly surprising given that Maye Wong's husband, Thomas Wong, was one of the CCBA's most influential members, and their daughter, Barbara Jean Wong, was a member of the Mei Wah Club. In inviting the Mei Wah Club to perform at China Nite, the CCBA gave the club nearly complete control over the form that their performance would take. Sponsor SooHoo and member Iris Wong suggested that the Mei Wah Club utilize a set of unused drums at the CCBA offices for their China Nite performance. With little practice, a handful of members from the Mei Wah Club put on a short performance with the drums borrowed from the CCBA as part of China Nite. While not mentioned in the China Nite program or newspaper coverage, the initial performance of the Mei Wah Club was such a success that when the CCBA announced they would host a second fundraising festival, the club was invited to perform again. Soon after the invitation, the original performers gathered other young women and began practicing for what would be the official debut performance of the Los Angeles Mei Wah Girls' Drum Corps at the 1938 Moon Festival.[77]

More so than any other performance at the festival, the presence of the Mei Wah Girls' Drum Corps served to disrupt notions of Old Chinatown as linked to a particular conception of femininity rooted in the Orient of the Western imagination. The club members made their own costumes and choreographed their own routine. Unlike the Chinese American women who performed in the Dragon Boat and lantern parades at the festival, the costumes designed by the Mei Wah Club were not culturally marked as Chinese in any overt way. According to historian Shirley Jennifer Lim, the costumes of the group were modeled on military band uniforms. Lim points out that these costumes paid homage to China in subtle ways: "In allegiance to their Chinese heritage, their shirts bore frog fastenings and cheong-sam type collars and sleeves which they paired with American white pants and shoes."[78] All the members of the Drum Corps dressed in matching uniforms with the exception of the outfits worn by Iris Wong, who lead the Drum Corps, and by Barbara Jean Wong, who served as the band's majorette. Unlike most of the other band members whose dark shirts contrasted with their lighter pants, Iris Wong wore a light colored top to match her light colored pants with a flowing sash tied around her waist. Barbara Jean Wong, who as the majorette performed at the front of the marching band with her baton, wore a light-colored shirt and shorts, outlined in sequins, with matching white shoes. [79]

In later years, when the Mei Wah Drum Corps competed at regional competitions and in local parades, this type of costuming allowed the uniforms of club members to resemble the outfits of other marching bands in California. Yet in their performance at the Moon Festival, these costumes played a different role. Because so much of the festival drew on Orientalist fantasies about Chinatown, these military marching band-inspired costumes provided a subtle and

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[75] Marjorie Lee dates the founding of the Mei Wah Club as January 5, 1931 but does so without attribution; Lee, *Linking Our Lives*, 107. In contrast, Maye Wong recalls the founding as some time in 1932. Maye Wong Interview May 8, 1979, Box 6, Folder 3, Interview 34, SCCAOHP, UCLA Special Collections.

[76] Mei Wah Club Minutes Book, Chinese American Museum at El Pueblo Historical Monument, David and Dora SooHoo Collection.

[77] Mei Wah Club Minutes Book, Chinese American Museum at El Pueblo Historical Monument, David and Dora SooHoo Collection.

[78] Shirley Jennifer Lim, *Feeling of Belonging: Asian American Women's Popular Culture 1930s-1960* (New York: New York University Press: 2005), 93.

[79] *Federation News*, No.1, Vol. 8, (November 1938): unpaginated.

recognizable contrast to much of the surrounding atmosphere. Certainly the high school students who made up the Mei Wah Drum Corps provided a striking contrast to the Moon Festival Queen, the dragon boat, or the "two hundred girls dressed in colorful Chinese gowns, forming Chinese characters" described by the Federation of Chinese Clubs newsletter.[80] This was especially true of Barbara Jean Wong. Her costume was distinct from both the military-inspired uniforms of her counterparts in the Drum Corps and from the traditional dress of the women in the lantern parade. Wong, through a combination of sartorial choices and performance, embodied the ways in which the Mei Wah Drum Corps subverted mainstream Orientalist representations of femininity at the festival.

In short, the Mei Wah Drum Corps created a cultural contradiction within the world of the festival, one that could not be easily reconciled with the expectations that many white spectators brought to the event. The very rupture in the fantasy world facilitated by the Mei Wah Club's performance made the young women of the Mei Wah Drum Corps visible in a way that other performers at the festival were not. The Orientalist nature of the festival created the theatrical space for the Mei Wah Club to perform; yet at the same time, the young women in the club created a representation of themselves as simultaneously members of Chinatown and also *not* a part of the Orientalist world that so many spectators expected at the festival. Through their performance, these Chinese American women demanded to be seen as part of modernity in a way that traditional Orientalist iconography implied was not possible. In the process, this 1938 performance of Mei Wah Club represented a distinctly Chinese American form of cultural expression.

With her distinct costume and placement at the front of the Drum Corps, Barbara Jean Wong occupied a prominent place in the performance. In many ways her position as the majorette at the front of the group was fitting given her experience as a childhood radio actor and Hollywood background performer. Yet her performances with the Drum Corps differed in one important way from those she did in radio and film—in films she always performed in the background; in her radio performances she was given a prominent role, but listeners heard her voice without attaching that voice to an Asian American face. But as the majorette of the Mei Wah Girl's Drum Corps, Wong discovered that the Moon Festival provided a platform where she could be both Chinese American and a star.

Planned primarily by the CCBA with the support of the Federation of Chinese Clubs, the 1938 Moon Festival presented a way for local Chinese Americans to engage their place in the national imaginary in ways that would have been nearly impossible even one decade earlier. As the war in Asia progressed, the nature of China relief fundraising also evolved. In 1940, under the guidance of Henry Luce, the publisher of *Time* and *Life* magazines, eight major aid organizations in America joined to form United China Relief.[81] This newly combined organization continued to partner with local communities to host wartime festivals. The added support of Luce insured that these festivals received national media coverage. In the Los Angeles area, United China Relief created a committee in Hollywood to fundraise in the film industry that was separate from the committee in the city of Los Angeles. This Hollywood committee was headed by David O. Selznick, the powerful movie producer behind features such as *Gone with the Wind* and Alfred Hitchcock's American debut, *Rebecca*.[82] When United China Relief partnered with the CCBA to

[80] Mei Wah Club Minutes Book, Chinese American Museum at El Pueblo Historical Monument, David and Dora SooHoo Collection.
[81] Leong and Wu, "Filling the Rice Bowls of China," 136-137.
[82] See David O Selznick to B.A. Garside, June 16, 1941, United Service to China Records, Box 18, Folder 1, Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts, Princeton University Library.

plan the second Moon Festival in 1941, the event was organized under the direction of Selznick and the Hollywood division of United China Relief.[83]

No longer held in the autumn as the Moon Festival traditionally was in China, the 1941 Moon Festival occurred between August fourth and tenth as part of Mayor Fletcher Bowron's city-wide China Relief Week.[84] Held over three nights, the 1941 Moon Festival was divided between China City, New Chinatown, and Old Chinatown. Spectators who wished to enter the three "pay areas" had to purchase a fifty-cent ticket, the proceeds of which went toward United China Relief.[85] The Chinese dragon returned, as did the fashion show. Anna May Wong also appeared. A local teenager, Margaret Kwong, was chosen as the Moon Festival Queen and mentioned in the *Los Angeles Times*. The Mei Wah Drum Corps performed once again, and this time, Barbara Jean Wong's photo appeared in *Life* magazine.

Despite the continued involvement of the Chinese American community, the added involvement of Hollywood meant less control was in the hands of the community. The CCBA appears to have seceded much of the planning for the 1941 event to United China Relief. A parade between the pay areas featured fifty bands, two Chinese dragons—one of which was more than two hundred feet long—two camels, two hundred women carrying Chinese lanterns and at least six rickshaws. More than one hundred Hollywood stars, including Bob Hope and Marlene Dietrich, participated in the parade over three different nights. Meanwhile, Old Chinatown was transformed into an amusement zone replete with a Ferris wheel and merry-go-round. New Chinatown featured a one-ring circus.[86]

Amongst all this, local community members found their roles different than in the earlier two fundraising festivals. The Mei Wah Drum Corps did not wear the military-inspired uniforms they designed, but instead wore costumes that appeared to be made from silk with elaborate embroidered borders surely meant to evoke "the Orient" in the minds of onlookers.[87] The photo of Wong and the Mei Wah Drum Corps that appeared in *Life* did not identify Wong or even give the club's name. While the 1941 festival still presented a platform for everyday Chinese Americans to engage dominant notions of race and gender, that platform now had to be shared with others, many of whom were much more experienced in shaping public opinion. Aspects of the Chinese American vision still came through, but the festival did not provide the same opportunities as in 1938.

With tens of thousands of spectators and expansive coverage by the local press, the 1938 Moon Festival can be seen as the film that Hollywood never produced. Organized primarily by the local community, the festival provided a platform for Chinese Americans in Los Angeles to present their own vision of Chinatown to a broader public audience. For members of the CCBA, the festival provided a way to challenge long held views about Old Chinatown as spatially and temporally distinct from the rest of the city. For the teenagers of the Mei Wah Drum Corps, the festival launched their group on a journey that would last more than a decade and feature scores of competitions and performances. For many of the other U.S.-born members of the community who participated in the festival, the event provided an opportunity wherein they were allowed to

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[83] David O Selznick, "United China Relief Office Memorandum," August 30, 1941, United Service to China Records, Box 18, folder 1, Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts, Princeton University Library.
[84] *Chinese Press,* August 8, 1941, 1.
[85] "Moon Festival Will Be World's Biggest Four-bit Show," *Los Angeles Daily News*, August 7, 1941 (unpaginated Clipping in Chinese American Museum holdings).
[86] "Moon Festival Will Be World's Biggest Four-bit Show," *Los Angeles Daily News*, August 7, 1941 (unpaginated Clipping in Chinese American Museum holdings).
[87] The photo of the Mei Wah Drum Corps is identified with the caption, "Chinese Drum Majorette Leads Chinatown Band with a Flourish of Symbols," See "Hollywood Stars Help Los Angeles Celebrate China Relief Festival," *Life,* September 1, 1941 37-38.

be both Chinese and American. Long regarded as perpetual foreigners, a generation of American citizens found in the 1938 Moon Festival a moment when their heritage was recognized, rather than denigrated, and when their relatives across the Pacific were supported. In short, for the first time in many of their lives, the Moon Festival provided hundreds of Chinese Americans an opportunity to perform on a stage of their own creation.

Conclusion

In December of 2003, the Chinese American Museum opened near downtown Los Angeles. The museum opening brought a crowd of more than 500 people to the Garnier Building one of the remaining structures in what had once been Old Chinatown.[1] Once located on Los Angeles Street, the Garnier Building housed some of the most important organizations in the community including the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association and the Chinese American Citizens Alliance. The museum was the culmination of nearly twenty years of planning and fundraising. Among the museum's permanent exhibits was a recreation of the Sun Wing Wo store that had once been housed in the building.[2] Twenty-first century visitors to the museum could now interact with the store replica after first viewing a permanent exhibit dedicated to the history of Chinese in Los Angeles. Seventy years after the neighborhood's destruction commenced, visitors and residents of Los Angeles alike were still interested in Old Chinatown. In 2003, though, popular perception of the old neighborhood and the ethnic enclave it once housed were profoundly different than they had been in 1933.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Old Chinatown was one of a handful of segregated districts in the city to which white cultural producers assigned a distinguishable set of racial characteristics. In the first three decades of the twentieth century, the boosters and media elite in the city cast Chinatown as the racialized Other against which the white suburban image of the city would be constructed. The film industry produced dozens of silent films that perpetuated stereotypes of Chinatown as a Yellow Peril. Hollywood films portrayed Chinatown as a site of secret lairs and underground tunnels run by violent tongs and defined by violence and vice. City newspapers then took Hollywood representations and grafted them on to Old Chinatown. In the process the suburban image of Los Angeles defined by a white heterosexual family living in a single-family home was constructed against the image of Chinatown as a site of deviance and alterity.

Rather than contest the idea that Chinatown itself was different, Chinese Americans decided to reshape the boundaries of that difference in ways that better worked for them. Building on Chinese American self-representations from San Francisco and New York Chinatown, Chinese Americans in Los Angeles pushed back against popular representations of Chinatown as a Yellow Peril. Over the first few decades of the twentieth century, members of the Chinese American community in Los Angeles utilized performance both in Chinatown for tourists and in background and bit roles in Hollywood cinema to shape dominant ideas of race, gender, and sexuality in the city and the nation as whole. In the process, they rearticulated ideas of American Orientalism in ways that were more beneficial to the certain segments of the Chinese American community. During a period of massive geopolitical realignment in the Pacific, Chinese American performance in Los Angeles laid the groundwork the increasing acceptance of Chinese Americans during the Second World War.

Yet the strategy of rearticulating Orientalism was not without its perils. Chinese Americans who utilized this strategy continued to construct themselves as a racial Other, albeit one which they wanted whites to accept as members of the U.S. melting pot. This was a process of re-ascribing meaning to difference not of dispelling notions of difference altogether. While the selling of Chinese American Orientalism had always been deeply integrated with the political, this process remained at it heart a financial intervention. Chinese American Orientalism had

[1] "Telling the History of LA's Chinese," *Los Angeles Times*, December 19, 2003, B3.
[2] Heart of Chinatown, *Los Angeles Times*, December 18. 2003, E14.

always been a way for a certain segment of the Chinese American population, who were segregated from making a living in other ways, to perform a commodified version of their culture to whites as a way of making a living. While it was for a while counter-hegemonic, Chinese American Orientalism was never a truly radical alternative.

The US entry into World War II, further facilitated a shift in the way in which the nation saw Chinese Americans and urban Chinatowns. In 1943, Congress passed the Magnuson Act permanently repealing the Chinese Exclusion Act, setting a quota of 105 immigrants of China per year, and allowing Chinese immigrants to become naturalized citizens. Alongside the symbolic repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act, portrayals of Chinatown as a site of urban violence, deviant sexuality and rampant drug use became far less frequent. Gone were the Hollywood images of white women in peril in Chinatown dens, and in their place, were neon signs for chop suey, cocktails, and fortune cookies after meals. But the fact that Chinatown was less frequently seen as Yellow Peril after World War II does not mean that the press or image-makers in Hollywood gave up on their fears about racialized neighborhoods in the city. Rather, they simply applied the racial script long deployed to mark Chinatown as a site of racial depravity and difference onto other areas of the city.[3]

In the post-war period, many Chinese Americans began moving out of the city's core and into neighborhoods that had long been reserved exclusively for whites, and yet at the same time, other neighborhoods and other racial and ethnic groups soon became targets of the media's racist mythmaking power. Even though the Supreme Court ruled restrictive covenants unenforceable in 1948, racist housing practices, individual prejudices, and structural racism continued to concentrate people of color, and in particular the city's Black and Latinx residents, into largely segregated communities. Hollywood and the city's media elite repurposed the image of the crime ridden urban neighborhood begun with representations of Chinatown onto different groups and neighborhoods in the city's core.

What's more, Chinese American self-representations that had once subverted Orientalism were eventually incorporated into mainstream discourses and used in the maintenance of social power. Elements of Chinatown that were once subversive became in different contexts hegemonic. *The Good Earth* provided a venue for Chinese American performers to challenge racist hiring practices that marginalized their participation in Hollywood. At the time of the film's release in 1937, the performances of Asian American background and bit-players challenged many white viewers to see China and Chinese people in a different light. Today, this film is rightly seen as a cringe-worthy reminder of the dominance of Yellowface performance in Hollywood of the 1930s. Today, in the context of the early twenty-first century, a viewer would be hard pressed to find any element of the film that could be considered subversive. At the same time, Chinatown's architecture and neon signs once used to dispel fears of difference now attracted middle class white artists to the neighborhood, threatening to push out long-time Asian residents. Some gentrifiers seem to believe that you can have Chinatown without Chinese people.

Yet to focus only on the long-term discursive implications of the performances and self-representations from the first part of the twentieth century misses the influence these performances had on the lives of the performers involved. One of the longest lasting and most empowering elements of the 1938 Moon Festival came in launching the Mei Wah Drum Corps. Years after the end of the Pacific War, the group continued to provide young Chinese American women a chance to perform with other youth their age at regional parades and festivals. In 1939,

[3] On racial scripts see Natalia Molina, *How Race is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

the group captured first place in their division at the All Western Band Review in Long Beach. In the coming years, the group performed at anniversary celebrations for the opening of New Chinatown and appeared at the festivities for the opening of Union Station. Occasionally they traveled farther afield, performing in places like Las Vegas and across the boarder in Mexico. As the original group aged out of performing, the Mei Wah Club recruited a new cohort of young women to carry on the tradition. The group's last performance occurred when the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association moved from the long-time home in the Garnier Building in Old Chinatown to a new building adjacent to New Chinatown in the early 1950s.

In many ways, the members of the Mei Wah Club went on to lead seemingly non-descript lives. Barbara Jean Wong, the teen radio star, Hollywood performer, and majorette of the club went on to be a public school teacher in Los Angeles. Other members of the group became housewives and school secretaries. The remaining members of the Mei Wah Club continued meeting actively for more than fifty years after their first performance in 1938. By the time of their last meeting all of the groups founding members were well into retirement age. Long after the original members of the Mei Wah Club held their final performance, the club continued to be a force in the community. In the coming decades, though, they made their mark not through performance but rather through service. The Mei Wah Club continued to hold annual fundraisers for scholarships and local charities demonstrating their strong support of community.

Today, the broader history of Chinese American performance is simultaneously visible and marginalized. The performances themselves can be seen on display in photos at places like the Chinese American Museum and in the background of Hollywood films from the period that are available for home viewing. Yet even though the performances remain visible, the stories of the individual performers remain largely forgotten by much of the larger public. Traces and fragments of their history can be found in the archival collections of organizations like the Chinese American Museum and the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California. These documentary fragments paint a picture of performance and camaraderie from a period now on the final precipice of living human memory. This was a moment when performance lay at the center of the Los Angeles Chinese American community; when a neighborhood came together to challenge the ways they were portrayed by dominant society; and when a cohort of young people formed relationships that would last the course of their lives. It has been an honor to retell their story.

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[1] This list represents the films discussed in the dissertation. A number of the earlier silent films on this list no longer exist. Their contents have to be pieced together through newspaper descriptions.

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