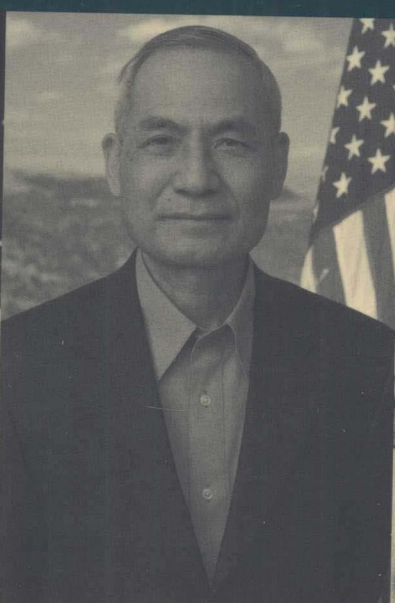
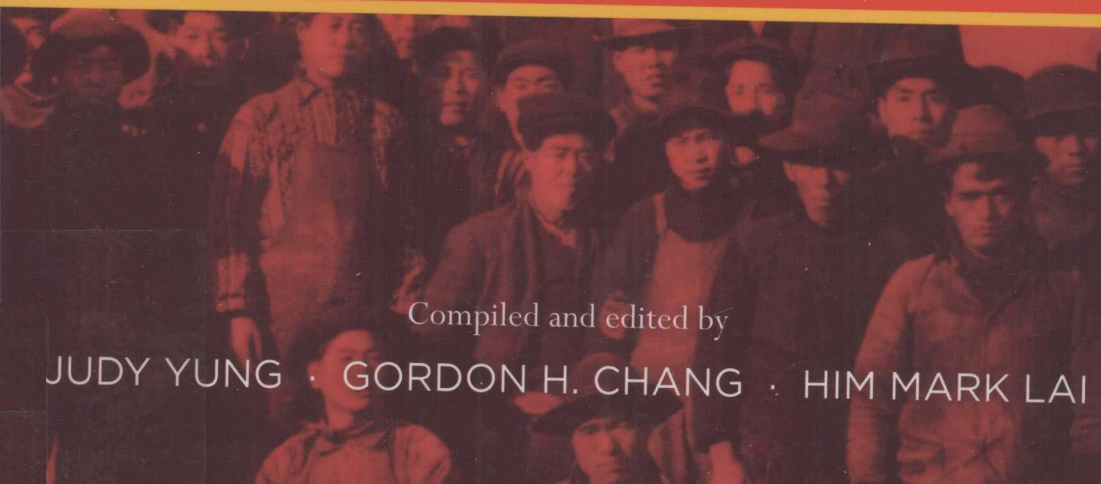


# Chinese American Voices



FROM THE GOLD RUSH TO THE PRESENT



Compiled and edited by

JUDY YUNG · GORDON H. CHANG · HIM MARK LAI

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*From the Gold Rush to the Present*

EDITED WITH INTRODUCTIONS BY

Judy Yung, Gordon H. Chang,  
and Him Mark Lai

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

*Berkeley Los Angeles London*

University of California Press, one of the most distinguished university presses in the United States, enriches lives around the world by advancing scholarship in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Its activities are supported by the UC Press Foundation and by philanthropic contributions from individuals and institutions. For more information, visit [www.ucpress.edu](http://www.ucpress.edu).

University of California Press  
Berkeley and Los Angeles, California

University of California Press, Ltd.  
London, England

© 2006 by the Regents of the University of California

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Chinese American voices : from the gold rush to the present /  
edited with introductions by Judy Yung, Gordon H. Chang, and  
Him Mark Lai.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-520-24309-9 (cloth : alk. paper)—ISBN 0-520-24310-2  
(pbk. : alk. paper)

I. Chinese Americans—History—Sources. I. Yung, Judy.  
II. Chang, Gordon H. III. Lai, H. Mark.

E184.C5C479 2006

973'.04951—dc22

2005021227

Manufactured in the United States of America

15 14 13 12 11 10 09 08 07 06  
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (R 1997) (*Permanence of Paper*).

## PREFACE

The story of the Chinese in America has been curiously told. In most accounts, they have been mute. Although they have been integral to this country's history, their voices have rarely been included by either their historical contemporaries or subsequent writers. Although one historian of their experience even described them as "silent sojourners,"<sup>1</sup> in fact, they were ignored. They were laborers who helped build much of the American West in the nineteenth century, but they were not asked what they felt about their toil; they were the victims of murderous violence, social ostracism, and discriminatory legislation, but they were not asked for their reaction; their lives were described variously as quaint and exotic, as depraved and threatening, and more recently as successful and exemplary, but they were not asked to describe their own lives in their own terms. Missionaries, journalists, and historians may have written about what the Chinese in America did or what was done to them, but they often neglected to consult the Chinese themselves.

The first scholarly book devoted entirely to the Chinese in America appeared as early as 1909. *Chinese Immigration*, by Mary Roberts Coolidge, a sociologist who espoused many causes, was as much an attack on unscrupulous labor leaders and opportunist politicians behind the anti-Chinese movement as a defense of the Chinese, whom she saw as indispensable labor in the building of the American West.<sup>2</sup> Openly sympathetic to the Chinese, Coolidge tried to discuss their social life, community organizations, and customs, but she fell short because her source materials (government

1. Gunther Barth, *Bitter Strength: A History of the Chinese in the United States, 1850-1870* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 7.

2. Mary Roberts Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration* (New York: Henry Holt, 1909).

reports, missionary observations, and political tracts) were virtually all written in English by non-Chinese.

Perhaps the most influential writer about the Chinese after Coolidge was historian Gunther Barth. His *Bitter Strength*, published fifty-five years after Coolidge's pioneering work, did include some Chinese primary sources. But whereas Coolidge argued that the Chinese were just as assimilable as European immigrants, Barth argued that they were not immigrants but sojourners whose foreign ways and indentured status had brought on their troubles. A number of historians, most notably Elmer C. Sandmeyer, Stuart Miller, and Alexander Saxton, also probed into the causes behind the anti-Chinese movement, but they came up with different conclusions.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, by choosing to focus on the excluders rather than the excluded, and in failing to use primary sources generated by the Chinese themselves, their works did little to improve America's understanding of Chinese Americans.

A breakthrough came when sociologists Stanford Lyman, Rose Hum Lee, S. W. Kung, and Betty Lee Sung began researching and writing about the development of social organizations and family life among Chinese Americans as well as the impact of racial discrimination on their efforts to assimilate into mainstream society.<sup>4</sup> Although they used few Chinese primary sources, their roots, connections, and investigations in the Chinese community enabled them to provide considerable texture and depth to understanding Chinese American life. They were followed in the 1970s by a new generation of scholars who were inspired by the new social history to study "history from the bottom up." In their efforts to document how the Chinese actually experienced and understood their own lives in America, they conducted oral histories and searched for writings by the Chinese themselves, be they on the walls of the Angel Island immigration station, in old Chinese-language newspapers, or in personal papers stored in dusty boxes in the basements of family homes.<sup>5</sup>

Their historical approach and findings allowed new issues to be addressed: How did the Chinese organize their lives and communities in America? How

3. Elmer Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973); Stuart Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant: The Immigrant Image of the Chinese, 1785-1882* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969); and Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

4. Rose Hum Lee, *The Chinese in the United States of America* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960); S. W. Kung, *Chinese in American Life: Some Aspects of Their History, Status, Problems, and Contributions* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962); and Betty Lee Sung, *Mountain of Gold* (New York: Macmillan, 1967).

5. See, for example, Victor and Brett De Bary Nee, *Longtime Californ': A Documentary Study of an American Chinatown* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972); Tin-yuke Char, *The Sandakwood Mountains: Readings and Stories of the Early Chinese Immigrants in Hawaii* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1975); Him Mark Lai, Genny Lim, and Judy Yung, *Island: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island, 1910-1940* (San Francisco: HOC-DOI, 1980); and Diane Mark and Ginger Chih, *A Place Called Chinese America* (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt, 1982).

did they regard their work, social, and family lives here? What were their perceptions of America, including its culture, politics, values, and attitudes? How did the Chinese relate to other ethnic groups and respond to racial discrimination and exclusion? How and why did they maintain transnational kin, political, and cultural relations with their homeland? And how did the experiences of the early immigrants compare with those of subsequent generations of American-born Chinese and the large influx of Chinese immigrants after 1965? Addressing these questions contributed to opening new vistas on American social history generally and new understandings of its cultural and political histories.<sup>6</sup> In recent years, there have been several efforts to synthesize the written accounts of the Chinese in America, combining the early studies that explored the political and social dimensions of the "Chinese question" with the new social history to interpret the experiences of Chinese Americans along with those of other Asian Americans.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, in-depth scholarship on a range of Chinese American subjects continues to be produced by young scholars, including third- or fourth-generation Americans and foreign students from China with valuable biliterate skills.<sup>8</sup>

While progress has been made in writing more nuanced, sophisticated, and meaningful history about Chinese Americans, much remains to be done in

6. See, for example, James W. Loewen, *The Mississippi Chinese: Between Black and White* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971); Lucy M. Cohen, *Chinese in the Post-Civil War South: A People without a History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984); Sandy Lydon, *Chinese Gold: The Chinese in the Monterey Bay Region* (Capitola, Calif.: Capitola Book Company, 1985); Sucheng Chan, *This Bitter-sweet Soil: The Chinese in California Agriculture, 1860-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); L. Eve Armentrout Ma, *Revolutionaries, Monarchists, and Chinatowns: Chinese Politics in the Americas and the 1911 Revolution* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990); Renqiu Yu, *To Save China, to Save Ourselves: The Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance of New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992); and Charles J. McClain, *In Search of Equality: The Chinese Struggle against Discrimination in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

7. See Roger Daniels, *Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States since 1850* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988); Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1989); and Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (Boston: Twayne, 1991).

8. See, for example, Madeline Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration between the United States and South China, 1882-1943* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); Erika Lee, *At America's Gate: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); John Kuo-Wei Tchen, *New York before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776-1882* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Xiaolan Bao, *Holding Up More Than Half the Sky: Chinese Women Garment Workers in New York City, 1948-92* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001); Shehong Chen, *Being Chinese, Becoming Chinese American* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Yong Chen, *Chinese San Francisco, 1850-1943: A Trans-Pacific Community* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); Huping Ling, *Surviving on the Gold Mountain: A History of Chinese American Women and Their Lives* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998);

uncovering important primary material. Contrary to popular and scholarly opinion, the Chinese have generated extensive documentation about their experiences here. In English as well as in Chinese, this material spans a wide spectrum: immigration case files, the records of business and community organizations, legal and government documents, personal manuscript collections, speeches, testimonies, and correspondence; and of published materials, there are oral history interviews, magazines and newspapers, pamphlets and newsletters, autobiographies, poems, and folk songs. These materials record the history of the Chinese since their early days in America.

Some of this primary material has been reproduced in the past,<sup>9</sup> but most of it has remained obscure and inaccessible to the general reader. *Chinese American Voices* aims to correct this historical amnesia and to encourage an appreciation of the texture and depth of Chinese American history from the perspectives of the Chinese themselves. It is the first effort dedicated to presenting primary documents generated exclusively by Chinese Americans, writing in English or Chinese, from their arrival during the California gold rush to the present day. We attempt to cover a broad spectrum of experiences that reveal the diversity of socioeconomic status, gender, generation, geographic affiliation, political perspective, and cultural lifestyle among Chinese Americans. We purposely excluded primary documents that have been widely published elsewhere; thus, much of the material in this volume appears in print for the first time or is reprinted from hard-to-find publications.

*Chinese American Voices* is very much a collaboration of three historians who have devoted most of their lives to researching, writing, and teaching Chinese American history. Having each developed extensive research collections through the years, we began the project by combing our own libraries for materials written by Chinese Americans themselves. This included going through our voluminous collections of journal articles, news clippings, and unpublished papers as well as secondary sources for citations of Chinese voices that speak to different aspects of their lives in America. Working together, we collected over three hundred documents, from which we selected some sixty for inclusion in this anthology. In some instances, we conducted additional oral history interviews, looked through Chinese newspapers on microfilm, surfed the Internet for new voices, and combed

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and Xiaojian Zhao, *Remaking Chinese America: Immigration, Family, and Community, 1940-1965* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

9. See Paul Jacobs and Saul Landau with Eve Pell, *To Serve the Devil*: vol. 2: *Colonials and Sojourners* (New York: Vintage Books, 1971); Cheng-tsu Wu, "Chink!": *A Documentary History of Anti-Chinese Prejudice in America* (New York: World Publishers, 1973); R. David Arkush and Leo O. Lee, eds., *Land without Ghosts: Chinese Impressions of America from the Mid-Nineteenth Century to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); and Franklin Odo, ed., *The Columbia Documentary History of the Asian American Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

through local libraries and archives for additional materials to fill in certain gaps.

What were we looking for? Of utmost importance were documents and stories that touched upon and revealed certain important moments or turning points in Chinese American history: the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882; the Sino-Japanese War and World War II (1937–1945); the Cold War and the Confession Program (1950s); the civil rights movement and the Immigration Act of 1965; U.S. normalization of relations with China in the 1970s; and the rise in hate crimes beginning with the Vincent Chin case in 1982. Thus, we included such entries as the Angel Island poem “Detention in the Wooden Building”; an interview with World War II veteran Eddie Fung; testimonies by victims of McCarthyism; and community reactions to the Vincent Chin and Wen Ho Lee cases.

Second, we wanted to challenge the stereotypes of Chinese Americans as silent sojourners, passive victims, and the model minority by providing actual examples of social agency and political activism throughout Chinese American history. This was not difficult, as it is usually outspoken community leaders and activists who leave the best records behind. Examples of such documents include Norman Asing’s letter to Governor Bigler protesting his racist remarks about the Chinese in 1852; the testimony of the Chinese-American Citizens’ Alliance before a congressional committee to reform the Immigration Act of 1924; the activity reports of the Chinese Women’s Association in New York during the war years; and Shui Mak Ka’s speech before twenty thousand garment workers on strike in New York City in 1982.

Probably the most difficult documents and voices to find were those that truly represented a diverse population in terms of gender, socioeconomic background, generation, and geographic affiliation. Because of our own backgrounds and research interests, our initial selections tended to focus too much on California, immigrants from Guangdong Province, the working class, women, and leftist politics. We tried to correct these biases in our final selections by including an equal number of male voices; stories of immigrants from Taiwan, Fujian, and Vietnam since 1965; interviews with Chinese Americans who live in the Midwest and South; poems and essays by the younger generation about what it means to be Chinese American, mixed race, or gay/lesbian; and success stories like those of David Ho, an AIDS researcher, and Gary Locke, governor of the state of Washington.

Finally, we included some entries that we found irresistible because of their unique point of view and poignant sentiments. Such a find was a newspaper column by Liu Liangmo in the *China Daily News* telling of his friendship with singer and actor Paul Robeson and how he got Robeson to introduce a popular Chinese war song, “March of the Volunteers,” to American audiences. Another unique find was “I Want to Marry an American Girl” by Eddie Gong, who we later discovered served in the Florida state legislature from 1963 to



1972. Probably the most poignant pieces in the anthology are the folk songs sung by “living widows” left behind in China and an 1876 report on the difficulties involved in finding the remains of Chinese laborers who had died in America.

We chose to divide *Chinese American Voices* into three parts, corresponding to three distinct periods in the development of Chinese American history and life experiences. Part I (1852–1904) covers early Chinese immigration and the anti-Chinese movement, which culminated in the passage of the Chinese exclusion acts, ending large-scale immigration of Chinese into the United States; Part II (1904–1943) covers the modernization of Chinese America during the exclusion period, and the impact of the Sino-Japanese War and World War II on the Chinese community; and Part III (1943–2003) covers the Cold War era, the liberalization of immigration policies, and efforts on the part of the Chinese to become an integral part of America. To lend meaning and context to the documents and personal stories, we provide an overview history of major developments in each period at the beginning of each section. We also introduce each document with background information on the author and comments on its historical significance, and end each document with a list of references for further reading and investigation.

An important and unique feature of this anthology is the inclusion of Chinese primary documents that have been translated into English. The writing style of the originals varied considerably. Some, for example, were composed in the formal, classical style, which made translation difficult. For others, especially documents and creative expressions generated in the mid-twentieth century, we attempted to convey not only the literal meaning but the tone and expressive flavor as well. Following standard practice, we used the Hanyu Pinyin system for Chinese proper nouns, except in cases where the names have been commonly spelled in a different romanization system or spoken in Cantonese or another dialect. Although an attempt was made to be consistent in the Chinese transliteration within each document, no attempt was made to be consistent throughout this book. A Chinese glossary is provided in the appendix for clarification.

We make no claim for comprehensiveness. We recognize that we have been highly selective in our choices, and that these choices reflect our own interpretations of Chinese American history, perhaps our personal biases and values as well. Our aim, however, is for a wide range of Chinese American voices to be heard and for this anthology to complement the many accounts of Chinese American life and experiences that already exist and those that will be produced in the future. We hope our collective efforts here will lead readers—whether scholars, writers, students, or the general public—to engage in further reading and investigation, and that they will come to see Chinese Americans not as silent sojourners or perpetual foreigners, but as an integral part of American history and life.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It has taken the three of us over ten years to complete *Chinese American Voices: From the Gold Rush to the Present*. Such a monumental project could not have been possible without the assistance of many friends, colleagues, librarians and archivists, and community contacts. We are fortunate to have had four excellent translators, Ernest Chin, Marlon Hom, Ellen Yeung, and Shiree Teng, who helped us render the Chinese-language documents into English.

We are indebted to the following individuals for their help in suggesting, locating, and in some instances interpreting the primary documents included in this anthology: Xiaolan Bao, Ko-lin Chin, Michaelyn Chou, Philip Choy, Colleen Fong, Marlon Hom, Peter Kiang, Bob Lee, Sandy Lee, Nellie Leong, Gordon Lew, Raymond Lew, Charles McClain, Ruthanne Lum McCunn, Franklin Ng, Mae Ngai, Vu Pham, Wei Chi Poon, Bill Strobridge, John Kuo-wei Tchen, Mi Ling Tsui, Wanda Wang, Wang Xing Chu, Brad Wong, Eddie Wong, Elaine May Woo, Renqiu Yu, Xiaojian Zhao, and Helen Zia.

We wish to also thank Eddie Fung, David Ho, Daphne Kwok, Bonnie C. Lew, Ah Quon McElrath, Sheila Chin Morris, and Johnny Wong for allowing us to include their interviews in this anthology; Roger Daniels, Ruthanne Lum McCunn, Franklin Odo, and Vicki Ruiz for their critical readings of the manuscript; the Senate Committee on Research at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and the Center for East Asian Studies at Stanford University for granting us research funds to complete this book; Monica McCormick, Mary Severance, Niels Hooper, and Anne Canright of the University of California Press for their editorial guidance; and last but not least, Eddie Fung, Vicki Chang, and Laura Lai, for their unflagging support and sustenance throughout.

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